



FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE
FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

Parent Toolkit

to support

PARENTAL SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION

DRAFT FOR REVIEW AND FEEDBACK



This Toolkit has been created by the BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and BC First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) to support the importance of parental involvement in education.



The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is committed to supporting First Nations in their efforts to improve the success of all First Nations students in BC. FNESC facilitates collaborative services related to advocacy, research, professional development, program administration, and information sharing. See www.fnesc.ca



The First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) represents First Nations controlled schools in BC and has a mandate to support those schools in creating effective, nurturing, and linguistically and culturally appropriate education environments that provide students with a positive foundation in all academic areas. More information is available at www.fnsa.ca.

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Parent Toolkit

Parents play a key role in the education of their children.

- ▶ Parents are their children's first and most important teachers.
- ▶ Parents are the primary shapers of their children's social skills.
- ▶ Parents are fundamental to children developing self-confidence and a positive self-identity. Parents transmit their values and culture to their children, which is key to their overall development and educational success.

First Nations parents and guardians have a right to be involved in all decisions about their children's education. Parental rights are the foundation of First Nations control of First Nations education, and parents must be fully informed and involved in determining and guiding their children's education.



Parents are central to promoting their childrens' access to educational opportunities that:

- ▶ build their confidence in their self-identity and traditional values, languages and cultures, encouraged by their families and communities;
- ▶ give them the skills they need to thrive in today's society, including relevant technological skills; and
- ▶ prepare them for any opportunities they choose for higher learning, employment and lifelong success.

Fortunately, supporting children's healthy growth and development and being involved in the education process can be very rewarding.

Sometimes, however, it can also be challenging.

- ▶ Many parents are initially uncertain how to become active in their children's schools.
- ▶ It is not always clear how to support learning at home.
- ▶ It can be especially difficult to know what to do if problems arise.

That is why this Toolkit was created. It includes a series of short, reproducible papers that can be adapted and shared with parents to provide information about topics in three general areas.

1.0

Appreciating the importance of parental involvement in education

1.1 The Valuable Role of Parents in Student Success

1.2 The Value of Your Support for the School

2.0

Understanding the structure of the school system, how to build positive relationships with school staff for the benefit of students, and what to do if difficulties arise

- 2.1 What Is the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act?
- 2.2 Parents' Education Rights and Responsibilities
- 2.3 Roles and Responsibilities of Education Personnel
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- 2.5 Questions To Ask At Parent Teacher Interviews
- 2.6 A Parent's Role in Special Education Planning
- 2.7 Helping All Students Build Connections
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3.0

Thinking about how to create healthy and supportive learning environments at home

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Notes About the Terms Used In This Toolkit

Parents, Caregivers, and Families

For simplicity, this Toolkit uses the term “parents.” However, the information shared in this Toolkit relates equally well to parents, grandparents, other family members, and other caregivers. FNEESC and FNSA respect the contributions of all adults who help promote success for First Nations students.

Types of Schools

This Toolkit refers generally to “schools,” but there are actually several types of schools in BC.

- ▶ **Public schools** are funded by the BC Ministry of Education and operate as part of one of the 60 school districts in the province.
- ▶ **Private and independent schools** follow specific rules and regulations set by the BC Ministry of Education, and often charge tuition to First Nations and/or parents.
- ▶ **First Nation schools** have been created and are directed by First Nations themselves. Some First Nation schools have also become independent schools, recognized by the BC Ministry of Education.

Most of the information in this Toolkit applies to all schools, but there are some differences to be considered. Where relevant, the Toolkit highlights which policies or structures apply only to specific types of schools.

Students With Exceptionalities

The majority of the information included in this Toolkit relates to all First Nations students and families.

In a few cases only, some items might be specifically relevant for students who would benefit from carefully planned additional supports – commonly referred to as “students who have special needs,” “students who have exceptionalities,” or “students who have disabilities or diverse abilities.”

Because special education issues are quite complex, FNEESC and FNSA have created resources focused specifically on those topics. For example, please visit the FNEESC and FNSA web site to learn more about the Talking About Special Education pamphlet series.

