

HONOURING INDIGENOUS WOMEN

GIRLS AND GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE

A NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF
CANADA INITIATIVE



Native Women's
Association of Canada
L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada



Native Women's
Association of Canada

~~~~~  
L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

## Native Women's Association of Canada

1 Nicholas Street, 9th Floor  
Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7

Tel: 613-722-3033

Fax: 613-722-7687

Toll-Free: 1-800-416-4043

[www.nwac.ca](http://www.nwac.ca)

**Funding Provided by:**  
Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

# Canada

The Honouring Indigenous Women Project is an initiative by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). The opinions, findings, and conclusions stated herein are those of the Native Women's Association of Canada and do not necessarily reflect those of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada funded the Educational Guide. NWAC permits others to reference this work. NWAC requests that you reference any part of the Guide or toolkit material when using these materials in any other publication.

**This presentation and additional toolkit materials are also available in French**

**The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) works to advance the well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people, as well as their families and communities through activism, policy analysis and advocacy.**

Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people continue to experience discrimination on multiple grounds, in various complex forms, and from various sources including individuals, businesses and governments.

NWAC's areas of advocacy include, but are not limited to education, employment and labour, environment, health, human rights and international affairs, violence against women and gender identity/gender expression.

We collectively work to preserve Indigenous culture and achieve equality for Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. NWAC achieves this by having a say in the shaping of legislation directly affecting Indigenous women, girls, gender diverse people, their families, and communities.

## MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to empower Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people through increasing their involvement in the development of legislation. We work to empower women, girls, and gender diverse people by promoting their participation in the development and delivery of programs that promote cultural values and equal opportunity. It is vital for women to play a role in addressing the complex nature between their social determinants of health and their overall well-being.


As such, NWAC works to improve living outcomes for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people, and by extension for the community at large. Positive change is achieved through facilitating relationships and strengthening partnerships in collaboration with a regional network of affiliate organizations partnerships.

*Note: The word ‘woman’, ‘women’ and female pronouns, where used, are meant to include all cis-women, trans-women, and gender diverse people as well as Two-Spirit people’s.*



## **DISCLAIMER**

The information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images and other material contained in this Toolkit are for informational purposes only. The purpose of this Toolkit and Guide is to provide, information, understanding, and knowledge of various topics relating to empowering Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. The Native Women's Association of Canada does not recommend or endorse any specific tests, physicians, products, procedures, opinions or other information that may be mentioned in this Toolkit and Guide or any website listed therein. Reliance on any information appearing on this website is solely at your own risk.





## ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is committed to healing Indigenous communities and to empowering women, girls, and gender diverse people by helping them to recognize their own inner strength. NWAC has created the Honouring Indigenous Women Toolkit as an educational resource to address the need to restore honour and respect for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people. This Toolkit also identifies many of the changes necessary to achieve reconciliation, healing, respect and honour for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people going forward.



## PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

The toolkit and accompanying guide aim to assist Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people understand the traditional roles of their ancestors. Traditionally, the community respected, valued and honoured Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people. Presently, we must honour women in our communities for their bravery and strength.

This toolkit and guide can be used in a classroom setting for all youth. The lessons within this guide are specifically structured in a way that teaches traditional values and helps to foster a sense of pride for having an Indigenous heritage. There are accompanying activities designed to help youth connect to their hearts, spirits and sense of self.

The main activity within this toolkit is the Faceless Dolls. This activity embodies respect and honour for all Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.

**Included within each Honouring Project bag:**


- This Guide
- Colouring book
- Pencil cases, colouring pencils and sharpeners
- Coloured felt sheets
- Scissors, glue
- Doll patterns
- Accessories to create dolls







## Topics of This Presentation Include:

- A Strong Diverse Nation
  - Traditional Roles of Women
  - Defining Respect and Honour
  - Cleaning the Lens
  - Wolf Cub Story
  - Valuing Yourself
  - Mindfulness Activity
  - Sustainability in Culture
  - Some Traditions and Teachings
  - Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ in Traditional Indigenous Culture
  - Empowerment Word Search Activity
  - Indigenous Innovations
  - Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People (MMIWGGD)
  - Be Safe, Be Wise, Be Aware
  - Affirmation Activity: I am, I can and I will
  - Moving Forward
- 



Grandmother Moon  
You know all women from birth to death  
We seek your knowledge  
We seek your strength  
Some are STARS up there with you  
Some are STARS on Mother  
Earth Grandmother,  
lighten our path in the dark  
Creator, keep our sisters safe from harm  
Maa duu? Mussi cho

## **A STRONG DIVERSE NATION**

One of the initial steps in reconciliation is to understand that Indigenous people are a diverse group with multiple cultural values. Indigenous people today come from various backgrounds, creating a very diverse people from coast to coast. In Canada, Indigenous people identify as either First Nations, Métis or Inuit. Each group has their own specific history as well as unique culture. The Indigenous population is on average the youngest in Canada, as well as the fastest growing.<sup>1</sup>

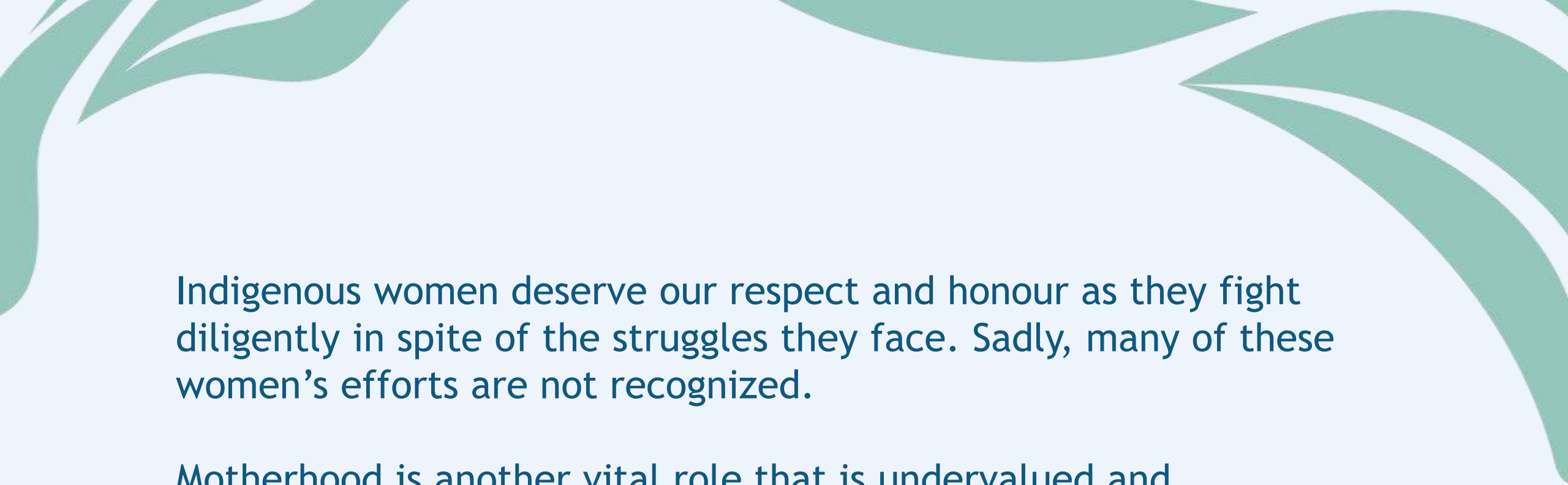
The relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian Government is unique. Indigenous people lived on the lands prior to the arrival of colonists. As such, the Canadian Government recognizes that Indigenous peoples have special rights and title to the land.



## **Women Roles**

The role of women and gender diverse people in all Indigenous communities has changed drastically since colonization. Throughout the years, many brave and courageous Indigenous women have been working tirelessly to reclaim their traditional roles. They do so by advocating and engaging in protests to bring awareness about critical issues affecting Indigenous people.

Indigenous women have also used legal means to change policy and legislation. All of these efforts are part of the road to reconciliation with the hope that the impacts will have long-term benefits for Indigenous people.



Indigenous women deserve our respect and honour as they fight diligently in spite of the struggles they face. Sadly, many of these women's efforts are not recognized.

Motherhood is another vital role that is undervalued and underappreciated. Raising children is arguably the most important job there is, yet contributions made by Indigenous mothers are often unrecognized. These women give their hearts and their lives to healing their communities and families. Indigenous women work tirelessly to restore the traditions of respect and honour that were once a fundamental part of the culture.

## First Nations

First Nations people are the most populous of the three Indigenous groups. First Nations people live in every province and territory, either on a reserve or in an urban or rural setting. First Nations territories are still used as a basis for regions of traditional lands. In all speeches and presentations, Indigenous people offer respects to the traditional territories in which they stand on.

A band is a First Nations community with its own governing body. This often includes an elected chief and council. There are over 600 bands throughout Canada. British Columbia and Ontario have the highest population of First Nations people in Canada. There are over 50 known First Nations languages.<sup>2</sup> First Nations people's relationship with the Canadian Government is unique due to their treaty agreements.





## Métis

Métis people have a mixed European (mainly French and Scottish) and Indigenous ancestry. This group has their own unique and rich identity, history, and culture. Métis people are the second most populous of the three Indigenous groups. Métis people currently reside in all Canadian provinces and territories,<sup>3</sup> however traditionally, they lived in a large area referred to as their Homeland. This area spread from Ontario to British Columbia as well as areas in the northern United States of America. Michif is the Métis people's traditional language. Métis traditional culture respected and honoured women's roles.



## Inuit

Inuit are traditionally from the Arctic areas of North America. The Inuit people have flourished in what some would call very harsh environments. The Inuit people are very innovative and invented many tools that we use today. The Inuit are a diverse people and their traditional language is Inuktitut, which consists of five main dialects.<sup>4</sup>

*Inuit women play an integral role in governing our communities and our society. Inuit women are the links to the past and to the future; Inuit women are the vessels of culture, health, language, traditions, teaching, caregiving and child rearing. These qualities are fundamental to the survival of any society.*

*- Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada<sup>5</sup>*






## Traditional Roles of Women

Hundreds of years ago in North America, Indigenous women and men lived with the belief that all people were created equal. All roles within the community were important and everybody had a place. Colonists from Europe first arrived in North America over 500 years ago. The Europeans came from a culture where men had all of the power. This type of culture is called a 'patriarchy'. When Europeans first encountered Indigenous peoples, the colonists were surprised by the expansive roles and responsibilities carried out by Indigenous women, especially when compared to the limited roles allowed for European women. European men did not recognize or respect that Indigenous women could be capable leaders, which often led to their exclusion in decision-making. The patriarchal views held by the colonists soon began to influence Indigenous communities.






Europeans regarded Indigenous people as inferior and strategies were put into place to assimilate the Indigenous population into the mainstream patriarchal culture. As the colonists established their own communities and asserted control over the land, they enacted various harmful policies designed to control and assimilate Indigenous people. This systematic assimilation policy is known as ‘colonization’. The effects of colonization have deeply harmed Indigenous peoples, eroding their languages, traditions and cultures. Consequently, the honour and respect of Indigenous women was degraded.

The colonists imposed strict rules that defined what women were allowed to do, seeking to eliminate the roles where women had power or influence. Traditionally, Indigenous women and gender diverse people had more respect and freedoms. Sadly, the colonists succeeded at limiting and degrading the roles for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.

