

How to Offer Tobacco and Make a Request of an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Chief, or other Indigenous Person

Offering tobacco is an act of respect and a traditional way by which many Indigenous people make requests. Please note that Inuit Elders and Knowledge Keepers do not accept tobacco offerings because they do not use it ceremonially. It is still a kind gesture to offer a small gift, though, such as tea.

There are many ways of presenting tobacco, but it is most commonly given as a tobacco tie (see photo). Here's how to make a tobacco tie in order to ask a Chief, Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Elder or other Indigenous person for their help or knowledge:

1. **Get some tobacco:** It's best to use traditional tobacco (not for commercial smoking use), organic tobacco, or pipe tobacco (e.g., Drum). In a pinch, you can use commercial loose tobacco (but this is discouraged as it's laced with chemicals).
2. **Get some cloth:** From any fabric store, buy a length of broadcloth (ideally, 100% cotton), in a solid colour such as red, yellow, white, green, purple or blue.
3. **Prepare the tobacco tie:** The person making the request should prepare the tobacco tie. As you do so, think about what you will request and have good, kind thoughts in your mind. Here are step-by-step instructions on how to assemble your tobacco tie:
 - Cut a square of fabric (4 inches by 4 inches)
 - Cut a thin strip of fabric (about ½ inch by 6 inches)
 - Put a pinch of tobacco in the centre of the cloth square
 - Gather the corners of the square together
 - Wrap the strip of the fabric around the top of the gathered fabric and tie a knot. (You can also tie it up with a piece of yarn or twine.)
4. **Make your request:** Offer the tobacco tie when you first make your request. Approach the Elder, Chief, Traditional Knowledge Keeper, or Indigenous guest with the tie in your left* hand, held out in front of you. Respectfully (and specifically) ask what you would like them to do. If they accept and take the tobacco, they are agreeing to do what you have asked. If they aren't able to fulfill your request, they will say that they can't take the tobacco at this time. (*The left hand is closest to the heart, the residence of spirit.)

Here's an example of what to say when making your request and offering tobacco:

I am offering you this tobacco for...

- o ... the opening and closing remarks at [name of event].
- o ... smudging the meeting room and the participants.
- o ... your guidance with _____ .

(We acknowledge drawing from the Ontario Federation of Labour's Aboriginal Circle and Aboriginal Person's Caucus's *Tobacco Offering Protocol* to make this resource sheet.)



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