1.0

Appreciating the importance of parental involvement in education

- 1.1 The Valuable Role of Parents in Student Success
- 1.2 The Value of Your Support for the School



The Valuable Role of Parents in Student Success

All parents want their children to make friends, have positive experiences, and succeed in school. But many parents underestimate how important they are in making those things happen.

The Research is Clear...

- ▶ Parents make a meaningful difference to their children's education.
- ▶ When families are involved in education, student achievement increases

How do you make a difference?

- ▶ **Simply demonstrating that you value education is more meaningful than you might think. Research shows that when families promote the benefits of a good education, students' outcomes improve.**
- ▶ **Creating a positive educational environment at home is essential. You support your children's educational success by ...**
 - talking to your children about school and why you think it is so important.
 - showing an interest in what they are learning.
 - encouraging your children to do their best.
- ▶ **Being able to read is a foundation for educational success. And the good news is, you don't have to be a teaching expert to build your children's reading skills. You help your children's literacy and language development by ...**
 - Helping your children access books, such as using the library in the school or in town to bring books into your home.
 - Reading to your children or listening to them read to you.
 - Telling stories.
 - Talking with your children about topics that interest them.
- ▶ **Students must attend regularly in order to succeed in school.**
 - Making sure your children arrive at school on time every day is crucial.

- Teaching children to arrive at school on time each day also builds habits that will benefit them throughout their lives.
- ▶ **Students need to be rested and ready to learn.**
 - Helping your children (even stubborn teenagers) get to bed at a reasonable time improves their ability to concentrate. Adequate sleep helps children and teens absorb new knowledge and manage their behaviour.
 - Encouraging your children (even picky eaters) to eat nutritious foods ensures they will have enough energy to learn and fully participate in school activities.
- ▶ **Meeting with teachers and school staff who support your children is critical. When school staff and families work in partnership, students benefit. What can you do?**
 - Get to know your children’s teachers early in the school year, and do what you can to build a positive relationship with them.
 - Read your children’s report cards carefully and pay close attention to their progress in school. Follow-up with teachers if you have specific questions.
 - Read reports and notices sent to you about your child’s progress, about whether they are keeping up with assignments, etc.
 - Attend parent-teacher meetings.
 - Work together with school staff to maintain high expectations for your children.
 - Share your knowledge about what your children do well and what helps them learn.
- ▶ **Students need routines and a space at home to help them study.**
 - Try to set aside regular times for your children to do homework, prepare for tests, read, etc.
 - As much as you can, find a time and space that is quiet, free from distractions, comfortable, and well-lit where your children can do their schoolwork. Don’t wait until too late in the evening, when your children will be tired and they should be going to bed.
 - Help your children organize the things they need for studying so they don’t waste time running around looking for supplies, materials, charge cords, etc.
 - Turn off phones so your children aren’t tempted to text and check the internet when they are supposed to be studying.
- ▶ **Do not underestimate the real difference you make in your children’s educational success. You are helping them learn and succeed each and every day.**

The Value of Your Support for the School

Family involvement in schools has a positive effect on student achievement. Education is a shared responsibility, relying on many people for success.

The Research is Clear...

Children of parents who are active in the school ...

- ▶ often get better grades.
 - ▶ perform better on tests.
 - ▶ have better attendance.
 - ▶ have fewer behaviour challenges.
- ▶ If you are able to volunteer in the school, you will get to spend valuable time with your children and learn more about their life at school.
 - ▶ Getting involved is a great way to show your children that you are interested in their education and that you think school is important.
 - ▶ Volunteering allows you to get to know school staff, which is really helpful if you need supports or information.
 - ▶ Parent volunteers are essential for organizing all kinds of school activities. They are a valuable resource and they make schools better.
 - ▶ Volunteering reinforces to your children the importance of contributing to the community.

Even if you haven't been involved in the past, it's never too late to start. In fact, there is often a shortage of parent volunteers at the high school level, even though parental involvement is just as beneficial as your children advance to higher grade levels.

Parents can contribute to schools in many different ways.

