

# *Parents as First Teachers*

A resource booklet about how children learn  
for First Nations and Métis parents in BC

## In this issue:

- » How Children Learn
- » Teach and Guide Your Child
- » How You Can Support Learning



# How Was This Resource Developed?

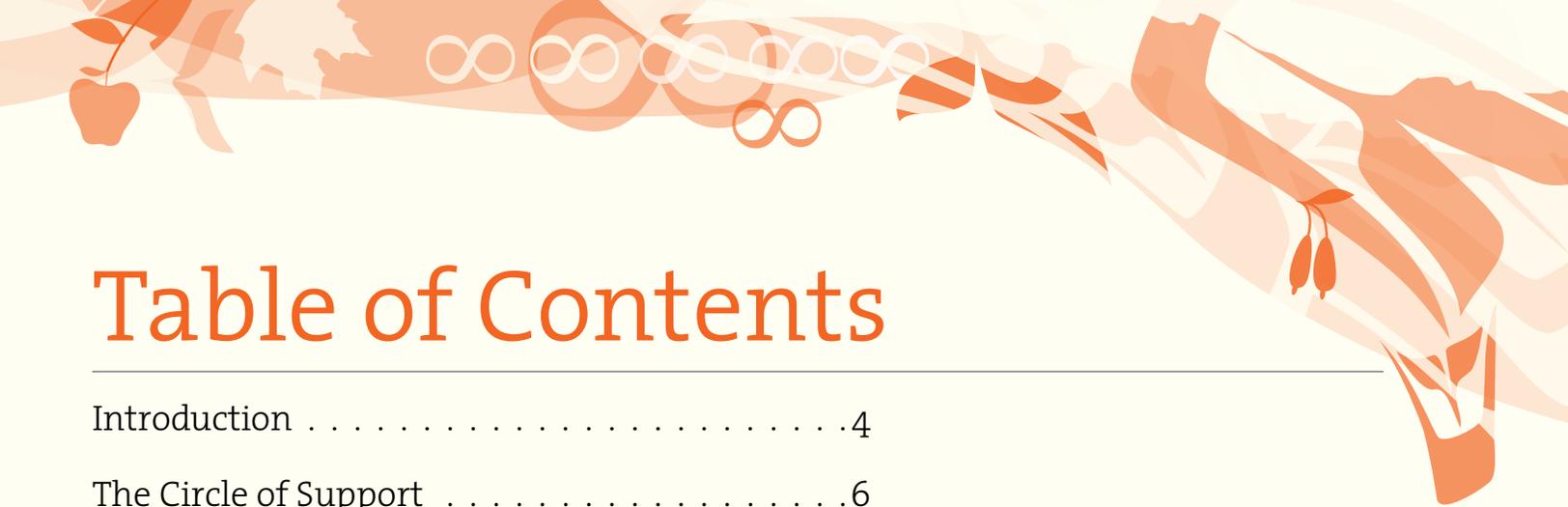
This series of resources is a response to a growing interest in parenting information for First Nations and Métis parents in BC. The resources share important parenting information. See the back cover for more themes in the series.

Many people contributed to the development of this resource. They generously took time to share their stories, teachings, ideas and photos. They shared their knowledge and experience, provided advice, developed text and reviewed layout. The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAHA) and the First Nations Health Authority would like to thank the following people for their role in developing this resource:

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*angigatkw  
means parents  
in Nisga'a*

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# Introduction

The first few years of a child's life are critical for learning. Caring for children is the shared responsibility of our communities. If our children are our future, we must think of ourselves as their past. We want our children to look back with fond memories of feeling loved and safe. We can give our children a brighter future. We can work towards healthier families in healthier communities. It is very important to expose children to their First Nations or Métis language and culture during these years – this is a foundation of who they are.

This booklet shares information, culture and knowledge about early learning. It will help you strengthen your role as the first and most important teacher for your child. At the end of this booklet you will find resources and services for your family.

*“As leaders, parents, guardians and care-givers, we must promise our children that they will have every opportunity to be safe and healthy in their homes and communities. No parent should have to choose between their culture and traditions and a future for their children. Our children must not be burdened with the broken promises and mistakes of the past. Instead, we need to focus on a bright future where our children can achieve their dreams and meet their true potential through fair, stable and secure education and health systems. This is our broader struggle but one that starts with love and care in the home.”*

*– Shawn A-in-Chut Atleo, National Chief,  
Assembly of First Nations*



## Singing Our Stories

*“From my earliest recollection as a toddler, I remember my mother singing. She especially loved it when there was a gathering where someone brought along a guitar. She favoured vocalists like Hank William’s Jambalaya, loudly belting out, ‘Dress’n style, go hog-wild, me-oh-my-oh,’ and Ernest Tubb’s twangy, Walking the Floor Over You. However, her musical talents didn’t stop there: my mom had the unique ability to yodel! Usually after a night of song and music, someone would demand an encore. My mother, always the entertainer, obliged, ending the evening with Wilf Carter’s, My Little YoHo Lady.*

