

Pow Wow Etiquette

If you have never been to a Pow Wow, here are a few rules that may help you feel more at home. Keep in mind that customs vary from region to region and Pow Wow to Pow Wow. When in doubt quietly wait until there is a break in the action and ask the folks near the drum(s) to point you towards a staff volunteer or the Arena Director.



- 1) Dress and act appropriately. Short shorts, halter tops, swimwear, profanity and 'making out' have no place at Pow Wows. If you are going to dance anything other than open intertribals, wear your regalia. Women dancing behind or near Gourd Dancers should always wear a shawl.
- 2) Pointing with the fingers is considered poor manners by some nations. If you must point, use your head and nod in the direction you wish to indicate.
- 3) The seating around the Arena is reserved for dancers in regalia. Seats with blankets, shawls or regalia items on them are taken and should not be bothered. Do NOT sit on someone else's blanket unless invited. Uncovered seats are considered available.
- 4) Pets should be left at home. The Arena is a sacred place from the time it is blessed until the Pow Wow is over. At no time should pets be allowed in the Arena.
- 5) Listen to the Master of Ceremonies. He will announce who is to dance and when. Most Pow Wows conduct Intertribals in which the public may participate. Check with the Arena Director for more information.
- 6) Pictures should NOT be taken during Veterans Songs, Flag Songs, Prayers or any other time announced by the Master of Ceremonies. If you wish to photograph a dancer in regalia, ask first. If the picture is for publication or commercial use, that should be explained before the picture is taken.
- 7) Respect the Head Man and Head Woman Dancers. Their role entitles them to start each song or set of songs. Please wait until they have started to dance before you join in. In some traditions, it is considered improper to pass the Head Man or Woman Dancer within the Arena.
- 8) Show respect to the Flag, Honor and Veterans songs by standing until the song is completed.

- 9) Some songs require that you be familiar with the routine or have special eligibility rules in order to participate. Trot dances, snake, buffalo, etc. require particular steps or routines. Veterans dances may be restricted to Veterans, Combat Veterans or in some cases, the relations of Veterans. If you are not familiar with a particular dance, observe and learn. Watch the Head Dancers to learn the procedures.
- 10) The Flag Song, or Indian National Anthem, is sung when the American Flag is raised or lowered. Please stand and remove hats during the singing of this song. It is not a song for dancing. Pictures are not allowed during these songs.
- 11) Most Pow Wows are non-profit and depend upon donations, raffles, blanket dances, etc. for support. Donations are encouraged as a way to honor someone. Any participant can drop money onto the blanket to aid in the powwow expenses.
- 13) Certain items of religious significance should be worn only by those qualified to do so. Respect the traditions. Never intentionally touch another dancers regalia, person or property without permission.
- 14) Giveaways, attributes of Indian generosity, are held at many dances. They are acknowledgments of appreciation to recipients for honor or service given to the people. When receiving a gift, the recipient thanks everyone involved in the giving.
- 15) If you wish to ask for a special song from a drum, talk to the Area Director first and make sure the Master of Ceremonies is informed. It is traditional to make a gift (monetary or otherwise) to the Drum for special requests.
- 16) Before sitting at a drum, ask permission from the Head singer. Do not touch a drum without permission.
- 17) If at any time you are uncertain of procedure, etc., please check with the MC, Arena Director, or Head Singer. They will be glad to help you with your questions.
- 18) Unless you are sure spectator seating will be provided, bring a chair. Remember that the seating immediately around the Arena is for dancers only.
- 19) Alcohol, drugs and firearms are prohibited at Pow Wows.
- 20) If you see a lost feather, or you yourself drop a feather, do NOT pick it up. Notify the nearest Veteran, the Head Veteran, Head Man Dancer or Arena Director immediately.

21) Before dancing barefoot speak with the Arena Director. At some events this may only be done by Sundancers known to the organizers.

22) If you have a question, ask. Most dancers, singers, elders and staff are happy to help. Offer a cold drink or other small, symbolic gift to those who help you.

