



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 You Can Get Support



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 (NCCA) and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) would like to thank the following people for their role in developing the 2013 resource:

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angigatkw
 means “parents”
 in Nisga’a

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NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

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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 we think of our children as our future, we can 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 and where they come from.

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, Former National Chief,
Assembly of First Nations*





pearaan
means "parents" in Michif



The Circle of Support

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 territory, their community and 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. Families can include extended family, young or old, single or married, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two-Spirit with biological, adoptive or foster relationships. Each family is unique and each child has individual needs. Several people within these different types of families may take on the role of parenting.

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, nurse practitioners, 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

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.

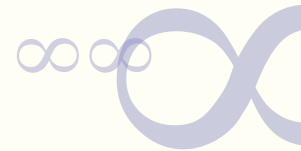


*Connecting to community
and family helps your child
to learn and to develop a
sense of belonging.*

“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 Elder Mary Thomas, Shuswap Nation from Aboriginal Infant Development Program Of British Columbia, “Cherishing each and every Gift” Practice Guidelines, 2nd Edition, 2016



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

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?



*sk'wimémélt
means "baby or child"
in Secwepemc*

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 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.

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.

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 they eat it.

Play

Play is the way children learn and 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 to a parent program where they can learn to share and get along with other children. Children also learn by observing other children and adults around them. Remember that all children develop in their own ways and in their own time, so try not to compare your child to 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.



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

*When children are calm and relaxed,
they are able to focus on learning.*

Structure and Routine

Children thrive on structure and routine. They function best when they know what to expect and when to expect it. Eating breakfast soon after waking up and getting dressed each day is a routine that promotes healthy habits and helps children feel safe and secure.

Routines are predictable, but flexible. They are predictable because they happen regularly, but they are flexible because they do not always depend on the clock for activities to change. For example, if you are playing outside with your children and the weather is really nice, you might stay outside a little longer and adjust the nap time accordingly. Develop a healthy daily pattern for your children, starting from their birth, but allow for some flexibility in their day. Everyday routines like having breakfast, eating dinner as a family, and having regular bath time, reading time, free play time and bedtime give children stability. 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, nurse practitioner, 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*.

Early Brain Development

The first 3 years of life are crucial for children's healthy brain development and learning. Between birth and 3 years old, our brains are twice as active as when we are adults. This sensitive period of brain development is an important time because this is when your children are more ready to learn and develop certain skills. The stronger the brain's connections, the better the ability to think and learn. Through positive repeated interactions with your children, and by talking with them and spending time with them, it is easier for them to develop the basic skills of life, such as seeing, talking and showing emotions. If children are not given the chance to build their brain connections during sensitive periods of early brain development, it is harder for them to think and learn later on. Interact with your children often and consistently to help shape their future.



A sense of belonging

A sense of belonging also helps with your children's learning. Talk with your children about family, community and culture. Teach your children their First Nations or Métis language or learn your languages together. This will help to link them to their traditional lands and relations, and make them feel connected through a sense of belonging. Involve your children with extended family, community and cultural events. Local friendship centres, family rooms in schools, health centres, public health departments, and other parents in your community can keep you informed and help connect you and your children to cultural activities and opportunities for learning.

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



Teach and Guide Your Child

Positive guidance and teachings help your child grow up to be a happy, caring person with good self-esteem, respect for others, and the skills to solve problems. The way you guide and teach your child will depend on their age and stage of their development.

There are ways that a parent can set the stage for good behaviour, such as:

- Physical space – a calm, comfortable, and organized space
- Age appropriate toys
- Routine so your child knows what to expect
- Sleep – try to have naps, bedtime, and awake times at the same time each day
- Regular snacks and mealtimes throughout the day
- Television and other media – limit screen time and know what your child is watching and/or playing

There are no bad children

Avoid yelling and threatening your child. These behaviours or actions 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. These forms of discipline can harm your child emotionally and physically. Never hurt your children.

There are more effective ways to guide and teach your child. Teach your child about communicating, getting along with others, about what is expected, and how they can manage different situations. This gives them the skills they need to manage in the world, helps them to develop good self-esteem, respect for self, others and their physical environment, and should teach your child problem solving skills.