- ▶ If you are able to volunteer in the school, you can:
 - Share your special knowledge and skills, such as your talents for sewing, cooking, carpentry, carving, speaking your language, etc.
 - Read with students, either individually or in small groups
 - Listen to students read to you

- Help with music, arts and crafts, dancing, and other learning activities
- Lend a hand during field trips
- Help with breakfast and lunch programs
- Tutor students one-on-one
- Assist in the school library
- Help to coach a sports team
- Take photos at school events
- Help to keep bulletin boards neat and up to date
- Talk with students using your own language
- Assist students with extra math drills
- Volunteer in the computer lab
- Organize or assist with an after-school club
- Fundraise for the school

The list of things you can do to help is almost endless. And even things that seem small can make a big difference for school staff and students! You don't have to spare dozens and dozens of hours to make a real difference.

If you need other ideas, ask your child's teacher or principal for help.

And remember – not all activities will be right for everyone. You might need to try a few different activities before you find a volunteer role that is comfortable for you.

- ▶ **If you are not able to regularly volunteer in the school, that's fine; you can still make an important difference by visiting the school when possible.**
 - Attending the school for meet-the-teacher night, student concerts, family fun nights, sporting events, or other social gatherings will show that you value the school and education.
 - Participating in fun, informal events can help you become more familiar with the learning environment. It will also give you a chance to get to know your children's teachers in a relaxed atmosphere.
 - Attending a special event is a great way to show your children that you care about their life at school.
- ▶ **Parents can also provide invaluable support by helping to make decisions for the school. If your school has a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) or some other type of parent leadership group – get involved if you can. You do not have to be an education expert to contribute. Sharing your thoughts and ideas is enough.**

Tips For Volunteering

If you are able to volunteer, here are a few tips to remember.

- ▶ Read the school handbook so you are familiar with the school's rules and procedures.
- ▶ Be clear about how much time you have to help.
 - Don't be afraid to say no if a job will be too time consuming.
 - Be clear about what you can and cannot do up front, before plans are made.
- ▶ Talk to your children about your volunteering.
 - Remind them you are there to help everyone.
 - Most children like having their parents involved. If your children seem uncertain about your role, tell them you aren't there to watch them; you are assisting because the teacher and school need your help.
- ▶ If you see something that makes you uncomfortable, talk to the teacher or principal about it. Don't talk to other people about the issue without letting school staff know you have a concern.
- ▶ Let the teacher or school staff know if your plans change and you can't follow through on a commitment. People are counting on you to be there.
- ▶ Always be positive about the school, students, and families while you are volunteering.
- ▶ Remember to respect the confidentiality of other families and all students.
- ▶ Appreciate the importance of your contributions. Remember that volunteering not only benefits your family. It helps the classroom, the whole school, and the community by showing that education really matters.

And remember that parent volunteers are often asked to complete a criminal record check. This is very common in many schools.

2.0

Understanding the structure of the school system, how to build positive relationships with school staff for the benefit of students, and what to do if difficulties arise

- 2.1 What Is the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act?**
- 2.2 Parents' Education Rights and Responsibilities**
- 2.3 Roles and Responsibilities of Education Personnel**
- 2.4 Suggestions for Meeting With School Staff**
- 2.5 Questions To Ask At Parent Teacher Interviews**
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What Is the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act?

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration).

- ▶ The UN Declaration sets out standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world.
- ▶ It builds on existing human rights and fundamental freedoms and describes how they apply to Indigenous peoples.
- ▶ The UN Declaration emphasizes that Indigenous peoples have the right to:
 - live in dignity
 - maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions
 - pursue self-determination
- ▶ The UN Declaration is a framework for reconciliation.
- ▶ The UN Declaration has been adopted by 148 nations around the world.

Article 13

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

British Columbia's Implementation of the UN Declaration

- ▶ In November 2019, the Province of BC passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) into law.

