



## REMEMBER

- **Family:** For Indigenous people in particular, their individual story is often tied to the larger story. So don't forget to ask them about their family's story - maybe by saying - "Tell me about your family - Who's important to you and what have you learned from them?". That's all part of finding out who the teen before you is.
- **Culture:** Indigenous peoples have suffered tremendous cultural disruption and loss. Growing numbers of Indigenous youth today are fighting hard to regain and reconcile a connection to their culture around roles, values, and purpose.
- **Laughter:** Humor is integral to family and community for Indigenous people, they love to laugh. It is key to dealing with everyday and intergenerational struggles.
- **Hospitality:** Indigenous people are incredibly hospitable. They have generous spirits and a desire to share with and help each other. Their strength is in their community.
- **Spirituality:** Indigenous people believe that everything is connected to Creator, that people are deeply spiritual beings, and that care for the earth is a spiritual act.

Understanding the culture and history of an Indigenous youth is important, but just like every other youth, who they are is more. Don't make assumptions because you know the bigger story. Get to know their unique and individual story too.



## RECOGNIZE

- Almost half of the Indigenous population of Canada is under 25. Because of this, the number of Indigenous adult role models is decreasing at a time when young people are increasingly needing support.
- Indigenous youth are disproportionately represented in the foster care system, (approx. 60%) in suicide rates (twice the national average), and in correctional facilities (approx. 50%). They are a highly vulnerable population in need of support and understanding.
- Trauma as a result of the historical treatment of indigenous people in Canada impacts many Indigenous young people. With historical trauma, descendants who have not directly experienced a traumatic event can still exhibit the signs and symptoms of trauma, such as depression, fixation on trauma, low self-esteem, anger, and self-destructive behavior.
- Not every member of a group has the same response to a current or past traumatic event. Many Indigenous young people are looking forward hopefully to change and justice in their communities and families.
- Supportive relationships impact every youth. Within this context, opening doors to exploring the meaning of hope, belonging, meaning and purpose together will always lean in the direction of healing.



## RESPOND

- **Lean into learning.** The story of Indigenous peoples in Canada is broad and deep. Take time to understand the past and the current realities they live in.
- **Acknowledge.** Indigenous people are a resilient people group, having survived genocide and adverse effects of both residential schools and colonization. Recognize and affirm this strength and resiliency as you talk with the teen in front of you. Chances are, there have been hurdles in their life that they have surmounted - some thrown there by people that may have looked a lot like you.
- **Ask questions.** Learn from the youth themselves, asking about where they are from, what they know about their culture, or how they are involved in their culture today. But remember that they may not feel a strong connection to their culture and need to also be known as an individual apart from culture as well.
- **Share moments.** Indigenous teens are varied in their personalities but many are more comfortable in smaller, casual settings and in side-by-side conversations. They love to laugh - and will laugh at you and with you when you invite them to. This is a great way to bond.
- **Create traditions.** Tradition is important so create your own traditions and memories together. Your shared experiences build trust and a sense of connectedness.
- **Pray for them and with them.** Ask the youth if they pray and if you could end your time with a prayer. As you pray, consider calling God "Creator" - because this was how he was first known to humans and how he's seen by indigenous people. And don't forget to invite the youth to pray for you too if they are open to this..



## RESOURCES

**albertamentors.ca** - Filled with tools and guidance for mentoring Indigenous youth.

**Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A Toolkit for Service Providers** - This comprehensive guide is both educational and practical.

Joseph Bob & Joseph Cynthia A. (2019) **Indigenous Relations, Insights, Tips & Suggestions to make Reconciliation a Reality.** Indigenous Relations Press. pg.26