

APPROACHING A TRADITIONAL HEALER, ELDER or MEDICINE PERSON

When you are on a healing journey, it is a natural step for you to seek help and guidance from a Traditional Healer, an Elder or a Medicine Person.

HEALERS

When Healers talk about healing, they say that the Creator and the spirits work through them to help the people. If they are asked in what way they are different, they say that the gifts they have and that they are allowed to use is what makes them different. They always express their deep gratitude for the healing powers of everything that the Creator has put here and for the spirits that do the healing.

Each Healer has a purpose and that purpose is to help the people. They tend not to call themselves Healers but might refer to themselves as helpers in Traditional Healing or helpers to the spirits.

The help that they give is credited to the spirit that they have, the Creator, and the spirit helpers who come in many forms to assist them. Helpers can manifest in any form. They can be animals, trees, sticks, rocks, fire, water, plants and earth.

The abilities of some Healers are said to be their birth right and generally these individuals start training and working at an early age. The abilities of others may be revealed later in life as a result of a severe illness or a near-death experience. Some may go on fasts or on a vision quest where their gifts and their responsibilities are revealed and explained to them by the spirits.

A Healer can be given his or her direction of how to take care of the people through dreams and visions.

There are similarities to all healing practices but each Healer has their own way and medicines that they work with. Each Healer is an individual and they live their lives according to the teachings they have received. Some may work with plants, some may counsel, some may use other forms of doctoring and some may heal with their hands. They may work through ceremonies such as the sweat lodge or the shaking tent. There may be one or many forms of healing that they have received training in.

Depending on the form that their healing work takes, Healers may use drums and shakers as they sing and pray. They will use one or more of the four sacred medicines for smudging.

MEDICINE PEOPLE

Some Healers are called Medicine People because they work with the plant medicines. They know about plants and they prepare medicines.

There are special procedures for everything. If a Healer needs a powerful medicine for someone, the Healer has to find out how to get it, how to keep and store it, and how it should be used and given. One plant may have five or six different uses. The Healer may need to fast in order to learn about a particular medicine. Healers say that they are continually learning.

<Doctoring<

Doctoring takes many forms. The use of the medicines is one of them. Removing sickness by extraction is another.

Some Healers are specialists in treating certain illnesses. For example, a Healer may have special abilities to help with heart disease or with diabetes.

As Traditional Healing is holistic, if a person seeks help for an ulcer, it is not only the ulcer that is treated. The root cause of the condition is addressed.

<Spiritual Healing<

All Healers look at all aspects of the individual - the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical - as they are interrelated. There are some who describe the work they do in terms of working with energy, the mind and the spirit. They might work with eagle feathers to get to the core of the problem.

<Counselling<

Counselling is an intrinsic part of all Healing, but there are Healers whose particular gift is to use words to heal. Some communities have seers who it is said can see backwards and forwards.

<Ceremonies<

Healers may perform doctoring during a sweat lodge ceremony or they may take care of you when you go on your fast for healing. They may work through the shaking tent to advise and prescribe and they may support you when you participate in the sun dance.

ELDERS

A Traditional Elder is someone who follows the teachings of our ancestors. It is said Traditional Elders walk and talk the good way of life.

Traditional Elders teach and share the wisdom they have gained of the culture, history and the language. The sharing of their wisdom is healing.

An Elder does not have to be a senior but could be someone younger who has many teachings and who has earned the respect of their community by contributing to its spiritual development.

VISITS WITH HEALERS, ELDERS AND MEDICINE PEOPLE

When you go to a Healer, Elder or Medicine Person, be yourself, be respectful to them and to yourself.

Take tobacco to give as an offering. Tobacco is meant for that communication between you, the Healer and the Creator. The tobacco can be in any form. For example, it can be one cigarette from a pack, it can be a pack of cigarettes, it can be a pouch of tobacco or it can be loose tobacco wrapped in a small square of cloth (called a tobacco tie).

Talk to the Healer or Elder explaining why you have come to them.

Refrain from taking alcohol or drugs for four days before going to a Healer.

Women schedule their appointments with Healers for times when they are not on their moontime.

Other gifts can be given to express your gratitude for the help you have received. This may be in the form of an item such as a basket or blanket or it could be money.

There are certain protocols specific to each Healer, Elder or Medicine Person. Many Healers will have helpers who will convey these protocols to you. For example, they will let you know whether you may receive treatment after having chemotherapy.

REFERRALS TO HEALERS, ELDERS AND MEDICINE PEOPLE

As our awareness and knowledge of our traditions and culture increases, so does our honour and respect for these ways. This has not always been the case in our communities. There are always those who present themselves as Healers, Elders or Medicine People who have not earned that title and may use the teachings and medicines in the wrong way. It is important for everyone, especially young people, to be aware of this and to exercise caution when they seek healing, teachings or advice. It is advisable to consult with people whom you trust to get referrals to respected and recognized Traditional Healers, Elders and Medicine People.

Other pamphlets in this series include:

- ⌘ Fasting
- ⌘ Clans
- ⌘ Your Name and Colours
- ⌘ Feasts and Give Aways
- ⌘ Sweat Lodge
- ⌘ Moontime
- ⌘ Traditional Healing
- ⌘ Four Sacred Medicines
- ⌘ Sacred Items and Bundles

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“Native Teachings are about a Way of Life”

The information in this pamphlet is only a small portion of the many and extensive Native Teachings that exist. Teachings vary from First Nation to First Nation and even from one geographic region to another. For more information, please consult with a Traditional Elder, Healer or Medicine Person.

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