

# Sisters in Spirit Vigil Toolkit: Honouring Families and Survivors of MMIWG2S+

September 2025

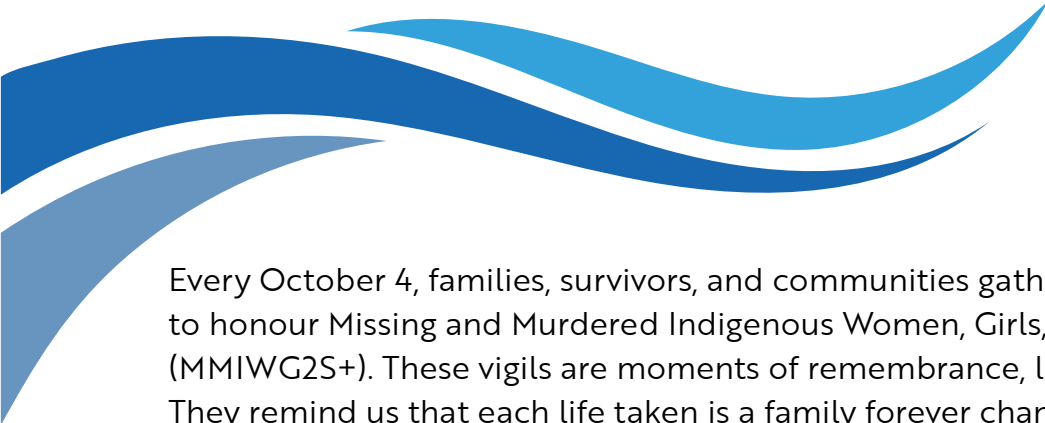


Native Women's  
Association of Canada



L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada





Every October 4, families, survivors, and communities gather for Sisters in Spirit Vigils to honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people (MMIWG2S+). These vigils are moments of remembrance, love, and community care. They remind us that each life taken is a family forever changed, and that survivors deserve to be heard, held, and supported.

This toolkit offers guidance for organizing a vigil that places families and survivors at the centre. It provides ideas, resources, and practices that can help you shape a meaningful gathering, whether small or large, public or private, traditional or contemporary.

## The Symbol of the Grandmother Moon

At the heart of the Native Women Association of Canada's (NWAC) Sisters in Spirit initiative is the Grandmother Moon Logo, a powerful emblem of sacred feminine life-giving energy. The artist Dick Baker crafted the Kwakwaka'wakw Moon design to symbolize that without women, our nations cannot endure.

Grandmother Moon teaches us about cycles, balance, and renewal. She is tied to water, life, and the sacred feminine. In many Indigenous traditions, she governs the life cycles of women and reminds us of the deep connection between women, the earth, and the rhythms of the universe.

Grandmother Moon shines light in times of darkness, guiding spirits, and reminding families that their loved ones are never forgotten.





## Hosting a Vigil

A vigil can take many shapes, but at its core it is always a gathering of love, remembrance, and community care, with families and survivors at the centre. Each vigil is deeply personal, shaped by the wishes of families and the spirit of the community that comes together. There is no “right way”, what matters most is creating a space where loved ones are honoured and where survivors feel safe and never alone.


### Why Hold a Vigil?

- To Remember: Say the names out loud of the loved one and honour their spirits.
- To Support: Create safe spaces where families and survivors feel seen and surrounded by care.
- To Raise Awareness: Keep the crisis of MMIWG2S+ visible across the country and in all levels of governments.
- To Call for Action: Connect remembrance to concrete steps for justice and accountability to start moving towards implementing the 231 Calls for Justice.

### Planning and Hosting a Vigil: Shaping the Gathering

Some families find strength in public vigils that bring the wider community together to stand in solidarity. Others prefer intimate circles at home or in sacred outdoor places, surrounded only by those closest to them. In some cases, families connect through online or hybrid vigils, making it possible for loved ones near and far to join in honouring together.

No matter what the setting, the heart of the vigil is the same: to honour, to remember, and to create safety and care for families and survivors. These gatherings are also a reminder that grief and love can be carried collectively, so that no family stands alone. Each vigil, no matter the size, adds to the chorus of voices demanding justice and change our loved ones deserve. When we come together in this way, we create space not only for mourning, but also for strength, healing, and hope for future generations.



## How to Build a Family-Centered Vigil

Begin in ceremony and family voice. Every vigil should be shaped by families and survivors, where they choose, how they remember, and who they invite to stand with them. Grounding practices can include:

- Inviting Elders or Knowledge Keepers for opening prayers and smudging
- Inviting families and survivors to use their voices to continue to bring awareness and share stories that are not forgotten
- Creating a ceremonial space, including:
  - Candles
  - Red dresses
  - Photos
  - Red flowers
  - Drumming
  - Banners
  - Flags
  - Grandmother Moon imagery
  - Traditional Medicines

## Resources from NWAC

NWAC supports communities, families, and organizations who wish to host Sisters in Spirit Vigils by offering practical resources, including:

- Printable banners and posters featuring the Grandmother Moon symbol.
- Educational handouts and fact sheets on MMIWG2S+ and the Calls for Justice.
- Toolkits and templates to help with planning, outreach, and media engagement.
- Vigil listings and promotion to support awareness of vigils taking place across the country.

These resources can be requested directly from NWAC by contacting [mmiwg@nwac.ca](mailto:mmiwg@nwac.ca), and are meant to ensure communities feel supported and connected to the large movement while centering families and survivors.



## Caring for Families and Survivors

MMIWG2S+ families and survivors carry the deepest truths of both grief and resilience. Honouring their voices means creating spaces where healing is possible, while also recognizing their strength as a driving force for justice and change. By centering their care, vigils affirm that no family should walk this journey alone.

### Support with Care

- Centre families from the beginning to ensure they are included in everything that is shared
- Provide wellness supports, Elders, counsellors, quiet rooms and refreshments
- Offer honoraria, transportation or childcare to ease burdens and support them in attending vigils that honour their loved one


### Safety and Space


- Establish clear photo consent policies and “no photo” identifiers
- Provide attendees with emotional supports for pauses and private healing spaces

## Framing the Message and Engaging in Outreach

The way we speak about vigils shapes how the world listens. When rooting messages in love, dignity, and truth brings healing, while amplifying the urgent call for justice and accountability. Through careful outreach, each vigil becomes not only a remembrance, but a movement for lasting change.

### Tone of Messaging

- Use affirming wording, including “We Remember”, “Justice Through Love”, “Never Forgotten”, and “Say Her Name”
  - Focus on dignity, sacredness, and justice
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### Engaging in Outreach

- Develop event posters that can be shared and spread across the community
- Engage in social media tributes, ensuring that they are use with permission and guided by the wishes of families and survivors
- Engage with schools, communities, and media to amplify your event with care and consent from families and survivors

## **Legacy Through Action**

Vigils are not the end – they are the beginning of continued action. Continue to engage in this work by:

- Growing youth involvement through “Moon Circles” to share teachings and memory
- Supporting families year-round with meals, advocacy help, and a safe space
- Keeping teachings alive in ongoing community events

Sisters in Spirit Vigils are more than gatherings, they are woven threads of memory, ceremony, and collective care. The guidance of Grandmother Moon’s strength, shaped by families, and carried forward by communities, they remind us that healing and justice must walk together.

On October 4, and every day:

We honour. We heal. We continue until justice is real.

If you have questions about this toolkit, or wish to access additional resources for your Sisters in Spirit vigil, please reach out to [mmiwg@nwac.ca](mailto:mmiwg@nwac.ca).