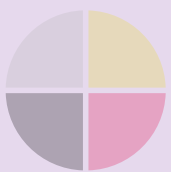




# AFFIRMING FAITH

## INDIGENOUS

## WORKBOOK



Egale

 Rainbow Faith  
and Freedom

Funded by the  
Government  
of Canada

Financé par le  
gouvernement  
du Canada

Canada 

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territories of diverse Indigenous Peoples, who have stewarded these lands for millennia. These lands, now known as Canada, are home to a rich tapestry of Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions.

We acknowledge the enduring presence and contributions of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to this land, and recognize their deep connection to the territories, waters, and resources.

We acknowledge the painful history of colonization, forced displacement, and cultural suppression that Indigenous Peoples have endured, and the ongoing impacts of these injustices.

We commit to honouring Indigenous rights, supporting reconciliation efforts, and fostering meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities based on mutual respect, understanding, and partnership.

May we all work together towards healing, justice, and a future where Indigenous Peoples are empowered to thrive and flourish across Turtle Island.



# ABOUT

## Egale Canada

Egale is Canada's national 2SLGBTQI organization working to improve the lives of 2SLGBTQI people in Canada and to enhance the global response to 2SLGBTQI issues. Egale achieves this by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education, awareness, and legal advocacy. Our vision is a Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and all forms of oppression so that every person can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias.

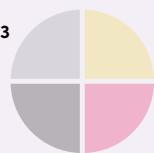
## Rainbow Faith and Freedom

Rainbow Faith and Freedom (RFF) is a global movement to confront religious-based LGBTI Discrimination and improve the human and equality rights of LGBTI people everywhere. Decreasing and lessening the effects of religious-based LGBTI discrimination can, and will, make changing punitive laws easier and improve the lives of LBGTI people so they can be who they are, love who they want, and find safe and accepting places to practice their faith (worship).

## Acknowledgements

Egale and RFF would like to acknowledge the thoughtful guidance, expertise, and written contributions of the Advisory Committee members: Mita Hans, El-Farouk Khaki, David Lewis-Peart, Albert McLeod, Shira Stanford-Asiyo and Haran Vijayanathan.

We wish to also thank Heather Beamish for their written contributions to this resource.



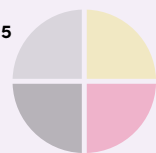
Egale and RFF are also grateful to Dr. Erin Reid and Dr. W. Y. Alice Chan from the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy for their support in reviewing and advising on evolving drafts of this document, as well as for their written contributions to this resource.

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## 4. INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW: DOS AND DON'TS 28

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# 1. INDIGENOUS OVERVIEW

## 1.1 Indigenous Worldviews: Overview

Prior to contact with Europeans, Indigenous Peoples in the Americas believed in animism. Animism is the belief that objects, places, and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence. In some Indigenous traditions, some things are perceived as animated and alive, from animals and plants to rocks and rivers, weather systems, human handiwork, and sometimes even words themselves. Although many Indigenous people converted to Christianity as a result of colonization, many Indigenous people today continue to hold animist beliefs. Due to the impact of Indian Residential and Day Schools, many Indigenous people in Canada today follow Christian belief systems. According to the 2021 Canadian Census, of the 1.8 million people with an Indigenous identity in Canada, nearly half (47.0%) reported having no religious affiliation, and more than one-quarter (26.9%) reported being Catholic. The proportion of Catholics varies from one Indigenous group to another: 31.6% among Métis, 24.5% among First Nations, and 17.4% among Inuit.

The specific creation stories, important figures, and ceremonies that a nation practices are culture-specific and often vary significantly from one people to the next. This document does not seek to summarize or represent all these diverse traditions. Rather, it is intended to provide a general overview of common concepts to help ground readers in pursuing further independent learning.



## 1.2 Important Concepts

### ○ Creator vs Creation

While most Indigenous traditions employ ceremony and belief in the divine, the nature of divinity differs significantly from many other organized religions around the world.

Indigenous people conceive the divine in terms of a spiritual realm that is fundamentally undefinable, but which spans and unites everything in the Indigenous world. There is no singular supreme deity. To appease early colonists and settler society and their belief in one supreme Christian god, Indigenous people created a new term, Giichi Manito (Great Spirit)<sup>1</sup>. However, this concept did not exist within the pre-colonial Indigenous worldview.

