

Minute for Right Relations
May 2022
Tobacco Offering

Tobacco is one of four sacred medicines (along with Sage, Cedar and Sweetgrass). Tobacco always comes first. Tobacco is used in ceremony and ritual, as an offering of gratitude or respect, and to lift up prayers. It is offered before harvesting other medicines. Tobacco should always be handled with respect and with a good mind.

The Tobacco Tie – how and when to offer it

When asking an Indigenous elder or knowledge keeper to share a teaching, lead ceremony, offer advice, or to share a song or prayer, it is appropriate to offer tobacco. If the person accepts the tobacco, they are agreeing to help. Offering tobacco is a respectful way of *asking* for assistance and should never replace proper remuneration or an honorarium.

How to Make a Tobacco Tie

It is preferable to use traditional ceremonial tobacco. If you are unable to find traditional tobacco, it is fine to offer loose tobacco. (You may purchase traditional ceremonial tobacco online or in some Indigenous shops or you may purchase loose tobacco from a tobacco store).

Gather fabric to make your tobacco tie. It is best to use natural fabric – cotton broadcloth is best to use. The fabric should be about 4 inches (or 10 cm) square. Typically, tobacco ties are made with red fabric, but it is ok to use other colours as well. Be aware that the colour of fabric may carry special meaning to some Indigenous Nations.

The person making the request or offering the tobacco should be the person to prepare the tobacco tie. As the tobacco offering is prepared, it is important to think about what you are requesting, and to have a good mind while you prepare the tobacco bundle.

Place a small amount of the tobacco in the centre of the cloth and gather the ends of the cloth together. Tie the tobacco bundle with a piece of yarn, twine or a strip of cloth fabric.

How to Offer the Tobacco Tie

Offer the tobacco tie or pouch when you make your initial request. To make a request, offer the tobacco tie or pouch by holding it in your left hand in front of you – you should not try and place it in the person's hands until after the request is accepted.

Clearly state your request. Be specific and as detailed as possible. If the person agrees to your request, they will accept the tobacco. If they can not fulfil your request, they will decline the tobacco.

If you are asking an Elder or Knowledge Keeper to share knowledge over zoom or other online platform, you should still make and offer the tobacco tie. You can make arrangements to deliver the tobacco tie at a later date.

Assembling a tobacco tie is an act of prayer. You should always prepare your tobacco tie with a good mind and good intention.