



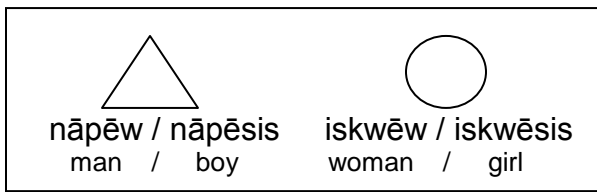
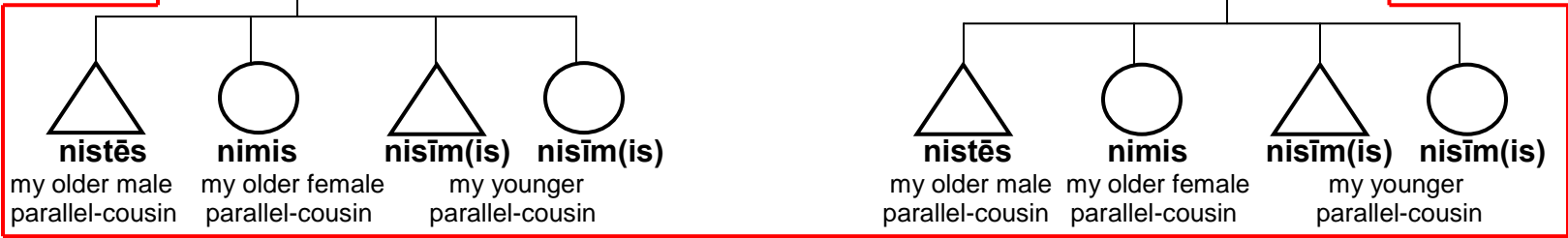
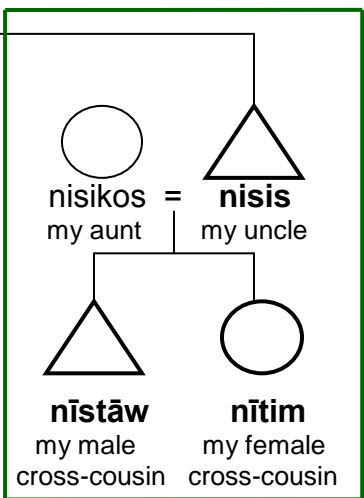
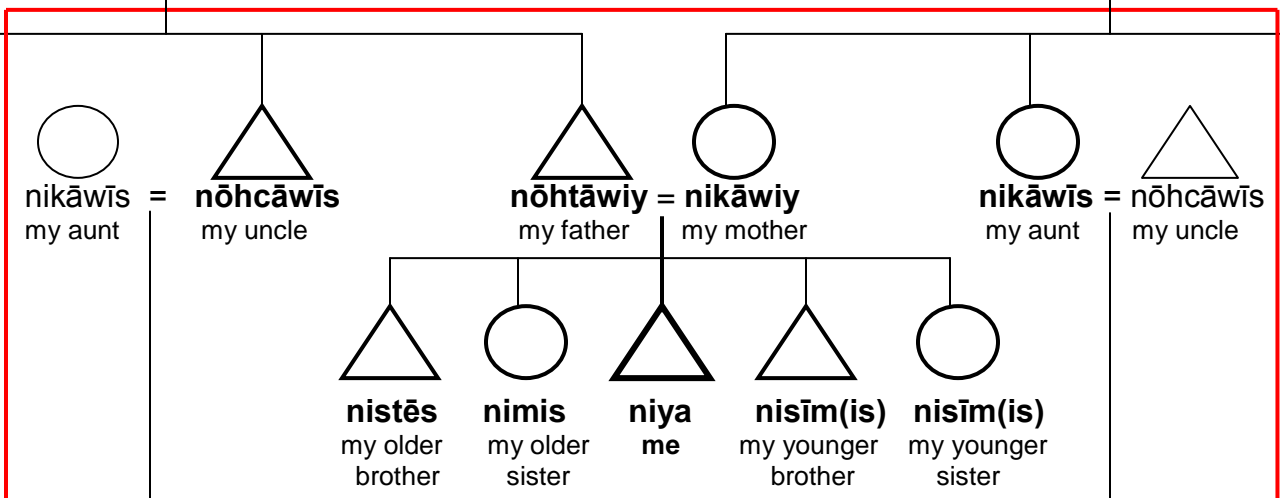
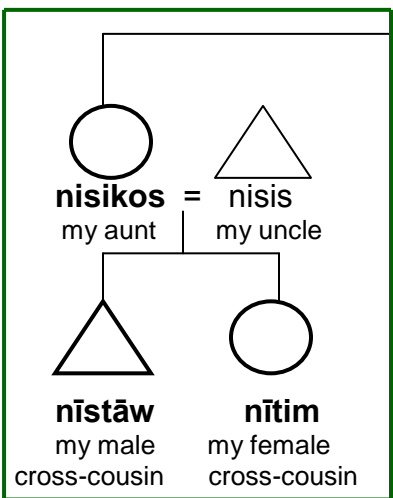
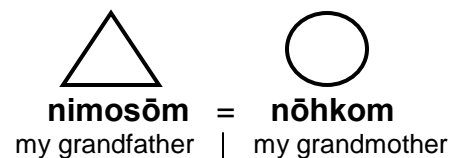
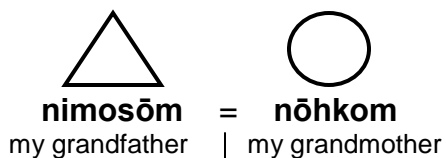
Parallel-Cousin versus Cross-Cousin terminology in Cree. Parallel relations are enclosed in the **red** box. Cross relations are in **green**.

