

# GITXSAN CULTURAL PRACTICES

with births, near death and upon the death of a Gitxsan person



In Gitxsan culture, flowers (majagalee) represent our children.

# INTRODUCTION

The information shared in this Booklet shows some of the ways in which the 'Father Clan' provides support to his partner and their children – the Gitxsan System Cultural Practices sets out that the 'father's house' group are to provide support to his partner/spouse as soon as they are united as a couple; and, the support given to the children begins from birth till death.

The Gitxsan are Matrilineal people, and this means the women are placed in 'high regard' and they have their role to carry out within the Gitxsan system; and, to support the woman and children, the father clan's role is carried out in various ways and capacities.

Being of the Gitxsan Nations means everybody is a member of their mother's house group. This means, your siblings, your mother's siblings belong to the same house group.

Your partner/spouse is a member of their mother's house group (not that of the spouse/partner).

Every child has a place with the Gitxsan System. Children are of their mother's House Group and clan.

The people in the father's house group are the 'father clan' – part of their role is to be a support to their children and to the children of their siblings.



# BIRTH OF A BABY

## Baby's First Bath

The Auntie from the Father's side gives the New Born Baby its First Bath

## Family Blessing:

- The Grandmother Examines the New Born Baby to check for any recognizable Birth Marks – this is so everyone will know who has 'Come Back' to the family through Reincarnation; and, the Reincarnated Person is Welcomed Back.
- The Grandmother opens the hands of the New Born Baby to see what it has brought back to the family – symbolic of gift the baby has come back with for this life time.
- The Grandmother Blesses the New Born Baby to ensure 'the Pathway of Life' is ingrained in the baby's being – this is done by Sharing with the Baby:
  - the Family Strengths
  - the Baby's Heritage as a New Family Members in the family
  - Messages of what is expected of the baby to – become a healthy and strong emotional, spiritual, physical and mental human being

## Umbilical Cord:

The honor of cutting the Umbilical Cord is given to the Aunt from the Father side to signify that the Child also has ties to his side of the family.

The Umbilical Cord is then taken by a relative from the father's side to bury in a place of significance on their land – the person chosen to do this is someone who the parents want the child to take after (someone who is knowledgeable, leads a good life, is responsible, reliable, etc)

## Misscarriage or Still Born

In the event of a Miscarriage or the Baby/Fetus is Still Born then the Fetus is taken by a member of the Father's Side to Bury in a Place of Significance to the family – on their land.

## What hospital staff can do:

- Check with the Expectant Mother if she will have family come to be a part of the Birth to go through the Cultural Practices.
- Confirm with the Expectant Parents how many they need to have in the Delivery Room to conduct the 'New Born – Baby Welcoming Ceremony'

- Discuss with the family how they want to proceed with the cultural practice of Welcoming the Baby at birth – How many in the Delivery Room?
  - Pre –Delivery
  - Upon Delivery
  - After Delivery
- Discuss how you can accommodate meeting the hospital protocols while meeting the family's need to have their Cultural practices at the birth of the baby.
- Identify a family Spokes Person (Father Clan person) – the one who will share the wishes of the parents and that of the hospital to the friends and family who have come to Welcome the New Born Baby.
- Provide a waiting space for the friends and family that have come to Welcome the Baby.





# NEARING DEATH

## Father Clan Role

- One to Two persons from the father clan are assigned to be beside the bedside of the person who is near death.
- Ensure the comfort of the family and that all their needs are met this time.
- Ensure a peaceful environment for the family and friends.
  - Any indication of happiness is considered 'taboo' as this will encourage the dying person to return to this realm instead of moving on to the heavenly realm
- The Wishes of the dying person is Shared with Others by the Father Clan members who are chosen to be by his/her bedside.
- Need for quiet time, need for less people in the room, to help quench their thirst and or feed him/her, etc.
- The father clan persons help family members with regard to what they need to do to help the dying person 'Let Go' – to reassure the dying person that you, as a family member will be 'OK' and will be able to continue on with your life once the person has left.

## How the Hospital and staff can support all when someone is nearing death:

- Provide person who is dying with a 'private room' which is large enough to accommodate the influx of family coming to say their 'Good Byes' and pay their respects over the next few days.
- Have the hospital nurses share what their needs are (with regard to the care of the dying person) with the 'Father Clan' member who has been assigned to be with the dying person.
- To make available a 'Coffee Cart' which the family can use over the next few days to be hospitable to the persons that are coming in to say their farewell to the dying person.
- To have a good size table where 'incoming refreshments' can be made available for the friends & family of the dying person.

