

POW WOW ETIQUETTE

Pow wows are celebrations, social gatherings, family reunions, and sometimes friendly dance competitions. But, as with the sacred thread that runs through all of life, there are sacred traditions to be found in this coming together of people.

There is a circle in most dances, representing the circle of unity, the cycle of life. Dancers often follow the clockwise pattern of the sun.

Some of the regalia and/or ornaments signify special events or honors in a person's life, special religious traditions or symbols rooted in legend.

Everyone is welcome at most powwows, regardless of tribe - non-Indians too. One will have the occasion to learn and share in the cultural and social traditions but are expected to show respect and understanding for these events. For newcomers to these colorful events, a bit of explanation may enhance the enjoyment and understanding.

Vocabulary and Titles:

Arena – dance circle, this area is blessed before the dance and must remain pure throughout the Ceremony. There is a single entrance to the arena facing East, you should not enter the arena unless invited, and this is the only entrance that should be used to enter. This invisible boundary should not be broken at anytime by anyone.

Regalia – attire worn by dancers – NOT a costume. The development of a dancer's regalia is a very personal process. Often items have taken years to create or may be gifts and have deep meaning.

Master of Ceremonies – (MC) officiates over Ceremony proceedings. Guide to the events – pay attention to his announcements.

The Drum – the heartbeat of Mother Earth. The drum acts as an agent to bring harmony and balance to participants and to spectators. The drum acts as an intercessor to the spiritual realm.

Grand Entry – opening processional of officials and dancers.

Head Man Dancer – lead dancer, he will begin and guide the other dancers through the dance.

Head Woman Dancer – lead dancer, she will begin and guide the other dancers through the dance.

Intertribal Dance – social dance; open to visitors to come join the dancers in celebration.

General:

- **Bring your own seating** chairs and benches around the arena is reserved for dancers, seats with blankets or other personal items are taken.
- **Items left at seats are not to be touched** this is a gathering of family there should be no need to guard belongings from each other.
- **Dress appropriately.** Halter tops, sandals, and shorts are not appropriate for this celebration. You are never wrong with long pants and a buttoned shirt/blouse.
- **Pictures** may be taken with the permission of the dancers. The Master of Ceremonies will guide you during the pow wow.
- **NO drugs or alcohol** permitted at any time for any reason.
- **Supervise your children** so that all may enjoy the event without distraction.
- **Animals** should not be brought to the event.
- **Do not litter.**
- One should not move through the area in large groups. Divide into small groups if necessary as to not draw attention.

Respect:

- **Do not touch a dancer's regalia.** These items are made with great care and are often gifts to the dancers from friends and family. They have deep significance and should be respected.
- **If something falls, leave it.** Inform the individual that they have dropped something, and they will go through the proper procedures to retrieve it.
- **If invited to dance, please do.** It is disrespectful to decline, do not worry about not knowing how, the person who invited you will teach you.
- **Listen to the MC,** he will let you know when you need to stand and when you may sit after honor songs. He will also announce intertribal dances and other invitations for guests to participate.
- **Respect Everyone,** Non-Native and Native, Especially Elders. Treat everyone with respect and kindness. Look out for the children. Always treat others as you would expect to be treated.
- **Have A Good Time!** Above anything else, powwows are social events. It's a time to see old friends and meet new ones. Don't be afraid to ask questions and engage in conversation with vendors, dancers, singers and other powwow participants. Enjoy yourself!

Some Things to Consider When at a Pow Wow

1) Dress and act appropriately. Hot pants, halter tops, swimwear, profanity and 'making out' have no place at Pow Wows. If you are going to dance anything other than open intertribals, wear your regalia. Dancers not in regalia should wear long pants and buttoned and collared shirt.

2) Pointing with the fingers is considered poor manners by most. If you must point, use your head and nod in the direction you wish to indicate.

3) The seating around the Arena is reserved for dancers in regalia. Seats with blankets, shawls or regalia items on them are taken and should not be bothered. Do NOT sit on someone else's blanket unless invited. Uncovered seats are considered available.

4) Pets should be left at home. The Arena is a sacred place from the time it is blessed until the Pow Wow is over. At no time should pets be allowed in the Arena.

5) Listen to the Master of Ceremonies. He will announce who is to dance and when. Most Pow Wows conduct Intertribals in which the public may participate. Check with the Arena Director for more information.

6) Pictures should NOT be taken during Veterans Songs, Flag Songs, Prayers or any other time announced by the Master of Ceremonies. If you wish to photograph a dancer in regalia, ask first. If the picture is for publication or commercial use, that should be explained before the picture is taken.

7) Respect the Head Man and Head Woman Dancers. Their role entitles them to start each song or set of songs. Please wait until they have started to dance before you join in. In some traditions, it is considered improper to pass the Head Man or Woman Dancer within the Arena.

8) Show respect to the Flag, Honoring, and Veterans songs by standing until the song is completed.

9) Some songs require that you be familiar with the routine or have special eligibility rules in order to participate. Trot dances, snake, buffalo, etc. require particular steps or routines. Veterans dances may be restricted to Veterans, Combat Veterans or in some cases, the relations of Veterans. If you are not familiar with a particular dance, observe and learn. Watch the Head Dancers to learn the procedures.

NOTE: The purpose of an Honor Dance is exactly that. It is not a time to showboat or show your best moves. It is a time for respect to the person being honored.

- 10) The Flag Song, or Indian National Anthem, is sung when the American Flag is raised or lowered. Please stand and remove hats during the singing of this song. It is not a song for dancing.
- 11) Most Pow Wows are non-profit and depend upon donations, raffles, blanket dances, etc. for support. Donations are encouraged as a way to honor someone. Any participant can drop money onto the blanket to aid in the powwow expenses.
- 12) Certain items of religious significance should be worn only by those qualified to do so. Respect the traditions. Never intentionally touch another dancers regalia, person or property without permission.
- 13) Giveaways, attributes of Indian generosity, are held at many dances. They are acknowledgments of appreciation to recipients for honor or service given to the people. When receiving a gift, the recipient thanks everyone involved in the giving.
- 14) If you wish to ask for a special song from a drum, talk to the Area Director first and make sure the Master of Ceremonies is informed. It is traditional to make a gift (monetary or otherwise) to the Drum for special requests.
- 15) Before sitting at a drum, ask permission from the Head singer. Do not touch a drum without permission.
- 16) If at any time you are uncertain of procedure, etc., please check with the MC, Arena Director, or Head Singer. They will be glad to help you with your questions.
- 17) Unless you are sure spectator seating will be provided, bring a chair. Remember that the seating immediately around the Arena is for dancers only.
- 18) Alcohol, recreational drugs and firearms are prohibited at most Pow Wows.
- 19) If you see a lost feather, or you yourself drop a feather, do NOT pick it up. Notify the nearest Veteran, the Head Veteran, Head Man Dancer or Arena Director immediately.
- 20) Before dancing barefoot speak with the Arena Director. At some events this may only be done by Sundancers known to the organizers.
- 21) In some places it is OK for adults to dance while carrying infants or small children. In other places this is considered contrary to local etiquette. Ask before doing so.
- 22) If you have a question, ask. Most dancers, singers, elders and staff are happy to help. Offer a cold drink or other small, symbolic gift to those who help you.