



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION?

In 2021 the Government of Canada declared September 30 the inaugural National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, affirming its commitment to implementing the Calls to Action identified in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 2015 [report](#).

One of the Commission's 94 calls to action was to "... establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.

The day is an opportunity to pause and reflect upon what we can do as individuals and a community to advance reconciliation. It honours the children who never returned home and Survivors of residential schools, as well as their families and communities. Public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the reconciliation process.

HOW IS IT COMMEMORATED?

Both the [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#) and [Orange Shirt Day](#) take place on September 30.

Orange Shirt Day is an Indigenous-led commemorative day intended to raise awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and to promote the concept of "Every Child Matters". The orange shirt is a symbol of the stripping away of culture, freedom and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over generations.

The origins of Orange Shirt Day begin with the experience of six-year-old Phyllis Webstad (Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation), who arrived at her first day of residential school, only to be stripped of her new orange shirt—and with it, her sense of self-worth. Phyllis's story speaks of the brutal legacy of colonialism that dehumanized Indigenous peoples, and her experience has galvanized communities across Canada to recognize the harm that nearly two centuries of residential schools have done to Indigenous children, their families, and the generations who followed them.

On September 29, the U of T Community is encouraged to wear orange to honour the thousands of Survivors of residential schools, those that did not return home and their families and communities. At U of T, orange flags are flown on all three U of T campuses leading up to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation starting on September 20 and lowered, with all flags, to half-mast for September 30. Buildings across the country - including the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill - are illuminated in orange from September 30 at 7:00 pm to sunrise on October 1. Local activities also take place that commemorate the history and legacy of residential schools.

HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

- 1** **Get educated.** Ensure staff are aware of the National Day for Truth & Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day, and how they can be supportive.
- 2** **Intentional planning and accommodations.** Update your scheduling tools to ensure you are aware of the observance. Members of our community may request time to reflect and observe this day. It is the responsibility of both the Manager and the individual seeking accommodation to work cooperatively and respectfully to explore and implement appropriate accommodation options. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to switch shifts to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and attend workshops or events. Look for solutions that suit all parties.
- 3** **Don't make assumptions.** Not all Indigenous colleagues will commemorate the day in the same way.
- 4** **Encourage learning.** Training for faculty members, librarians, and staff can be found through the [Learning and Leadership Centre](#). These sessions are an opportunity for community members to gain a greater understanding of the land they are on, learn about Indigenous communities through historical and contemporary lenses, and build skills to be better allies.