## Farewell to Friends and Family

- Farewell to Friends and Family – it is important that all friends and family come to say their 'Good Bye' to the person that is dying to help support the transition of the spirit to the heavenly realm

## **‘Hanging On’ to Life - Prolonged Dying Process**

- If the person that is dying goes through a prolonged dying process – family that haven’t come to say their ‘Good Bye’ are encouraged to come and say their ‘Good Bye’, otherwise the dying process is prolonged until the spirit of the dying person is satisfied that they have seen all persons that were significant to him or her.

### **How the Hospital and staff can honor this process:**

- Ensure all persons are welcomed when there are Visiting ‘No Restrictions’ and ‘limited visitations’ for the dying person.
- Friends and family are informed that ‘Visitation Restrictions’ or ‘Limited Visitation Hours’ and / or ‘Limited Visitation is being enforced’ due to health risks – this is to be communicated to the Father Clan person and that person is to communicate it to the visitors

## **Sudden and Unexpected Death**

- Family and Friends all come in large numbers to go through the ‘Farewell’ and ‘Good Bye’ process.
- The Maternal family and the Father Clan will meet to determine their next steps with regard to their unexpected loss of a loved one.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN A GITSXAN PERSON DIES IN THE HOSPITAL:**

- A large influx of friends and family will come to say their ‘Good Byes’

### **Who to Approach:**

- Family Spokes Person – Wing Chief or Matriarch
- If Maternal Family Chief or Wing Chief is not present at the time of death then a member of the Father Clan will serve as a Liaison for the family with the hospital & medical staff - the hospital staff can approach the Father Clan members who were assigned to be at the bedside of the dying person
- Once the Chief and Wing Chief are present at the hospital, then all communication with the family is through the Chief and/or Wing Chief

### **What the hospital and staff can do:**

- Ensure there is a space large enough to accommodate the family and extended family where they can go to say their ‘Good Bye’ to the person that is dying.

- If, there isn't an alternate space to have people wait to say their 'Good Bye' then providing Chairs for them to sit in the hallway near the room of the deceased is acceptable.
- To provide a meeting space where the Maternal family and the Father Clan can meet to address their most immediate needs and roles.
- To ensure the father clan persons are informed as to which hospital staff person they can speak to with regard to any issues/concerns that need to be clarified

## UPON THE DEATH OF THE GITXSAN PERSON:

- The body of the deceased is not moved until all the significant family members have arrived to say their 'Farewell' and 'Good Bye'

### Bathing of the Deceased Person

- The Maternal family may wish to have one or two members of the father clan give the deceased a sponge bath prior to having him/her moved to a larger room for viewing by the family.

### Prayers Offered by the local Minister or Elder

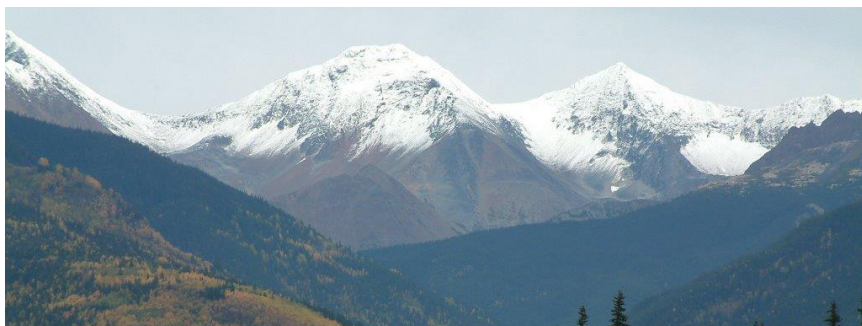
- The local minister or elder is asked to Bless the deceased and the family prior to moving the body of the deceased.

### Family Viewing

- Is opened up to all in a larger room to accommodate having all extended family members say their 'Good Bye' to the deceased – this is to support the deceased in moving on to the spiritual realm and on to the heavenly realm.

### What the Hospital and staff can do:

- All of the above.



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To request copies of this document or to suggest a correction or improvement, please contact:

Verna Howard  
Community Engagement Coordinator  
First Nations Health Authority  
250-849-5266  
verna.howard@fnha.ca

Content shared by Art Mathews, Gitxsan Elder from Gitwangak and Frances Sampson, Gitxsan Elder from Sik-e-dakh (formerly known as Glen Vowel).

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