Traditionally, Indigenous women were honoured for their strength of spirit and the ability to give life. From the traditions of the Aanishnaabe people:


*The Earth is said to be a woman. In this way it is understood that woman preceded man on the Earth. She is called Mother Earth because from Her come all living things. Water is Her life blood. It flows through Her, nourishes Her, and purifies Her.<sup>6</sup>*





Many Indigenous traditions believe the woman's role as child bearer forges a connection between women and the spirit of water. Historically, Indigenous women acted as caretakers of the environment and water. Today, Indigenous women are speaking out about environmental issues impacting water in their communities and across Canada in an attempt to influence environmental policies.<sup>7</sup> Indigenous women care deeply about building communities that are responsible and environmentally conscious because they care about the planet they are leaving for their children.

Women held various roles in society, from warriors to mothers. Many of the roles still exist in a modern form, like being a mother, healer or caregiver, however the role has been devalued. "Women's work" is not valued equally when compared to jobs considered to be "men's work". Additionally, if a girl, a woman or a gender diverse person adopts a role that is commonly dominated by men, the person's contributions may often be judged as inferior simply because of who they are.





It takes courage to stand up for the rights of women, and for decades, women everywhere have been fighting for equality. Although there has been some progress, there is still a long way to go. Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people experience inequality in unique ways because of the intersection of their various identities. Many work tirelessly to restore the traditions of equality, respect and honour. These women pour their hearts into healing their communities so that future generations can once again take pride in who they are.

In order to re-establish a sense of value and respect for the roles traditionally held by women, it is necessary to define the roles and explore why they are important. The following section will explore the traditional roles of women.



## Teachers

Women are often teachers, and bestow their knowledge to children and others around them to the best of their abilities. Teaching and learning are lifelong processes that help us understand the world around us and how we fit into that world. Teachers deserve honour and respect.



## **Warriors (Traditional)**

Pre-colonization, women fought bravely as warriors. Today, women can choose to serve in the military or other armed forces. These women should be respected and honoured.

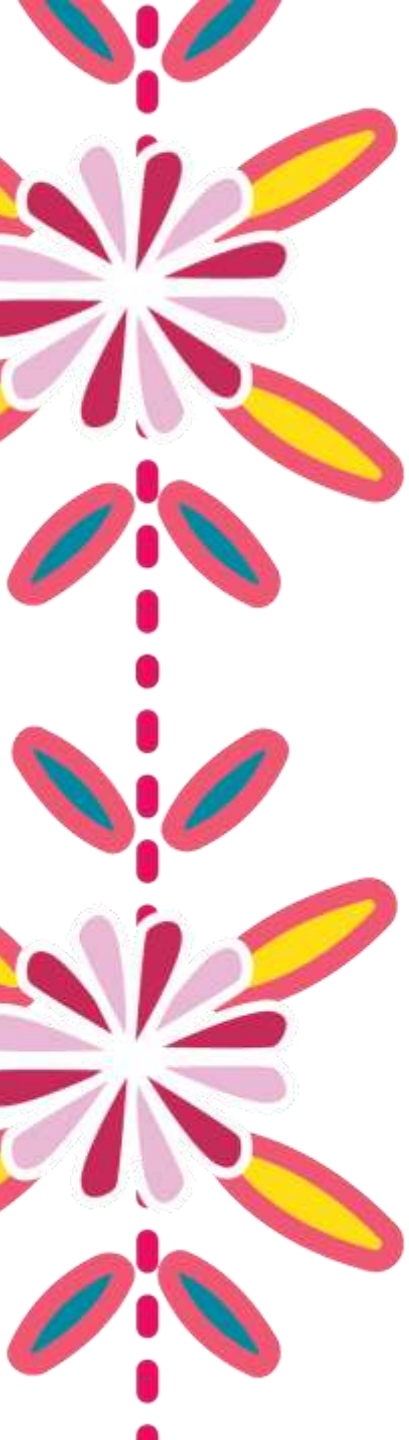


## Leaders

Indigenous women are a powerful force when they advocate and organize. Women can be leaders in various areas, from our local communities all the up to the national level, from politics and the work place to our own families. Indigenous women use their passion and integrity to help promote justice and equality. Women who assume leadership roles deserve honour and respect.







## Mothers

Motherhood is arguably the most important job there is. Mothers are the bridges between our generations. Let's show mothers that they are appreciated by giving them our honour and respect.



## Caregivers

Indigenous women are often caregivers. A caregiver is a person who supports people in need (i.e. children, elderly, people with health conditions). The essential role as a caregiver is very demanding, and often not valued. Without caregivers, the health of communities and families would diminish. They deserve our respect and honour.



## Medicine Women

A medicine woman is spiritual leader who is also a traditional healer. Traditional healing is a holistic practice that focuses on spiritual, physical and emotional wellness. The traditional knowledge has been passed down for thousands of years. Indigenous women who have become medicine women are valued and cherished. They use natural medicines to improve the health of their loved ones and the community. They are deserving of our respect and honour.





## Elders

Honouring our Elders is becoming a lost tradition. Our Elders have a lot of wisdom, and are often willing to share it. Elders deserve our respect and honour.



## **Knowledge Keepers (Traditional)**

Knowledge Keeper was a traditional role. Knowledge Keepers recorded our history via oral traditions. Often, women were honoured with the role of Knowledge Keeper.

## **Defining what Respect and Honour should look like for Indigenous Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People.**

This activity is a kind of sharing circle. Sharing circles are a sacred tradition in many Indigenous cultures that allow participants to share their experiences, emotions, opinions and/or ideas in a safe environment. The person who speaks should introduce themselves to the group and speak from the heart. Participants must listen respectfully to the person who is speaking, keeping their own thoughts and opinions to themselves. The goal of a sharing circle is to listen and learn from others. This way every voice can be heard and valued as the interconnectedness of the group grows.

Smudging is usually performed before a sharing circle to remove negative thoughts and energy. Smudging allows for honesty and integrity to complement the sharing activities.

A Talking Stick has also been a long-time tradition throughout Indigenous communities. It shows respect and honour. If an Elder were present, they would be asked to speak first. The protocol for the Talking Stick is simple: only the person holding the stick is allowed to speak, and others must listen respectfully and quietly.

This is a group activity and is a type of sharing circle. This activity will bring attention to our feelings as we explore, “What should respect and honour look like for women, girls and gender diverse people?”

Sometimes emotions that feel uncomfortable can rise up within ourselves. It is easy to ignore our feelings or push them aside in certain situations, but it is important to check in with our hearts from time-to-time. For example, you hear something that reminds you of a time in the past when you were disrespected and it makes you angry. It is natural to feel angry when we are disrespected, however it is important to recognize and acknowledge your anger. This is known as a ‘check in.’ By allowing ourselves to feel emotions and process them in a safe environment, they are less likely to control us. If we ignore the anger or other emotions, it can make us behave in ways that are harmful to ourselves or others.

The goal of the activity is to create a shared meaning of respect and honour and to understand that we all want to be treated with respect and dignity for who we are.

**Activity:**

Type: Group activity/Sharing Circle

- Estimated time: 15-45 minutes (dependent on group size)
- Materials needed: Talking stick







### Instructions:

1. If possible, smudge before the activity
2. If you have a Talking Stick, you can use it, or designate one. Be aware that the Talking Stick is present to represent respect and honour for one another.
3. If an elder is present they can be asked to speak first.
4. Take turns in a circle answering the question.
5. Once completed, write down a collective definition to the question on a flip chart or chalk board.

### QUESTION:

*‘What should respect and honour look like for women, girls and gender diverse people’.*



## Cleaning the Lens

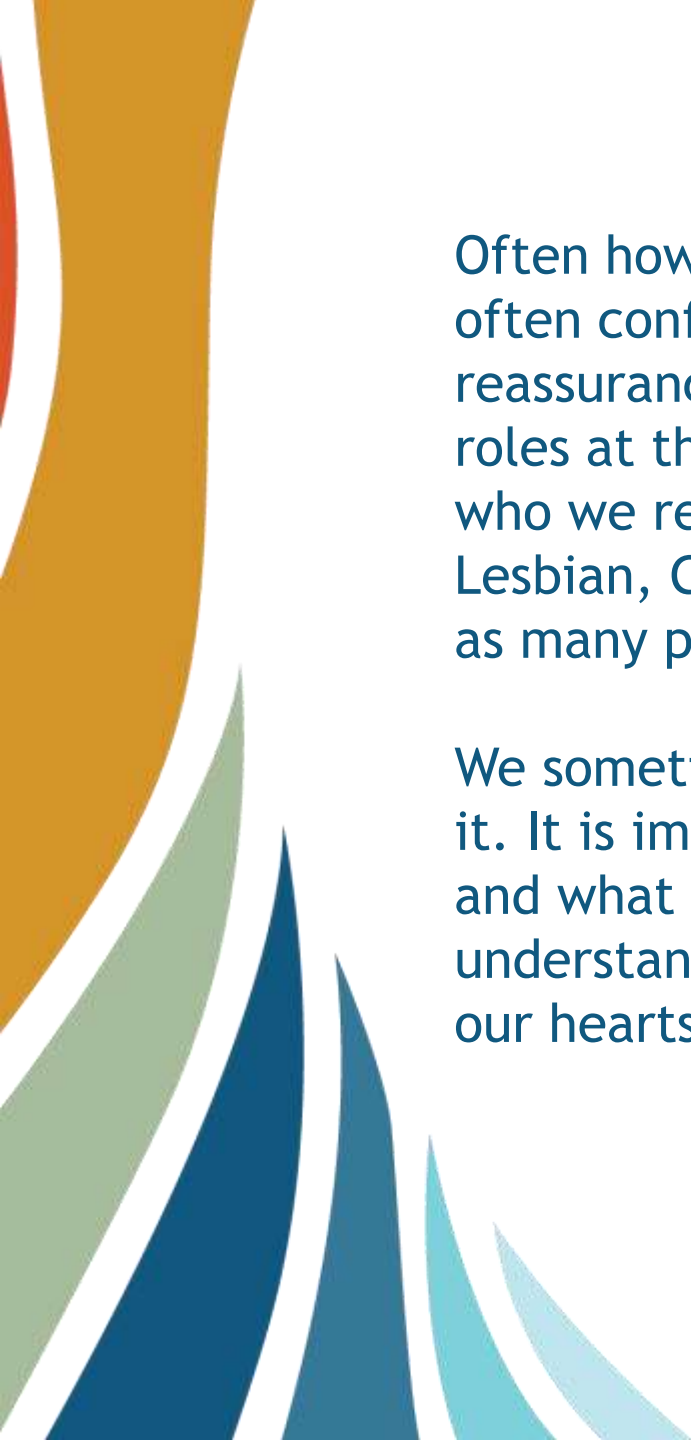
How we see and understand the world is often referred to as our lens or perspective. At times, it can be difficult to see things from other people's perspectives. When a majority of people share the same lens, their perspective becomes the dominant perspective. If the dominant perspective views certain minority groups as inferior than the dominant group, social problems may arise, such as racism, harassment and discrimination. Racism along with other dehumanizing behaviours and attitudes can poison the lens of minority groups by making them see themselves and their world in a distorted way. This distorted lens can make them believe that they are inferior to others. In this way, people can devalue themselves by internalizing racism or other forms of hate.

When people are not aware of their own tainted lens and how the dominant perspective can cause them to devalue themselves, many people struggle, and rightfully so, to see their world and themselves clearly.

There are fundamental differences between Indigenous and colonial perspectives. These differences can sometimes lead to disagreements and mistrust. Since the colonists arrived, the colonial culture has undervalued Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people and viewed Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people as inferior to both men and non-Indigenous women.

Indigenous culture has evolved over the centuries and has incorporated certain European traditions and cultures. Some people have accepted the integration of the different cultures while others prefer to maintain their traditional ways. It is important to know and understand history from different perspectives, and how colonial and Indigenous history has molded our view of the world and how we see ourselves. The ways in which reconciliation can occur is by acknowledging the past and honouring Indigenous cultures.



