

Overview of Tribal Cultures

Despite past hardships and upheavals, tribal traditions and values endure. Knowing something about tribal cultures can open the way for positive relations with Indian people.

Indian Values and Attitudes

Indian people take pride in their own tribes' histories and cultures. Each tribe is unique.

Within the multitude of tribal cultures, tribal people share some core values and attitudes. For example:

- Family plays a central role, and elders are treated with great respect.
 - Information often comes through storytelling.
 - Indians place high value on preserving native languages and religious traditions.
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Addressing Native Americans

If asked, tribal people will explain how they want to be addressed. Most prefer use of a specific tribal name.

Family and Elders

The family holds a central place in all tribal cultures.

- Tribal families treat distant clan members as close relatives.
- Family needs outweigh other concerns and commitments.

Tribal communities show great respect for the wisdom of their elders by:

- Addressing them first in group settings.
- Consulting them about how to proceed.

Younger tribal members interpret as needed for elders with limited English.

Tribal people stress the importance of family and elders in their cultures.

Sharing Information

Tribal people carefully consider responses when answering questions and making decisions. Therefore, when working with tribal people, plan to double or triple the amount of time you would ordinarily expect to spend. Also keep in mind that:

- A rushed and impersonal manner may shut off conversation.
 - Information often is shared by telling a story.
 - Tribal people consider it an insult to provide information you may already know; as a result, they can appear reluctant to answer a question or volunteer information.
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Hospitality

Most tribal cultures value hospitality, and may expect visitors to share food and drink.

Native Languages

- In the United States, there are about 600 distinct tribal languages belonging to more than 10 language families.
 - The ability to speak one's language is highly prized.
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Worship

Religious traditions endure among tribal people. Expressions of spiritual life include:

- Dancing, singing, and chanting.
- Showing reverence by actions such as drinking water, burning sweet grass, taking a sweat bath, or fasting.
- Gathering for ceremonies in certain locations at specific times.
- Treating burial grounds and other traditional sites as sacred.

The circle carries special meaning for tribal people.

Relationship to Land

Traditionally, tribal people have not viewed land as the property of human beings. Because of these beliefs:

- Tribal members often share use of the land.
 - Land is considered sacred.
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Resources

Review the following weblinks:

- Native Americans
<http://killeenroos.com/link/amind.html>
 - National Museum of the American Indian
<http://www.nmai.si.edu/>
 - Navaho Codetalkers
<http://www.lapahie.com/NavajoCodeTalker.cfm>
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Conclusion

This lesson presented tribal values and attitudes concerning:

- The importance of family and elders.
 - Preferred ways to converse and interact.
 - The high value placed on preserving native languages and spiritual traditions.
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