#### Note:

Traditional Indigenous spiritual beliefs, values, and life philosophies have been continually impacted by Euro-Christian colonization for the past 400 years. As a result, it is often difficult to discuss one without also discussing the other. Through various missions and the Indian Residential and Day Schools program, the state and Canadian Christian churches sought to sever Indigenous beliefs and connections to the spiritual realm by outlawing and replacing traditional social protocols, ceremonies, legends, and teachings.

Similarly, the concept of spirits exists within Indigenous cosmology, but unlike in many other world religions, where these tend to have human-like attributes, Indigenous people consider spirits to be amorphous entities. For Indigenous people, spirits reflect various dimensions of nature and follow the four seasons (winter, spring, summer, and fall).

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Roger Roulette, Ojibwe Language Specialist, circa 2010, personal conversation.





For example, “thunderers” are the entities that bring rain, wind, and lightning. Although technically formless, some Indigenous Peoples, such as the Ojibwe, depict thunderers as birds, a metaphor for their aerial nature and power. Today, many Indigenous teachings, legends, and spirit names are based on the concept of thunderers, such as the Thunderbird.

## ○ **Medicine Wheel and Four Directions Teachings**



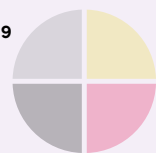
*Figure 1: Ojibwe  
Medicine Wheel*

The Medicine Wheel holds a sacred place in the traditions of many First Nations Peoples. Often depicted as a circle, sometimes with distinct coloured segments, its design and teachings can vary among cultures. Elements of the wheel might correspond to cardinal directions, life stages, facets of one’s being (such as body, mind, spirit, and emotion), elements, seasons, medicinal plants, sacred animals, legendary figures, or spiritual insights. While First Nations communities adhere to these teachings, it’s essential to note

that Métis and Inuit also possess their unique historical directional teachings. The contemporary understanding of the Medicine Wheel and the teachings of the four directions primarily originate from the Western Prairie regions.

## ○ **Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Ceremonial Healers**

**Elders** are the spiritual and cultural Knowledge Keepers for their communities. As such, they are highly respected individuals whose responsibilities often include leading important ceremonies, mediating conflicts, and supporting the community’s overall spiritual health. Elders learn these skills through years of mentorship and apprenticeship with more senior Elders.



**Knowledge Keepers** are individuals taught by an Elder but who have not been granted the title of Elder.

This being said, every Nation is unique and may have their own particular ceremonial or spiritual roles with Nation-specific terminology. So, while some Nations may have **Knowledge Keepers**, others may additionally have **Fire Keepers** and/or **Bundle Keepers** for example.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.3 Important Ceremonies



Some of the more widely practiced ceremonies today are cultural circles, the pipe ceremony, smudging, Sundance, sweat lodge ceremonies, and potlatch. The traditions discussed below are largely based on the Algonquian culture, which includes the Mohawk, Ojibwe, and Cree. The potlatch originates with the Peoples of the Pacific Northwest, including the Haida, Tlingit, and Coast Salish.

It is important to remember that Indigenous beliefs and traditions evolved over 20,000 years on Turtle Island<sup>3</sup>. Understanding and respecting these traditions are a key aspect of decolonization and reconciliation.

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2 For some Indigenous Nations, Fire Keepers assume the chief responsibility for tending the ceremonial Fire during various ceremonies. Bundle Keepers are stewards responsible for the care and ceremonial handling of bundles important especially for decision-making. These bundles have both physical and abstract aspects that convey a vision, a mandate, and a story.

3 Turtle Island is the name many Algonquian- and Iroquoian-speaking Peoples (mainly in the northeastern part of North America) use to refer to the continent of North America. Within numerous Indigenous creation narratives, the turtle is depicted as upholding the world and symbolizes the essence of life itself. Turtle Island therefore speaks to various aspects of certain Indigenous Peoples' views about creation. And for some, the turtle is also a marker of identity, culture, autonomy and respect for the environment.



## ○ Cultural Circles



Cultural circles are small events in which participants openly discuss their experiences and receive knowledge or counsel. Often mediated by an Elder or Knowledge Keeper or another community leader, circles tend to follow established protocols regarding who may speak and when, and may centre on sharing, healing, spiritual resolution, or reparative justice.