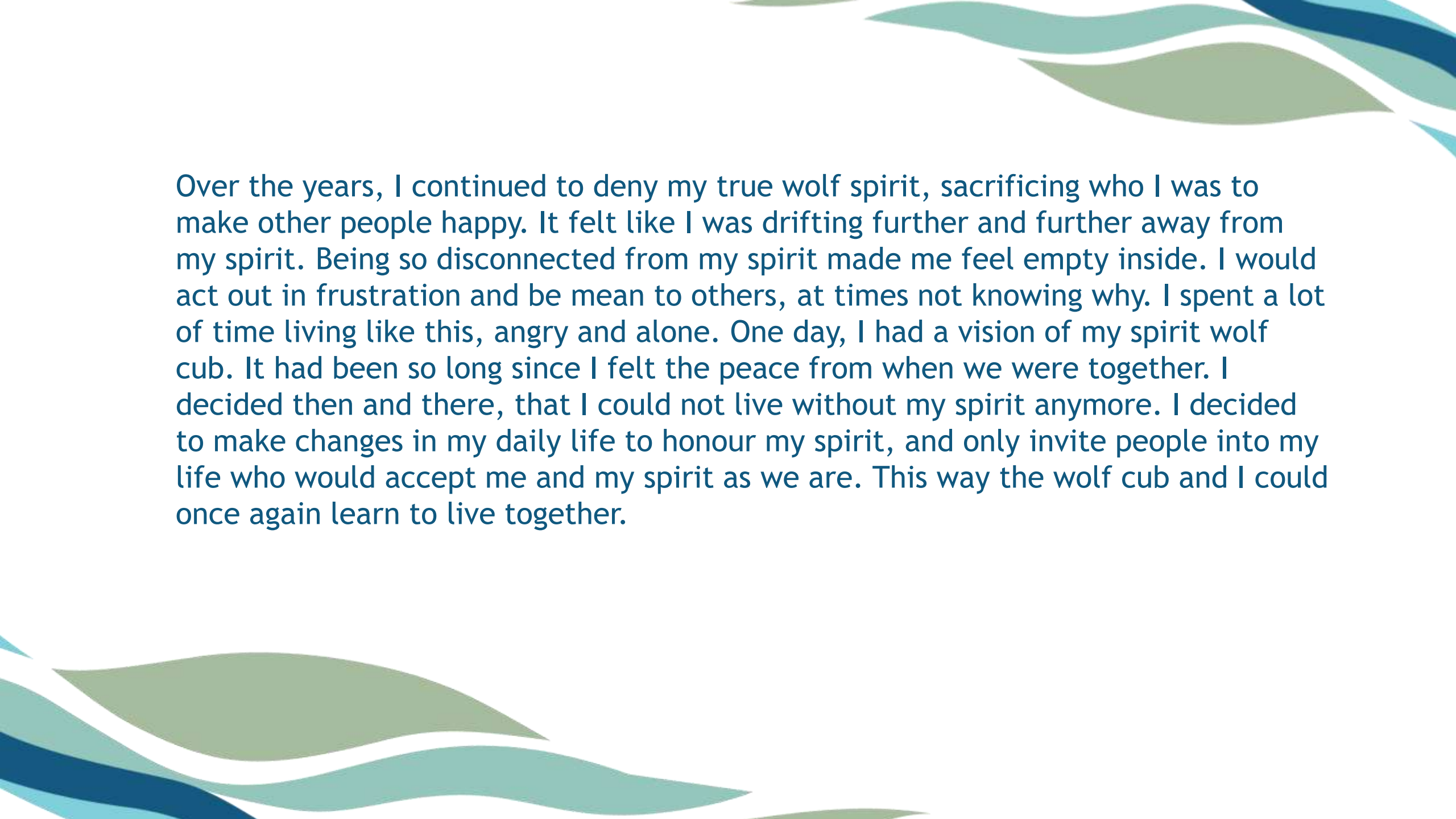


Often how we are, is not who we are. What does that mean? It means that we often conform to our surroundings for acceptance or for safety and reassurance. Consequently, we risk becoming trapped in socially comfortable roles at the expense of who we are. How we behave may not be in line with who we really are inside. Examples of this can be seen throughout the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans, Queer and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S+) community as many people fear ‘coming out’ socially and therefore stay closeted.

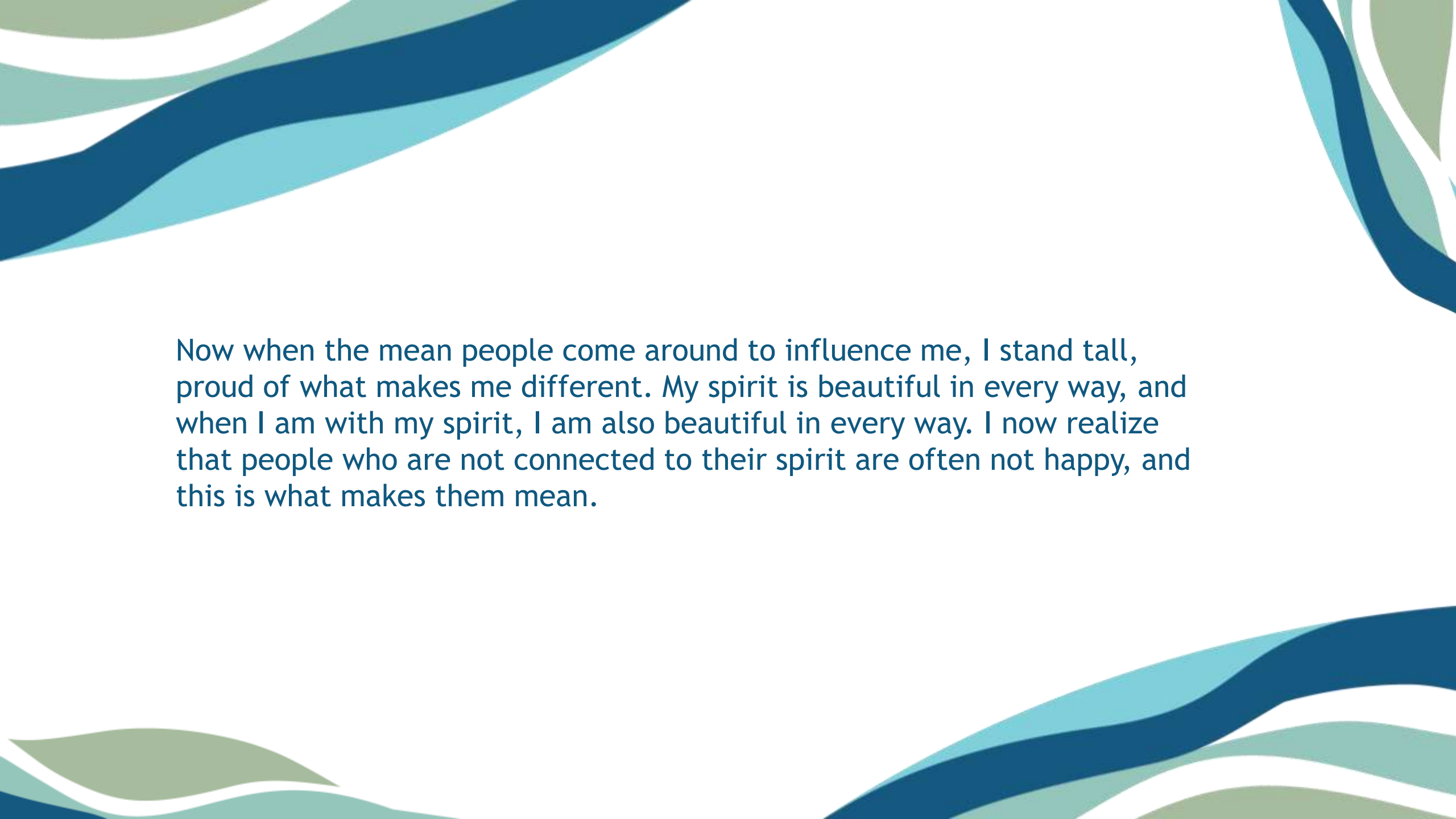
We sometimes act how we are ‘supposed’ to be because others accept us for it. It is important to take the time to figure out what we really connect with and what we believe. Once we have that knowledge, we can gain an understanding of who we really are. Moreover, we can follow what is truly in our hearts and become our true selves.

## **“WOLF CUB STORY”**

When I was young, I identified my spirit as a wolf cub, beautiful in every way. Back then, I was true to myself and therefore I was at peace. As I grew up, I started to hear people say that wolves were bad. I knew I was not a bad person, so they could not possibly mean me. I started to realize that people would be mean to those they believed to be wolves. I began to worry about my safety. One day, the mean people asked me if I was a wolf. Out of fear, I said, “I was not a wolf.” Surprisingly, they believed me and left me alone. Denying my wolf cub spirit made me feel sad, as it distanced me from my inner wolf spirit. As time passed, I found I was attracted to different people than most. The mean people once again came around looking to pick on someone who was different. When they approached and asked me what type of people I liked, I told them I was the same as them, and that I liked the same type of people they did. Once again, they believed me and left me alone.



Over the years, I continued to deny my true wolf spirit, sacrificing who I was to make other people happy. It felt like I was drifting further and further away from my spirit. Being so disconnected from my spirit made me feel empty inside. I would act out in frustration and be mean to others, at times not knowing why. I spent a lot of time living like this, angry and alone. One day, I had a vision of my spirit wolf cub. It had been so long since I felt the peace from when we were together. I decided then and there, that I could not live without my spirit anymore. I decided to make changes in my daily life to honour my spirit, and only invite people into my life who would accept me and my spirit as we are. This way the wolf cub and I could once again learn to live together.



Now when the mean people come around to influence me, I stand tall, proud of what makes me different. My spirit is beautiful in every way, and when I am with my spirit, I am also beautiful in every way. I now realize that people who are not connected to their spirit are often not happy, and this is what makes them mean.

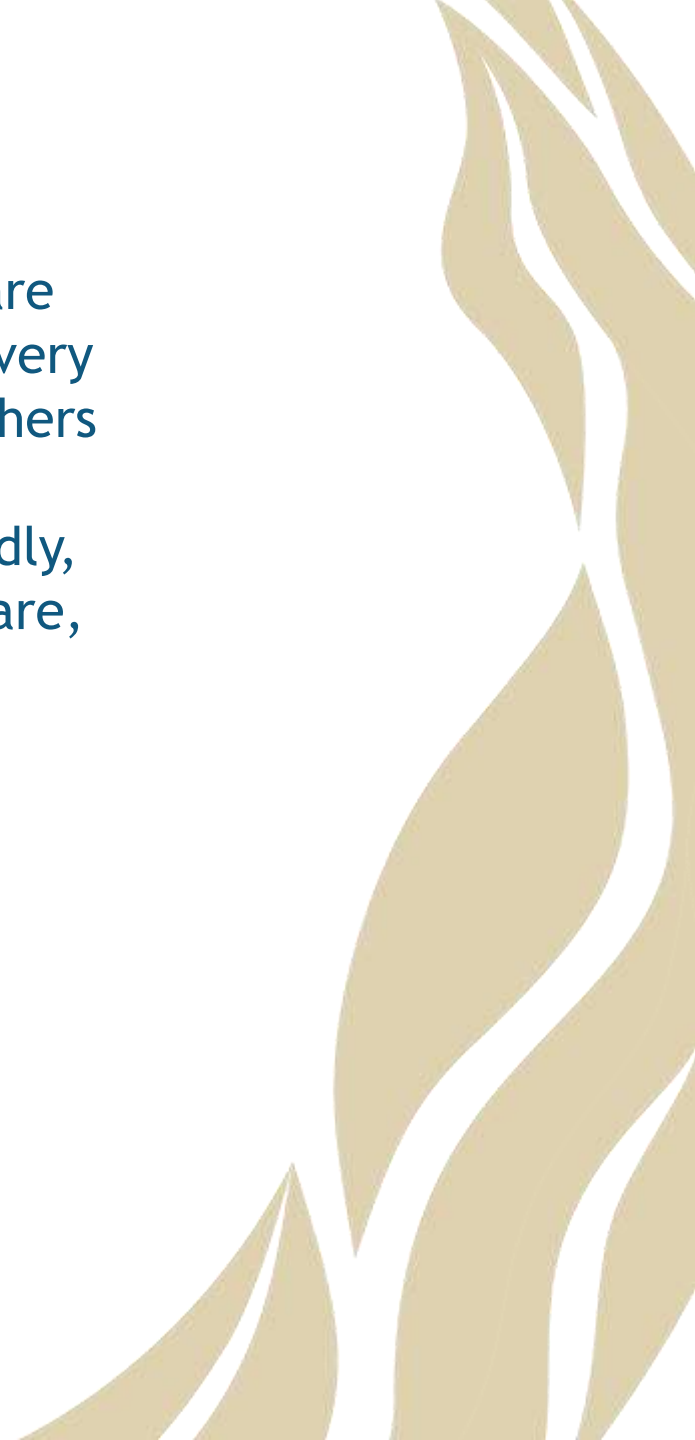


When people are mean to me I do not let their judgement poison my lens or distort my spirit. I know it is beautiful and I don't need their reassurance. By reconnecting with my wolf cub spirit, I value what makes me different and I once again feel at peace. Now, I live every day honouring my spirit. I am a beautiful wolf cub.



