



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Early Learning and Child Development

“Healthy Family Connections”

This is the third offering in a three-part series on early learning and child development. This piece focuses on healthy family connections – from how to stay centred ourselves so that we can model positive choices to our children to fun activities we can do together. We’ve included links to a wide range of resources within the document, and you can discover more articles and ideas at fnha.ca/what-we-do/maternal-child-and-family-health/aboriginal-head-start-on-reserve.

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. The six key components of Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve support the healthy emotional, social, spiritual, physical and intellectual development of our children:

- (1) culture and language;
- (2) education;
- (3) health promotion;
- (4) nutrition;
- (5) parent and family involvement; and
- (6) social support.

Please use your judgement when doing the activities described below, which may not be appropriate for all age groups or all children. Make sure the materials you choose are safe and free from hazards – for example, you’ll want to avoid small materials that could cause choking or items that are sharp, unclean and/or unsanitary.

“We are strong, we are resilient and we are not alone.”

There will be times when we may be off balance and feel challenged to regain our spiritual, emotional, physical and mental well-being. You may have heard the saying “It starts with me” or “Parents are the child’s first teacher, which is a sacred gift.” Well, sometimes, parents just need to take a break, be gentle on themselves and know that it’s okay to be flexible!

Parents need time for their wellness. That can mean creating space for your own down time—let your children watch TV or play a game. As long as they are safe, take the time you need to regain your balance.



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Be flexible with your daily routines, as this also sets a good example for your children about managing your stress through healthy living. When you are prepared, rested and relaxed, you can better respond to unexpected events, and that will make it easier for you to support your loved ones.

Some Aboriginal Head Start “We Believe” Statements for Inspiration:

We believe...

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

That adults are community role models who are to teach children how to live a good life.

That children, through being loved, valued and encouraged, will gain the courage, the strength and the wisdom to use the power of a good mind and spirit in all that they do.

Download the complete set of “We Believe” posters on the [Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve webpage](#)

Promoting Children’s Social-Emotional Well-being

Helping our children learn how to express their emotions in healthy ways is one of the most important gifts we can give them. This helps them develop a strong foundation of social-emotional well-being, which can support them in so many areas – from developing self-confidence to forming healthy relationships.

Depending upon the child’s age and stage of development, they will express themselves in a variety of ways. Parents need to respond based upon the child’s developmental stage. For example, a 12-month old toddler may bite when they are upset as they do not yet have the language skills to express their frustration verbally. It is important to have age-appropriate expectations when helping our children express their emotions.

While some children may give voice to their anger and frustration by naming their emotions, others may use their bodies to express emotions by pushing or kicking.

Here are a few strategies to support your child when they are upset:



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Make sure you and your child are safe. If it is safe to do so, kneel down to make eye contact with the child. Acknowledge your child’s feelings with a statements such as: “It’s okay to be angry or frustrated, how can I help you?”

Breathe together. This calming technique can be used at any time. Demonstrate to your child how to “take three big breaths” to help them relax their mind and body. Ask the child “how can I make you feel better?” Do not assume the child is seeking a hug during this time. Check out the article on “Problem-Solving Strategies and Guiding Children” in the second resource in our “Early Learning and Child Development” series for more ideas (see the [Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve webpage](#))

Identify the feeling/emotion. Help your child identify how they are feeling. A feeling/emotion chart is often a useful tool to help them label their emotions. Offer the child the paper and crayons to draw how they are feeling. Remind them that it’s OK to be angry and to have these feelings. Emotions are a part of life and there are no bad feelings. We need to learn how to express our emotions in a way that is not hurtful.

Find some quiet space. Offer other options, such as a comfortable quiet place to relax. Items such as a squishy ball, a book, etc., can be beneficial. Sometimes children enjoy quieter activities such as painting, arts/crafts, puzzles, etc.

As adults, we play an important role in guiding our children, and that often starts with ourselves. Learning together and reaching out for support can make it easier for us to be mindful of our own energy. We’ve all had the experience of where our own high emotions or stress may trigger others. Considering what steps we can take as role models and focusing on what we can control is a wonderful way to help our children develop social-emotional well-being.

Connecting the Mind, Body and Spirit

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 well-being.

It takes patience, dedication and time to strengthen our gifts, and we often need support to do so. Reach out to people in your community or family members, such as Aunties, Uncles, Grandparents/Elders. Your trusted loved are there for you when you need support.