*Many of the Stl’atl’imx songs my mother taught us as a child were social songs that gave the listener a glimpse into everyday life. Singing our stories was a way to connect us to a culture that we had been disconnected from. Songs, like, Kuka’s (Grandmother’s) Song, taught us the importance of family relations. This powerful and haunting song tells a story of a grandmother who grieves not only for her recently passed daughter, but also for the child who was left behind. So... in order to find peace, she must walk the whole earth. Owl Mountain is another expressive song that helped me envision the place where huckleberries were ripe for picking and the girls met the boys.*

*My favourite song, however, is one that my mother learned in residential school. The Gathering Song’s beat is lively, brisk and somewhat whimsical. It seems that traditionally, we all had our place in the community and knew what tasks to perform. This invitational song requests girls to pick berries and boys to go hunting and fishing. Then, when the work is done, all are invited to play. Adding movement that coincides with various tasks made this song engaging and helped us to learn the language. This playful, spirited song brought to life traditional roles in the community and the importance of work before play.*

*I believe my mother didn’t even understand just how much she contributed to my overall education, outside of institution walls... but she did. Her gift was her stories through song.*

*Kukwstum, thank you mom.”*

*– Judy Lemke, Lil’wat/Stl’atl’imx Nation*



# The Circle of Support

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How we live together as a family has changed over time. Today there might only be two people in a house – the parent and child. Families may have moved to a city, far from their traditional land, their grandparents, aunts and other family members.



## Connecting to family

There are many different types of families, large and small. There are blended families and families that include several generations. Parents can be extended family, young or old, single or married, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, biological, adoptive or foster. Each family is different and each child has different needs.

## Connecting to community

Connecting to community and family helps your child to learn and to develop a sense of belonging. Children learn to take pride in their clan and heritage. It is a symbol or story of who they are, where they come from, and who their family is. Parents need the support of each other and all of the generations in their community.

The community you live in can help support you and your growing child. The community can help your child learn, and help you teach your child. A community can be the place where you live, the groups of people you know, and the services you access. It is helpful to get to know the people and services in your community, and how they can help you. There are many places to go to for help in your community. Family, friends and other parents can help. Doctors, public health nurses, Friendship Centres and health centres also play a role. There are infant development and parenting programs. You are not alone. See the information in the back of this booklet, or call Healthlink BC at 8-1-1.

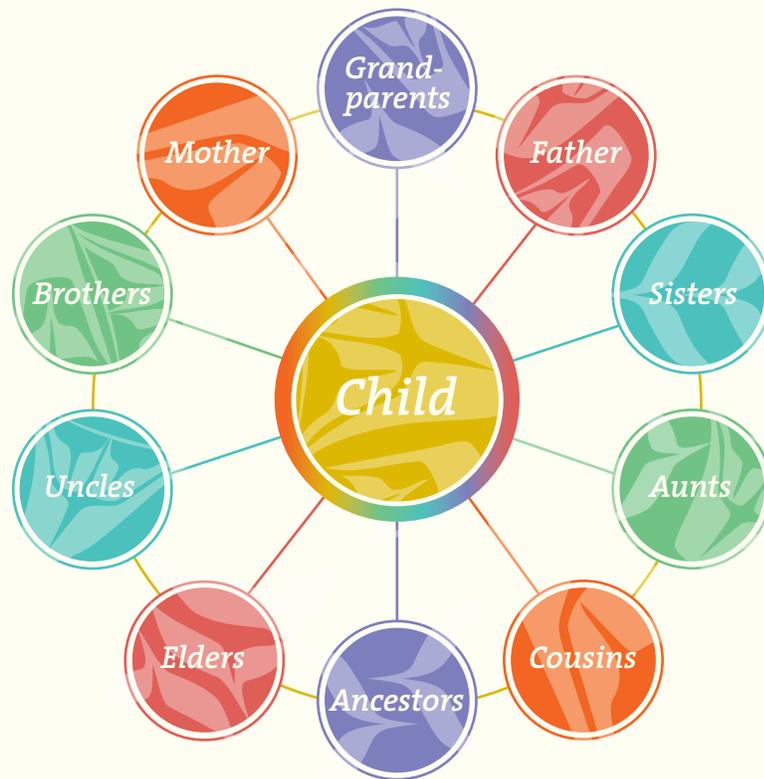
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## Elders in BC say:

- Every child is special.
- Every child needs to be treated with care and respect.
- As a parent, you are part of a larger circle of support.

