



DISCUSSION GUIDE

COMMEMORATING THE NATIONAL DAY FOR
TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Introduction

Acknowledging the history and ongoing impact of residential schools upon Indigenous peoples is a vital part of our national journey towards reconciliation. The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a small part of that work, but it is an important step on a lengthy path. In 2022, the GNWT encouraged all NWT residents to observe this day by honouring those who have been lost, as well as the survivors, families and communities who continue to grieve.

In 2022, the GNWT made funding available to communities to observe the Day in the way that they think most appropriate. Moving forward, the GNWT seeks to learn more about how it could provide additional support on this important day.

Ensuring that the Day meaningfully and genuinely fosters healing and reconciliation, the GNWT seeks the input and insight of Indigenous peoples, with a series of questions that we hope will initiate discussion and result in a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation that is respectful, inclusive and meaningful.

We will also be talking to Indigenous governments and asking the public these same questions. Once we have gathered all of the information, we will make some recommendations to the GNWT on the best ways to acknowledge and support that National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in future years.

Background: Why hold it on September 30?

September 30th was observed in Canada as Orange Shirt Day for several years before it became a federal statutory holiday in June 2021. Orange Shirt Day commemorates the history and ongoing trauma caused by residential schools and honours those who were lost, as well as the survivors, families and communities who continue to grieve. The wearing of orange shirts on this day is a reminder of the shiny orange shirt taken from six-year-old Phyllis Webstad, a Northern Secwepemc (Shuswap) from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation (Canoe Creek Indian Band) on her first day at the St. Joseph Mission Residential School. September 30th was chosen because it was the time of year when children were taken from their homes and put in residential schools.

Marking September 30th as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is not intended to replace Orange Shirt Day, but to heighten the visibility of the ongoing legacy of residential schools. Wearing an orange shirt on September 30th remains an important act of remembrance.

Background: Making the Day Count

By formalizing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, the GNWT seeks to honour those affected by residential schools and their ongoing legacy in a serious and impactful manner. However, the GNWT is aware that commemorations must amount to more than simply adding a formalized holiday to the calendar.

The future of how this day is marked in the NWT will best be determined in partnership with Indigenous voices, and informed and driven by those voices and their leadership to ensure that the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is truly representative of the peoples whose histories and experiences it seeks to commemorate.

Through these questions, the GNWT is seeking to understand how residents and communities are choosing to observe this day and to discover what could be further done to respectfully and non-intrusively mark this day of remembrance. In what ways have communities marked events of remembrance and commemoration previously? What existing or developing traditions regarding remembrance and commemoration are already a part of the process of remembrance and grieving? Which of those traditions would be helpful or are transferable in guiding future commemoration? As well, discussions should consider “new traditions,” as communities adapt to social media and other technologies.

Conclusion

The GNWT looks forward to learning what role our partners think the GNWT should play to respectfully and meaningfully acknowledge the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The GNWT recognizes that this is a difficult, yet necessary conversation and that residents may need support.

- Former residential school students can call 1-866-925-4419 for emotional crisis referral services and information on other health supports from the Government of Canada.
- Indigenous peoples across Canada can also go to The Hope for Wellness Help Line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for counselling and crisis intervention. Call the toll-free Help Line at 1-855-242-3310 or connect to the online chat.
- In the NWT, the NWT Help Line offers free support. It is 100% free and confidential and has an option for follow-up calls. To talk to a trained responder, call the NWT Helpline at 1-800-661-0844.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did you do anything to mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in 2022?

- a. If yes, what did you do to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation?*
- b. If no, why did you choose not to mark the day this year?*

2. What kinds of activities would most meaningfully acknowledge and support the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation?

3. What kinds of activities should be avoided?

4. What role, if any, should the GNWT play in future commemorations of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation?

With input from Indigenous governments and organizations, the GNWT wants to explore how it can best support the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in a respectful and considerate manner. While the GNWT is following the federal government's lead in making September 30th a paid holiday for GNWT public servants and teachers for this year, it has not been determined how the day will be recognized in future years.

5. If it is involved, what are the best ways the GNWT can support Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, communities, and individuals in acknowledging and supporting the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation?

Supporting education and increasing awareness of the history and impact of residential schools are essential to successful reconciliation, and the GNWT is committed to learning how this can be done in a respectful manner. The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an opportunity for all residents to consider what they can do to advance reconciliation in the Northwest Territories. It is also an opportunity to revisit the GNWT's role, its resources, and how they can best be used.

6. What learnings/lessons/messages should be shared that day? What are the primary lessons that the public and non-Indigenous peoples should take away from the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation?

7. In what ways other than direct funding can the GNWT help communities and residents mark the day? What existing resources or programs could be included? Or should they?

8. How should survivors (including intergenerational) be respected and supported on this day and in promotion of activities around the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to ensure they are not exposed to harm or trauma?

9. How can/should personal actions of reconciliation be encouraged? What can those look like (see for example the Fraser & Komarnisky 150 acts of reconciliation for Canada 150, developed by NWT residents)?