

Tipi Etiquette

Proper behavior among Plains Indians—as in most societies—was governed by extensive, strict and often subtle rules.

The principles below are a sampling of various points of etiquette that Indians knew and heeded when paying a social call at a friend's tipi.

If the door is open, a friend may enter the tipi directly. But if it is closed, he should announce his presence and wait for the owner to invite him to come in.

When a male visitor enters the tipi he goes to the right and waits for the host to invite him to sit in the guest place to the left of the owner at the rear. A woman enters after the man and goes to the left.

When invited to a feast guests are expected to bring their own bowls and spoons and to eat all they are given.

No visitor should ever walk between the fire and another person, but instead should pass behind the sitters, who for their part, lean forward to make room.

Women should never sit cross-legged like men. They can sit on their heels or with their legs to one side.

In a group of men only the older ones should initiate conversation. The younger men should politely remain silent unless they are invited to speak by an elder.

When the host cleans his pipe everyone should leave.