Recognize Teachable Moments



It can be challenging to regain our balance when we are exhausted or going through a difficult time. But there are things we can do to get back on track. Eating healthy food and taking the time to exercise and rest can help regain strength. Avoid the use of shaming, name-calling or blaming. Take a deep breath to think about what you are going to say before you say it. Sometimes you may just need to (safely) step away to regain your thoughts and overall well-being. It is OK to ask for help. Be kind to yourself and compassionate with yourself.

Sometimes we just need to press the pause button to reflect on the situation before we move forward. It is important to offer yourself forgiveness and acknowledge what you may do differently next time.

Setting clear, healthy and safe boundaries is an important way for parents to be positive role models for their children. Consider incorporating positive personal values, such as forgiveness, in your daily routines. Role model and provide examples to your child to demonstrate how to apologize for behaviour that may have harmed others. Discuss the expectations for behaviour that are important to you and your family. Be a positive role model in your words and actions – children pay close attention to your actions. For example:

- Demonstrate respect—“Please knock on the door during my “quiet time.”” *This will support respect, and, of course, privacy.*
- Role model truth and humility— “I’m sorry, I made a mistake.” *This will support the child in offering respect after making a mistake.*

Mindful Family Time

Setting aside time to be together as a family is a wonderful way to be present with your loved ones and check in on how they are doing—mind, body and spirit. Some families might have family meetings and some may have a sharing circle. When we create a “safe space” for discussions we are supporting each other through trust, respect and honour. This safe space allows family members to build self-esteem and have stronger connection, co-operation and balance within the family.

You might set some rules to create a respectful and safe space, such as turning off the TV or radio, taking turns speaking, respecting others’ feelings and options, acknowledging courage, and making sure people know it’s OK if they don’t want to share just yet.

Depending upon the child’s developmental stage, you may need to limit the length of time for these meetings. Consider a quieter time of day, such as when the child is most alert rather than immediately after a meal or during their regular play time. There are many other ways to share



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quality time together, such as going on a family walk, having a game night, sharing a song or story, or drumming or learning other talents as a family.

Honour Your Spirit

Take good care of yourself. You may need to take a deep breath. Sometimes you may need to physically take a moment to step away and come back (be sure the child is safe first). Be patient with yourself and take the time you need to think before you speak.

Respond calmly, discuss feelings and or thoughts. Check out the second offering in our series “Early Learning and Child Development” for more ideas on how to nurture resiliency in ourselves and our children (see the [Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve webpage](#)).

Parenting Resources Grounded in Indigenous knowledge

The FNHA and the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health re-launched some parenting resources, grounded in Indigenous knowledge. Enjoy!

You can access these resources on our website: <https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/new-editions-of-childhood-health-and-wellness-resources-support-parents-and-caregivers-to-raise-healthy-vibrant-children>

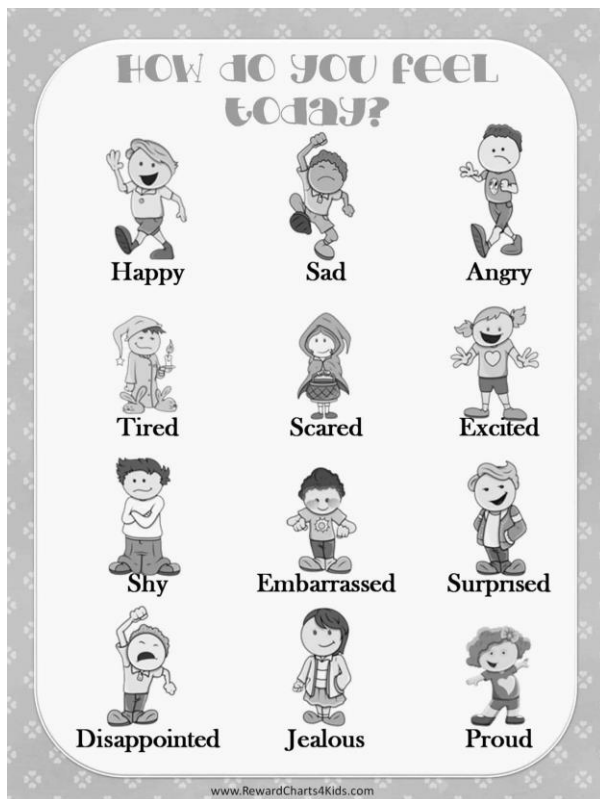
- **First Teachers:** <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/parentteacher.pdf>
 - Emphasizes early childhood development and learning through experience and play.
- **Family Connections:** <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/familyconnections.pdf>
 - Presents information for parents and caregivers on bonding, forming secure attachments with children, and connecting with extended family and community.
- **Fatherhood is Forever:** <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/fatherforever.pdf>
 - Discusses the important parenting role of fathers, including learning about being a positive role model for children and some of the different approaches they can take to deal with different situations.
- **Growing up Healthy:** <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/growingup.pdf>
 - Focuses on the steps parents and caregivers can take to keep infants and children well, through nutrition, physical activity and caring for the body.