Guiding children's behaviours is effective when it is based on their stage of development, what they are able to do, and their personality. Guiding children's behaviours should always be positive, consistent and fair. It should never involve physical or verbal violence such as yelling, hitting, threatening, or any other actions that will cause your children to feel any type of fear, pain or discomfort.

Handling problems well, as soon as they come up, is an important part of guiding children's unwanted behaviours. In the long run, it is best to prepare your children for good behaviours before there are problems. This gives them the skills they need to do alright in the world. Teach your children about communicating, getting along with others, knowing what is expected, and how they can deal with stressful situations.

Understand the reasons for unwanted behaviour

Recognize that behaviour is children's way of communicating with the people around them. Your children may behave in a negative way if they are feeling tired, stressed, hungry, afraid or full of energy. They may misbehave because they need your attention and will show this with behaviours you do not want. Daily routines and positive interactions with your children are important and helpful in avoiding unwanted behaviours from them. Think about the reasons for your children's unwanted behaviours and, in a calm and understanding manner, talk with them about why these behaviours are unwanted and what you can do to help them change their unwanted behaviours. Positive guidance reinforces good behaviour. Role model positive behaviours for your children.

Your child's behaviour has a lot to do with their age and stage of development - what they are able to do, their learning, their understanding and experience of their environment. If you know what to expect through the different ages and stages of development, you as a parent can learn to guide and teach your child in an age appropriate way that your child can understand. On this page, and the following page, you will find examples of methods to support positive behaviour.

For more information on ages and growth milestones, including cognitive, emotional and social development, see:

- **HealthLink BC - Growth and Development Milestones**
healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/abo8756



Handling problems well, as soon as they come up, is an important part of guiding children's unwanted behaviours.

Teach and Guide Your Child

Acknowledge your children

Look for opportunities to provide feedback to your child on wanted behaviours through acknowledging these behaviours, as opposed to praise. Acknowledgement is healthier for your child than praise.

Acknowledge your children's hard work by engaging with them and showing an interest in what they do. Acknowledging your children helps them develop a sense of self-directed confidence and motivation, rather than seeking praise from others to validate their self-esteem. Children who are recognized for their efforts will work harder and look for new challenges. They will become more resilient as they attribute failure to lack of effort instead of lack of ability. On the other hand, children who are regularly praised are more likely to avoid risks or tasks which they are not as good at, for fear of not being praised if they fail. In the worst case scenario, praising your child excessively can create the unintended perception from your child that you have low expectations for them. This could affect their self-esteem. Some examples of ways to acknowledge rather than praise or reward your child include the following, keeping in mind using positive tone and body language to support your messages:

- "I saw you smile and you looked like you were really proud of yourself when you completed your homework." In this example, we are focusing on the child's effort and describing our observations rather than placing our judgements on the child in terms of what the adult thinks is praiseworthy.
- We can ask children questions to show our curiosity about their feelings. For example, "how did you feel when you put your face in the water during swimming lessons?" The child's pride in themselves is their personal reward and doesn't need approval from others.
- Acknowledge when your child self-regulates, shows determination or persistence; e.g., "I noticed that puzzle was difficult for you and you took a break from the puzzle, then went back and finished it. That makes me so happy and proud to see that you didn't give up. How did finishing that hard puzzle make you feel?"

Acknowledging your child through effort-based praise will give them the confidence to continue strengthening the positive attributes they know they have, and the resilience to progress through challenges when they arise. It will help your child pursue hobbies and interests they love and try new things, which will help them explore and grow. This is in contrast to a child limiting themselves to only certain activities because their self-esteem is tied to these activities, or because they are seen by others as praiseworthy.



lhulhedoh
means "family" in Dakelh

Use "time ins"

Use this to encourage good behaviour through positive interaction and by talking with your children when they are 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 child learn how to manage their emotions by helping them talk about feelings. For example, "Are you mad/sad/afraid?" or "How are you feeling?"
- Give your child a hug and show that you care.
- Once your child has calmed down, talk about different ways to deal with the same kind of problem next time.

