

Sexuality in Original Languages

Recommended Age: 12+

Goals

- To get youth to explore concepts of sexuality in their Original (Indigenous) Languages.
- To encourage people to speak their language.

Have Ready

- Copies of the following handout.
- Pens.
- Dictionaries/online.
- Prize for the winner (optional).

Note to Facilitators

- There may be diverse languages and dialects of a language present, so emphasis is not on accuracy or focusing on 'the right' answers. The goal is to build community by generating laughter and curiosity, while increasing Indigenous language use. It is not about getting translation or pronunciation correct. It is about being brave enough to try and say the words out loud. Giving people permission to speak, make mistakes, and 'sound funny' reduces barriers to learning. Creating a safer space where people are not shamed or made fun of is essential when revitalizing Indigenous languages. Ideally, this activity has multi-generations and a few fluent speakers present.

Instructions

- Ask youth to translate these words into their Original Language and remind them they can ask for help from friends, family, Elders, teachers, community members, etc. Activity can be done as individuals or in teams.

- The first to finish wins, or if time runs out, the person who has the most answers completed.
- Have a prize ready for the team or individual. To claim the prize, they must read some answers aloud.

Debrief

- If people used their electronics to access a translator or dictionary, it is okay; there is no such thing as 'cheating' when it comes to relearning our Languages. We relearn by any means necessary. Technology can be a helpful tool in strengthening our cultures.
- **"Do all of these words have to do with sexuality?"** Yes. Even a hippopotamus has sexuality. Sexuality is more than just what we think about when we think about sex. **Sexuality is about who we are, how we express ourselves, how we feel about ourselves, what we like and don't like, as well as how we communicate and create relationships with the Land, each other, and all living things. Sexuality is natural and happens throughout our lives.** Whether we have sex or not is only a small part of sexuality.
- **"Why is hippopotamus hard to translate?"** Because we don't have hippopotamuses on this Land. Our languages are very connected to the Land, which is why they contain so much knowledge. Also, Indigenous people are very adaptable and resourceful, which are keys to survival. A good example of this is how we figured out how to say hippopotamus even though there is no word for it in the Language. **"Anyone want to share what they came up with?" "How do you say hippopotamus in your Language?"** (Answers are usually very funny.)
- **"Why is orgasm or masturbate sometimes left blank when we do this exercise?"** Because of colonization, and in particular the sexual abuse that occurred/occurs and the shaming and stigmatizing of sexuality because of the Residential School Legacy, many people are not comfortable talking about these things.
- Since Europeans arrived, there has been a tremendous amount of shame put on sex and sexuality. It is important to know that the shame is not our fault and if we are not comfortable talking about these things, it is okay. What is important to remember is that within Indigenous cultures prior to colonization, sexuality was

understood as a normal part of life and there are healthy ways, including language, rituals, medicines, ceremonies, and intergenerational education systems, that direct us to develop a healthy sexuality.ⁱ

- **“Does anyone want to share what the word orgasm or masturbate translates to?” “If someone were to think in their Original Language, what does it mean?”** Often, answers given are along the lines of “to explode,” “a big relief,” “feel really good,” “playing with themselves.” Sometimes deeper understandings that speak to Original Understandings of healthy sexuality are revealed. For example, one answer that came out is one translation of ‘orgasm’ in Cree meaning “to undo someone.” There are lots of meanings to re-discover!
- It is important to speak and relearn Original Languages because contained in them is not only the knowledge, wisdoms, Original Understandings, and instructions from the Ancestors, but as we relearn and continue to **think** in our Languages, we restore our worldviews to their rightful places in the body, hearts, and minds of The People. This is key to recovering from the impacts of colonization and it brings healing to the Nations in a practical, tangible, life-affirming way that promotes pride and health.

Try to translate these words into your Original Language. Ask for help from friends, family, Elders, teachers, and community members.

Water

Earth

Friend

Condom

Fart

Hippopotamus

Respect

Laugh

Heart

Masturbate

Orgasm

Fire

Translate this example of asking for consent!

“Can I give you a hickey?”

Consent is Ask. Listen. Respect.

We might not get a yes every time, but we will never know unless we ask. Consent is important and builds healthy relationships.

ⁱ“Traditionally in Indigenous cultures sexuality was seen as a gift and a source of great pleasure. Community adults openly taught children about their bodies, the moon time, and other sexual and reproductive passages. The Kokums, Grandmothers, were the keepers of the knowledge of herbal medicines for, among other things, birth control. This perspective was lost with the influence of the church and residential schools. The impact of the church-run schools, what the schools taught about sex, and the sexual abuse experienced there has made talking about sex for many Indigenous people taboo.” From Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada, & Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada. (2002). *Finding our way: A sexual and reproductive health sourcebook for Aboriginal communities* (p. 339). Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada.; Thoms, J. M. (2007). Leading an extraordinary life: Wise practices for an HIV prevention campaign with Two-Spirit men. In (pp. 1–68). 2 Spirits.