*“Because our people had that strong belief, whatever happened, we had to keep our family circle strong. With a circle, there is no beginning and no ending. Within the family circle, we have the grandparents – who were the teachers, the young moms, the young dads, big brothers, big sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins. They are all on the outside of the circle and every one of them had an obligation to the little ones in the centre. Children were never growing up without somebody there all the time.”*

– Teaching from a Shuswap Elder, 2004



*Coast Salish people used to live with many families. As many as 40 or more people lived in one long house. All the adults raised all the children.*



# How Children Learn

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Every day your child is learning. Just holding your baby, looking and smiling at your baby, helps your baby to learn. Did you know that babies can recognize the sound of their mother's voice from hearing it in the womb? Did you know that babies around 4 to 5 months old can recognize their name?

Here are some of the important ways that children learn, from newborns to school children:

## How they are cared for

How children are cared for impacts their learning. If their needs are met (food, clothing, safety, love etc.), they learn that the world is a safe place and that they are valued. It is easier for children to learn and to be positive about life when their needs are met.

## Experience

Experience teaches children about the world and their place in it. Every day of a child's life is spent learning, growing and developing. Try to include opportunities for learning in daily life.

## Senses

Senses are used for learning. The best way to learn is by using all of your senses. Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting all create brain cell connections. The brain connections that are used often will become permanent. Those that are not used as often will disappear. Activities that use the senses can include reading to your child, finger-painting, dancing, singing, listening to music, smelling and tasting new foods, and touching interesting things. You could sing together, or touch new surfaces such as stone, leaves, bark, or a raw hide drum. Your child can learn about numbers by counting each berry as he/she eats it.

## Play

Play is the way children practice life skills. Find time to interact with your children and to play with them every day. You don't need to buy expensive toys. In the first years of a child's life, you are your baby's best toy. Use simple household objects like pots, pans, cardboard boxes, tubes and plastic containers. Young children love playing with these simple toys. You don't always need to have organized games with rules. Free play is important for children. Play outside with your child every day. Allow your child the freedom to be active, to run and explore. Bring your child to a playground or a parent program where they can learn to share and get along with other children.

## Emotions

Emotions can have a powerful impact on learning. Children are happier and more ready to explore and learn when they feel emotionally safe. Your closeness, eye contact, smile, voice, and touch help your child to feel loved and safe. Be predictable in your expectations and reactions. Repeat rules and expectations in a calm voice. Find time in the day for quiet, peaceful activities or reflection. Praise your child for things they have done well. Give feedback that is positive and supportive. Be respectful, encouraging and understanding.



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*Think of ways to make learning fun. Remember that you make all the difference. You are your child's most important person. You are your child's first teacher.*

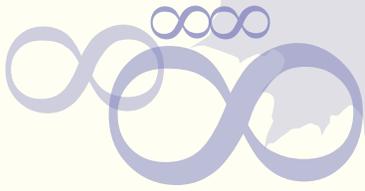
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*How many caring and encouraging phrases can you think of? Practice using them every day. Encourage your children to use them with each other.*

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## Routines

Routines help children feel safe and promote healthy habits. Babies and children thrive on routines. They function best when they know what to expect and when to expect it. Develop a healthy daily pattern for your child starting from birth. Everyday routines like waking up in the morning, getting dressed, having breakfast, family dinner time, bath time, reading time, and bed time, will give your child stability. They will help your child feel secure. When children are calm and relaxed, they are able to focus on learning.

## Health

Health also sets the stage for learning as well. Children who eat healthy food, are active, and get enough sleep every day, will find it easier to learn. Seeing your doctor or community health nurse is also part of staying in good health. To find out more about raising healthy children, see the booklet *Growing Up Healthy*.

## Sensitive periods

The first 3 years of life are crucial to brain development. Sensitive periods are times when your baby's brain is more ready to develop certain skills. At certain ages it is easier to develop skills such as seeing or talking. If babies or young children are not given a chance to build these brain connections during sensitive periods, it will be harder for them to learn the skills later on.

## A sense of belonging

A sense of belonging also teaches your child. Talk about family, community and culture. Teach your children their First Nations or Métis language. This will link them to their people and land, and make them feel connected. Connect your child to extended family, community and cultural events.



*skwimémelt*  
means baby or child  
in Secwepemc

# Teach and Guide Your Child

Discipline can teach and guide your child. It helps your child grow up to be a happy, caring person with good self-esteem, respect for others, and the skills to solve problems.

## There are no bad children, just wanted and unwanted behaviors

Avoid yelling and threatening your child. These raise your child's stress level and prevent learning. Never hurt your child. Hitting, pinching or spanking will teach your child that it's okay to do the same to others.

Handling problems well, when they come up, is an important part of parenting. In the long run, it is best to prepare your children before there are problems. This gives them the skills they need to manage in the world. Teach your children about communicating, getting along with others, about what is expected, and how they can manage.



*Ihulhedoh*  
*means family in Dakelh*

## Understand the reasons for unwanted behaviour

Your child may misbehave because he/she is tired, hungry or afraid. Routines are important to children, and helpful in avoiding unwanted behaviour.

