

## Smudging Guidelines Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### 1. What is a Smudging Ceremony?

Smudging refers to the burning of one or a combination of the sacred medicines: sweet grass, sage, cedar, and/or tobacco involving one or many people. Tobacco used as a sacred medicine is different than it being used recreationally. Also, at no time will the tobacco or any smudge material be inhaled directly or intentionally. The person hosting the smudge will guide everyone during the ceremony. Those that “smudge” as it is commonly called, are responsible for a smudging bundle which may consist of some or all of the following: plant material, feather, shell/bowl, and a fire source.

### 2. What is the importance of a smudging ceremony?

The smoke from the sacred medicines serves to cleanse the body, mind, spirit and heart. The Elders teach us that the smoke:

- helps the mind to think only good thoughts,
- the mouth so only good things are said,
- the eyes so that the good in all things are seen,
- the ears to listen and hear,
- the hands so they respect all that is touched,
- the feet so that only good paths are followed and,
- the heart so that our daily lives are guided in a positive way.

Traditionally this is an important step in creating a foundation of good intentions and communication between individuals or groups of people.

3. Can anyone participate in smudging?

Smudging is a tradition common to many First Nation People. While there are guidelines and protocol to follow, smudging is a spiritual ceremony not to be confused with any religious practice. Anyone can participate in smudging if they have either received teachings from an Elder or practicing smudger and/or understand and follow the protocol being used at the time a smudge is offered. Due to varying beliefs and practices, generally the Elder or person who is hosting the smudging ceremony will provide details of the protocol to follow. Some common protocols for example pertain to; women on their "Moon Time" (menstruating) or anyone who has used alcohol or drugs in last four days. If you are seeking to have someone come in to perform a smudging ceremony, have a conversation with them about these protocols and how they might be handled in a sensitive way with the students.

4. Is there a requirement to inform parents/guardians that students are participating in smudging?

Individual students may request to smudge during the school day with parental consent. Parental consent is also required when smudging is part of a class lesson or small group activity (see Appendix A and B).

When a school is hosting an activity that involves a smudging ceremony, the school principal is required to notify parents/guardians in advance through standard school communications methods.

5. What if a school is reluctant to allow smudging?

School Administration Supervisors and the Diversity Management Coordinator can work with the school to assist in supporting smudging practices at the school.

6. If we do not have a Mi'kmaq Indigenous Student Support Worker do we still need to allow students to smudge at our school?

The Halifax Regional Centre for Education recognizes and respects a wide variety of traditions and cultural observations of students and staff within its Board. If there are Mi'kmaq or Indigenous Students who are requesting to smudge, permission should be granted (upon receipt of parental consent) and supervised by an adult.

7. Does a school staff person have to be present with the student(s) when outside smudging on school property?

Smudging during school hours, on school property, requires the presence of a school staff person.

8. Does the smoke have a negative effect on the person similar to drugs and alcohol?

The sacred medicines of sage, sweetgrass, ceremonial tobacco and cedar do not cause any mind altering affects. The smoke is not meant to be inhaled but rather washed over the body or object. It can however help clear energy and promote a feeling of spiritual connectedness, thus contributing to a positive attitude.

9. How often can a smudging ceremony be permitted at the school?

There are no time frames for allowing smudging ceremonies. A smudge happens as often as determined to be needed. However, often a smudge is held at the start of an activity or as part of a learning opportunity for students. Each request should be looked at individually. The length of time for a ceremony may vary depending on the size and needs of the group/individual.

10. What happens if a student wants to participate but does not have parent consent?

Except where a smudge is being done during an assembly or large event, parental consent is required.

11. Are students allowed to leave a class exam or test to attend a smudging ceremony?

Every consideration should be given to make sure smudging is done during appropriate times for students. If some are in a test or exam, a second ceremony may be planned for those students to attend at a later time.

12. What happens if a student is disrespectful during a smudging ceremony?

If you are seeking to have someone come in to perform a smudging ceremony, have a conversation with them about how they might handle disrespect of the ceremony in a sensitive way with the students. Smudging is led by a person who has respect for the sacredness of the smudging ceremony and understanding of the reasons it is used in the First Nation culture. Students will be introduced to the protocol at the beginning of any smudge ceremony. Students who are disrespectful during a ceremony should be addressed immediately and educated on the sacredness of the ceremony.

13. How large of a group is acceptable during a smudging ceremony at school?

There are no set group sizes.

14. Is smudging a religious practice?

Smudging is not a religious practice. Smudging is a traditional practice which serves as a way to maintain a spiritual connection in a good way. Many that smudge regularly may also practice other types of ceremony specific to their nation.

15. Does there need to be a designated area for smudging?

Schools may want to identify a specific area, in alignment with the Smoke Free Places Act of Nova Scotia, for smudging. The Indigenous Student Support Worker and/or Elder may be of assistance in selecting an appropriate location.