## ○ Pipe Ceremony



The pipe holds deep significance for many First Nations Peoples. Traditionally, Pipe Ceremonies were conducted to initiate negotiations and significant gatherings. In these Ceremonies, participants form a circle and a prayer-blessed tobacco-filled pipe is circulated, sometimes more than once. While every participant touches the pipe, they can opt not to smoke it. Engaging in a Pipe Ceremony signifies a commitment to the group, ensuring honesty, respect, and adherence to the group's decisions. While the Pipe Ceremony is rooted in Plains Indigenous traditions, its practice has spread throughout Turtle Island.

## ○ Potlatch



Potlatches are traditional gift-giving events celebrated by Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada and the United States. While they commemorate significant events like marriages, they also strengthen clan and inter-community bonds. Although not purely spiritual ceremonies, they often involve honouring the spirit realm and sharing stories, making them vital for transmitting spiritual knowledge. Cultures such as the Heiltsuk, Haida, Nuxalk, Tlingit, Makah, Tsimshian, Nuu-chah-nulth, Kwakwaka'wakw, and Coast Salish have long upheld this tradition. However, in an attempt to suppress Indigenous culture, the federal government banned potlatches in 1895. This prohibition lasted until 1951, when it was finally repealed.



## ○ Smudging (Purification Ceremony)

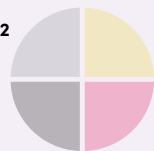


The smudge ceremony is a common ritual practice among Indigenous Peoples of Canada and the United States. It is a purification ritual that involves burning sacred herbs and resins, such as white sage, sweetgrass, cedar, and tobacco, in a shell or clay bowl while prayers are called forth. The purpose of the ceremony is to cleanse the body, mind, and spirit in preparation for the arrival of spiritual entities that are called upon to assist with gaining knowledge and healing. The Ojibwe word for smudge is ababasso, which means “to draw smoke.”

## ○ Sundance (also, Raindance, Thirst Dance)



The Sundance is a profound multi-day sacred ceremony orchestrated by a spiritual leader, often a medicine person, aiming to unify the community and invoke the guidance of the spiritual realm. Typically held during the spring or early summer, the event sees the establishment of a sacred dance pole and the conduct of sweat lodge ceremonies integral to the ritual. Participants, or dancers, engage deeply, offering prayers not just for themselves but also on behalf of their families and the broader community. These prayers are often accompanied by offerings or personal sacrifices, symbolizing their commitment and reverence. Historically, in a bid to suppress Indigenous culture, Sundance ceremonies faced a ban imposed by the federal government in 1895. This restriction persisted until 1951, when it was rightfully rescinded. It’s essential to note that the Sundance is predominantly a tradition of the Plains and Prairie Indigenous communities, reflecting the rich tapestry of their cultural and spiritual practices.



## ○ Sweat Lodge Ceremony



The sweat lodge ceremony is a revered purification rite, often standing alone but sometimes integrated into the broader context of a Sundance gathering. The sweat lodge building itself is considered sacred, and great care is taken in its design and erecting, with many elements having symbolic importance. Within the confines of this sacred space, participants gather around a hallowed pit filled with heated stones. As the warmth envelops them, the host leads them in offering prayers, creating a profound spiritual communion. These ceremonies, commencing often as the sun sets, can stretch into the early hours of dawn, symbolizing a journey from darkness to light. Concluding the ritual, participants often partake in a communal feast, celebrating their renewed spirits. While unique in its Indigenous Canadian context, the essence of a ritual bath in the sweat lodge finds parallels in purification practices across various cultures globally.

## 1.4 Sources and Suggested Resources

Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Cultural Advisors (Queens University)

<https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/ways-knowing/elders-knowledge-keepers-and-cultural-advisors>

Four Direction Teachings – Our Stories (pressbooks.pub)

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigstudies/chapter/four-direction-teachings/>

Fred Wahpepah - About the Sweat Lodge Ceremony (YouTube)

<https://youtu.be/KG77eUxgqD4>



Guidelines for Working with First Nation, Metis and Inuit Elders and Knowledge Keepers (Carleton University)

<https://carleton.ca/indigenous/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines-for-Working-with-Indigenous-Elders.pdf>

Guidelines to Support Working with Elders (First Peoples Cultural Council)

<https://fpcc.ca/stories/working-with-elders/>

Haida Religious Traditions (Encyclopedia.com)

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/haida-religious-traditions>

Healing Circle (Living My Culture)

<https://www.livingmyculture.ca/culture/first-nations/healing-circle/>

Indigenous Elders in Canada (The Canadian Encyclopedia)