Discipline is effective when it is based on the stage your child is in, what they can do, and their personality. Discipline should be positive, consistent and fair. It should be used in a calm and understanding manner. It reinforces good behaviour, and helps children change unwanted behaviour. On this page, and the following page, you will find examples of discipline methods for your children.

## Praise your children

Tell them what they have done well. It is better to use praise than to buy or give rewards. For example, praise your child when you see him/her getting along well with others, or helping out without being asked.

## Use "time ins"

Use this to encourage good behaviour through positive interaction and by talking with your child when he/she is misbehaving. This can help you both figure out what is wrong and how to make it better. Instead of distancing yourself from your child when they are having a hard time, focus on your child's needs and the source of the unwanted behaviour. Here are some examples:

- Help your children learn how to manage their emotions by helping them talk about feelings. For example, "Are you mad/sad/afraid?"
- Give your child a hug and show that you care.
- Talk about different ways to deal with the same kind of problem next time.

## Redirect

Redirect your child when his/her behaviour is not okay. Redirection means changing direction, moving from an unwanted to a wanted behaviour. For example, if your child is jumping on the couch, you can tell him/her to do their jumping outside. If a toddler is knocking over a sibling's tower of blocks, talk to him/her about the problem, and give him/her their own blocks to build with. Use a calm voice and explain how you would like your child to behave.

## Distract

Distract your child when he/she needs help to move on to a new activity. For example if your toddler is having a tantrum because it is bath time, you may be able to distract him/her by talking about the toys you are putting in the tub. Or if your toddler is reaching for your coffee, you can let him/her know it is hot, and show him/her a tea set or plastic cups he/she can play with.

## Encourage problem-solving and offer choices

Encourage problem-solving and offer choices to help your child find a solution. Recognize that behaviour has a source. Your child may misbehave because he/she is hungry, tired, stressed or full of energy. For example if your child is running and yelling in the house, you can say, "I see you have a lot of energy. What can we do together? Do you want to go tobogganing or skating?" Solving problems helps children learn to understand and manage their behaviour. Giving your child choices empowers him/her to think things through and make decisions.

*"When you give your child choices in a situation – you empower them to make decisions and think things through."*

*– Deanna Leon, Executive Director, Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn (Splatsin Teaching Centre) Society*

## A natural consequence

A natural consequence is what happens if you do nothing. Only use this approach if it is safe. This works best when it is felt right away. For example:

- You tell your child to sit at the table while drinking his/her milk. Your child gets up and spills the milk. The natural consequence is that your child has a mess to clean up.
- Your child is playing roughly. You tell him/her to play alone for a short time so that no one gets hurt. The natural consequence of being rough is that your child will need to play alone for a while, instead of with their friends.

## Try these tips to help your child calm down:

- Hold your child in a comforting way until his/her spirit is calmed.
- Take your child outside to look at the stars.
- Go to a quiet place in the house and do a craft together.
- Sing a gentle and loving song to your child.



# How You Can Support Learning

Learning and the love of learning begins at home. The teaching your child receives from you and your extended family will help your child learn. It will build pride. It can help your child be ready for and do well in school.

*“Every home should be known as a child development centre.”*

*– Grand Chief, Ed John – First Nations Summit,  
Hereditary Chief of Tl’azt’en Nation*

You are your child’s protector, teacher, and role model, as well as parent. Every child is unique and different. Parenting is also a very individual experience. Love and cherish your child. Positive infant and child experiences include:

- **Bonding**  
Love, hugs, comforting, reading to your child.
- **School readiness**  
Encourage talking, singing, curiosity and learning new things.
- **Physical development**  
Balance of activity, rest, nutrition, routine and structure.
- **Speech and language development**  
Talk, read and listen to your child. Make eye contact with your child.
- **Connectedness**  
Teach connection to the land, community, ancestors, traditions and culture through stories, activities and participating in community events.

You cannot turn back time, but you can move forward and do the best you can for your child. How can you do this?

- Take things one day at a time.
- Don’t give up.
- Ask for help when you need it.



*Grand Chief Ed John makes a strong point that while we have wonderful services and programs for our children, we must never forget our responsibility as our child’s first teacher.*



# What You Can Do

## DURING PREGNANCY

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Your role as your child's first teacher begins during pregnancy. Your baby's brain starts developing before your baby is even born. Babies start learning early in pregnancy.

They respond to what their mother hears, experiences and feels. Babies can hear when they are in the womb and language skills start before they are born. Talk and sing to your unborn baby. Rub or stroke your belly in a gentle and caring way.



*Parents and caregivers have a sacred duty to the gift that they have brought into this world. Give thanks for your child.*

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## Your health during pregnancy is important to early learning

Many things have an impact on an unborn baby's brain. Alcohol changes brain development in unborn babies. There is no safe time or safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy. Smoking limits how much food and oxygen your baby gets. Drinking or smoking can affect your child's ability to learn later in life.

It is best to quit smoking and drinking before getting pregnant. If the pregnancy came as a surprise, it is important to quit drinking and smoking as soon as you think you might be pregnant.