Distraction

Use distraction as a way to draw your children's attention away from something that is beginning to upset them to a new activity or conversation. For example, if your children are upset because it is bath time and they are in the middle of playing with something, you may be able to distract them by talking about the toys you are putting in the tub. If one of your children is reaching for your coffee, you can let them know that your coffee is hot and should not be touched because it may burn them. Give your child a plastic cup to play with, instead. Do not use distraction when your children are really upset or having a tantrum. Try offering them a choice instead.

Choice

Another strategy to change unwanted behaviour is to offer choices to your children. Giving children choices empowers them to think things through and make good decisions. It helps them learn to understand and manage their behaviour. For example, an 8 o'clock bedtime is not negotiable, but giving your children the choice between wearing red or blue pyjamas, or letting them choose between skipping or hopping to bed, gives children a sense of control over their actions. It also helps you to put boundaries on your children's behaviour.

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 their milk. Your child gets up and spills the milk. The natural consequence is that your child has a mess to clean up.

Try these tips to help your child calm down:

- Hold your child in a comforting way until their 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.

“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



Children who are recognized for their efforts will work harder and look for new challenges. They will become more resilient as they attribute failure to lack of effort instead of lack of ability.



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.



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.

Love and cherish your child

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.

Moving forward

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.

"Every home should be known as a child development centre."

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



What You Can Do

during pregnancy

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.



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

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.

Your health during pregnancy is important to early learning

Many things have an impact on an unborn baby's brain. Alcohol and drugs change brain development in unborn babies. There is no safe time or safe amount of alcohol or drugs during pregnancy. Smoking limits the amount of nutrients and oxygen your baby gets. Drinking, doing drugs or smoking can affect your baby's ability to learn later in life.

It is best to quit smoking, doing drugs, and drinking before getting pregnant. If the pregnancy came as a surprise, it is important to quit drinking, doing drugs and smoking as soon as you think you might be pregnant. Find out what community supports are available to help you stop during this time.

See your doctor, nurse practitioner, midwife or community health nurse regularly. Find out what medicines (prescription, over-the-counter, herbal) are safe during pregnancy. Ask about prenatal nutrition programs that offer teaching and access to 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.

Birthing supports

Many women are required to travel away from of their community to have their baby. This can be a challenging time for women and their families. Women may choose to hire a doula to support them during this time. A doula provides emotional, physical, and spiritual support for women and families during pregnancy, labour and after birth.

How to find a doula:

- Contact your local Friendship Centre
- Ask your doctor, midwife, nurse, or local health provider to assist with a referral
- **Contact the Doula Services Association's Referral Line**
1-877-365-5588
- **Find a doula online**
bcdoulas.org/find-a-doula



*As you talk, sing, hold and
love your baby, your baby is
learning. Some Elders say to use
storytelling 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 their place in the
universe.*

What You Can Do

0 to 6 months

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

Babies are born ready to learn and have many skills

In order to develop more skills, babies need to use their brains 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 care-givers. 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 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 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 their brain. Babies thrive on attention and affection. You can't spoil them by responding to their needs in a loving way.

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 they are sick, hurt or upset. Be there when your baby is sad, lonely or frightened. Babies cry to let you know that they need you. 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 them how to treat other people in the future. To learn more, see the parent booklets, *Family Connections* and *Fatherhood is Forever*.

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 they drift off to sleep.
- Comfort your baby.
- Watch for your baby's cues and respond to them.

Skin-to-skin contact

Immediately after your baby is born, you can hold your baby "skin-to-skin." This is where your baby wears only a diaper and is placed against your bare chest. Lightly place a blanket over your baby's back, making sure their face is uncovered. Your nurse or birth support person can help you get settled. Let your baby stay on your chest for at least an hour. This helps babies adjust to being outside the womb and can be done by both mother and father. Holding your baby skin-to-skin can help calm a fussy baby. It also helps regulate your baby's heart rate, breathing, temperature and blood sugar levels. Skin-to-skin contact is encouraged even if you had a caesarean section. Both full-term and premature babies benefit from being held skin-to-skin. You can hold your baby skin-to-skin as often as you like during the first few days to weeks of life (and beyond). This helps with bonding and lets you both get to know one another.



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.



