

POW WOW ETIQUETTE

A Pow Wow is a Native American gathering that was originated to bring many tribal members together in peace and harmony, and to this day this tradition has continued. The tribal members congregate to show support for one another as well as display traditional wares and [dance](#). Also, Native American foods are available for you to sample.

For many years, Pow Wows were closed off to the public for various reasons, but now the American Indians welcome anyone who has a true interest in the culture and fellowship. Pow Wows are a great source of learning about Native American culture, and most tribes encourage the public to come.

Before attending a Pow Wow, there are several things you should know. Pow Wows have rules of etiquette that should be followed. These rules have been handed down over generations from elders to youth and represent respect, brotherhood, and courtesy for the tradition and life.

Every Pow Wow has a "Master of Ceremony." The "Master of Ceremony" is usually a tribal head or an elder. The job of the "Master of Ceremony" is a demanding one, for it is this person who leads the entire Pow Wow.

The "Master of Ceremony" begins the "Grand Entry" where the [dancers](#) enter the ring and are seen in full regalia for the first time. This person also has all control of any activity within the Pow Wow and leads many prayers.

The arena is the area where dancers step lively and show their traditional [dancing skills](#). The arena is in the form of a circle. The reason the dancers always dance within this circle is because the circle represents "The Circle of Life." Being invited to dance in the circle is the only time a spectator is allowed in the arena.

If you wish to take pictures or make recordings of any kind, you should get permission. The "Master of Ceremonies" will instruct you and either grant or deny permission. It is important that you follow his instruction because many Native Americans do not want their pictures taken for religious reasons. To take a photograph or make a videotape, or even make a sound recording, without permission shows lack of respect for the culture.

You should expect to remain seated for most of the Pow Wow, and you will be asked to stand during Grand Entry, Flag Songs, and the [National Anthem](#). Other times, you will be asked to stand during invocation, special prayers, and also the closing of the Pow Wow. At closing, a prayer will be said to send you on

your way. The Master of Ceremonies will determine if you should or should not stand during closing prayer. If you are near the arena and dancers are dancing, you should again sit down until the dance is finished.

Exercise respect during these special times because these are the most sacred times during a Pow Wow. Exercise good judgment at all times. No matter how tempting, do not touch the regalia of any of the dancers. Touching any part of a dancer's costume shows lack of education for the culture as well as lack of respect for tradition.

Many of the parts of dancers' costumes are eagle feathers that have been blessed. If you touch these, the dancer will need to disrobe and have the parts blessed again. In extreme cases, the dancer will not be allowed to dance. No one will be allowed to sit at the [drum](#) without permission of the head singer.

Again, the drums are sacred, and it is believed that anyone who takes a place behind the drums has been selected by God to be there. No one drums without special permission, and no one sits in the drumming area without special permission. Great offense is taken if you choose to sit in this area. You should never turn down an invitation by anyone, especially elders, during a Pow Wow.

No one will make unreasonable demands; you can count on that. The invitation may be for a simple dance. You should accept all invitations graciously and enjoy yourself. Even if you do not know the dance steps, most are easily learned and someone will instruct you as you go. Never bring alcoholic beverages, drugs, or attend a Pow Wow under the influence of any such substance. The Pow Wow is a place of happiness and brotherhood so do not spoil it for yourself or others by attending under the influence.

There is so much to be learned from a Pow Wow. You will indeed be enriched by knowledge of and respect for a culture that is the oldest in this country. You will also reap the blessings that everyone receives from attending a Pow Wow.