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-elders-in-canada>

Interactive Video (Four Directions Teachings)

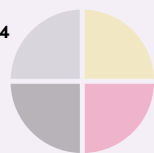
<https://fourdirectionsteachings.com/interactive.html>

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Supporting Wellness in Inuit Communities in Nunavut (ccnsa-nccah.ca)

<https://www.ccnsa-nccah.ca/docs/health/FS-InuitQaujimajatuqangitWellnessNunavut-Tagalik-EN.pdf>

Lesson Four: Healing Circles – Exploring Indigenous People in Canada and Traditional Health Practices (pressbooks.pub)

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigenoushealth/chapter/lesson-five-healing-circles/>



Pipe Ceremony - Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia (University of Saskatchewan)

[https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/pipe\\_ceremony.php](https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/pipe_ceremony.php)

San'yas Anti-Racism Indigenous Cultural Safety Training Program (San'yas)

<https://sanyas.ca/>

Sun Dance - Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia (University of Saskatchewan)

[https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/sun\\_dance.php](https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/sun_dance.php)

Sun Dance (The Canadian Encyclopedia)

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sun-dance>

Sweat-lodge Ceremony - Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia (University of Saskatchewan)

[https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/sweat-lodge\\_ceremony.php](https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/sweat-lodge_ceremony.php)

Turtle Island (The Canadian Encyclopedia)

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island>



# 2. INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW: COLONIAL HISTORY AND IMPACTS

According to the 2021 Census, the Indigenous population in Canada is approximately 1.8 million, and it is growing at a much faster pace than the non-Indigenous population (9.4% vs. 4.9%). While many (47%) report having no religious affiliation and over a quarter (27%) follow Christianity, there is a growing uptake of pre-contact traditional beliefs, values, ceremonies, and life philosophies.

Prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island practiced a variety of spiritual traditions centred around an animist worldview – that is, the belief that everything that exists in the world has an essence of life and that all life is interconnected. The depth and breadth of Indigenous forms of spirituality and spiritual ceremonies were lost on European colonizers who, in general, considered these to be nothing more than superstition.





## 2.1 Christianization and the Residential School System

A significant element of Canada's colonial project was focused on the elimination and erasure of traditional Indigenous spiritual teachings and practices. Beginning in the early 1600's, Western European settlers, driven by ethnocentric beliefs and the imperialistic ideologies of their time, considered First Nations and Inuit peoples "heathens" or "pagans." This perspective was rooted in a Eurocentric worldview that perceived Indigenous spiritual practices as inferior, barbaric, and in need of "enlightenment" and "salvation." As a result, there was a concerted effort to forcibly convert Indigenous communities to Christianity, through a number of mechanisms used to support the conversion effort, including missionary initiatives and the **Indian Residential Schools and Day Schools** (IRS) program.

Instituted in the mid-1800s by the Canadian federal government, the IRS program was a deliberate and aggressive strategy to strip Indigenous children of their cultural identities. By forcibly uprooting them from their families and communities, the government sought to erase their Indigenous heritage and mold them into a Western paradigm. This process involved systematically teaching these children to reject and abandon their home languages and traditions, supplanting them with Christian doctrines and values. In a further act of control over Indigenous populations, the Canadian government delegated the operation of these institutions to various church bodies.<sup>4</sup> The IRS program's oppressive reach extended for over a century; there were as many as 90 residential schools across Canada by 1967. This grievous chapter in Canadian history only concluded with the closure of the last such school in 1997.

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<sup>4</sup> Specifically, these were the Anglican Church, Baptist Church, Mennonite Pioneer Mission, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Church, and United Church of Canada.



The IRS program cut younger generations off from their spiritual Elders geographically as well as through language loss. Since Indigenous knowledge sharing, including spiritual teachings, followed an oral tradition, this made the passing along of cultural knowledge extremely difficult and much was lost entirely. As a result, many Indigenous people today continue to consider themselves Christian (whether practicing or non-practising), while others identify as Christian while simultaneously adhering to their ancestral spiritual practices. These beliefs do not merely exist side by side, but represent a deep intertwining of Christian tenets with Indigenous cosmologies, rituals, and ceremonies. The fusion of these belief systems underscores the adaptability and resilience of Indigenous spiritual traditions in the face of colonial impositions, while also challenging simplistic understandings of religious identity and Indigenous spiritual expressions.