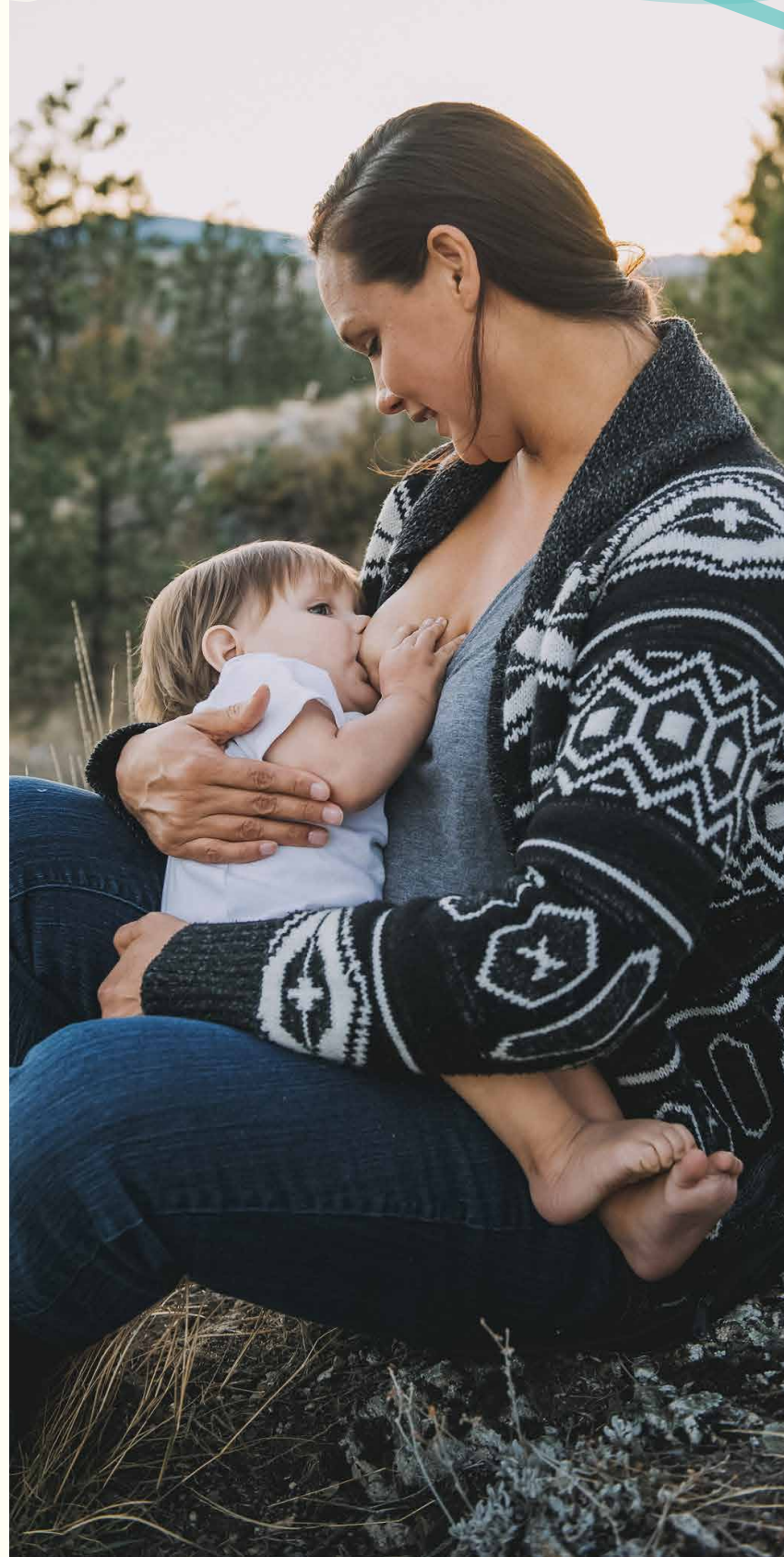
Parents and care-givers have a sacred duty to the gifts that they have brought into this world. Give thanks for your child.

