



Round Dance 101: Everybody Dance!

Indigenous Education

What is a Round Dance?

A Round Dance is a social gathering of Nations in celebration of a specific cause (Elder Rod Hunter, U of C, 2022). A traditional celebration of Cree/Saulteaux cultures, today, the Round Dance is embraced by many Indigenous communities including the Blackfoot, Dené, Stoney Nakoda and the Métis. There are many types of Round Dance gatherings, such as:

- Memorial Round Dance to honour those who have passed on
- Celebratory Round Dance
- Tea Dance

While nations might share similar traditions, they each have varying customs for the Round Dance (Eagletail, 2022). For example, the Blackfoot nations observe a similar version, called a Tea Dance. Commonly understood as a “healing dance”, Piikani Elder Dr. Reg Crowshoe teaches that the Round Dance is an important celebration for an oral society (U of C, 2022). It brings people together and is a way to build family and to support one another. According to Elder Rod Hunter (Stoney Nakoda), it’s important to treat all with a good heart so that when people leave they will be happy they came to dance (U of C, 2022). The goal of the Round Dance is to get people smiling, dancing and laughing together.

Who can attend a Round Dance?

The Round Dance is for everyone; it is a communal event and everyone is welcome. It provides the time to honour traditions and memories of our ancestors, and to celebrate Indigenous cultural practices through song, dance and language.

A Round Dance...

- Traditionally begins with a pipe ceremony for the event organizers and Elders
- Starts with an opening prayer and offering by an Elder, followed by a traditional feast/feeding the community
- Is danced in a circle together, holding hands, moving east to west in the direction of the rising and setting sun
- Reinforces equality and inclusion, and demonstrates the “circle of life” illustrated in nature (Riebe, 2017)
- Symbolizes the heartbeat of the community through the beat of the drum, with all dancers moving as one
- Is a social gathering that provides an opportunity to swap stories, to catch up on the latest news, to “break bread” (bannock) together, to share some tea, and to hear the old and new songs

- Winds down with a “giveaway”- each guest receives a small gift as an expression of thanks from the 'host' clan, community, or family, directly followed by a song of gratitude where everyone participates by holding up their giveaway items as cued by the Emcee
- Closes with a Going Home song

Protocols of the Round Dance:

- Round Dances are alcohol and substance-free events
- In some settings, parents are encouraged not to carry babies or small children while dancing (traditionally, some communities believe that spirits might misinterpret that they are giving the child away as a gift in the giveaway!)
- While not mandatory, guests are encouraged to wear ribbon skirts / a long skirt, or a ribbon shirt

What if I don't know how to Round Dance?

It's easy! Here's a quick lesson:

- Step one—Join the circle.
- Step two—Place your left hand palm up, and your right hand palm down.
- Step three—Clasp hands with your neighbours in the circle.
- Step four—Leading with your left leg, take a step to the left.
- Step five—Slide your right leg towards your left, keeping your right foot connected to na'a (Mother Earth)
- Repeat steps four and five, and now you're dancing!

There are many types of dances you might encounter at the gathering, such as the Potatoe Dance, Owl Dance, or Apple Dance. Listen for the Emcee's instructions and when in doubt, follow the lead of those around you.

Watch a quick introduction to the Round Dance [here](#)

References

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