

Métis Elder Protocols

Historically, Métis Elders were more commonly referred to as “*Ahneegay-kaashigakick*” — “the ones who know.”

At feasts or buffets, Elders will wait and not rush to get in line for food.

They are waiting to see that there is enough food for the children, women, and younger men. Children, because they are our future; women, because they are the givers of life; and younger men because they are the providers and protectors.

Secondly, as role-models they are modeling the virtue of patience.

Patience is the companion of wisdom, as St. Augustine said, “Sometimes in life you will be presented with road blocks and hurdles that may derail you, and if you are lacking patience, you will be in big trouble. It’s times like that where having patience is even more required. With patience you will react more calmly and also be more confident.”

Elders, primary concern is for the health of their community. They have already lived a long life.

At feasts, young people are expected to approach Elders and offer to get them a plate of food. They will also ask about dietary requirements or restrictions. The Elder will then certainly think a good thought for your mother who raised you to be a considerate person.

My friend, the late Maori leader Joe Waru, told me that he was taught that before an Elder was even aware of being thirsty or hungry he was expected to bring them water or tea and ask if they wanted to eat.

At board meetings of Métis National Council that go overly long I have observed our young staff (without being told) obtaining plates of fruit snacks for our board members knowing that the diabetics would require a snack to maintain an appropriate blood glucose level.

At Feasts for the Dead, it is the duty of the young men to serve everyone. This is training for their role as providers and protectors.

At feasts, including Thanksgiving, Xmas and Easter and Feasts for the Dead, it is the custom to prepare a plate of food for “Those who have gone before.” This is done after the prayer but before anyone is served. This food is later placed on a sacred fire, or buried in sacred ground. Some Métis families prepared a complete place setting with cutlery etc.

Terms of address:

Out of respect Elders are addressed as Mr. or Mrs, Mooshom or Kookom or Senator where applicable. Some Métis address their Elders as “Auntie” or “Uncle.” Gabriel

Dumont and the soldiers of the 1885 Resistance addressed the Elders fighting alongside them as “Uncle.” Alternately, introduce or address as Elder “X”. The Maori also address their Elders as “Auntie” or “Uncle.”

Some Métis address their parents as *mémère* and *pépère* (or *mémé* and *pépé*) when their parents have grandchildren.

Elders are recognized for their wisdom, their stability, their humour and their ability to know what is appropriate in a particular situation. The community looks to them for guidance and sound judgment. They are caring and are known to share the fruits of their labours and experience with others in the community.

Defining the Role of Elders Today – In the Family and Community

(By the Central Urban Métis Federation Inc., Saskatoon: CUMFI.¹)

- Pass on the languages (Michif, Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, French, etc.);
- Show respect to other elders in the community;
- Bridge the gap between Elders and Youth;
- Provide a sense of pride in the Métis heritage and traditions;
- Tell stories and legends;
- Offer guidance (not lectures);
- Hold/lead/support summer cultural camps;
- Tutor students to help them cope with life;
- Talk to young people about traditions, customs, languages;
- Act as counsellors in school;
- Teach parenting programs;
- Teach children in schools about culture, history, the present, and the initiatives that Elders have taken;
- Form partnerships with Youth to solve problems;
- Age does not have very much to do with becoming an Elder – you have to earn the respect of the Community to become an Elder;
- Elders need to earn the respect of the community if they want to be involved;
- Should have the knowledge of history and traditions;
- Person must be honest, spiritual, holistic, and be able to offer guidance and spiritual healing;
- Elders should have time and respect for others;
- Elders should be good role models to others;
- Elders should take time to help others.

Elder Development should include:

- More Elders conferences with young people involved;
- Advertise conferences, reach out to the community;
- Keep Elders conferences non-political, politicians can speak but should have no control over the conference;

¹ CUMFI is a Métis owned and operated non-profit, charitable organization located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

- Arrange transportation and accommodations;
- More Elders in the community;
- More Cultural gatherings;
- Help for Elders to heal from residential school experiences;
- Elders have knowledge and cultural understanding that needs preserving;
- Teach Youth that Elders are always willing to give advice;
- Change education systems to include more Michif language;
- To preserve our culture we must use education (Elders teach Youth);
- Children need to be taught to be thankful for parents and grandparents;
- Recognize that television is a bad influence;
- Recognize that children are stuck between the Métis and White people;
- Teach children that when they are in trouble that the Elders want to hear it from them first, not the police or a friend;
- Children need to learn to work because this forces you to put limits on yourself by being accountable; and
- Sit down and discuss things with children and grandchildren.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation gives us the following.

Essential qualities in an Elder:

1. Disciplined and committed to a lifetime of learning;
2. Knows traditional teachings and is committed to helping people within this framework;
3. Physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually healthy;
4. Born with, or seeks, the gift of healing in apprenticeship with a traditional healer;
5. Walks his or her talk, i.e., lives a healthy lifestyle within the parameters of traditional values;
6. Provides help when asked, although may not provide this immediately [sometimes they will refer to another Elder with particular expertise in your area of interest];
7. Able to bring traditional values and life ways into contemporary urban life and living in a practical way;
8. Treats his or her family, spouse, children, parents, Elders and other traditional healers in a respectful and caring manner [all people];
9. Is a positive role model for Aboriginal people;
10. Able to teach and correct behaviour with kindness and respect without humiliating the individual;
11. Always hopeful of people and able to see the goodness in people;
12. Does not use alcohol or drugs or engage in other destructive addictive behaviour;
13. Does not set a fee for their teaching or healing service or request gifts in payment;
14. Knows the medicines and ceremonies [has experience and participated in ceremonies], and;
15. [Demonstrated] evidence of his or her success exists among the [Aboriginal] people and the [Aboriginal] communities

Reference: Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2005, pp. 70-71.



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