Other Resources to Explore



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- A children’s storybook—Our smallest warriors, our strongest medicine: Overcoming COVID-19: <https://caih.jhu.edu/programs/strongmedicine>
- Rabbit and Bear Paws Teachings: <https://rabbitandbearpaws.com/teachings/>
- First Nations Health Authority: <https://www.fnha.ca/>
- Printable (two-sided) Social –Emotional Posters



Sometimes I have “Big Feelings”

We all have “Big feelings,” such as feeling angry or frustrated. Here are some tips to support our children as they learn how to manage these big feelings:

Safety is always first. Acknowledge your child’s feelings with: “It’s OK to be angry or frustrated, how can I help you?”

Show them how to “take three big breaths” to relax their mind and body. Offer a hug.

Offer other options include finding a comfortable, quiet place to relax, squeezing a squishy ball or reading a book. Sometimes children like to relax with quieter activities such as painting, arts/crafts, puzzles etc.

Photo credits:www.rewardcharts4kids.com



Grandmother/Grandfather Teachings

Seven Teachings

The Seven Teachings is a set of teachings that have been passed down for many generations. It is a guide to living a good life, living without conflict and living in peace.

The teachings remind us of our connections to the land, animals and nature. When we honour and follow these teachings, we honour our ancestors, our family and ourselves.

Each teaching is represented by an animal who reminds us of our connections to the land, assisting you to live a balanced and peaceful way of being.

Explore each teaching, and discuss how these beliefs support our well-being and daily lives.

Respect—The Buffalo

“Respect yourself and others”

Courage—The Bear

“Be courageous “

Honesty—The Sasquatch

“Be honest with yourself and honest to others”

Love—The Eagle

“Love yourself and love others”

Wisdom—The Beaver

“Be wise with yourself and others”

Humility—The wolf

“Be humble and be humble to others”

Truth—The Turtle

“Be truthful to yourself and truthful to others”



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SPRING YOGA

10 easy yoga poses for kids



1. Say hello to the sun.



2. Pretend to be a tree.



3. Pretend to be a flying bird.



4. Pretend to be the falling rain.



5. Pretend to be planting seeds.

KIDS YOGA
STORIES

Mindfulness and Relaxation

Yoga can calm the body, mind and spirit. You do not require any props or materials.

Find a comfortable and safe space to try out the poses, and make sure to remove any furniture so you can enjoy the movements.

Yoga is low-impact and is great for all ages. It will support you in your breathing patterns and positive thinking. Try and take time for it every day.

The most important message is to have fun and enjoy the laughter it may bring!

Photo Credits: Kids Yoga Stories



Balance, Structure and Gratitude

As children thrive with structure, it's important to maintain a daily routine. Roles and responsibilities guide children in understanding how to follow basic instructions and provide a sense of organization, stability and comfort. This also helps them develop healthy, positive behaviours and a sense of personal control. Routines not only have emotional benefits but health benefits as well!

Meal Time

Share a family meal together. Have children help you set the table, prepare the meal and clean up afterwards. While you eat, take turns speaking about what you were grateful for on this day, what made you laugh or what you learned.

Bedtime

Try to get into a regular routine for bedtime. Having a bath, brushing teeth, washing hands and face or reading a book together may help children rest well for the night.

Daily Routine

A morning routine could consist of waking up, getting dressed, brushing teeth, washing hands and face, and brushing hair.

Quiet time: reading, colouring, puzzles, arts/crafting, etc.

Free time: Allow the child to choose what they would like to do. We encourage limiting TV or computer screen time.

Physical activity: Go for a walk or jog, clean up the garden, do some yoga, dance or enjoy kicking a soccer ball.

Culture and Language: Encourage songs, drumming, rattles, prayers, etc.

Transitions can be hard for many children. Sing “five more minutes” songs for clean-up or let them know about plans for the day ahead of time.

Time for Reflection and/or Honouring

Consider using early morning and/or sunset times to offer thanks with your children.

“Creator we thank you for this day, for our loved ones, the land, the water and the animals. “