See your doctor, midwife or community health nurse regularly. Find out what medicines are safe during pregnancy. Ask about healthy food and vitamins during pregnancy. Work together with your partner and family to make your home happy and healthy. These all help to give your unborn baby the best start in early learning.



*You are your baby's first teacher, even before your baby is born.*

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# What You Can Do

## 0 TO 6 MONTHS

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You have an important role – you will care for this new person, and you are the one who will introduce him/her to the world.

### Babies are born ready to learn and have many skills

In order to develop more skills, their brains need to be used often. A baby's brain will make new connections with each new learning, new word, new lullaby, new kiss on the cheek and every hug or snuggle. Babies learn by each new experience and repeated experience. They need interaction with loving, caring parents and caregivers. These experiences build the foundation for understanding and learning. Babies do not learn well if they are put in front of the television or are left alone in a crib or playpen. Parents need to provide lots of warmth and attention to set up early brain connections. These will help your baby be ready for more learning later in life.



*As you talk, sing, hold and love your baby, your baby is learning. Some Elders say to use a rattle to connect your baby to the spirit world and remember the sound of the thunder beings. Your baby will have a strong spirit founded in culture, secure in knowing his/her place in the universe.*

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### As a newborn, your baby's needs are simple

What you can share is simple too. More than anything, your baby needs your love, time and attention. It is your simple, everyday actions that will make the most difference. Do lots of little things with your baby. Respond to your baby. Talk and sing to your baby. Touch and play with your baby. Repeat the same action or game over and over, as long as your baby shows interest. With every little word and gesture, you are helping your baby to learn. With every repetition, you help make strong connections in his/her brain. Babies thrive on attention and affection. You can't spoil them by responding to their needs in a loving way. Babies cry to let you know that they need you.

### Babies need to know someone will always be there for them

Show your love for your baby. Pick up your baby. Cuddle your baby. Share smiles. Comfort and hold your baby, especially when sick, hurt or upset. Be there when your baby is sad, lonely or frightened. Let your baby know you will be there when needed. It will give your baby the confidence to explore and learn. The way you relate to your baby teaches him/her how to treat other people in the future. To learn more, see the parent booklet *Family Connections* and *Fatherhood is Forever*.

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### Here are some ways you can help your baby learn:

- Make play part of your everyday routine. Bath time, meal time, and dressing your baby are good times for play and learning.
- Massages or other forms of skin-to-skin touch promote bonding and use the senses.
- Sing to your baby as he/she drifts off to sleep.
- Comfort your baby.
- Watch for your baby's cues and respond to them.

## 7 TO 12 MONTHS

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As your baby grows, he/she learns to roll over, sit, crawl, stand and walk. Your baby learns to reach for things, pick them up, and pass them from hand to hand.

At this stage, babies are curious and want to learn about the world around them. It can feel like a miracle watching your baby's skills and interests grow with each day.

### Every baby is unique

Each baby reacts and learns differently. Watch for cues that tell you what your baby likes and needs. Follow your baby's lead. Babies will show you what they are interested in and when they are ready to learn. You will soon be the expert in knowing what your baby wants and likes.

### The brain develops connections for seeing and hearing early in life

Even before they can talk, babies are learning language skills. It is important to talk, sing and read to your baby. Point to interesting things and to moving objects.

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### Here are some ways you can help your baby learn:

- Talk to your baby as you do chores. Tell your baby what you are doing.
- Encourage your baby to copy you. Try making faces, noises, or clapping your hands.
- Encourage your baby as he/she learns new skills. Babies may fall many times before they are skilled at walking.
- Teach your baby to wave and point, and respond to his/her gestures.
- Listen to the noises your baby makes, and respond to the noises. This will help your baby learn to speak.



*Before a baby can even say a word, hundreds of words can be stored in his/her brain.*

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# What You Can Do

## 1 TO 3 YEARS

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Toddlers (1 to 3 years of age) learn to talk and explore farther away from their parents. They are learning that they are a separate person from their parents.

### Toddlers learn to do things on their own

They learn best if they participate in activities, not just watch activities. They often say:

- “Me do it.”
- “No.”
- “Mine.”

Parents can help teach their children important skills needed to grow and learn. This page and the following page share skills children can use throughout life.



*Our Elders say our children don't come in pieces, so we should look at the whole child.*

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### Self-regulation

Self-regulation is an important skill for children. Children are ready to learn when they are calm and focused. It's important to help toddlers learn to adjust their emotions and behaviours, to cope in a positive way. Self-regulation is being the boss of your behavior, emotions and attention. It develops when caring adults respond sensitively to a child. Parents can help their toddler:

- See what is around them.
- Listen to others.
- Understand consequences.
- Use words and actions to explain their needs.
- Learn to solve problems.

These teach your toddler to deal with obstacles in life. They keep the toddler in the calm and alert state that is important for learning. It is also important to model good behaviour – toddlers learn by watching those around them.





