



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

## Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR)

### Exploring your Program

#### “Connections with our Plants, Foods and Medicines”

Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve recognizes and affirms that culture and language are the fundamental part of a child's development and reflect the uniqueness of our First Nations communities, as we take into account the emotional, social, spiritual, physical and intellectual needs of our children. Our six key components include: (1) culture and language; (2) education; (3) health promotion; (4) nutrition; (5) parent and family involvement; and (6) social support.

*This is the second series to [Exploring Your Program](#). It is intended to provide a framework for each community based upon their own stage of development and state of readiness. This supportive information is Community-based and Community-paced and at their own stage of decision-making. For further support please connect with your Regional Head Start Advisor*

#### A few of the Aboriginal Head Start “We Believe” Statements:

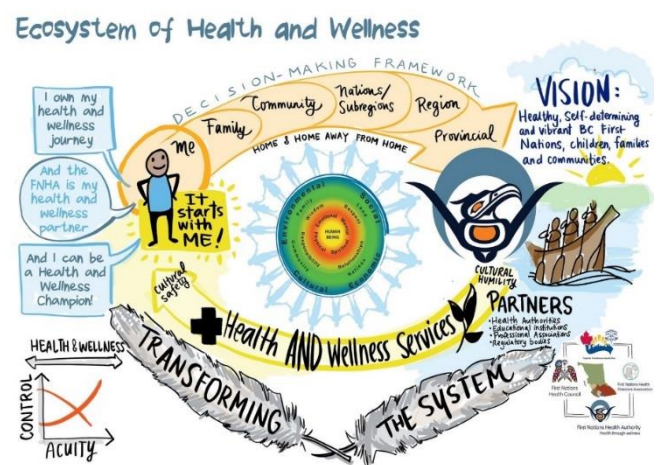
*That our children have a right to live proudly as Aboriginal people in the lands of their ancestors.*

*That children have a right to learn their respective First Nation language(s) and histories, and adults have a responsibility to pass on the instructions that the Creator gave in the beginning of time as are reflected in our languages, cultural beliefs and cultural practices.*

*That it is essential for children to develop meaningful relationships with Elders, the carriers of knowledge and history.*

*That children, under the guidance of Elders, will embrace learning throughout their life*

*That children acquire knowledge by watching, listening and doing, and adults are responsible for encouraging and guiding them in all those activities.*





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## Connections to our Plants, Foods and Medicines

In our previous series we learned that each season sustained and prepared First Nations communities for many generations. For example, elements such as life cycles, directions and seasons of spring, summer, fall and winter. Each territory varies in traditional beauty of its land, water, forests, mountains or terrains.

As caretakers of this land, we have witnessed many of our communities weave the relationship of this responsibility with our traditional ways of healing while exploring these teachings.



Vancouver Coastal Region and Traditional Wellness

The following samples and concepts are a few creative ways and/or items that may need to be considered in developing or implementing early learning and child development concepts into your program.

## An Invitation

For many years, we have witnessed many communities gather with Knowledge Keepers, Elders, Traditional Healers, community members and parents to participate in the experiential learning, planning and developing of their curriculum. These key participants may offer or speak to other protocols/teachings for you to consider such as offerings, prayers or other Honourings.

We suggest that you follow your community's protocols while promoting awareness, inclusion and belonging.



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## A knowledge pathway or transformation

Our oral stories, creation stories and painted images such as pictographs have shared many historical ways of how BC First Nations people have lived off the land.

Knowledge was not shared through a book; rather it was shared through relationships, experiences, observations, exploration and valuable teachings or lessons. We can observe the many living markers such as Petroglyphs, totems, food caches, root cellars and/or homes such as pit houses.

Our Elders and Knowledge Keepers have shared teachings with us, such as thanking the plants for growing while asking for permission to harvest them from our Mother Earth, who has sustained us for many generations.



Traditional territory of Nuxalk First Nation

It has been said that our blood memory can be felt on a deep cellular level, just as the plants will offer themselves and stand out from the other ones. It is important to acknowledge the spirit of the plant and how you will use this medicine to feed other people.

