

THE PAGAN AWARENESS NETWORK (PAN Inc) has created this pamphlet to educate newcomers about a facet of Pagan practices that many may find confronting or just plain weird: ritual nudity, also known as working 'sky-clad'.

Many Pagans, especially those involved in traditional Wicca, perform their rituals and ceremonies sky-clad, or naked. This is a legitimate custom that pre-dates modern attitudes towards the human body.

Sky-clad rituals occur in different contexts: small groups in private homes, large public Pagan festivals, in same-sex groups, mixed groups, and family-based covens.

People actually do this? Why?

Many Pagans don't accept the standard Western moral taboos regarding the naked human body. They regard these taboos as unhealthy and unnatural.

Pagan groups and individuals may choose to work sky-clad for a number of reasons – usually the intent is to make a self-empowering and positive statement that there is nothing shameful about the human form.

Many Pagans view the naked female body as symbolising the Goddess, and the naked male body as symbolising the God. It is a reminder that the Sacred exists in all of us.

In closed covens, working sky-clad can foster feelings of trust and equality – there are no social distinctions when clothing is laid aside. Many traditionally-minded Pagans claim that working sky-clad enables one to better raise and direct magickal energy.

Is it compulsory?

Definitely not. Not all Pagans choose to work this way. It is an optional experience.

If you are interested in joining a coven or other group, you should establish straight away whether sky-clad work is part of that group's activities. If the idea doesn't appeal to you, look for a group that practices clothed instead.

Is there sex involved?

No. Unless the specific purpose of the rite is sex-magick or similar, sky-clad rituals are no more sexual in nature than clothed rituals.

Being sky-clad during ritual does not EVER of itself imply a sexual invitation or expectation.

What if I don't have a good body?

You DO have a good body. Modern culture pressures us to be ashamed of our bodies because we don't conform to some impossible ideal of physical beauty. Many Pagans are aware of this cultural "imprinting" and consciously reject it.

I'd like to try it, but the idea freaks me out. How do I get over the fear of being naked in front of others?

Talk to Pagans you trust who have gone sky-clad. Be honest about your fears and expectations. Ask them what their first time sky-clad was like. Chances are they quickly got over their initial fear and joined in with gusto.

Remember, you don't have to do ANYTHING that makes you feel uncomfortable. No one should be judged by their preference for sky-clad or robed ceremonies.

What if someone laughs?

That is a BIG no-no in Pagan circles. It is considered a gross breach of etiquette to laugh or make remarks, as this debases the sacred context and group trust.

Will everyone look?

In that situation it's pretty hard not to. People are naturally curious. If you get a sleazy vibe, though, listen to your instincts. Cover up and/or leave the Circle.

What if I get cold? Put your clothes back on.

I'm a guy. What happens if I get a hard-on during a sky-clad ritual?

Not a lot. Experienced Pagans know that there is nothing shameful or embarrassing about something as natural as human sexuality. As long as you're not acting in a way that is threatening or offensive, it shouldn't be an issue. If you are worried, speak in advance to the group leader. A good leader won't laugh at you for seeking advice.

It's possible that someone present may feel confronted if the situation . . . err . . . arises, but if so they have the option to leave. As do you, if you feel awkward or uncomfortable.

Can I just strip down to my underwear?

Discuss it with the group leaders. Chances are you'll feel silly being the only one and quickly get the rest off.

What if I'm photographed without permission?

This is a risk at some Pagan festivals (although many strictly prohibit cameras.) Ask the organisers in advance what their policy on photographs is. If you see cameras in evidence, approach the people concerned and politely ask them to respect your right to privacy. Most people will. Speak to the organisers if you still have concerns. When in doubt, the safest course of action is to stay dressed.

I'm under 18. Can I join a coven that works sky-clad?

Sorry. No ethical group or teacher will let you participate in a sky-clad rite if you're under 18. This is for their protection as well as yours – Pagans have to deal with enough bad press as it is, and nobody wants to face hysterical accusations of paedophilia or ritual abuse.

Be VERY wary of any group or teacher who allows or encourages U/18's to work sky-clad with adults.

Of course, if you're under 18, there is nothing stopping you from practicing sky-clad as a solitary. Just make sure you lock the door, unless you want some awkward questions from your Mum . . .

PAGAN FESTIVALS:

GETTING YOUR GEAR OFF WITH STRANGERS!

Some Pagan festivals are 'clothing optional' – this means you can be dressed, undressed, or anything in between. People often take the opportunity to wear body ochres, paint themselves, wear masks etc. Many newcomers find it easier to go sky-clad for the first time at a festival – the relative anonymity of being part of a large group of naked people can make 'taking the plunge' less confronting.

A few clothing-optional festivals are all-ages events. If you are taking children you should warn them in advance that they might see things they're not used to. Also, be aware that even at clothing-

optional events there may be times when clothing is compulsory – for example, naked people may not be permitted in kitchens for health and safety reasons.

If you go to a festival and are unsure of the dress-code, ask one of the organisers. Many festivals, especially adults-only events, supply a 'Code of Conduct' to attendees and it is important to read this material in advance.

ETIQUETTE – WHAT NOT TO DO IN THE BUFF

There are a few rules of etiquette relating to Pagan rituals that are well known to most experienced Pagans. They apply equally to sky-clad and clothed rituals. These rules include, but are not limited to:

- Many rituals call for participants to hold hands. Other than this, keep your hands to yourself unless clearly and unambiguously invited.
- Never make remarks about another person's physical appearance.
- Never take photos of people without their prior consent. This includes anyone in the background.
- What happens in Circle stays there – don't discuss with someone who wasn't there what other people did, unless it somehow affects you (i.e. if you felt unsafe and now want impartial advice.)

rites and responsibilities: the law

For information on personal safety and sexual assault prevention, please see the "Safety in the Circle" pamphlet, also produced by the Pagan Awareness Network Inc.

REMEMBER: It is ILLEGAL for anyone to touch you in an inappropriate manner without your prior consent.

This is true irrespective of whether you are at a clothed or a sky-clad ritual.

Be aware also that laws exist in each state of Australia concerning public decency: it is illegal to be caught naked in a public place. A public place is any place you might reasonably expect to be seen by a member of the public. This can include private property – a back yard with high fences is unlikely to be regarded as a public place, but the front garden in view of the street is a different matter.

Privacy is the key to any successful sky-clad ritual.

To join PAN Inc or for more information

Email: ***info@paganawareness.net.au***

Write to: ***PO Box 1062
North Sydney NSW 2060***

An annual membership of \$40 Single (GST Inc) or \$30 Concession brings many benefits, including discounts at participating retailers, our regular 'Small Tapestry' publication listing Pagan events and gatherings across Australia, and regular updates on the legal and media work happening on behalf of the Pagan community. For more information, please post or email your details as follows:

Name: _____

Address: _____

State _____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____

(Do not send money with this. A formal membership application will be sent to you via the post along with further information about PAN Inc)

Enquiries and correspondence to:

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Sky-Clad: The Bare Facts

Answers to the questions you've been too shy to ask!

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