## Resilience

Resilience is the ability to steer through serious life challenges and find ways to bounce back and to thrive. We work on this throughout our lives, and we need to start as early as possible. People who respond to hardships with resilience are healthier, live longer, are happier in their relationships, are more successful in school and at work, and are less likely to get depressed. Parents can help build their children's resilience through:

- A secure bond with a caring adult.
- Relationships with positive role models.
- Taking part in activities and learning new skills.
- Building self-control, thinking skills, confidence and a positive outlook.

## Language

Language is an important skill. There is a window of opportunity for learning to talk between 1 and 2 years of age. This is a time when children easily learn to understand and speak new words. Talk together often and use new words to point out objects, people and interesting things. Encourage your toddler's reactions and questions with engaging answers. Speak to your toddler in the language you are most comfortable with. If you are learning your First Nations or Métis language, share what you are learning.

Read books to your child from an early age. This will help your child learn to read later on. Rather than simply reading the story, add to the reading experience. Ask your toddler questions about what is in the book. Encourage your toddler to think about words and objects. If you have difficulty reading, or can't get books in your own language, talk to your toddler using family photo albums, magazines or catalogues. As you flip through the pictures, describe what you see, or make up a story.

## Problem-solving

Problem-solving skills start developing early in life. Activities that include math ideas will help your child learn how to solve problems. Games that include stacking things, sorting colours and shapes, and counting things are a good way to start. Songs and rhymes with numbers are a fun way to learn as well, such as *Ten Little Monkeys Jumping On The Bed*. These will help your child begin to learn about numbers and counting, so that problem-solving and math skills will be easier to learn later on.

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## Here are some ways you can help your toddler learn:

- Create a safe place for your toddler to learn and explore. Toddlers still need to know you are there to keep them safe. They need to know they are loved. You can teach them about emotions and empathy.
- Let your toddler make simple decisions (choose between two healthy snacks, choose between two different shirts).
- Use something they are interested in and ask, "What colour is it? Is this bigger or smaller than that?"
- Ask your toddler to hold two blocks of different shapes behind his/her back. Ask your toddler to tell you about the shapes of the blocks. Then change the blocks. This will help your toddler learn through touch and not just sight.
- Show your toddler photos of people. Ask your toddler what the people in the photos are feeling.
- Do household tasks together. Encourage your toddler to imitate you using child-sized tools: shovelling snow, washing dishes, sweeping the floor, carrying things, etc.
- Show your toddler photos of people he/she knows well (parents, friends, neighbours). Encourage your toddler to name the people and talk about them with you.
- Tell a story using your toddler's stuffed animals, toys or other objects.
- Sort, stack and count plastic containers. Make music with them.
- Using a big cardboard box, make a pretend boat together.

# What You Can Do

## 4 TO 6 YEARS

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Children aged 4 to 6 learn more about themselves as a person. They begin to make their own choices outside of the home and begin to develop their own friends. They learn about likes, dislikes and getting along with others.

### All children are different, even in the same family

All children have their own personalities and enjoy different things. In families with more than one child, each child needs special attention and time to follow his/her interests.

- Learn to understand each child's personality, needs and skills.
- Set clear expectations for each child, based on their personality, needs and skills.
- Set expectations for when children are playing together.
- Respond to your child's interests.
- When you play together, let your child take the lead, and try to add to the experience.

### There are many changes for children as they enter school

It is a different place with different rules and different people. You can help your child get ready for school by talking about school, reading books about going to school, walking by the school, or visiting the classroom. You can help your child adjust to school by asking about what happened at school every day. Prompt your child by asking about specific things such as gym, music, special guests etc. Listen to what he/she says. Watch for any changes in eating, sleeping, energy and behaviour. Ask your child what he/she needs from you.



*Learning starts early  
and occurs throughout  
the life cycle.*

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You are still your child's most important teacher even though they are learning many important things in school and from their friends. You can teach your child about family, friendships, plants, animals, and traditional practices. Follow your child's interests, and help him/her with school learning.

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### Here are some ways you can help your child learn:

- Share stories about family members and show pictures if you have them.
- Share traditions such as crafts, gathering medicines, fishing and hunting.
- Practice traditional ceremonies.
- Speak your First Nations or Métis language, even if you do not know a lot of words.
- Put up signs in your house in your First Nations or Métis language. For example, put a sign on the door that says: Door (in your First Nations or Métis language). You can use English words if you do not know the word in your First Nations or Métis language.
- Find out how your child is doing at school and help him/her as needed. You can play counting games, help your child learn to write his/her name, or go to the library and get books to read together.
- Leave loving messages for your child, such as "I love you." Try using letter magnets.
- Teach your child about the world around him/her. Help your child learn the names of trees, plants and animals.
- Find out what interests your child. Help your child learn more. If your child is interested in an animal, visit a library and get a book about the animal. Make up stories about the animal. Draw the animal together. Count animals.

