RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage are ceremonies that mark the great moments of life. Aboriginal people share some rites of passage with non-Aboriginal people because we have lived together for hundreds of years: the wedding is an example.

However, Aboriginal Nations have their own rites of passage that are part of their culture. Here are a few examples:

Rite	When	How
Walking out	When the child is about one year old	This is the first time the baby walks outside the family home. He or she walks on a path of conifer branches toward the grandparents or godparents, who hold out their arms. The little boy receives a wooden rifle and the girl receives a doll, symbols of their future traditional roles.
Vision quest	Passage to adulthood	In this ceremony the young person goes off separately, often into the woods, and spends time fasting. A period of reflection during this vision quest helps the young people gain a better understanding of their identity and which spirit could be their guide in life.
Sweat lodge	When you need help	The person enters a tent where hot stones on a fire are regularly sprinkled with water to create steam. The person stays there until the spirits speak, helping with a decision or to gain understanding about what is happening.

Without being rites, some spiritual ceremonies are in important in the lives of many Aboriginal people.

Ceremony	When	How
Offering	> After a hunt > During a visit to a sacred site	An offering of tobacco or food is made to the spirits of the place or animals to thank them, honour them or to ask a favour.
Purification	> Before important discussions > Before participating in an event, a rite	Sage or another sacred plant is burned, and the person directs the smoke to his head, heart and whole body to purify it.
Divination	> Before hunting	An animal bone is heated over a fire and the marks can indicate the location of the game.
Dreams	> Each time a dream seems important	Attempt to interpret the symbols in a dream (e.g. animals that appeared) to understand the message of the spirits.