



Talking with teens about Sacred Tobacco

June is National Indigenous Peoples Month – a time to salute the rich histories and cultures of Indigenous communities in Alberta. This is a great month to help your teen explore Indigenous worldviews on tobacco.

Many First Nations and Métis peoples see the traditional tobacco plant as sacred. They use it in a good way, with honour and respect for the wisdom of their ancestors. When used this way, traditional tobacco is sometimes called Sacred Tobacco.

Using Sacred Tobacco is different than using commercial tobacco that is harmful, like smoking cigarettes, cigars, or using spit tobacco. It's also different than using other products that contain nicotine, like vapes and pouches.

Use the tips below to help your teen balance

traditional views on tobacco with the harms of smoking, vaping, and using nicotine pouches.

Teach respect for Sacred Tobacco

Talk with your teen about the uses of Sacred Tobacco. Remind them that these uses have traditional meanings and purposes. For example, some Indigenous peoples use Sacred Tobacco to:

- Support ceremonies, prayers, and blessings.
- Show respect and thanks
- Connect with the Creator
- Exchange as a gift for knowledge, teachings, and time
- Make an offering to Mother Earth
- Support healing

Remind your teen that using tobacco in these ways has deep cultural roots, while using commercial tobacco is different. Be clear about the facts:

- Smoking causes serious health problems. It is **not** connected to Indigenous culture.
- Vaping nicotine can lead to addiction. It is **not** a spiritual act.
- Nicotine pouches are full of chemicals. They are **not** a medicine.

Encourage your teen to go to keeptobaccosacred.ca/sacred-tobacco/ to learn more about how Sacred Tobacco is different from commercial tobacco. You can also point them to behindthehaze.ca, a teen-friendly site with facts on vaping and quit tools and resources.

Hear from Indigenous Elders

Help your teen learn from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers – people who share traditional wisdom and spiritual knowledge. Elders are our most important cultural guides and teachers on Sacred Tobacco. They hold stories and wisdom that have been passed down for generations.

If your family doesn't have access to an Indigenous Elder or Knowledge Keeper, your teen can visit keeptobaccosacred.ca/elder-voices. It's a hub for tobacco teaching videos and stories shared by Elders and Knowledge Keepers from across Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8.

Learn about Sacred Tobacco where you live

Help your teen research efforts to reclaim tobacco as a sacred plant in your community.

Encourage them to reflect on ways they can show their support. For example, they can:

- Go to Indigenous cultural events and gatherings that are open to the public, like drum circles or powwows. There, they can learn and follow the tobacco protocols in place.
- Visit public gardens where tobacco is being grown in its natural form (*Nicotiana rustica*). For example, they can go to the medicine gardens at Edmonton's Alex Decoteau Park or the healing gardens at Calgary's Arthur Child Cancer Centre.
- Follow the [Tobacco Warriors](#) on social media. These are Indigenous young adults who share tobacco teachings they've received from Elders, inspire teens to respect Sacred Tobacco, and spread the word about smoking and vaping harms.

Together, let's celebrate Sacred Tobacco during National Indigenous Peoples Month. Respecting traditional tobacco is an act of reconciliation.

For more information, go to:

- [Keep tobacco sacred](#)
- [Traditional tobacco and commercial tobacco](#)
- [Acts of reconciliation you can do with your teen](#)