## Valuing Yourself

We all have an inner voice. Sometimes that inner voice says we are beautiful and sometimes that inner voice is not kind. We can be very judgmental of ourselves and we sometimes obsess about what others think of us. We have to be careful about changing things about ourselves to gain other people's acceptance. When we do so blindly, we begin to devalue ourselves. If we continue to ignore who we are, we risk becoming complacent and disconnected from ourselves.



It is important not get lost in this fast-paced world, and forget to look inside ourselves. When we take the time to understand ourselves we can approach our future with purpose. As we move forward in life, we learn to identify our stressors. Certain life stressors can be managed, while others are out of our control. We must work to make peace with the stressors that are out of our control. As we make time for ourselves and maintain our sense of purpose, we can take the steps in life that will take us to places we truly want to be.



## Mindfulness Activity

Mindfulness is a powerful activity that can help us to let go of negative thoughts and feelings. Mindfulness is a mental state that can be achieved by focusing our awareness of the present and peacefully accepting one's feelings, thoughts and physical sensations without judgment.

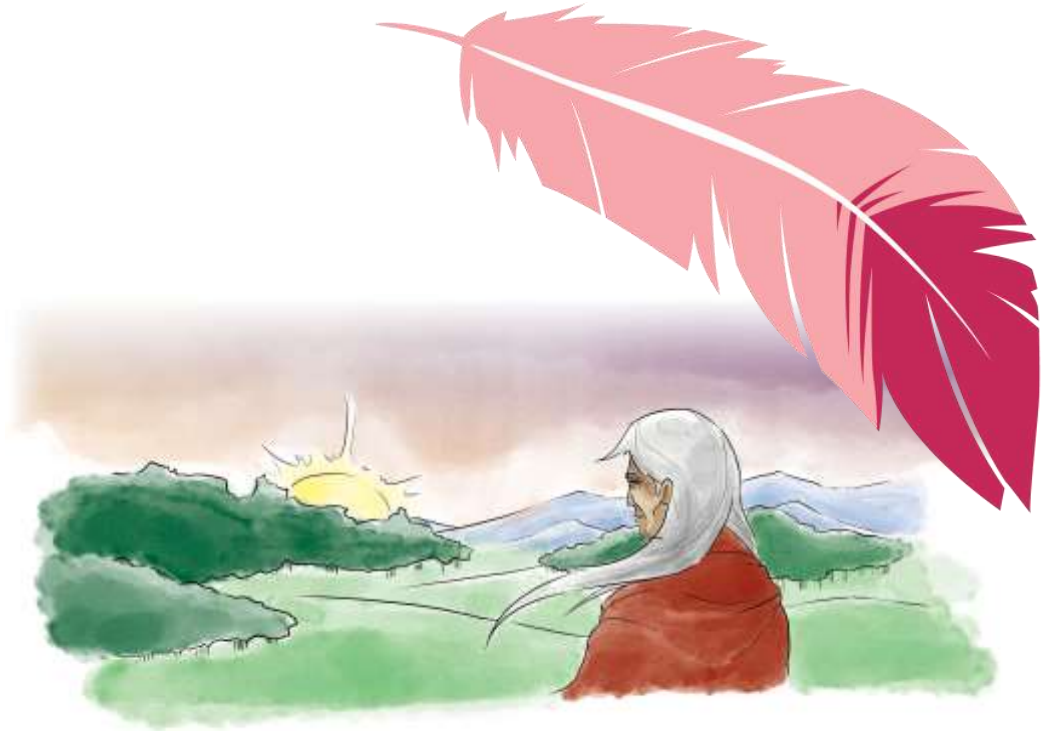
We will see the benefits of mindfulness through the mindful eating exercise. As we bring our attention to our senses and eat with focused awareness, our minds can relax in the present moment.

### Activity:

- Type: Group or independent activity
- Estimated time: 10-15 minutes (dependent on group size)



- Materials needed: Food (fruit variety works well for this activity)



## Instructions:

Choose a food that you enjoy.

Look at the food you have picked out but do not eat it. Take the time to identify the details of the food you chose. Look at its texture, colour and shape.

Now pick up the chosen food. Focus your attention on how it feels. It is rough or smooth? Hot or cold? Take the time to identify how the food feels.

Now, patiently bring the chosen food to your lips. DO NOT EAT IT. Does the chosen food have a smell? Can you sense if your mouth is beginning to water?

As you slowly place the chosen food in your mouth, notice how it feels on your lips, on your tongue. Take a moment to notice the sensations.

As you slowly bite into it, notice every flavor and sensation. Notice how it feels as you bite into it. Take your time as you chew it, and be aware of the food's taste, texture, and temperature.





## Discussion:

- What did that exercise feel like?
- Did you enjoy that food more than you usually do?
- How difficult was it to bring your attention to the moment as you followed each step.
- After eating the food mindfully, do you notice anything different about your state of mind?



## **Sustainability in Culture**

Indigenous cultures have always been deeply rooted in sustainability and respect for our planet. The world we live in is often referred to as ‘Mother Earth’. Mother Earth provides for all the life around us, including ourselves. She includes the eagles in the sky and the sky itself, the fish in the lake and the lake itself, as well as the moose on the land and the land itself.

Mother Earth provides us with gifts that allow us to sustain life, such as water and food. Mother Earth has entrusted us to be the protectors of the earth, and to know that we and the earth are one and the same. We cannot pollute the air without polluting our lungs, and we cannot pollute the water without polluting our bodies. Mother Earth has given us the gift of intelligence, so that we can be the guardians of our environment. As guardians, we have a unique ability to be aware of our environments, and a duty to take actions to protect and sustain our environments. The actions we take to protect the earth is a way to give thanks to Mother Earth for all her gifts.



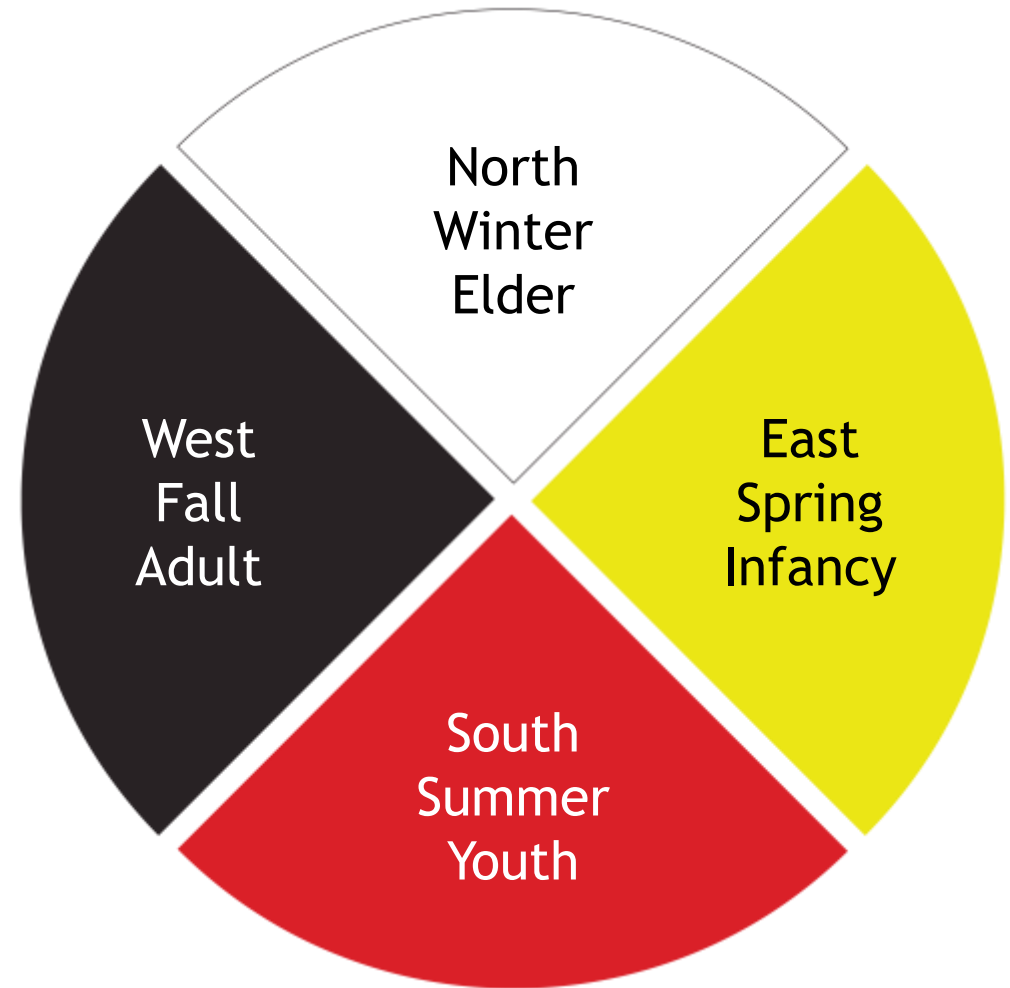


Many of our traditions and teachings are rooted in respect for our environments and ourselves. NWAC works to be inclusive to all Indigenous people. NWAC acknowledges that the cultural traditions herein are not universal amongst all Indigenous peoples and cultures.