# Children with Special Needs

Elders say that each child is a gift to their community. They are present in their community to teach the community something. The child is to be viewed as someone to learn from, rather than a person who is a problem.

## What if your child has special needs or is very sick?

Every parent hopes for a healthy baby, but this does not always happen. While each child develops in his/her own way, there are common patterns. Your doctor or community health nurse can help you learn about this. If you think your child may be struggling with learning, hearing, speaking, walking or any other part of their development, talk to your doctor or community health nurse as soon as possible. Early help is important as there are times when your child is more ready to learn certain skills.

Learning that a child has a special need can cause shock, disbelief, grief, guilt, shame, blame, and even confusion, depression, or disappointment. Parenting a child with special needs can be enriching and bring great joy. There are services in your community that can help such as an Aboriginal Friendship Centre or Aboriginal Infant Development Program. Sometimes, children need the help of a specialist. They are all there to help.

## Stay positive

Children with special needs can overcome incredible obstacles. Patience is important – it may take time to learn new skills. Love them for who they are and for the gifts that they possess and offer. See the information at the back of this booklet for helpful information and services, as well as:

- Children with Special Needs  
[www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec\\_needs/index.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/index.htm)
- Aboriginal Infant Development Programs  
Phone: 250 388 5593  
[www.aidp.bc.ca](http://www.aidp.bc.ca)



*Skak means children  
in Wet'suwet'en*



*Our Elders say, first you treat them the same way as any other child – with love, patience, understanding, nurturing, respect, teaching, role modeling, healthy living and care.*



# How You Can Get Support

All parents can benefit from support. It might be a book about parenting, an auntie who gives you a break, a grandmother with helpful advice, a parenting course, or a drop-in centre with helpful resources for parents. Think about what is needed to raise a healthy, happy child.

## HELPFUL

Health care support during pregnancy

Healthy food

Parents and family who show their love

Safe home

Happy home

Parents teach their children

## NOT HELPFUL

No care during pregnancy

Junk food

Parents not able to meet their baby's needs

Mould, overcrowding or not enough heat

Parents fighting, alcohol issues

Parents yell at their children or put them down

You are not a bad parent if you cannot afford a nicer place to live, or you can't afford a car, car insurance or gas. You can have many caring moments to remember as your child grows up. Your child can have equally shared memories. Think about what is best for your child. Ask for help when you need it.

## Think about your past

Parenting is learned through what you saw, heard and felt throughout your life. Most of us have some good memories of growing up, and some unhappy memories. Unfortunately, the residential school system separated many families. The child welfare and prison systems divide families. Each of these systems changes how we view ourselves and how we relate to others, especially our children.

Think about what kind of parent you want to be. You can choose to revisit the past when you want to share or reflect on it. Make sure that you are safe and supported if you decide to work through troubling memories. It may be helpful to work with a counselor.

The Non-insured Health Benefits Program provides crisis counseling for those living off-reserve in BC. This service has a list of approved counselors in each area of BC. On-reserve, you can access mental health services provided by the community.

• Phone: 1 800 317 7878  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/nihb-ssna/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/nihb-ssna/index-eng.php)



pearaan

means parents in Michif



## Moving forward

As a parent, the present is your place of strength. All of your thoughts, feelings, ideas and choices happen right now, in the present. You can't do anything about what happened in the past. You don't have control over the future, but you can plan for it.

- You have strengths, skills and supports.
- You can start changing how you live now.

## Ask yourself

- What will help your child learn, feel loved and happy every day?
- How can you be the best caregiver and first teacher for your child?
- Who can provide you with support during this time (family, friends or local services)?

Write down some things you can do to care for yourself. Write down some things you can do to be your child's first teacher. Practice making your home loving and safe every day.

*"It is never too late to heal wounds and rebuild relationships, especially among families and communities. We must no longer allow daily struggles and the dark history of residential schools to affect our kids. Change starts with every one of us."*

*— Shawn A-in-Chut Atleo, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations*



*We are trying very hard to bring back the value of family and extended family, including our Elders. We need to remember to keep family and community connected. In the past, everyone helped raise the children.*

## *I Didn't Know We Were Poor*

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*"A man in his 60's was asked about his childhood. His father died after the seventh child, so his mother remarried and had five more children. The second marriage ended in divorce because the man wasn't a good father or stepfather. As a result, his mother ended up being a single parent of twelve children.*

*His mother worked in a fish cannery, then a residential school laundry room and did housekeeping for a few neighbors to make ends meet. She didn't get paid in money for her housekeeping, but was paid in food, used furniture and clothes. This helped make her work salary go further.*

*The man said, 'I didn't know we were poor. I don't remember going hungry, but always getting something for Christmas, even if it was just a comb and hanky. I wore hand me down clothes, was looked after by my big brothers and sisters when mom was working and never being alone.' He was proud of his mother and had special bonds with his siblings. This man did not have a father in his life, but his older brothers were father figures to him. He graduated from school, became an accountant and later a mail carrier.*

*I have way more confidence than ever before, I thought I wasn't a good parent and today I feel like a great parent."*

*– Parent who participates in the Aboriginal Infant Development Program*

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*This story teaches about what is important in families. It doesn't cost money to be a good parent. Just do the best you can to love and support your family.*

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# How You Can Learn More

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**Aboriginal Friendship Centres** often have programs for pregnant women, parents and children.