Breastfeeding

Newborns should be breastfed as soon as possible after birth. Your baby is born with the instinct to breastfeed. Holding your baby skin-to-skin helps with breastfeeding. Babies can smell their mother's breast milk and if left in skin-to-skin contact, will begin looking for your breast usually within an hour following birth. Holding your baby skin-to-skin also helps trigger the release of hormones (Oxytocin) which helps increase your milk supply and helps you bond with your baby. Breastfeeding is not always an option for all mothers. No matter how you choose to feed your baby, you will still develop a bond between you and your baby.

Here are some ways you can bond with your baby

- Skin-to-skin contact immediately after birth and as much as you like in the days and weeks following birth
- Breastfeed your baby
- Gaze into your baby's eyes
- Talk and sing to your baby as they will be comforted by your voice
- If your baby is premature, ask the hospital staff if you can touch and hold your baby, including skin-to-skin contact
- Room-in with your baby at the hospital; sleeping in the same room will give you more time to get to know one another
- Wear your baby in a sling or carrier so that they are close to your body



What You Can Do

7 to 12 months

As your baby grows, they learn 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.



Before babies can even say a word, hundreds of words can be stored in their brains.

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.

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 they learn new skills. Babies may fall many times before they are skilled at walking.
- Teach your baby to wave and point, and respond to their gestures.
- Listen to the noises your baby makes and respond to the noises. This will help your baby learn to speak.



1 to 3 years

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 toddlers important skills needed to grow and learn. This page and the following page share skills toddlers can use throughout life.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation is an important skill for children. Children are ready to learn when they are calm and focused. It is 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 behaviours, emotions, attention, and body. 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,
- help their children to listen to their bodies (e.g., stop eating when they are full).

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 toddler’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.

Understanding consent

- Teach your child to ask for permission before moving into a playmate’s personal space. For example, guide your child by saying, “Let’s ask your friend if they would like a goodbye hug before we go.” If the friend says no, model respectful acceptance. You might say, “That’s okay! Let’s wave goodbye instead. See you next time!”
- Never force your child to hug, touch or kiss someone, even a family member, if they do not want to. As a parent, your role is to keep your child safe, which might mean ensuring that your child wears the proper winter gear for an outdoor walk in January even if the child does not want to, but respecting a child’s wishes about touch in circumstances that are not related to their safety is important.



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

What You Can Do

1 to 3 years

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 develop their language skills and 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 toddler 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 toddler begin to learn about numbers and counting so that problem-solving and math skills will be easier to learn later on.

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 or between two different shirts).
- Prepare a variety of foods together.
- 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 their 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 they know 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.





4 to 6 years

Children aged 4 to 6 learn more about themselves as a person. They begin to make their own choices outside of the home and 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 their 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

School 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 they say. Watch for any changes in eating, sleeping, energy and behaviour. Ask your child what they need from you.

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 them with school learning.

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 them as needed. You can play counting games, help your child learn to write their 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 them. Help your child learn the names of trees, plants and animals, and help them to identify those that may be traditional foods.
- 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.



Learning starts early and occurs throughout the life cycle.

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 as a person who is a problem.



“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.” - Diana Elliott, 2004

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 their own way, there are common patterns. Your doctor, nurse practitioner, 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, nurse practitioner, 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.

Are you aware of Jordan's Principle? There are funds through Jordan's Principle to ensure children receive the required care and treatments in a timely fashion. Refer to the First Nations Health Authority website for more information:

- **Jordan's Principle in BC**
fnha.ca/what-we-do/maternal-child-and-family-health/jordans-principle



*Skak
means “children” in Wet’suwet’en*

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:

- **Aboriginal Infant Development Programs**
aidp.bc.ca
- **CanChild**
canchild.ca
- **Children with Special Needs**
gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/healthy-women-children/child-behaviour-development/special-needs

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.

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.



*Think about what is best for your child.
Ask for help when you need it.*

helpful	not helpful
Health care support during pregnancy	No care during pregnancy
Healthy food and water	Junk food (candy, pop, chips etc.)
Parents and family who show their love	Parents not able to meet their baby's needs
Safe home	Mould or not enough heat
Happy home	Parents fighting, alcohol issues
Parents teach their children	Parents yell at their children or put them down





How You Can Get Support

“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, former National Chief, Assembly of First Nations



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.