Here are some examples:

## The Medicine Wheel

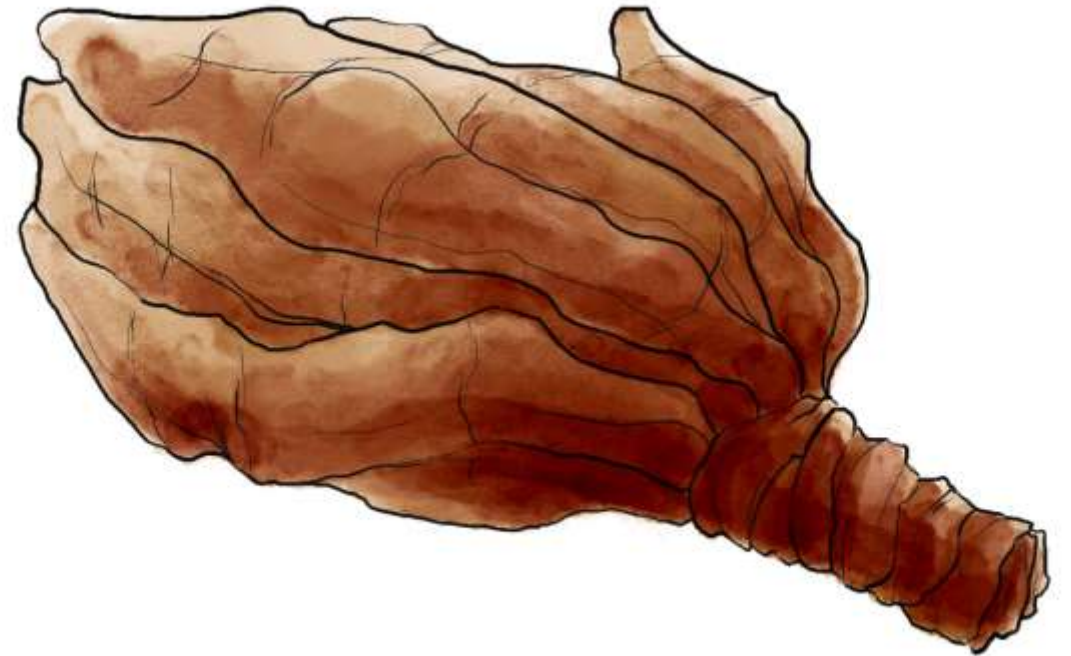


## THE FOUR SACRED MEDICINES

Sacred medicines are used in ceremonies to promote healing.

### Tobacco

Sacred Tobacco is often used as an offering, to show respect and good intentions. Tobacco is given to an Elder to show thanks after advice is sought. Tobacco is also offered to Mother Earth to show respect for nature after we take something from the earth.





## THE FOUR SACRED MEDICINES

Sacred medicines are used in ceremonies to promote healing.

### Sweet Grass

Sweet Grass is often referred to as the hair of Mother Earth. Sweet grass is used in Smudging ceremonies to relieve negative energy, and its sweet smell is known to produce a sense of calmness.



## THE FOUR SACRED MEDICINES

Sacred medicines are used in ceremonies to promote healing.

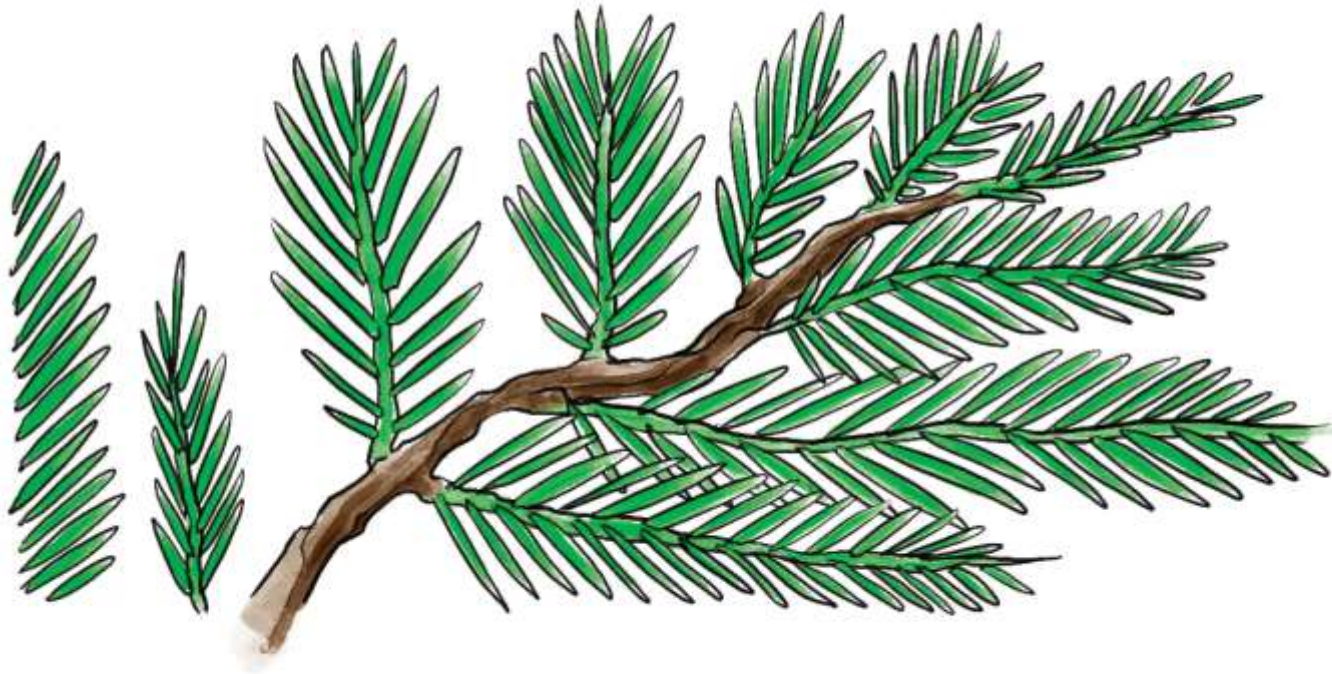


### Sage

Sage is often used in Smudging ceremonies, as it removes negative energy, and has a cleansing effect.

## THE FOUR SACRED MEDICINES

Sacred medicines are used in ceremonies to promote healing.



### Cedar

Cedar is used to remove negative energy and promote wellness, and is often used in Sweat Lodge ceremonies.





## SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS

|          |                                                                   |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Wisdom   | to cherish knowledge is to know wisdom                            |
| Love     | to know love is to know peace                                     |
| Respect  | to honour all of creation is to have respect                      |
| Bravery  | to face life with courage is to know bravery                      |
| Honesty  | to walk through life with integrity is to know honesty            |
| Humility | to accept yourself as sacred part of creation is to know humility |
| Truth    | to know these teachings is to know truth                          |

## TWO-SPIRITED PEOPLE AND LGBTQ+ IN TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS CULTURE

The idea of having two spirits is a part of Indigenous culture. The idea was commonplace throughout all of Turtle Island, otherwise known as North America. Historically, the names given to people who were gender diverse or those with varying sexualities were different in each tribe. The term Two-Spirit is relatively new and was created to unite all Two-Spirit people throughout Turtle Island.



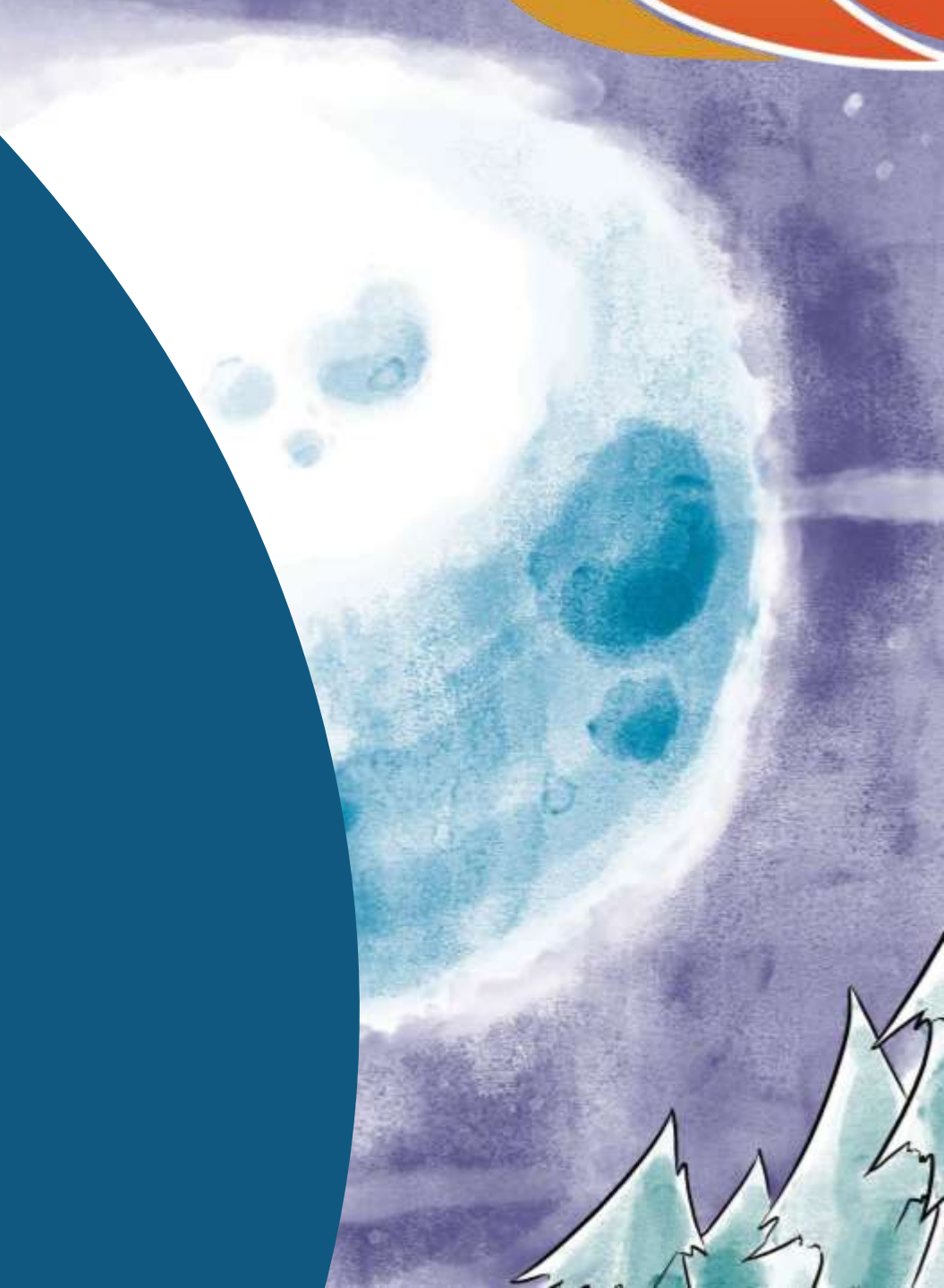


Two-Spirit people have long been a part of Indigenous culture but unfortunately, colonization and assimilation practices nearly destroyed this part of the culture.

Gender diversity was commonplace in many Indigenous traditional communities, and these communities were not infected with homophobia and transphobia. The Elder teachings tell us that a Two-Spirit person has two spirits - a female and a male spirit. Two-Spirit people were respected and honoured within their communities. Two-Spirit people were often visionaries, healers, medicine people, nannies of orphans and caregivers.<sup>8</sup> Two-Spirit people today often struggle with acceptance, discrimination and sadly, their health and well being has suffered.

Through the reclamation of Indigenous cultures and corresponding traditions, communities are starting to change. Gender diversity is being celebrated once again as Indigenous people are reclaiming their culture.


The Europeans saw gender as a binary, and had a limited understanding of sexuality. A gender binary means that there are only two types of genders (i.e. male and female). Colonists pressured Indigenous people to conform to the imposed genders of male or female. The rigid genders had corresponding roles that outlined the rights, roles in society, responsibilities and sexuality. Consequently, this diminished the pre-existing roles and rights for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.



Together we can restore the traditional communities. One way to help is by addressing the dehumanizing behaviours and attitudes that exist towards people who are Two-Spirit or gender diverse, as well as to those people that have different sexualities within our communities. If there is uncertainty on which pronouns to use for a person who identifies as Two-Spirit or non-binary, please ask them what they would prefer and use them respectfully. Discrimination and harassment towards anybody is never acceptable in any situation.

In Indigenous communities, there were once rituals for children who showed interest in activities associated with the gender outside of their assigned gender at birth. These rituals allowed the spirit(s) to represent themselves. One example of a performed ritual is as follows; if a boy was not interested in the traditional boy roles or work, the parents would hold a ceremony to determine how they would raise their child. The parents would set up an area surrounded by brush, and in the center place a man's bow and a woman's basket.