Owing to the relentless work by Indigenous communities to reclaim knowledge believed to have been obliterated by the IRS and other systemic cultural erasure initiatives, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis are persistently rediscovering fragments of their historical cultural heritage. Elders, as the custodians of ancestral wisdom, are now increasingly empowered to impart their spiritual insights and traditions to their communities, ensuring the continuity and revitalization of Indigenous knowledge systems.



## 2.2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission

To resolve a class action lawsuit by survivors of the IRS program, Canada founded the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2008. The TRC's mandate was to investigate and inform all Canadians of what happened at these schools and the enduring impacts of the program. As part of this work, the TRC documented the experiences of survivors, families, communities, and anyone personally affected by the IRS experience. Within its final report, the TRC released 94 Calls to Action in 2015. The Calls to Action seek to support the preservation and sharing of Indigenous cultural knowledge and foster greater cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness of the impacts of the IRS program.

Today governments, institutions, organizations, and corporations are invested in responding to the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. Among the activities that 2SLGBTQI organizations and individuals are encouraged to do to support reconciliation are: Committing to meaningful consultation and relationship-building

1. Providing programs to support cross-cultural knowledge sharing and reconciliation
2. Learning how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into program designs and delivery
3. Supporting emerging Indigenous artists and musicians
4. Attending and supporting Indigenous cultural events

5. Listening to Indigenous podcasts, artists, and music exploring authentic Indigenous experiences and Indigenous history
6. Reading books and watching documentaries that reflect on residential school history and lived experiences
7. Volunteering at an Indigenous not-for-profit organization



More detailed discussions on the history and enduring impacts of the IRS program on Indigenous people, contemporary cultural reclamation efforts, and initiatives underway in response to the TRC Calls to Action are unfortunately beyond the scope of this document. To learn more about these, readers are strongly encouraged to read the reports produced by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other resources linked below.

## 2.3 Sources and Suggested Resources

Christianity and First Peoples (Our Stories: First Peoples in Canada Website)

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigstudies/chapter/christianity-and-first-peoples/>

Majority of Indigenous Canadians Remain Christians Despite Residential Schools (CBC's The Current – audio podcast, duration: 19:39)

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-april-1-2016-1.3516122/majority-of-indigenous-canadians-remain-christians-despite-residential-schools-1.3516132>

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (Official Website)

<https://nctr.ca/>

The Canadian census: A rich portrait of the country's religious and ethnocultural diversity (Statistics Canada)

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.htm>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Government of Canada Website) <https://rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

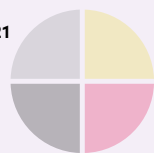
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (PDF)

[https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)



The Two-Spirit Archives - University of Winnipeg

<https://archives.uwinnipeg.ca/our-collections/two-spirit-archives.html#:~:text=The%20Two%2Dspirit%20Archives%20consists,Manitoba%20and%20throughout%20North%20America>



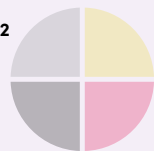
# 3. INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW: HISTORIC AND CURRENT STANCES ON 2SLGBTQI IDENTITIES

Prior to European contact and colonization, there was immense diversity in the ways in which Indigenous cultures across Turtle Island conceived of and understood human gender, sexuality, and social roles. While it would be inaccurate to say that all communities understood sex and gender in expansive ways and had inclusive social norms, it would be similarly inaccurate to say that most Indigenous cultures understood these concepts in similar ways to the European colonizers.<sup>5</sup>

Many (but not all) Indigenous cultures recognized more than two genders and had traditional teachings related to transgender identities. Similarly, many communities recognized and openly embraced same-gender attracted individuals and families. Often, these individuals held special roles within their communities, such as mediators, matchmakers, healers, or teachers. These traditions varied widely from culture to culture, so it is impossible to make any sweeping statements about how Indigenous people prior to European

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<sup>5</sup> It is also worth noting that the contrast between Indigenous and European perspectives on sex and gender was not unique to Turtle Island. Many Indigenous societies around the world had different ways of recognizing and respecting diverse gender identities and expressions, such as the hijras in India, the fa'afafine in Samoa, and the muxe in Mexico, to name just three examples of this. However, these cultures were often suppressed or erased by Euro-Christian colonizers who imposed patriarchal, misogynistic, and binary gender norms on the colonized peoples.



colonization understood or treated individuals who fell outside White, western heteronormative ideals.

