

Exploring Your Name

Recommended Age: 12+

Goal

- To get youth to explore a piece of their identity and engage the power of their name.

Instructions

- Sitting in a circle, ask youth to go around answering the following question(s): **“What is your name?” “Do you have any story about your name?” “Can you share one thing about your name?” “Do you know your Spirit Name?”**

Probing Questions

- **“Where did your name come from?” “Who named you?” “Do you have more than one name?” “How did you get it?” “Is there a meaning to it?” “How do you spell it?”**
- Try not to ask for nicknames, as they are not always positive or appropriate. When they do come up, even if inappropriate, take it as a learning opportunity and talk about how we all have the right to be respected and called by what we choose, and more importantly, we have the power to choose what names we answer to.

Note to Facilitators: Spirit Names

- For a non-Indigenous person, it is essential to remain culturally humble (i.e., respectful and reflective) when sharing knowledge from a culture that is not our own. This means sharing where the knowledge comes from, acknowledging the limitations of our knowledge of that worldview, continuously listening and learning, apologizing when misunderstanding, and prioritizing Indigenous presence and voices.

- This exercise is contributed by Vanessa AnakwudwabisayQuay from Peguis First Nation. The following information is one understanding of many teachings from diverse populations of Indigenous Nations.
- With Indigenous youth in particular, a Spirit Name or knowledge of names that are used in Indigenous cultures (sometimes still called an 'Indian name' within Indigenous communities) can be shared. Part of the teaching is every human being has a Spirit Name that tells us a lot about who we are, our Gifts, and the spirit we carry. It is said we all have a Spirit Name that is with us, whether we know it or not. If we wish to learn more about ourselves, it can be helpful to find out the name of the spirit that carries us. A way we may find our name is by using our Tobacco, as the sacred Medicine it is meant for, and offering it directly to Creator either by putting it in a Sacred (blessed) Fire or Water or out on a clean spot on the Earth (usually by a tree is good). Then we ask Creator for our name. Often when we ask directly, our answers come in mysterious ways or through our dreams and we have to be open to receiving our answers this way.
- A common way to get our name is to offer Tobacco to an Elder or Medicine person who has the Gift to have names revealed to them from the Spirits. Usually, this happens in a ceremony the Medicine person has been given and they can translate our name to us. Often the name our spirit carries has to do with nature and animals, so we watch that animal or specific part of nature to see what it does, how it reacts, and what it goes through. By learning about the name of our spirit, we can learn lots about our own qualities, characteristics, and responsibilities in life. The more we understand our spirit, the better we understand ourselves.
- This activity can have many positives by getting youth to explore their identity. Other positives often include being named after or by someone, funny stories, knowing who named you, nicknames, and hopes that were given with the name or even something as simple as a different spelling of a name. This activity can be open and inclusive of naming practices from all cultures and can be an opportunity to introduce Spirit Names for those who have not heard of such teachings.

Debrief

- Thank everyone for sharing their name.
- Our names are powerful.
- It is good to say our names aloud because there is power in acknowledging who we are and drawing on the power within each of us.