Afterwards the boy was told to go inside the brush and choose one item from the circle. As the boy entered, the parents set the brush on fire. The parents and others observed which item the boy took with him as he ran out. If it was the basket, they would raise their child as a girl and if the boy chose a bow they would raise the child as a boy.<sup>9</sup> There were many rituals, and this is just one example of how diversity within Indigenous cultures was celebrated and accepted.

On June 19, 2017 the Canadian Government passed Bill C-16. The Bill amended the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code to include gender identity and expression as a protected ground.<sup>10</sup> This is a momentous step in the healing process for Two-Spirit people. For the first time in Canadian history, people have legal protections to live free from discrimination because of their gender identity and expression. In addition, those who are discriminated against have the right to legal recourse.

## Empowerment Word Search

C H D C R E S P E C T W H B D  
B E A U T I F U L N E O T L P  
S Z D E O S J C B T F R U X W  
G T V V S B H D A G E T R O L  
K O U H A E R N P H A H T E X  
L N L N R T O H P D R Y O T Q  
E J H I N I F T O E L K I N D  
K G S O S I N Y T S E N O H T  
E H A S N A N I S Y S G S M N  
L V A R R O Q G N H S T K O A  
W P A B U D U L U E R B L A I  
I J I R P O L R M O D S I W D  
G V A U B Z C R N W B W E J A  
B V S L P X T G B W D E O M R  
D T P H D U I U B C M J F Y E

## EMPOWERMENT WORD SEARCH ACTIVITY

BEAUTIFUL

BRAVE

CHERISH

COURAGE

FEARLESS

LOVE

PASSIONATE

RADIANT

RESPECT

STRONG

STUNNING

TRUTH

WORTHY

UNSTOPPABLE

VIBRANT

WISDOM

HONESTY

HONOUR

KIND



## **INDIGENOUS INNOVATIONS**

Indigenous people are innovative. Because of their diverse forms of knowledge, Indigenous people have developed expertise in a number of areas. Through their deep connection to the land, Indigenous people developed various sustainable environmental practices to manage their resources. They harvested plants and developed advanced farming techniques. Indigenous people also discovered medicinal properties of plants and used them to promote healthy communities. Here are just a few of the things that Indigenous people invented or discovered.<sup>11</sup>

## **Willow Bark**

Indigenous people chewed or boiled a tea from the leaves or inner bark of the willow tree. The tea would relieve fever or other minor pains like toothaches, headaches, or arthritis.

Willow bark is the active ingredient in many popular pain relievers we all know today such as Aspirin.



## **Black-Berry Plant**

First Nations people treated sicknesses such as dysentery, cholera and an upset stomach by using the whole blackberry plant to make a tea.

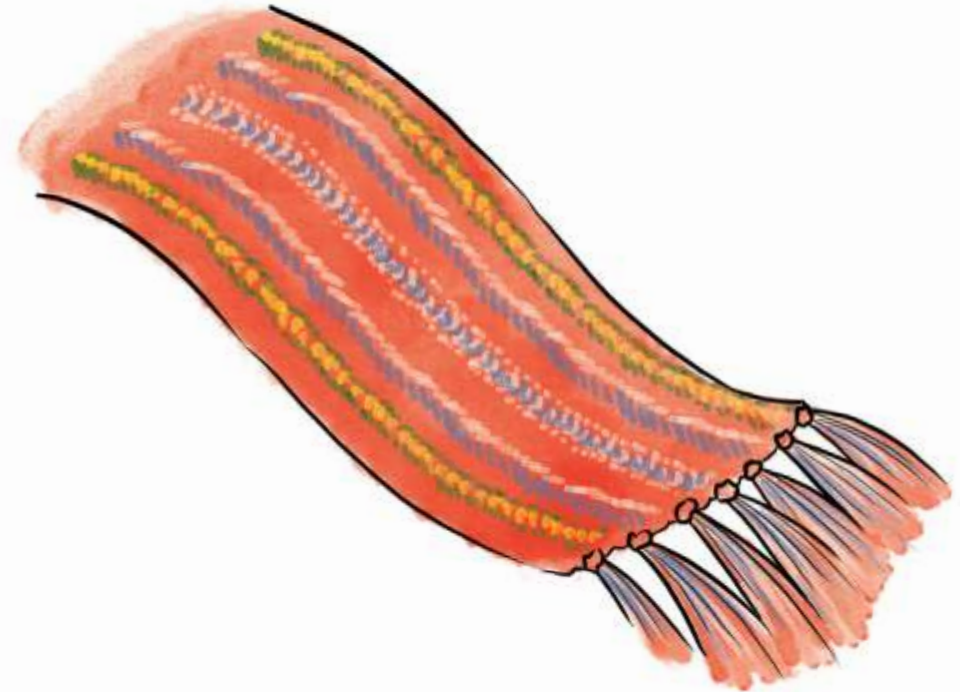
The entire plant, including its roots, stems and fruit are all used as medicines.



## Métis Sash

The Métis Sash has a long history with the Métis people. The Sash was a key trading item for the Métis.

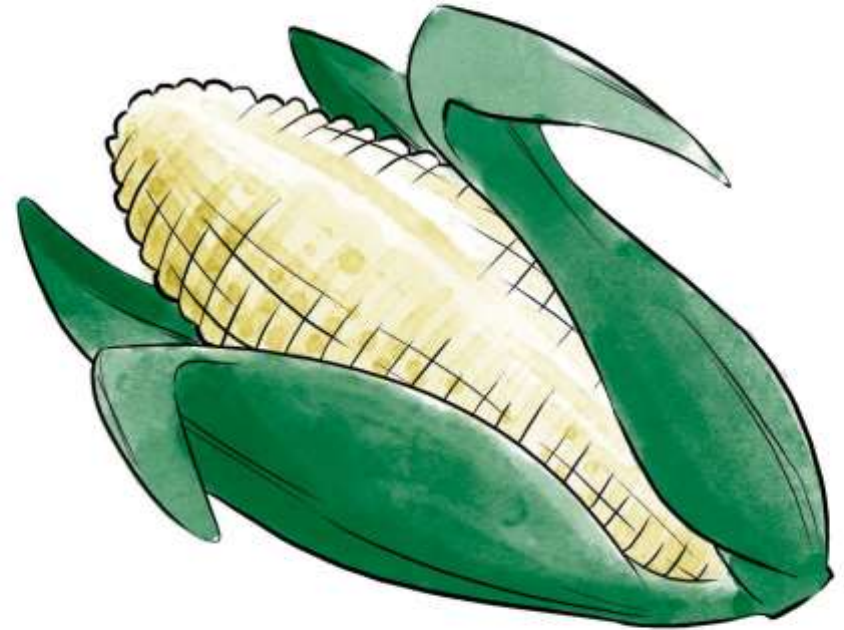
The sash has many uses. It was used as a tumpline (large rope placed over the head to pull canoes / heavy items), clothing, belts as well as many more practical uses.<sup>12</sup>



## **Corn (Maize)**

Corn is a staple food that was cultivated by Indigenous people for thousands of years. It was shared and now it is grown all around the world.

Indigenous people decisively transformed corn through special cultivation techniques, spanning over a thousand years. Today corn has many uses.



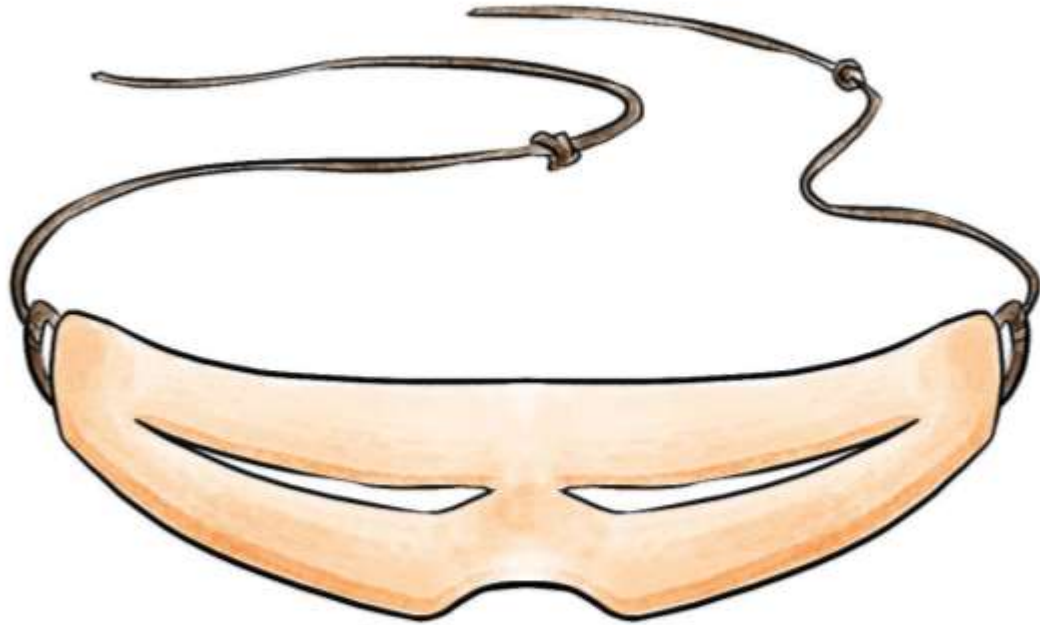


## **Pine Tree Tea**

Indigenous people used pine trees to make a tea that helped relieve coughs and chest congestion.

Many cough syrups today use parts of the pine tree.





## **Goggles or Snow Goggles**

The Inuit people created goggles with bone, antler and ivory materials.

The goggles helped to prevent blinding snow glare while they hunted.



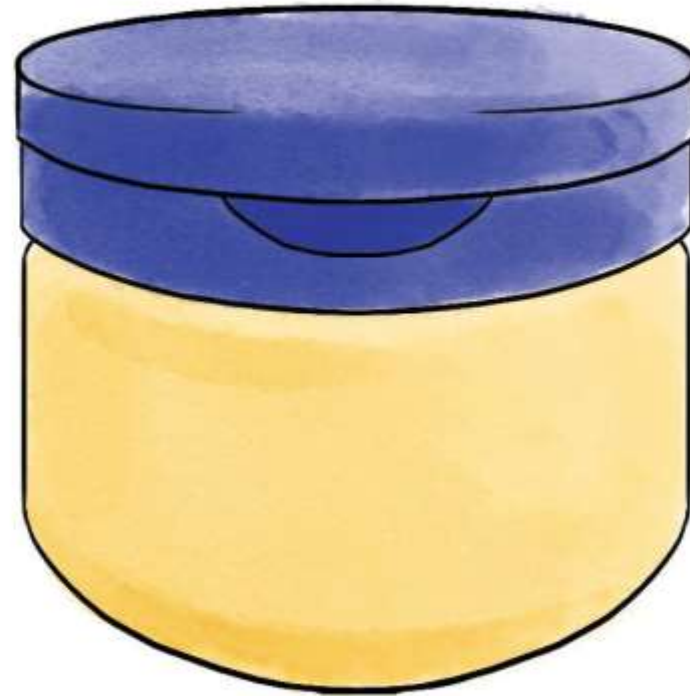
## Chewing Gum

Indigenous people created Spruce gum with the resin of spruce trees. Mint and other flavors are added to spruce gum to give it a multitude of flavours.

## **Petroleum Jelly**

Indigenous people used olefin hydrocarbons and methane to make petroleum jelly. The jelly was used to hydrate and protect animal and human skin.

