

Smudge Protocol
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
2019



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Purposes of Smudging:

Smudging is a tradition which involves the burning of one or more of the four medicines gathered from the earth. The four medicines used in smudging ceremonies are leaves from cedar, sage, ceremonial tobacco, sweetgrass. The most common medicines used in a smudge are sage, sweetgrass and cedar. However, ceremonial tobacco is used as a form of giving thanks.

Smudging has been passed down from generation to generation. There are many ways and variations on how a smudge is done. In general, smudging allows people to stop, slow down, become mindful and centered. This allows people to remember, connect and be grounded in the event, task or purpose at hand. Smudging also allows people to let go of negativity. Letting go of things that inhibit a person from being balanced and focused come from the feeling of being calm and safe while smudging. The forms of smudging will vary from nation to nation but are considered by all to be a way of cleansing oneself. Smudging is part of living a good life.

- We smudge to clean our eyes so that we will only see the good in others
- We smudge our ears so that we will only listen to positive things about others
- We smudge our mouths so that we will only speak well of others.
- We smudge our minds so that we will have only good thoughts of others
- We smudge our hearts so that we are open to only good feelings

While smudging was traditionally practiced by some First Nations, it is important to know that not all First Nations used smudging as a part of their spiritual well-being. Also of importance, Inuit did not historically smudge. Today, many First Nations, and Métis communities do engage in smudging, and occasionally some Inuit engage as well. Smudging should always be voluntary. A smudge may be offered to individuals, but they always should have the right to pass.

Smudging ceremonies are permitted if the activity is carried out with an Indigenous person and for traditional Indigenous cultural and spiritual purposes.

How do we smudge:

The act of clearing the air, mind, spirit and emotions may be accomplished in a variety of ways. **A smudge must be led by a person who has an understanding of what a smudge is and why it is done. That person may be an Elder, cultural teacher or knowledge keeper who has been invited into the school; it can be a staff person who is knowledgeable about the tradition of smudging; it can be a parent/guardian; and/or it can be a student. Smudging should never be simulated for the purposes of awareness.**

Individuals or small groups of students/educators may participate in a smudge at any given time throughout the school day. The medicine is placed in a smudge container (often abalone shells, stone bowl, treated ceramic bowl or other non-combustible container). The medicine is lit with a match. Once the medicine is lit, the smoke may be pushed forward with a feather or a fan. The person who lights the smudge may smudge first or last, depending on the leader's tradition.

The most commonly used medicine used in schools is sage. A smudge is created mainly from the leaf of the plant, for burning. It is important to understand that this particular medicine can create a billow of smoke. It is not necessary to create enough smoke to fill the entire space where a group is smudging. Only a small stream of smoke for the person who is smudging is required. Therefore, it is important for the helpers who create the smudge to keep it relatively small.

Once the group or individual has finished smudging the medicine is allowed to burn out and may be left in the smudge bowl or once the medicine no longer presents a risk of fire, the remaining medicine may be returned to the Mother Earth by placing it outside.

What does smudging look like in a school environment:

Schools are beginning to allow Indigenous students to engage in smudging. While many schools do not have a designated or ventilated area established in their buildings, smudging can be done without either of these being present. Smudging may take place on occasion in any classroom or office (eg. Principal's office) where a window may be opened and the space allows for individuals to be present in the room. Smudging can also be done outdoors.

Use and Benefits of Medicines (sage, sweetgrass, cedar, ceremonial tobacco):

Sage

- Sage is used to rid bad feelings and bad influences
- Sage is used to prepare people for ceremonies and teachings.
- It has more medicinal properties and is stronger than sweetgrass and as such it is used more often in ceremony

Sweetgrass

- Sweetgrass is often braided. It represents the hair of Mother Earth
- Each strand of the braid represents - the balance of mind, body and spirit
- This medicine is used to bring in good influences
- Sweetgrass is used in a healing circle - it has a calming effect

Cedar

- Cedar has many restorative medicinal use. Cedar teas and baths are healing
- Cedar is used in fasting and sweat lodge ceremonies as a form of protection

Ceremonial Tobacco

- Tobacco is used in pipe ceremonies and various other ceremonies
- It is believed that tobacco acts as a communication link between the people and the Creator
- Tobacco is not always burned. It is also used as a means of giving thanks
- Before and after killing an animal such as a deer, a hunter will often, while holding the ceremonial tobacco in his left hand, give thanks to the Creator and the animal for giving up its life so that the hunter can feed his family
- It is held in the left hand because it is the hand closest to the heart

- Some First Nations people will also place ceremonial tobacco on the ground and offer thanks to Mother Earth when picking medicines
- Ceremonial tobacco is also used as a gift. As traditional practice, First Nations people who seek assistance from another person such as an Elder, or Traditional Knowledge Keeper will often give that person some ceremonial tobacco as a gift in exchange for their help. In exchanging the tobacco, the giver and receiver of the tobacco enter into a contract with one another
- Ceremonial tobacco is not used in smudging very often

Care of Medicines & Smudge Bundles

These medicines should be kept in a dry place. They can be stored in paper bags or wooden boxes, or tied in a cloth bundle. Smudging should not be used if you have been using alcohol or drugs.