The Declaration Act:

- aims to create a path to respecting the human rights of Indigenous peoples.
- requires the provincial government to make BC laws consistent with the UN Declaration.
- states that this work should be done with Indigenous peoples.
- requires the development and implementation of an action plan that is developed with Indigenous peoples in BC.
- requires the provincial government to produce an annual report with an update on how the laws of British Columbia are being made consistent with the UN Declaration and how the goals in the action plan are being achieved.
- states that the government may enter into agreements with Indigenous governing bodies.

Parents' Education Rights and Responsibilities

Parents have important rights and responsibilities for their children's education.

Promoting a shared understanding of parents' rights and responsibilities can help everyone work together for the benefit of students.

If Your Child Attends a Public School

The *BC School Act* sets out the rules for how those schools must operate. The *BC School Act* states that parents are entitled to:

- be informed of their children's attendance, behaviour, and progress in school
 - receive annual reports about the general effectiveness of education programs
 - examine all records kept for their child
 - be consulted regarding the placement of children with special needs
 - be involved in the planning, development and implementation of their child's education program
 - belong to a parents' advisory council (PAC)
- **In the public education system, a School Board oversees the operation of schools within each school district.**
- School Boards allocate the budget for all schools in the district, establish the policies and procedures for schools, and are responsible for ensuring that all decisions made by schools are fair.
 - School Boards are led by a Superintendent of Schools.

Parents have a right to:

- be informed of School Board activities and decisions.
- attend School Board meetings.
- participate in parent advisory meetings of the district.
- ask for the school district's policies and procedures, including information about any First Nations programs and special education support services provided.
- contact School Board members, who are called Trustees, to share concerns or ideas.
- run for a position on the School Board.

Parents should also be aware that public School Boards must establish Codes of Conduct for schools within their district. School Boards must make their Codes of Conduct available to the public and provide them to students and parents. Boards must ensure Codes of Conduct outline:

- types of discrimination that are not allowed
- what is acceptable behaviour
- what is unacceptable behaviour, including bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, intimidation, threatening and violent behaviours

Codes of Conduct must outline consequences for unacceptable behaviours. These consequences should be restorative and appropriate for students of various ages and unique support needs.

Remember that you have a right to see the school's Code of Conduct if you have a concern about how your child is being treated at school.

Parental Rights and All Schools

For students attending any type of school, you should expect to:

- be informed about and involved in making decisions that directly affect your child, including changes in the courses or programs they are enrolled in.
- be informed of all school policies, programs, rules, and routines.
- be consulted about and provide consent before any formal assessment of your child takes place, and be informed about the results.
- have your concerns listened and responded to promptly and respectfully.

- be able to speak to school staff, such as teachers, education assistants, or principals, when you have questions, concerns or need information, and bring along a support person if you want to.
- receive regular and understandable reports about your child's progress.
- be involved in planning and reviewing your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP), if they have one.

Parental Rights to Confidentiality

You have the right to expect that all information about you and your family will be treated confidentially by the school.

School staff have a professional obligation to share your information only with people directly involved in delivering education services to your child. This includes respecting the privacy of, among other things:

- ▶ Your personal contact information
- ▶ Data about your child's progress in school, reports cards, etc.
- ▶ Information about whether your child has been assessed, for what purposes, and the results
- ▶ Information about your child's health status
- ▶ Any legal matters related to your child

You should be asked to provide consent before your child's information is shared, including before it is transferred to another school.

BC's Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) also sets out rules for how information about you and your children can be collected, used, or shared. According to PIPA, you have a right to:

- ▶ Expect an organization to collect, use or disclose your personal information reasonably and appropriately.
- ▶ Know who in the organization is responsible for protecting your personal information.
- ▶ Expect that your personal information will be protected through appropriate security measures.
- ▶ Complain about how an organization handles your personal information if a problem arises.

If you have concerns about your privacy or how your confidential information is being handled, ask questions. Schools must let you know what policies and procedures are in place to protect the confidentiality of you and your children.

You can also take your concerns to the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia if you have a serious complaint. The Office states that:

- ▶ You should try to settle the matter directly by contacting the person responsible for managing privacy issues within the organization.
- ▶ If you are not satisfied with the organization's response, you may ask the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of B.C. to review the matter.