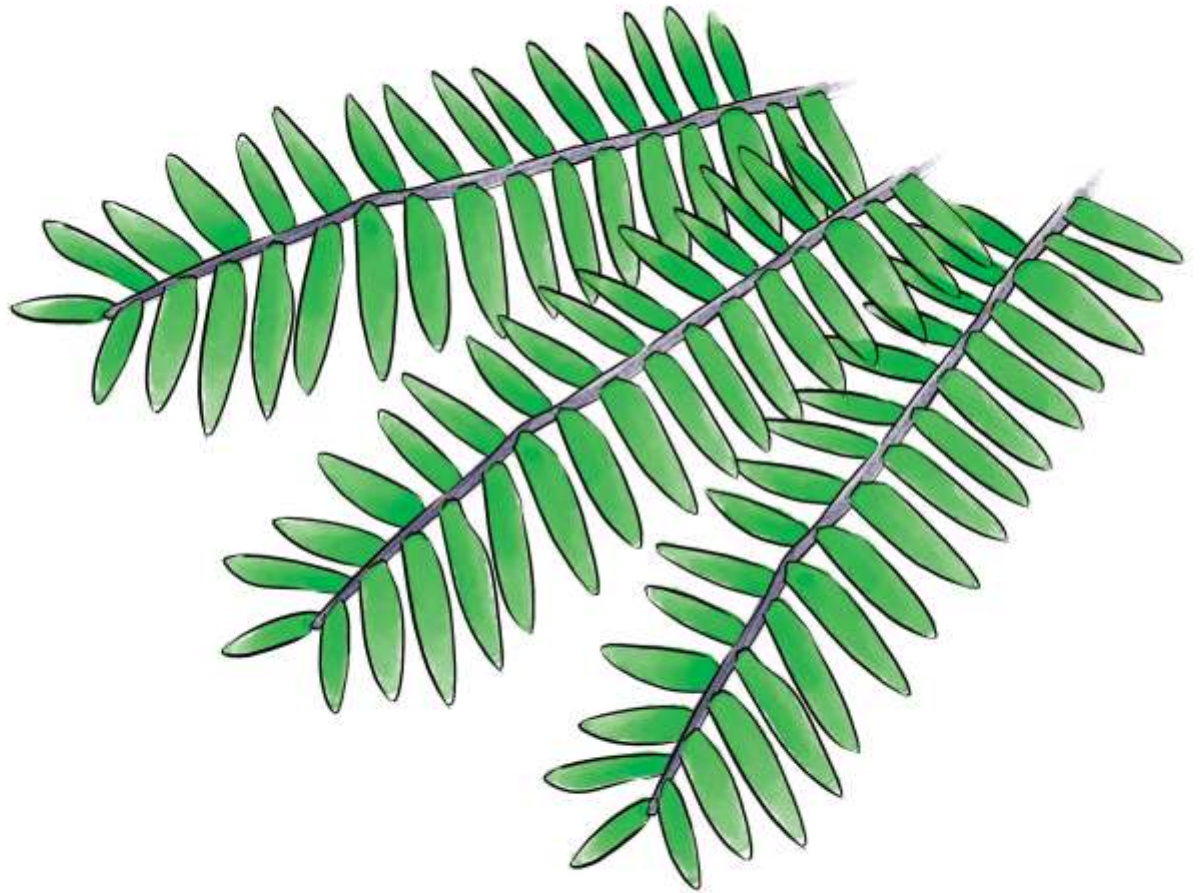
Petroleum jelly is used widely around the world today for multiple purposes.



## **Hemlock 'Cure for Scurvy'**

The bark and needles of the hemlock or pine tree are boiled to make a tonic rich in Vitamin C.

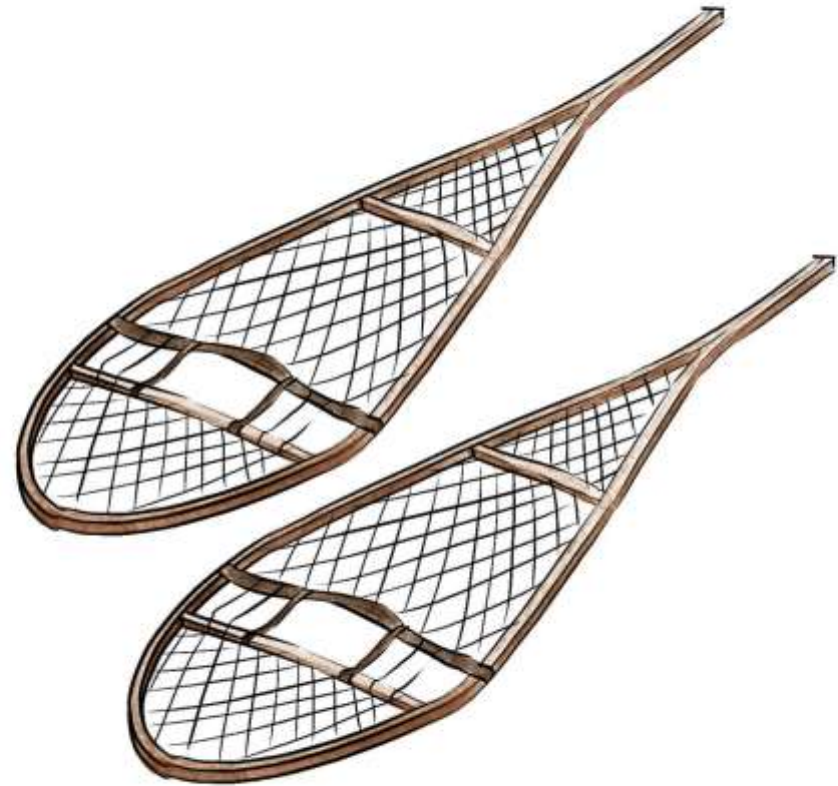
Indigenous people shared their cure for scurvy with European settlers.



## Snowshoes

Many kinds of snowshoes were developed by First Nations, Métis and Inuit. A very common style was made from spruce and rawhide thongs.

Snowshoes have evolved over the centuries leading to new designs for snowshoes and skis. Today, people enjoy many winter activities and sports thanks to these creations.



## Wild Rice

Wild rice is a cereal grain. First Nations and Métis people sometimes presented wild rice as a treasured gift to fur traders as a symbol of friendship.

Wild rice is often seen as a delicacy all over North America.



## Canoe

The canoe is an Indigenous invention. Traditionally made from bark and pitch, they varied in size depending on what they were needed for.

Today the canoe is used throughout the world as a means of transportation over water.



## **Maple syrup / Maple Sugar**

Indigenous tribes developed rituals around sugar making, celebrating the Sugar Moon (the first full moon of spring) with a Maple Dance.

Maple syrup and sugar is enjoyed all over the world today.

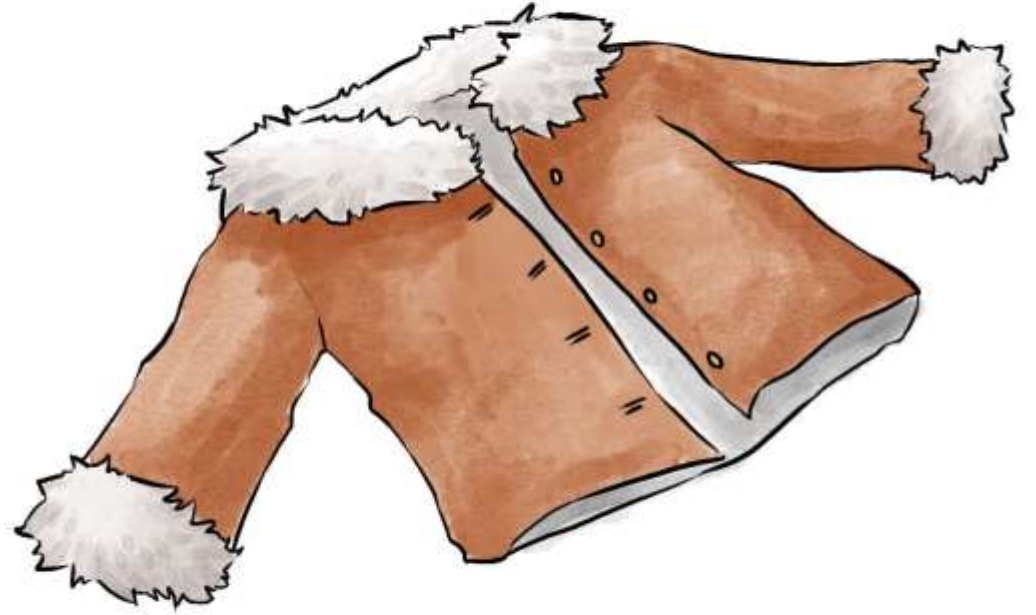




## Winter Survival

Indigenous people helped early settlers by teaching them about farming and how to make clothes for the harsh Canadian climate.

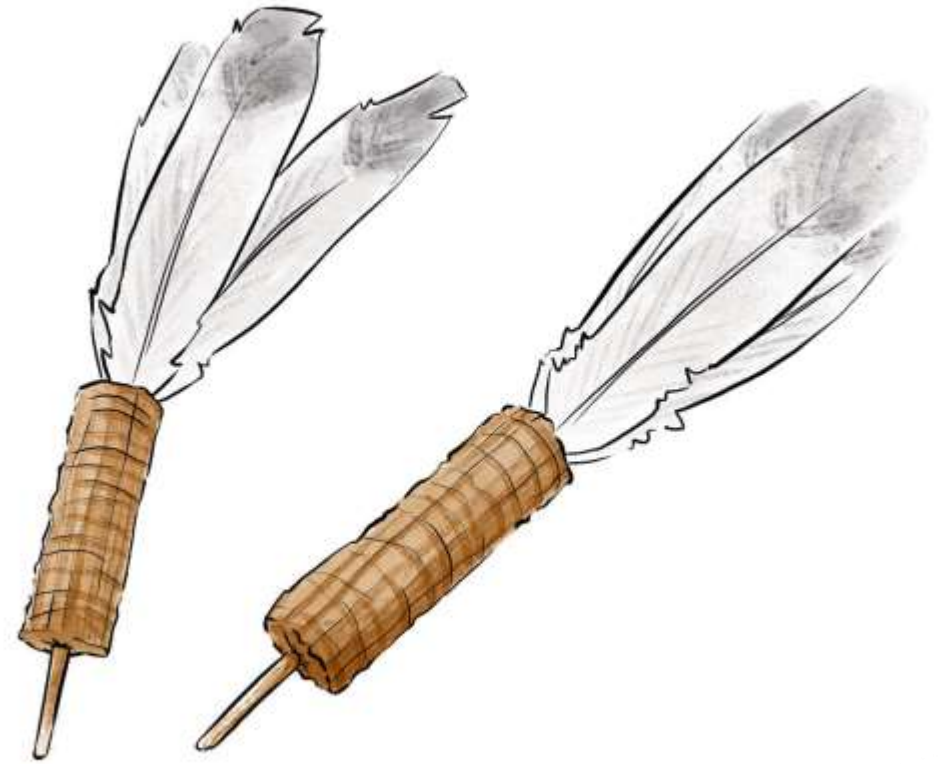
Indigenous people showed settlers how to keep them warm which allowed them to survive the harsh winters.



## Lawn Darts

Indigenous people created the game of lawn darts using shucked new green corn with its kernels removed. Feathers were attached to the darts to increase viability.

The game of lawn darts is enjoyed all over the world today.



## Lacrosse

Lacrosse is a team sport invented by Indigenous people.

Many believe it is the fore-runner to hockey. The national sport of Canada.



## Métis Fiddle Music

This music is distinctive to the Métis people and was developed over many years. Scottish and French Canadians introduced fur traders to the violin. The Métis created a music that was entirely unique.