In every school there should be an adult who is the keeper of the smudge bundle - this includes the smudge shell or other container, the medicine, and matches. If there is no designated area for smudging it is advisable that the smudge bundle be accessible even when the keeper of the smudge bundle is not present. For example, if the principal is the keeper of the smudge bundle and they are away, a student success teacher may have access to the smudge bundle to allow students to smudge.

Guidelines for School

1. Whenever possible, when introducing the tradition of smudging, include an Elder or Traditional Knowledge Keeper who can explain smudging, the medicines the teachings and the protocols.
2. Communicate with parents/guardians, staff and students about what smudging is, why people smudge and when and where smudging will take place. Continue to educate and inform throughout the school year. Embrace and encourage dialogue within the school community.
3. Give all parents/guardians, staff and students advanced notice that a smudge will be lit on a particular day, time and place. Parents/guardians and staff should feel free to ask questions and express any concerns they may have about the process.**

Decisions need to be made regarding when and where smudging will be allowed. Posting signs to indicate that smudging occurs at the school may be helpful in letting community know that it happens as part of the school function. Smudging may be part of a learning experience in a classroom, part of a course, during an event or a regular part of the school day. It may be done in a classroom, a gym or outdoors, depending on the guidance from the person who is leading the smudge. The most important thing is that when a smudge is lit, it is done with respect of those who choose not to be involved,

as well as those who choose to be involved. The school community should remember that at one time, Indigenous cultural traditions were illegal and smudging was a practice that had to be done in secret. Those who choose to smudge need to feel welcome and respected in learning environments.

Some schools and community organizations have posted signage in their facilities such as:

- This is a smudging environment and smudging occurs regularly in this facility.
 - Smudging occurs in this room.
 - Smudging is part of the school and classroom function. All are welcome to participate as a matter of choice.
4. Ensure that smudging does not pose a health risk to students, particularly students with severe asthma and respiratory issues. Communicating with parents and students prior to holding a smudge in a well-ventilated room can help to accommodate such concerns. Ensure students who are smudging have written permission** from parents/guardians to do so.
 5. It is recommended to use sage to smudge because all people can smudge with sage during anytime of the month. This is particularly important for the young women in the class or school, especially when they are on their moon time (menses). During this time, women can only use sage as a way to smudge. As students learn more about smudging, they can be introduced to the other medicines as well.

Procedure for Establishing a Permanent Indoor Smudging location

1. The principal will consult with the area supervisor, chief custodian, and Facilities Department regarding smudging activities taking place on site in an established permanent location.
2. Installation of an exhaust fan (where required) will be as per specifications established. The exhaust fan will be of sufficient size to accommodate the amount of smoke produced during the smudging.
3. A fire extinguisher must be permanently mounted in the room.
4. There can be no flammable materials or large quantities of combustible materials located in the designated room during smudging.
5. The smudge bowl must rest in an area with non-combustible materials. The smudge bowl used must be capable of withstanding the heat of the smudge.
6. The Principal shall communicate the specific smudging room number to all staff. A sign will be posted on the designated room door.
7. The room MUST be supervised by program staff during smudging.
8. When choosing/designating a permanent smudging room, educational awareness sessions should be delivered to encourage building greater understanding among school staff members and students.

Procedure for Occasional Smudging Indoors

1. Prior to any smudging, ensure that the chief custodian is advised of the date, time and exact location.
2. Smudging may take place on occasion in any classroom or office (eg. Principal's office) where a window may be opened and the space allows for individuals to be present in the room.
3. A fire extinguisher must be located in the smudging area or a portable extinguisher should be in close proximity.
4. There can be no flammable or large quantities of combustible materials located in the designated area during the smudging.
5. The smudge bowl must rest in an area with non-combustible materials.
6. The area must be supervised by program staff during smudging.

Procedure for Smudging Outdoors

1. All smudging must occur at least 40 feet from any structure.
2. The principal will ensure that the ground conditions are suitable to performing smudging; e.g. in extremely dry conditions, smudging should be moved indoors or paved areas.
3. The smudge bowl must rest in an area with non-combustible materials.
4. The area must be supervised by program staff during smudging.

** this denotes a conversation to be had - does this stay in the document? Can it be removed?
Can it be altered?