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

"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

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.

How You Can Learn More

Crisis intervention and mental health supports

Aboriginal Crisis Line (KUU-US Crisis Line Society)
Phone: 1-800-588-8717

Crisis Centre BC
Phone: 1-800-784-2433
crisiscentre.bc.ca

Northern BC Crisis Centre
Phone: 1-888-562-1214
BC Wide Line Phone: 1-800-784-2433
Youth Line Phone: 1-888-564-8336
northernbccrisissuicide.ca

Alcohol & Drug Information & Referral Service
Phone: 1-800-663-1441

Indian Residential School Crisis Line
Phone: 1-866-925-4419

Motherisk Alcohol and Substance Use Helpline
Phone: 1-877-327-4636

Prenatal and maternal health

Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program provides support to improve the health and well-being of pregnant women, new mothers and babies facing challenging life circumstances.
cpnp-pcnp.phac-aspc.gc.ca/en

First Nations Health Authority Maternal, Child and Family Health programs include programs such as the Prenatal Nutrition Program and Aboriginal Head Start for families living on-reserve.
fnha.ca/what-we-do/maternal-child-and-family-health

The BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs (BCAPOP)
Phone: 604-314-8797
bcapop.ca/POP-Programs

Infant health

HealthLink BC Safe Sleeping for Babies
healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/safe-sleeping-babies

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

La Leche League Canada encourages, promotes and provides mother-to-mother breastfeeding support and educational opportunities. For information on breastfeeding:
llc.ca

Early childhood development

Aboriginal Infant Development Program works together with families to support the growth and development of young children.
Phone: 250-388-5593
Toll-Free: 1-866-338-4881
aidp.bc.ca

Aboriginal Supported Child Development is a program for children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.
Phone: 250-388-5593
Toll-Free: 1-866-338-4881
ascdp.bc.ca

The **Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia (AHSABC)** provide programs that support early childhood development, school readiness, and family health and wellness for children from birth to six years old.
ahsabc.net

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for the Early Years – 0-4 give some guidelines for physical activity for children.
csepguidelines.ca/early-years-0-4/

Community Action Program for Children promotes the healthy development of young children (0-6 years) who are living in conditions of risk.
capc-pace.phac-aspc.gc.ca/en

Preschoolers: Building a Sense of Security fact sheet by BC HealthLink.
healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/ta7012



dusneke
means “parents” in
Nadleh Whut’en

Family health resources

First Nations Health Benefits

General Questions/Benefits Support Representative
Toll-Free: 1-855-550-5454
fnha.ca/benefits

HealthLink BC is a health information and advice phone line to find health information and services or connect with a registered nurse, a registered dietitian or a pharmacist.

Phone: 8-1-1
healthlinkbc.ca

HealthLink BC Dietitian Services can answer your questions about food and nutrition.

Phone: 8-1-1
healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating/email-healthlinkbc-dietitian

Immunization Schedule

bccdc.ca/health-info/immunization-vaccines/immunization-schedules

Jordan’s Principle

fnha.ca/what-we-do/maternal-child-and-family-health/jordans-principle

British Columbia Drug and Poison Information Centre

(BC DPIC) – call immediately if you think that your child has been exposed to poison.

Phone: 604-682-5050
Toll-Free: 1-800-567-8911
dpic.org

Parenting and family resources and supports

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC)

often have programs for pregnant women, parents and children.

Phone: 250-388-5522
bcaafc.com

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

bccf.ca

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

Phone: 604-925-6087 or
Toll-Free: 1-877-422-3672
fnsa.ca/parentsclub

HealthyFamilies BC – Parenting is an online resource for all British Columbians with information about pregnancy and parenting.

healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting

Public Libraries will have books about parenting and child development.

gov.bc.ca/gov/content/sports-culture/arts-culture/public-libraries

Métis Family Services provides services for parents.

metisfamilyservices.ca/programs-services

The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health

(NCCAHC) is a source of reliable, current information on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis child, youth, and family health.

nccah.ca

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 nccah.ca or at fnha.ca

Aussi disponibles en français: ccnsa.ca

For more information:



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

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fnha.ca



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