



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

# RED DRESS DAY IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

# WHAT IS RED DRESS DAY?

Red Dress Day, also known as the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People, is observed annually on May 5. The day serves to raise awareness and honour the memory of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people who have gone missing or have been murdered in Canada.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) crisis in Canada refers to the disproportionately high rates of violence, disappearance, and murder among Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. The crisis has been ongoing for decades and is a result of systemic racism, colonialism, and gender-based violence.

According to the [\*National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls\*](#), Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than non-Indigenous women in Canada. An official report from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police identified 1,181 missing or murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people since the 1980s, however, due to various factors such as underreporting and record-keeping discrepancies, the number could be as high as 4,000.

The causes of the crisis are complex and interconnected, including the legacy of residential schools, forced assimilation, and the ongoing effects of colonization. All the above contributed to the marginalization of Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, which has left them vulnerable to poverty, homelessness, and violence.

Red Dress Day takes its name and symbolism from an [art installation by artist Jaime Black](#) (Anishinaabe and Finnish), in which she hung red dresses to represent the missing and murdered Indigenous women across Canada and note their absence with a visual reminder.

# HOW IS RED DRESS DAY OBSERVED?

To address the crisis, the [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls issued a series of recommendations in 2019](#). These include calls to action for governments, institutions, and individuals to take action to address the root causes of the crisis and to provide support for Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people.

By recognizing the crisis, staying educated, and working towards systemic change, Canadians can honour the lives of those lost and support Indigenous communities in their quest for justice and healing. Wearing red on May 5 is a simple way to show support. Participating in events and programming held by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and the larger U of T community is a good way to show solidarity and to learn more. Taking time to educate yourself through the [various courses and workshops offered](#) can lead to a better understanding of the challenges faced by the Indigenous community in Canada and across the globe, and help non-Indigenous individuals become more effective allies.

# HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

- 1 Get educated.** Ensure staff and colleagues are aware of Red Dress Day and how to 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 Red Dress Day and attend workshops or events. Look for solutions that suit all parties.
- 3 Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all colleagues may observe Red Dress 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.