The style is very percussive and the metre in the music is often different from measure to measure. The style is so unique that most non Métis players call the Métis style of fiddle 'crooked' as it is nearly impossible to count to 8 over two bars. It is considered an oral tradition of Métis as it is too difficult to teach in formal training.





## **Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People (MMIWGGD)**

The Native Women's Association of Canada is committed to advocating for the well-being of all Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people. Part of the mandate of the MMIWGGD Inquiry is to look at the issues that may have led to the Murder and disappearance of Indigenous Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People. The value of doing this work is so that any issues can be identified and addressed. In particular, the MMIWGGD Inquiry has identified a lack of value and respect for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people as a key factor leading to violence against them. This toolkit is part of NWAC's plan to reclaim respect and honour for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.

*For more information on the Inquiry, please visit*

<http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/>



## BE SAFE, BE WISE, BE AWARE

### Hitchhiking

1. Avoid hitchhiking if possible. Instead, use taxi services.
2. If you do hitchhike, keep the following tips in mind:
3. Always let someone know where you are going, when you expect to get to your destination and call/text them when you arrive at your destination to let them know you arrived safely.
4. Carry a mobile phone and identification with you at all times.
5. Use roads that have heavier traffic.
6. Always note the description of anyone who offers you a ride, including their vehicle.

*If you notice suspicious behaviour, do not hesitate to call the police - the call can save a life*



## Going Out / Buddy System

If you are going out, always let others know when you will be back and where you are going. It is important to establish this as a routine.

Create a buddy system. Find a friend(s) you trust to be part of your buddy system. You can let them know where you are going and when you expect to get there. Also, offer to be a buddy for a friend so that you contribute to keeping your friends safe and vice-versa.





## Online safety

Be aware that people you don't trust or know may intercept and read your social media posts on Facebook and/or Twitter. They may find out information about you including what you are doing and where you are going. Limit who can see your posts or keep posts about your identity and location vague.

Be careful when logging into your accounts on another computer. The computer may have logged or remembered your credentials, and the person's computer or device may now have access to your personal accounts. Change your passwords often to help prevent theft/sabotage of your social media accounts.





## **Drinking and personal safety**

Do not drink if possible or if you are not of age. However, if you do drink, always keep track of what is in your drink. It only takes a second for someone to put something in your drink. Limit the amount you do drink so that you maintain your ability to assess the situation and environment around you. Stay in well-lit areas and be aware of your surroundings. Set clear boundaries with strangers and report suspicious people or behaviour to the police.

## Reach out when you need support

### - You are never alone

Remember, no matter what you are going through, you are never alone. If possible, ask your family if they can listen and provide support. If you cannot talk to them, many organizations are available to listen and help you through difficult times. Remember, Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people are sacred. Below are some agencies that are there to listen when you need to talk.

**Native Youth Crisis Hotline**

**1-877-209-1266**

**Kids Help Phone**

**1-800-668-6868**

**Trans Lifeline (Currently 18hrs/day)**

**1-877-330-6366**

*Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people are strong and beautiful, and are to be loved and treated with respect.*



## **Affirmation Activity: I am, I can and I will**

This activity is intended to help participants identify their own personal strengths and identify activities or situations where those strengths are used. Participants are encouraged to find new activities or situations where they can use their strengths. By focusing on their strengths, their sense of self-confidence will be nurtured.

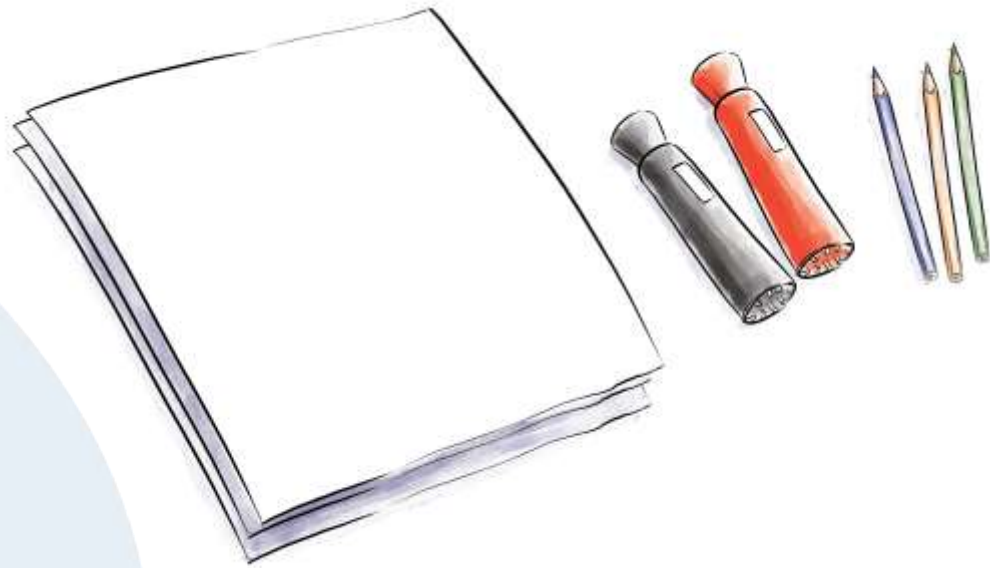
If we focus on our weaknesses, on everything we can't do, then we are blind to our own strengths and what we can do. The heart is symbolic in this activity because we have to feel what we write. What we write comes from the heart. With a heart full of honour and respect for ourselves, everyone can say, "I am, I can and I will."

### **Activity:**

- Type: Group activity/  
Sharing Circle
- Estimated time:  
20 minutes
- Materials needed: Paper, markers  
and/or colouring pencils

### **Instructions:**

Draw a large heart that fills the page. Try to come up with at least three statements in each area: I am, I can, and I will.



## I am

Write “I am” in the upper section of the heart. Identify three of your personal strengths and write them down near the top of the heart. Personal strengths are traits that help you in your day to day life. These are traits that should be valued and developed so that we can all become the best person we can be.

Here is a list of personal strengths that participants can choose from if they are having difficulty coming up with their own: kind, creative, open-minded, persistent, fair, honest, humble, curious, artistic, forgiving, loving, good self-control, easygoing, clever, courageous, dedicated, love of learning, friendly, ambitious, adventurous, compassionate, funny, generous, observant and enthusiastic.

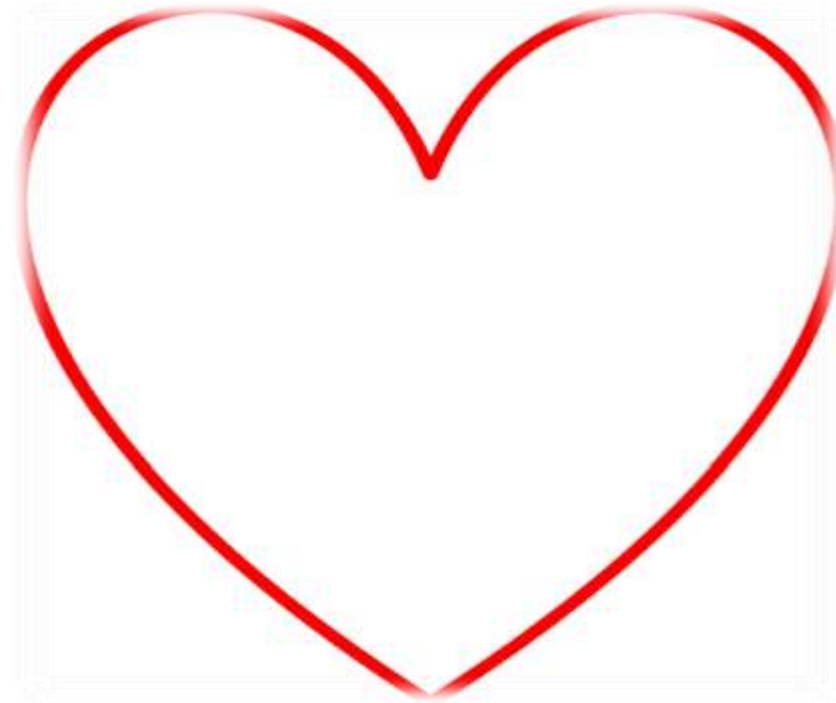
Sometimes participants may not be able to identify three of their strengths. Participants can be prompted with the question, “Think of a time when you did something or acted in a way that made you feel like a good person. I don’t mean something like doing well on a test or winning a game, but doing something nice like returning an item that someone didn’t notice they dropped, or helping someone who was having a hard time. What strength did you use in that situation?”

It can also be helpful to ask participants what they admire in other people. Many times, the traits we admire most in other people are traits that we do not acknowledge within ourselves. Participants who are stuck can write down the strengths they value and make them their own.



# I AM, I CAN AND I WILL

(Who I am now - What I can do- What I will do to be the best version of myself)



Let what's in our heart guide us

## Moving Forward

Today, Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people are gaining ground in the fight to reclaim their rights. It takes courage to stand up to people with power and say “No more!” When one person makes a stand and speaks out against injustice, others in similar situations unite and stand together. More and more, women, girls and gender diverse people are finding their inner strength by honouring their hearts and spirits. This creates positive changes in their lives and the lives of those around them. First Nations, Métis and Inuit women, girls and gender diverse people are all beautiful and have an intrinsic value that must be acknowledged.






This guide has covered several topics and used various activities to promote self-reflection and help individuals connect to their hearts and spirits.

By cleaning our own lens, we can relate authentically to ourselves and better understand one another. It is important to see the world through a wider and more inclusive lens. Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people come in a variety of body shapes and sizes, skin and hair colours, and can observe a multitude of cultural and spiritual beliefs.

Accepting what makes each individual different without judgement is respectful and will improve our own lives, and those of our families and communities. Everybody should be able to connect to a sense of confidence and pride for who they are.







It is important for everybody, whether they are Indigenous or not, to reflect on the content presented in this guide and challenge the harmful colonial perspectives that still exist today. The Indigenous people of this land deserve acknowledgement for the significant contributions they have made and continue to make in our communities and across this nation.

Together we can all work together toward a future where Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people are valued and respected.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. (2017, October 25). *Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census*. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. (2017, October 25). *Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census*. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. (2017, October 25). *Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census*. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Tait, H., Cloutier, E. & Bougie, E. (2015). *Inuit language indicators for Inuit children under the age of six in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-643-x/2010001/article/11278-eng.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. (2006). *Keepers of the light: Inuit women's action plan*. Page 1. Retrieved from <http://leslieenterprises.ca/Keepers.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Benton-Banai, E. (1998). *The Mishomis book: The voice of the Ojibway*. Hayward WI: Indian County Communications.

<sup>7</sup> Cave, K. & McKay, S. (2016). *Water song: Indigenous women and water*. *The Solutions Journal*, 7(1), 64-73. Retrieved from <https://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/article/water-song-indigenous-women-water/>

<sup>8</sup> Roscoe, W., & Gay American Indians (Organization). (1988). *Living the spirit: A gay American Indian anthology*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>9</sup> Roscoe, W., & Gay American Indians (Organization). (1988). *Living the spirit: A gay American Indian anthology*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

<sup>10</sup> Parliament of Canada. (2017). Bill C-16. Retrieved from <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-16/royal-assent>

<sup>11</sup> Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2016). *Did you know?* Retrieved from <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1302807151028/1302807416851>

<sup>12</sup> Manitoba Metis Federation. (n.d.) *The sash*. Retrieved from [www.mmf.mb.ca/the\\_sash.php](http://www.mmf.mb.ca/the_sash.php)

<sup>13</sup> Ciesla, W. (2002). *Non-wood forest products from temperate broad-leaved trees*. Rome: Food and agriculture organization on the United Nations.

# A NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA INITIATIVE



Native Women's  
Association of Canada

L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

Canada 

