

Participant's Pow Wow Etiquette

Much tradition is observed at Pow Wows. Not to follow the rules of etiquette can cause embarrassment and ill will. Ignorance of Tradition is usually mistaken for disrespect. While at the Pow Wow, please remember these points.

If you are going to dance, then wear dance clothes. Jeans and a cowboy hat, shorts and a shawl, jeans and a blanket, and jeans and a shawl are not considered dance clothes unless it is a "Special" dance, then everyone can dance.

Respect the positions of the head or lead dancers, their role entitles them to start each song or set of songs. Don't dance before the head dancers start dancing.

Dance as long and as hard as you can.

Show respect to the flag and honor songs by standing. Stand in place during "Special" songs until the group had danced around one time and then join if dancing, or if not dancing a "Special" then stand quietly until the song is over.

Do not stand in front of people who are watching.

While dancing, there should be no horseplay, i.e., fringe pulling, hair pulling, idle chitchat, pushing, poking, etc.

While dancing at a Pow Wow, honor the sponsoring organization's protocol. That is, if the sponsoring group is Southern-oriented, dance clockwise. If the group is Northern-oriented, dance counterclockwise. If there are two drums, follow the lead of the head dancers.

Some songs require that you dance only if you are familiar with the routine or are eligible to participate. Songs other than war songs (trot dance, green corn, snake dance, buffalo dance) require particular steps and follow certain routines. If you are not familiar with these dances, sit them out! Watch the head dancers to learn them. Only veterans (and in some cases, their relatives) are permitted to participate in veteran's songs.

The Flag Song, or Indian National Anthem, is sung when the American Flag is raised or lowered. It is not a song for dancing, nor is a quitting song for dancing. Stand during the Flag Song.

Pow Wow's are usually non-profit. Donations are encouraged. Blanket dances are a method of collecting donations. During a blanket dance, participants drop money onto a blanket placed on the ground for that purpose.

If you have decided to attend the dance and not dress, sit quietly on the sidelines and only participate if a "Special" has been called for friends or family.

Always sit in the same seat. At some dances, you may be ushered to your seat by the arena director or a member of his staff. Many dancers use a folded blanket. Do not sit on or move someone's blanket without their permission.

Certain items are worn only by those qualified. Included are war bonnets, fur turbans, rattles, claw necklaces, whistles and religious items. Items not to be worn are rubber and gear from pseudo-Indian kits.

Since the dance is the high point of any gathering, it behooves you to be neat and clean. Your dance clothes should be free of stains, wrinkles, foreign objects and should not have a bad odor.

Giveaways, attributes of the Indian's generosity, are held at many dances. Giveaways are acknowledgments and a sign of appreciation to the recipients for an honor given. When receiving a gift,

the recipient thanks everyone involved.

When someone want to “call a Special” today, he goes to the Pow Wow M.C. and requests it. The M.C. works it into the dance program, and when the time is right he announces it. The one who had requested the “special” comes forward and through a selected person then explains the reason for honoring this person. The Head Singer must then know the honored person’s own song or family song. The person being honored leads the dance along with the person who called the dance. Next come the family members and any friend who want to help. Here is the magic phrase: “Who want to help.” Everyone who dances is obligated to donate something to help the one who called the dance. If money is given, get in line, shake the hand of the person being honored, and hand him the money. The names of those receiving gifts are called and all gifts are given one at a time.

Ask the M.C., Arena Director or Head Singer if there is something you are not sure of.

During the quitting song, veterans do not remove their headpiece.