For more information or advice on how to proceed, you can contact:

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia

E-mail: info@oipc.bc.ca

Web Site: www.oipc.bc.ca

Telephone: (250) 387-5629

Parental Responsibilities

In addition to their rights, parents' responsibilities include the following.

- Ensure your children attend school regularly.
- Help make sure your children follow school policies, programs, rules, and routines.
- Share your concerns openly, clearly and immediately with appropriate school representatives.
- Respond to requests from the school for help in supporting your children's learning.
- Share your understandings about things that are going well for your children, and things that are not.

Roles and Responsibilities of Education Personnel

The first step in working positively with the school is knowing who to contact if you have concerns or need more information.

NOTE: Most schools employ people in the following positions, but there can be some differences in the specific roles and titles used in each school.

PRINCIPALS

Principals are responsible for leading schools. A principal's duties include:

- ▶ Making sure the school reflects the community's expectations
- ▶ Monitoring results and confirming that all students are learning and achieving at high levels
- ▶ Supporting all school staff so they can do their jobs well
- ▶ Ensuring the school is safe
- ▶ Managing school operations, including its rules and procedures, scheduling, busing, reporting to parents, etc.
- ▶ Communicating with the School Board or School Governing Authority
- ▶ Overseeing the conduct of students
- ▶ Managing the school budget, including funding for extra-curricular activities at times

You can contact the school principal if you have questions about the school generally or about your child's learning specifically.

CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Classroom teachers are responsible for leading the learning of all students in their classes. A teacher's duties include:

- ▶ Planning and delivering instruction
- ▶ Adapting teaching and learning activities to meet the needs of different students
- ▶ Ensuring that each student is meeting high expectations
- ▶ Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on each student's progress

- ▶ Communicating with parents about their child's education
- ▶ Supervising and coordinating the work of teaching assistants / education assistants
- ▶ Coordinating work with other support personnel, such as counsellors, therapists, etc.
- ▶ Helping to plan and implement strategies included in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students who have special learning needs (an IEP is a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and demonstrate learning)

Classroom teachers are key to the education of your child.

- Teachers spend the most time with students when they are at school.
- Research shows that teachers have the greatest impact on student's education outcomes.
- Research also shows that teachers are most effective when they work in partnership with parents and families to support students.
- ▶ **It can be very beneficial to get in touch with your children's teachers early in the school year to make a connection as soon as possible.**
- ▶ **Additionally, it is very important to participate when there are formal opportunities to meet with your children's teachers – such as parent-teacher nights, or parent-teacher-student conferences.**
- ▶ **You can also email or arrange to talk to your children's teacher at any other time if you have questions or concerns, or if you wish to discuss anything about your children's education. Regular informal communications can be helpful.**

TEACHING ASSISTANTS (TAs) / EDUCATION ASSISTANTS (EAs)

TAs and EAs work with students individually and in groups. They work under the supervision of classroom teachers. The duties of TAs or EAs may include:

- ▶ Helping teachers organize the classroom, supervise students, and assist with learning activities
- ▶ Helping students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meet their IEP goals
- ▶ Promoting students' social and emotional learning

Some TAs / EAs also may be specifically assigned to help with First Nations Language and Culture teaching.

EAs may help students who need assistance with personal care, or in some cases schools employ Care Aids or Personal Care Assistants to help with that role.

Note: Although parents may sometimes speak informally with a TA or EA about their child's specific learning needs, formal communications about students should always involve the teacher.

SUPPORT TEACHERS

Different types of support teachers, such as Learning Assistance Teachers or Resource Teachers, do not work in a specific classroom, but they provide valuable support to students who need extra help. Usually, the duties of support teachers include some combination of:

- ▶ Providing assistance to individual students and coordinating school-based teams who work with students who have special learning needs
- ▶ Coordinating IEP implementation strategies
- ▶ Helping students with their physical or behavioural needs
- ▶ Assisting students when they are moving to a new classroom or new school

FIRST NATIONS SUPPORT WORKERS

Sometimes called First Nations Liaison Workers, First Nations support staff are employed in many public schools to:

- ▶ Help support and improve education outcomes for First Nations students
- ▶ Sometimes lead specific programs for First Nations students

First Nations Support Workers are often available to help parents when they need information or to assist parents when they are meeting with school staff about their children's needs. You can always ask for their involvement.

