
Great Lakes Regional Advisory Lodge



Help Papers Series
Support Materials for Parent/Child Programs

TOPIC:

Successful Tribes

Great Lakes Region-Help Paper Series – Successful Tribes

Successful Tribes and Clans

The Tribe or Clan is the basic unit of the Native Sons and Daughters™ program. Each unit should be composed of at least 6 family groups. It is recommended that the children be close in age (this may be more important in the Sons programs). The Tribe or Clan should be organized as small a geographic location as possible. This will facilitate greater attendance at tribal meetings. Young members should be encouraged to recruit friends in their neighborhoods.

The Tribe Chief should be someone who is committed to the success of the tribe. Successful tribes have shared responsibility. This provides a ready supply of officers for each year. Your tribe should have a defined set of responsibilities for each officer. The most common officers are Chief, Sachem, Wampum Bearer, and Talleykeeper, but many more possible offices exist. Refer to the Members Handbook for a complete list of officers and their duties. Also in the handbook is a list of possible officer positions created for the children of the tribe.

- Tribe Chief:

The Tribe Chief leads the meetings with the support of other tribe members (including children). The Chief confirms in advance that the Host is prepared for the meeting. He/she develops the agenda, ensures the meeting begins on time, and keeps it moving. The Chief is the authority figure to keep members focused on the activity at hand. The Chief attends Longhouse meetings and keeps the tribe informed of major events that are of interest to all. The Chief is prepared to answer questions on future activities or meetings.

- Sachem (sometimes called the Assistant Chief):

The Sachem is the keeper of knowledge. Tribes may have a specific activity that is done every year. For example your tribe may sing Christmas Carols at a local Nursing Home. The Sachem knows things like how far in advance the Nursing Home needs to be notified, and what special rules need to be observed. Also there may be several favorite carols that are expected. Your tribe may have a chant at a Longhouse event. The Sachem should pass on this knowledge to the new tribe members. The Sachem maintains a list of things that your tribe meetings don't allow (eg. jello, red kool-aid, glue guns).

- Wampum Bearer:

The Wampum Bearer assists the Chief by collecting funds for Longhouse and Tribal activities. The Wampum Bearer maintains the tribes funds, and assists the children in public speaking by having them relate to the tribe how they earned their wampum. He/she teaches listening skills and courtesy while others tell their stories.

- Talleykeeper:

A talleykeeper may be used by a tribe to keep minutes and historical information for the tribe. An example is a tribe photo album. A son/daughter may find helping with this job both fun and educational.

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Tribe meetings should be regular (1-2 per month) and have a defined content and structure. You should make sure that everyone knows that they should be on time. Meetings can get off to a bad start if you have to sit around for 15 minutes waiting for somebody to show up. It forces you to rush to complete everything on time, or to end late. The standard parts to a meeting consist on an opening ritual, a craft, a game, a story, refreshments, and a closing ritual. You may choose not to incorporate all of these.

- Game:

1. It is important that both parent and child participate.
2. Select a game that can be easily played in the space provided by the host; possibly outside in good weather.
3. Encourage participation and fun over competition and winning.
4. Quick and easy can also be challenging - elaborate games waste time and quickly become boring.
5. Always try the game with your child prior to the meeting.
6. Introduce new games each meeting; repeat favorites occasionally.

- Craft:

1. Prepare the craft project with your child in advance.
2. Projects should be consistent with the ability of the children.
3. Keep projects simple so that the children can gain a feeling of success.
4. Have all materials ready in advance with enough for each dad and child team.
5. Complete a sample prior to the meeting for display and timing.
6. Arrange distribution of materials for a quick start.
7. Plan teaching steps carefully, involving all children and dads in the process.
8. Be alert to safety factors and group behavior.
9. Allow for display and take-home needs.
10. Ensure that parent and child work together.

- Stories:

Stories can provide an important time within the tribe meeting to settle down from the excitement to listen and focus on the Chief, Host Dad, or an appointed person(s) present a story. This also reinforces the Aim “listen while others speak”. Stories found in the books 20 Teepee Tails and The Tales of Running Deer are great stories that have a lesson or purpose, some with discussion questions. See the Help Paper on Story Telling

You must clearly set meeting responsibilities. There are two ways to so this. One way is to have the host responsible for the entire meeting. The other way is to assign responsibilities to various tribal members. Either of these can work. On one hand, you may not want somebody bringing in a game that doesn't go well in the area you have available, but on the other hand maybe they're more likely to come if they are responsible for something. There is no single right way to operate. .

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- Host Responsibilities:

The host provides a meeting place, simple refreshments, and age appropriate crafts or games. The host should test games and crafts prior to the meeting. The actual calendar of meeting dates should have been set well in advance. The host with son/daughter prepares an invitation to remind the tribe members of the coming meeting and delivers them (mail, hand-deliver, email, etc.) in time to allow tribe members to plan ahead. Creating the invitations gives the parent and child another opportunity to spend more time together.

Refreshments:

Usually served at the end of all activities, just before closing. Limit these to a desert or two, and some form of refreshment drink. Be aware if any children or dads have special dietary restrictions. Homemade goodies are usually a favorite. Many times, homemade deserts are fashioned around the season such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.

You should never be short on ideas. There is a wealth of reference material available at your local libraries, museums, and on the internet. Your Longhouse should have a collection of material available for people to use. If your group doesn't have a library, start one. You can start keeping records of things that tribes do, so that the material will be available to those who come after you.

Each tribe should make some tribal equipment or property. This gives people a sense of accomplishment and belonging. An example is a totem pole in pieces. Each family brings their piece to each meeting, and you begin the meeting by stacking them.

Support your Longhouse activities. Your tribe is a part of a larger organization that cannot function without support. Each tribe can be responsible for planning one activity during the year.

You can help recruit new members for your tribe. This can be to replace lost members or just to increase the size of your tribe. Talk to your child and see who his friends from school are. Arrange to meet the parents and invite them to a meeting. Don't wait for a beginning of the year Longhouse recruiting session.

Your tribe will be more successful if you are able to relate to the needs of the children.