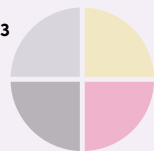
For more information on culturally specific traditions and attitudes toward gender and sexual diversity within Indigenous communities, readers are encouraged to access the resources by Harlan Pruden linked below.

## 3.1 The Impacts of Colonization on Indigenous Views of Gender and Sexuality in Turtle Island

Although Europe represents only about 8% of the planet's landmass, from 1492 to 1914, Europeans conquered or colonized more than 80% of the world. Colonial incursion into Indigenous territories brought trade, new knowledge, and technologies along with misogyny, and homophobic and transphobic attitudes. These were imposed on Indigenous people, forcing shifts in their traditional worldviews, social norms, and life philosophies.

Gay Indigenous men were a principal target of state suppression and oppression. Two Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQI people, especially transgender women, were targeted for violent erasure and conversion to cisheterosexuality.

Anti-sodomy (buggery) laws, which criminalized many forms of sexual activity, including same-sex sexual activity, were enacted in England in 1533 and were extended to its overseas colonies, including Canada. Enforcement of the law was often done in collusion with various church forces. "Buggery" remained a capital crime in Canada until 1869. In 1892, a more sweeping law was passed that outlawed all forms of same-sex sexual activity between people legally defined as male under the offence of "gross indecency". These laws remained in effect until 1969 and were regularly used to criminalize and institutionalize 2SLGBTQI people.



## 3.2 Two Spirit and Recognition of Traditional Identities

In 1990, Indigenous resistance to colonization and anti-Indigenous racism reached a national pitch with the Oka Crisis, also known as the Kanesatake Resistance in Quebec. That year, Indigenous LGBTQI people gathered north of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Here, at the 3d North American Native Gay & Lesbian Gathering, they adopted and introduced a new term to the LGBTQI liberation movement: Two Spirit (2Spirit).<sup>6</sup>

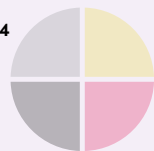
The term Two Spirit seeks to bind Indigenous LGBTQI people to the energy and power of the natural and spiritual worlds, and to the spirit of respect, nurturing and love in their families, communities, and nations. It is an umbrella term, meaning that it encompasses a variety of tribally-specific traditional identities and ways of being, but is not meant in any way to replace, erase, or amalgamate them.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau included Two Spirit people in his 2017 national apology to LGBTQI Canadians for the government's history of colonial oppression and suppression. Post apology, Canada has continued to include Two Spirit people in its decolonization and reconciliation efforts. The National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls report included 32 Two Spirit specific Calls for Justice and a Two Spirit national action plan report was released in 2021. In addition, the federal government officially

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6 "It is important to note that with the assertion of this new term, it was an act of sovereignty of body and land. The community rejected the colonial and offensive term of 'berdache' and replaced it with Two-Spirit. "Spirit-naming is an important part of my identity and healing. Embracing the Two-Spirit name has defined our place in Indigenous history and culture."

- Albert McLeod. <https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/article/history-two-spirit#:~:text=From%20July%2027%20to%20August,nation%2Dspecific%20genders%20and%20sexualities.>





moved the 2S acronym to the front of the commonly used LGBTQI acronym in 2022 with the launch of its first 2SLGBTQI Action Plan.<sup>7</sup>

### Note:

Not all Indigenous LGBTQI people today identify with the term Two Spirit, for a variety of reasons. Some prefer to use the term Indigiqueer to reflect their experiences living at the intersection of LGBTQI identity and Indigeneity. Others prefer to be simply referred to as LGBTQI. For these reasons, it is imperative to avoid assumptions and to always ask the individual which term(s) they identify with.

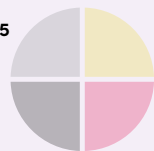
## 3.3 Contemporary Experiences

While many Indigenous communities today recognize and are welcoming of Two Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQI people, homophobia and transphobia directly tied to colonization and conservative Christian beliefs remain a reality in many communities.

A Two Spirit or LGBTQI Indigenous person's individual experiences of inclusion, safety, and spiritual health can be influenced by the specific Indigenous culture to which they belong, the micro-culture of the local band or community, the practising faith of the family, community leadership, past experiences, self-concept, and other factors.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/free-to-be-me/federal-2slgbtqi-plus-action-plan.html>



## 3.4 Sources and Suggested Resources

Additional readings related to Two Spirit traditions and resources to support the creation of more inclusive organizations and community spaces for Two Spirit people.