# nāpēsis ōma niya

(I am a boy)

## niwāhkōmākanak ōki

(these are my relatives)



Parallel-Cousin versus Cross-Cousin terminology in Cree. Parallel relations are enclosed in the **red** box. Cross relations are in **green**.

The cousin terminology of Cree is confusing many - because it is so different than "cousin" in English. Here is, hopefully, a brief yet useful explanation.

First:

We have **siblings** - our brothers and sisters. In English, we use the term brother for our male siblings, regardless of age. So my older brother Hal is "my brother", but my younger brother Marlow is also "my brother". In Cree, however, more distinctions are marked, because I have to be specific. Hal is nistês (my older brother) and Marlow is nisîm (or nisîmis) (my younger sibling). It's the same for sisters. Dolores is nimis (my older sister) and Nancy is nisîm (or nisîmis) (my younger sibling). Note, I differentiate older siblings by gender, but not the younger siblings - younger brothers and sisters are both called nisîm (or nisîmis).

Second:

We have cousins - the children of our parents' siblings. In English, we use the term cousins regardless of age, gender or which side of the family they come from. They are all cousins. Again, in Cree, far more important distinctions are made. First of all, there is a very important distinction made between "parallel-cousins" and "cross-cousins".

**Parallel-cousins** are the children of your father's brother or of your mother's sister. They are called "parallel" because of the same gender of your father and his brother (male) or of your mother and her sister (female). They are of parallel gender. In Cree, you can use different terms for your parallel-cousins (such as the man's term niciwâm "my male parallel-cousin" or the woman's term niciwâmiskwêm "my female parallel-cousin"). But you can also use the same terms as you would use for your siblings. In Cree, your siblings and your parallel cousins are treated the same. In English, siblings and parallel cousins are not treated the same.

In contrast to parallel-cousins, there are also cross-cousins.

**Cross-cousins** are the children of your father's sister or your mother's brother. They are "cross" cousins because of the opposite gender of your father (male) and his sister (female) or of your mother (female) and her brother (male). They are of opposite or cross gender. In Cree, your cross-cousins are never treated the same as your siblings or parallel-cousins. This is a very important difference. The terms for your cross-cousins are specific to the gender of both cousins. A man calls his male cross-cousin nîstâw (or nîscâs). A woman calls her female cross-cousin nicâhkos. The key term is a term that both men and women use, but which means different things for each. The term is nîtim. When a man says nîtim, he means "my female cross-cousin". When a woman says nîtim, she means "my male cross-cousin". So, the term nîtim means "my cross-cousin of the opposite gender to me". I am male, so I can only call my female cross-cousin "nîtim" and reciprocally she would call me "nîtim". The cross-cousin relationship is important, because traditionally cross-cousins of the opposite gender (those who call each other nîtim) were permitted to marry. Parallel-cousins were never allowed to marry. Parallel-cousins are like siblings. Cross-cousins are not siblings. This is not a distinction that English makes at all.