Phone: 250 388 5522 or  
Toll-Free: 1 800 990 2432  
[www.bcaafc.com](http://www.bcaafc.com)

**Aboriginal Infant Development Programs** work together with families to support the growth and development of young children.

Phone: 250 388 5593  
[www.aidp.bc.ca](http://www.aidp.bc.ca)

**Aboriginal Supported Child Development** is a program for children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

Phone: 250 388 5593  
[www.ascdp.bc.ca](http://www.ascdp.bc.ca)

**BC Aboriginal Head Start Programs** support early childhood development, school readiness and family health and wellness for children from birth to six years old.

Phone: 250 858 4543  
[www.bcfnhs.org](http://www.bcfnhs.org) for on-reserve programs  
[www.ahsabc.net](http://www.ahsabc.net) for urban programs

**BC Council for Families** is a source of dependable, current information and advice including parenting programs, online information, and online discussion groups for parents.

[www.bccf.ca/families](http://www.bccf.ca/families)

**BC Ministry of Health** has an online guide to all the toll-free resources in BC.

[www.health.gov.bc.ca/navigation/1-800.html](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/navigation/1-800.html)

**Best Chance** is an online resource for parents.

[www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca)

**Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program** and **Community Action Program for Children** programs begin during pregnancy and go up to early childhood. Many of the programs have help for breastfeeding, nutrition, food preparation, and also offer resources to help families.

[www.capc-pace.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.capc-pace.phac-aspc.gc.ca)  
[www.cpnpcnp.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.cpnpcnp.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

**First Nations Parents Clubs** help support parents to help with educational success.

Phone: 604 925 6087 or  
Toll-Free: 1 877 422 3672  
[www.fnsa.ca/parentsclub](http://www.fnsa.ca/parentsclub)

**Healthlink BC** directory has information about how and where to find health services in BC.

Phone: 8-1-1

**Healthy Baby Healthy Brain** is a parent website about early brain development.

[www.healthybabyhealthybrain.ca](http://www.healthybabyhealthybrain.ca)

**Local Libraries** may have books about parenting and child development.

[www.bclibraries.ca](http://www.bclibraries.ca)

**Métis Community Service Society of BC** provides services for parents.

Phone: 250 868 0351  
[www.mcsbc.org](http://www.mcsbc.org)

**National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health** is a source of reliable, current information on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis child, youth, and family health.

[www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/en/publications.aspx?sortcode=2.8.10&searchCat=1](http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/en/publications.aspx?sortcode=2.8.10&searchCat=1)

**The Non-insured Health Benefits Program** provides crisis counseling for those living off-reserve in BC. This service has a list of approved counselors in each area of BC. On-reserve, you can access mental health services provided by the community.

Phone: 1 800 317 7878  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/nihb-ssna/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/nihb-ssna/index-eng.php)

**Pregnancy Outreach Programs** are located throughout BC.

Phone: 604 314 8797  
[www.bcapop.ca/programs](http://www.bcapop.ca/programs)



*dusneke*  
*means parents in*  
*Nadleh Whut'en*

The booklets in this series include:



## Fatherhood is Forever

This booklet about fathering is for First Nations and Métis parents in BC.



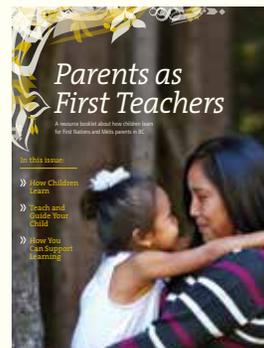
## Growing Up Healthy

This booklet about healthy children is for First Nations and Métis parents in BC.



## Family Connections

This booklet about bonding with your child is for First Nations and Métis parents in BC.



## Parents as First Teachers

This booklet about how children learn is for First Nations and Métis parents in BC.

You can view all of the English booklets online at [www.nccah-ccnsa.ca](http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca) or at [www.fnha.ca](http://www.fnha.ca)

Aussi disponibles en français: [www.nccah-ccnsa.ca](http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca)

For more information:



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

500-100 Park Royal South  
West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2  
604 913 2080  
[info@fnha.ca](mailto:info@fnha.ca)  
[www.fnha.ca](http://www.fnha.ca)



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Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9  
250 960 5250  
[nccah@unbc.ca](mailto:nccah@unbc.ca)  
[www.nccah-ccnsa.ca](http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca)