

A guide to ...

CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

- HOW TO SHOW RESPECT
WHEN INTERACTING WITH THE ORIGINAL
PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA

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* This information has been compiled - mainly for activists, event organisers and any 'non- original descent' person or persons who intend to interact with Australia's original inhabitants, whom we now commonly call, the AbOriginals.

Note:

It is debatable whether the term 'ab-original is appropriate. Therefore, the Original People will be termed more specifically from here on as: the Originies.

The following views are the author's, and are gained from the author's own experiences in most States and Territories of Australia. This does not mean that there are not exceptions to the information presented since all tribal groups individually express their creation.

If any person takes offence at what is printed here, that was not the intention.

It is acknowledged that most of non-original descent Australian people still have a great deal to learn about the Original Inhabitants and it is with great humility and humbleness that this information is offered.

May the following information help reduce the gap of understanding between Originie and non-original cultures of this land that we all now call home, Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*Deep gratitude and honour to Elders -
past and present.*

*We honour them for maintaining all
the lands contained in what is now
called Australia.*

*We are humbled by the grace,
humility and patience shown by all of
the present day descendants of the
Original Inhabitants in the face of
such great adversity.*

A great regret is felt by many...

Prologue

It is hereby acknowledged that this country now called Australia was and still is first and foremost, the land of the Original Inhabitants.

If it is ones' fervent wish to now show the utmost respect to the Original Peoples of this country in THEIR customary way, then this information is hopefully a step in the right direction.

Previously, people may have occupied, used or moved to protect some land or place without contacting the original custodial people of that particular land or place in question. As cultural awareness understandings deepen and people choose to become more aware of other cultural customs and ways other than their own, we come to realise how integrally important it is to firstly acknowledge, then link in and unite with the First Peoples of our nation, before we do anything else. The underlying reason for showing respect to the Original Custodians of that land - by way of following protocols, is that; by tying in with the local tribe, it ensures that we are getting it right – literally '*from the ground up*'. This happens because of the belief and acceptance that the Original People of the land have a deep spiritual connection to the land right up to this present day. With this belief in mind, and understanding the repercussions of that deep connection, it is considered that if we do follow guidance from local elders or others, it then allows for the increased possibility of success in our ventures on that particular land. Ventures which, it is assumed, are grounded in positive and proactive support for a healthy and whole *Mother Earth*.

What are protocols?

The Collins dictionary definition is that protocols are:

'The accepted or established code of procedure or behaviour in any group, organisation, or situation.'

So, following on from that: if you wish to adopt the manners and customs of the culture you are interacting with, there are certain steps that if taken, will indicate to the other, that you are willing to acknowledge the other person or group's way of social interaction. Thereby, showing your respect for that culture and opening a strong avenue of communication.

Western materialist culture has very different protocols to the Original nations. 'Table manners' used to play a bigger part in our cultural protocols than they do today. Knowing which spoon to use and when was an important part of acceptance in social situations right up to the end of the twentieth century.

Every culture has different ways of demonstrating 'social respect' and using protocols. Showing social respect for another culture takes a person outside of their cultural norms and into another cultural perspective.

It is considered that for people who wish to gain the confidence of the local custodial group, demonstrating at least a willingness to follow protocols indicates to that group that your intent is not just respectful, but *REAL....*

In the past

Customs and protocols were adhered to closely within the culture of Australia's Original People.

To not pay respect to these laws, was often punishable by death. Travel across 'Country' was impossible without the correct protocols. Messages needed to be sent, say, by way of fire, that one was at the intersection of others country and were wishing to enter. Eating was not possible without following due protocol. In fact, movement was not possible without showing demonstrable respect to the surrounds and the individual 'beings' therein via protocol. It was the natural way of doing things.

After colonisation took effect, mainly on the East Coast, the Original families were shuffled around, separated and moved to the fringes of towns and generally out of sight.

Showing any traditional behaviour - like speaking language and demonstrating protocols, was tabu. Practice of it was banned in nearly all places over Australia - from the eastern seaboard and on out west in Australia.

The present day

It is acknowledged that all the tribes around the country maintain a connection to 'the old ways' to varying degrees. The further away from so-called civilisation their land was, the more they have kept 'the old ways'

together. Consequently, the Northern and Desert tribal mobs were less affected by colonialism.

Generally, in today's world, custom and protocols are still well known amongst the tribes, though they may not be so noticeably used in some cases, as traditional life lessens, or at least adapts... depending on how much colonial rule infiltrated the culture of the different tribes.

Some families may have appeared to have abandoned most of the old ways - though many of the old protocols and cultural interactions have lasted and adapted into a mishmash of 'modern-western-blackfella-culture' - particularly in the cities.

Traditionally, every family line had a particular piece of land that they oversaw and were (or are) connected to. As we know, in many places, it is not quite the same as it was.

Due to the governments policy of moving and mixing up of the mobs, many people were moved to new country - off their ancestral family land and onto other peoples' custodial land.

This was unmentionably hard to adapt to for the Original people - given their very long ancestral occupation and responsible maintenance of their particular and specific piece of land.

Unfortunately, sometimes the links back to country have been completely lost. Over the spate of generations, the families were uncontrollably moved, and they have now had children born on their relatively new country and now have history and some 'dreaming' on that new country.

Everything has changed. We must adapt to the new situation.

Pay Respect – the Procedure

**** Please note, this is very important.**

At all times, it is preferable that men do business with men and women do business with women – as is the Originie custom. To do otherwise can be positively dangerous and considered very disrespectful.