Ceremony is at the center of all that we do and so watch where you step, be gentle with your footsteps; listen with your heart, body, mind and spirit. While traditional medicines and practices can be incorporated into your program, it would be advised to consult with Knowledge Keepers in your community. For more information please visit:

Traditional Wellness Framework

[https://www.fnha.ca/WellnessSite/WellnessDocuments/FNHA\\_TraditionalWellnessStrategicFramework.pdf](https://www.fnha.ca/WellnessSite/WellnessDocuments/FNHA_TraditionalWellnessStrategicFramework.pdf)

## Building Curriculum and Connections to Land-based Learning

As the child is the learner, we have observed the importance of meeting them at their current learning level. It's about the process, not the outcome. It's about building the children's confidence as they learn through play in their natural environments. Outdoor play supports our respect and connection to the land, which is important for our mind, body and spiritual wellbeing. Building curriculum, we shared the various benefits of land-based learning. The following oral story shares the inspiration of this very connection.



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*Two children and their Auntie walk through a valley and reach a large, lonely looking rock. The younger sibling says to the Auntie, “I don’t think I could climb that rock, it looks too big.” The older sibling says, “It might be a big rock, but I’m even bigger!” As the older sibling begins to climb the rock, Auntie says, “This rock has been here for many generations and this is our ancestor.” The youngest sibling watches the older child climb the rock with big eyes and squeezes her Auntie’s hand, saying, “I’m not brave enough, Auntie.” Auntie kneels down and says, “Little one, you are brave and you are powerful. Your spirit will grow strong and you will have the body as fierce as this ancestor rock.” The sides of the youngest child’s mouth began to turn up. “Can you help me up there, Auntie?” Just then, the older sibling jumps down and grabs the youngest child’s hand, and they began to lift the child up on the top of that rock. Together they laugh and share how they were strong and brave, like the Bear.*

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### Lessons from the Land — where do we go from here?

For example: how can harvesting a cedar tree incorporate Early Learning and Child Developmental Fundamentals? Consider what you may hear, see, touch or feel. These may be elements of the Earth such as rocks, water, other trees, air, water, or metals. The Cosmos such as the sun, moon, or stars.

### Harvesting Cedar





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## Our Lands and Taking Care of our Water



## Traditional Medicines

### Working with Plants, Foods and Medicines

Our BC First Nations peoples harvest a variety of plants, foods and medicines during different times of the year. Some Harvesters may only harvest the root, the leaf or bulb, while others may draw upon the whole plant for its medicinal/spiritual use. It has been told that we only take what we need as we walk softly upon the earth. We encourage you to learn about the procedures or protocols within your community such as:

- Edible and Poisonous Plants
- Wild Herbs or Vegetables
- Sacred Offerings
- Animals or [Grandmother/Grandfather Teachings](#) such as the sacred teaching: Courage—being courageous like the bear.



Thet-simiya, Wendy Ritchie,  
FNHA Traditional Wellness Coordinator  
Skowkale First Nation



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## Connecting the Mind, Body and Spirit

In our third series [Early Learning and Child Development](#) “Family Connections we learned that when we are holistically connected to our mind, body and spirit, we are strengthening our inherent gifts while creating new space to learn and grow. Our culture, language, values, traditions, worldviews and environments are essential pillars for our overall wellbeing.

## Internal Resources

Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/maternal-child-and-family-health/aboriginal-head-start-on-reserve>

Traditional Healing <https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/traditional-healing>

Traditional Wellness: Foods and Medicines

<https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-for-first-nations/traditional-wellness>

First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness

<http://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-and-the-first-nations-health-authority/first-nations-perspective-on-wellness>

## External Resources

As I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms tɑʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder

<http://publications.ravenspacepublishing.org/as-i-remember-it/index>

Supporting the Scared Journey

<https://resources.beststart.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/E31-A.pdf>

Wild Foods and Medicines

<https://www.goodgrub.org/wild-foods/wild-foods-medicine-resources>

Outdoor Play Canada <https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/>

BC Early Learning Framework

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/early-learning/teach/earlylearning/early\\_learning\\_framework.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/early-learning/teach/earlylearning/early_learning_framework.pdf)