Ma-Nee Chacaby talks about Two Spirit identities (YouTube video)

<https://youtu.be/juzpocOX5ik?si=QkaaWYQXXYqC5mgn>

Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (PDF)

<https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

Sodomy Law: Canada (Wikipedia)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodomy\\_law#Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodomy_law#Canada)

Two Spirit Dictionary - We Matter Campaign (website)

<https://wemattercampaign.org/two-spirit-dictionary>

Two-Spirit People: Then and Now by Harlan Pruden (YouTube video, 60:24)

<https://youtu.be/LsKmwU3lslg>

### Two Spirit/Indigenous LGBTQI organizations

- 2Spirits in Motion Society (National) <http://2spiritsinmotion.com/>
- Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance (Atlantic Canada) <http://w2sa.ca/>
- 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations (Toronto) [www.2spirits.com](http://www.2spirits.com)
- 2Spirit Manitoba [www.twospiritmanitoba.ca](http://www.twospiritmanitoba.ca)
- Two Spirit Alliance of Saskatchewan <https://www.facebook.com/2SpiritSK>
- Edmonton Two Spirit Society <http://e2s.ca/>
- 2 Spirits of BC [www.2SpiritsBC.com](http://www.2SpiritsBC.com)



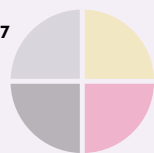
# Archives

## Two-Spirit Collection, University of Winnipeg Archives (Canada)

- Albert McLeod Fonds: <https://main.lib.umanitoba.ca/albert-mcleod-fonds>
- Connie Merasty Fonds: <https://main.lib.umanitoba.ca/connie-merasty-fonds>

## Two-Spirit Papers, University of Minnesota, (United States)

- Jean Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies: <https://www.lib.umn.edu/collections/special/tretter>
- Richard Lafortune (Anguksuar) Papers: <https://archives.lib.umn.edu/repositories/13/resources/2092>



# 4. INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW: DOS AND DON'TS



**Do respect and accommodate traditional practices.**

This includes being open to non-traditional work schedules to support attendance at sacred ceremonies or times of mourning. Be open to accommodating extended family or community members who may need to attend a ceremony or event. Offer tobacco when engaging traditional Elders and Knowledge Keepers in seeking knowledge or invocations for events or ceremonies.<sup>8</sup>



**Do foster the physical, spiritual, and mental health of Indigenous youth.**

In response to the TRC 94 Calls to Action, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations are finding ways to introduce traditional Indigenous knowledge and approaches to younger generations of Indigenous youth and developing trauma-informed programs that reflect the needs of Indigenous youth.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that there are federal, provincial, and territorial exemptions for the use of tobacco for traditional and ceremonial purposes in public spaces (e.g., a pipe ceremony). Protocols for Inuit and Metis elders may be different.





**Do consult and foster relationships with local Elders.**

Seek out the input of Elders and Indigenous consultants on how to make your programs, services, spaces, and events safer and more inclusive of the Indigenous people living in your area. When seeking collaboration with Indigenous Elders, consult the local Nation(s)' central office or Band Council for recommendations. If considering an Elder outside these channels, verify their affiliation with a specific Nation and their registration with a local Band to ensure genuine engagement.



**Do handle sacred objects with care.**

If handed a pipe, sacred tobacco, smudge bowl, eagle feather, or other sacred object, remember that it is precious and treat it with respect. If not prompted or handed, do not touch sacred items.



**Do learn and show your support.**

Feel welcome to participate in smudge ceremonies, pow-wows, and sharing circles.



# Don't

## Don't essentialize.

Not all Indigenous people follow traditional ways. Due to the intergenerational impacts of colonization and Indian Residential and Day Schools, many Indigenous people and communities follow Christian or syncretistic beliefs. In addition, Indigenous individuals might be non-religious, atheist, agnostic, or secular.

## Don't generalize.

Never assume that traditional ceremonial practices are the same across First Nations, Inuit, and Metis cultures across Canada. For example, the Indigenous peoples on the west coast of Canada have different land-based teachings and ceremonies than those in the prairies or eastern Canada.

## Don't be afraid to question or call out discriminatory practices.

Never feel compelled to participate in mainstream religious or traditional ceremonies and practices that are homophobic or transphobic (e.g., Indigenous ceremony leaders requiring all people assigned female at birth to wear long skirts).

