

Wolakota [the Lakota Way]

The premise of the Lakota society is based on respect or Wo-ohola (Respect). Respect is demonstrated as observing and maintaining integrity by reacting to eye contact or excessive and inappropriate talking, and behaviors lacking reservedness and warmth. Respect is to avoid these reactions completely or gauge them in accordance with age, gender, relations, and generation.

The following are some ways of promoting respect according to the traditional Lakota ways.

- Respect is to hold all people (especially the elders) in high esteem, honor them, venerate them, and to praise them for their probity (wisdom and integrity).
- When ideas and concepts are expressed in meetings, honor them and build on them if they seem good, especially if they came from elders or learned people.
- Never insist your ideas are better or argue this point.
- Never speak negatively about people in public because this tends to hurt people. When you hurt people it affects their heart. The heart is a sensitive organ and negative elements tend to build up and this poisons the mind. Decisions should be made from the mind and the heart.
- Do not walk between people who are talking in public and the audience or people who are talking to each other. Do not interfere with people talking or people who have the floor. Non-interference is a virtue.
- Steer clear of confrontation as much as possible. There are ways of settling differences, and diplomacy is one way. If people are persistent, walk away. This is especially true when you know that the person doing the confronting is wrong.
- Do not get up and walk out when someone is talking, except in an emergency. Apologize if it is appropriate to do so.
- Allow all speakers to speak their mind without interrupting them. Listen to people or pay attention to them as a courtesy.
- Do not spread rumors; always try to present facts and truths. Rumors will eventually become well known to people and will be taken care of in time.
- Traditional values should always be upheld because the youth look up to the older generations as models.
- Never correct, challenge or yell at an elder in public. To do so is a sign of disrespect.
- Always treat the youth or younger generation as one of your own relatives and with respect because they look up to you and emulate what you teach.
- When in company of elders, never speak out of turn, unless you are asked something.
- Never point at someone. To do so is a sign of disrespect. Remember the story of the two who pointed at the stars.
- Never threaten anyone with a pipe or ceremony. To do so will bring hurt to you and your family. Never use the pipe in public if there is a negativity or potential negativity.

- As a leader, you are a spokesperson for the people and you should always trust in the people to help you make important decisions.
- Respect your leaders because they deserve the respect they have earned.
- Leaders should always look for a compromise between two irreconcilable forces. Never take sides because a leader should be able to mediate in order to make the best decision for the people.
- Have compassion for people who experience hurt.

Respect is a significant component of Wolakota and really is the unifying force that helps the people to be in harmony and at peace with each other. Without Wolakota, the results would be catastrophic and would lead our society to decadence. This is why the leaders, especially the elders of the past, conceived of Wolakota and thus insured that the Lakota way of life would prevail. Today, like in the past when our society faced a similar ordeal or a collapse, our society is facing a similar meltdown because our society is moving away from the traditional respect of Wolakota. Our people must go back to the center of our traditional ways by reinstalling appropriate values of Wo-ohola and Wolakota.

Hecel oyate kin nipi kte.

Source: Victor Douville – Sinte Gleska University