Initially

Just like in our homes, we expect a knock on the door at least, before someone crosses the threshold into our abode. There is a similar principal for Originie people in the traditional way on their land, **as their land was their home.**

On arriving in the part of country where you are intending to spend time and energy, you may find it initially not-so-easy to locate the appropriate person who 'speaks for that country'. Still, we must do our best to find those still most **'steeped in the spirit of the land.'**

The people first and foremost you need to contact and work with are the Traditional Custodians.

They are usually there somewhere....often not so easy to find. You may have to look hard and ask all the Originies and others around the area – and trust that; with your right intention, they will show themselves in due time.

One learns to gain more patience when working with the Original people, as time is not treated the same with them as non-original cultures

do.

Put simply, time is not linear. One needs to have patience.

You may need to provide a week or two just to make contact and establish 'relations'.

Where practicable, it is good to contact the custodians of the area *before arrival*. If the first person or group you contact are not the one that has the authority to 'speak for the land', ask them to direct you to a person or persons that can make authoritative decisions for the land in question.

Upon making contact with the Custodians - and feeling sure that they are the correct person or persons to speak to, **inform them of your full intentions on their land.**

Request permission and ask for their 'blessings' and approval.

Invite them to be honoured guests at your event or happening if appropriate.

Be as 'open' as you can.

Response

A response to your message may not come immediately. Rest assured that your request has been heard and that it will be answered in due time.

WAIT. Patience is repeatedly needed.

Land Councils.

With all the respect that is due, and taking into account that there are always exceptions to the rule, Land Councils may or may not necessarily represent the Traditional Custodians of the tribe of that country that you may wish to work with.

If you are having trouble finding a **local** Originie, a Land Council office may help. Ring or go to the local Land Council and ask the office staff to direct you to a Traditional Elder or Custodian of the particular part of the country where you intend to stay and/or work.

One of the Land Council's **main** jobs is to register the Traditional Owners. This does not necessarily mean that they will be able to help you...

Hosting Others.

Protocols are also especially important if you are responsible for hosting another Original Nation person or persons - perhaps from overseas, to lands in Australia. As host of that person, it is your duty to contact local custodians and inform them of who your guests are, where they are from and of your guests intentions.

Perhaps connect the two Originie parties and leave them to do the rest with your help in implementation.

Added Protocols for Event Organising

Before the site is secured...

After identifying the place or land that you choose to hold the event and before you do anything else, search out a local Custodian. (see previous) Inform the Custodians of your intention to hold an event and the land involved. **Ask if it is appropriate to hold your event there.** The energy in some places is not conducive to holding events on in the first place. They may know of a better place for your purpose (they may also choose not to tell you). Ask for their approval and blessings for your occasion.

Ask if they would be honoured guests and if they would like to do a 'Welcome to Country' ceremony or opening ceremony (if appropriate). Perhaps a green gum leaf smoking -ceremony for cleansing - if that is their custom.

Wait patiently for their response if they do not answer immediately.

While on the land, (any land really) it is Original custom not to move any earth or rocks around *too much*, or take any rocks home. When informing Custodians of your intentions, give a full account of your ideas pertaining to the land . Then ask what they think about your ideas.

Generally speaking, any major rocks are usually left alone.

Of course, the answer must always be respected.

**** It is strongly suggested that before you start on your venture, that you are in agree-ance that the decision of what to do in the varying situations is up to the Elders and Custodians and must be respected and not questioned. You need to respect that.**

Be prepared to adapt and 'roll with the wisdom'.

'Elders' ... A new definition...?

Elders never nominated themselves to become one.

To do so is an ego statement. Elders are nominated by the community. Often the process is a case of 'social osmosis', as the person grows, it was obvious from a younger age that they have some innate wisdom.

Traditionally and in days gone by, Elders were initiated people who went through years of intricate ceremony.

More to the present day, people must be over a certain age to be deemed an elder. Sometimes the age people were ordained as an Elder had to be lowered, as the older people sadly died away.

At other times, younger people were recognised earlier for their demonstrated wisdom.

Sometimes, old ways step aside for practical reasons as the old ways are watered down over time. There was never meant to be competition or ego involved in this process.

When in the presence of Elders, it is suggested that you leave plenty of space for the Elder to talk. Attempt to make sure you do more listening than talking yourself. Elders often take more time to talk. Have you got the time?

It is not advised to stare too much at an Elder. Don't lock eyes for too long. In Original custom, it is respectful to avert direct eye contact, and looking down while talking and listening to an Elder is considered an act of respect. It is still okay to catch eyes irregularly.

Sit below them if you can, not above them.

In a Circle

If people are sitting or standing in some sort of circular fashion and verbal exchange is happening or if you are asked to join a circle:

Do not enter within the inside of the circle.

Do not cross the inside of the circle.

Go around the outside of the circle.

Do not walk in front of, or across the path (or on the shadow) of an Elder.

Do not step over people and babies who are lying on the ground.

There are many more and these are just a smattering of ways to show manners in blackfella fashion.

ABOVE ALL - BE AWARE of ways of showing RESPECT, whatever that means for you.

Epilogue

White forefathers walked onto the land and simply took it – often by force. For many, the struggle of resistance and for self-determination goes on to this day.

It is considered that by at least attempting to show some respect, by way of approaching the Originies and demonstrating a willingness to follow protocols, the door of understanding and healing opens a bit wider.

We may have quite a way to go to atone for the past, but we must continue to break old barriers in any way we can.

Understanding each other more, will help greatly in this process. It is sound advice to sometimes just sit, and LISTEN.

May the information presented here benefit all beings.