OTHER PROFESSIONALS

School psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, counsellors, etc. also sometimes support students and are part of school-based teams. If several professionals are helping your child, someone should be assigned to coordinate your child's services and communicate with you regularly.

SUPPORT STAFF

Custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, and administrative staff all have very important roles in schools and contribute greatly to student success.

Suggestions for Meeting With School Staff

Parents should be fully informed and involved in making decisions about their children's education

- ▶ It is most beneficial when parents and school representatives work together to ensure that students get a good education and have their needs appropriately addressed.
- ▶ To help make that possible, it can be useful for parents to touch base with their children's teachers and introduce themselves informally at the beginning of the school year. Establishing a positive, friendly relationship will have meaningful benefits for everyone.
- ▶ Working together also sometimes requires formal meetings of parents and school staff. It sometimes involves meeting with other professionals and specialists, as well.

Meetings can be very helpful. They can allow you and relevant education personnel to:

- ▶ get to know one another and build stronger relationships
- ▶ talk about your child's strengths, learning preferences, and areas for growth and development
- ▶ discuss your child's progress in school
- ▶ plan how to maximize your child's success
- ▶ prepare your child for a transition to a new class or school
- ▶ resolve any issues or concerns, always with the best interests of your child the priority

Although they can be useful, meetings can also be intimidating.

Many parents feel nervous when they are meeting with professionals – especially about a subject as important as their child’s education.

The following are a few tips to help reduce any uncertainty you might feel about meetings with school staff.

BEFORE THE MEETING

- ▶ **Be clear about the purpose of the meeting.**
 - If you ask for a meeting, explain why you want it. That will help ensure the right people attend the meeting. It will also help everyone come ready with useful information and materials needed for the discussions.
 - If someone else has organized the meeting, you can ask: What is the purpose of the meeting? Is there an agenda? What decisions will be made? Do I need to bring any specific information with me?
- ▶ **Feel free to invite someone to come along to support you – perhaps a family member or someone from your community. Sometimes it helps to “have a second set of ears.”**
 - If you do bring someone to the meeting, let them know the purpose of the meeting and how they can help you.
- ▶ **Make a list of any questions you have. It is very easy to forget things during a meeting. Notes can help you stay focused on what you want to know most.**
- ▶ **Ask in advance who will be attending the meeting and their roles.**
- ▶ **If possible, have both parents attend meetings with school representatives, if relevant for your family. Don’t be afraid to ask to meet at a time that is convenient for everyone.**

DURING THE MEETING

- ▶ **Make sure you understand all of the information presented.**
 - Don’t hesitate to ask questions. The purpose of the meeting is to inform you about your child’s learning.
 - You should not be expected to understand educational jargon. If people are using unfamiliar terms, do not feel embarrassed about asking what the terms mean.
- ▶ **Try to have patience, but be assertive and firm about what you think. You do not have to agree with what is being proposed. You know your child best. What you have to say is important.**

- ▶ **Seek solutions to challenges. Do not focus on what you don't want; focus on what you do want.**
- ▶ **Review any decisions made before leaving the meeting.**
 - What are the next steps?
 - Who is responsible for any required follow-up?
- ▶ **Do not agree to anything you are not sure about.**
 - Take extra time if you need it. Agree to meet again if necessary.
 - Do not feel rushed. Make sure you feel ready before signing any documents.
- ▶ **If someone else has taken minutes of the meeting, ask for a copy.**
- ▶ **Take your own notes, or ask someone to come with you to help take notes.**
- ▶ **Do not hesitate to emphasize the importance of confidentiality if it helps you feel more comfortable.**

AFTER THE MEETING

- ▶ **Think about whether you are satisfied with the information you received and any decisions made.**
 - Check how you are feeling. If you are not feeling good after the meeting, try talking to a support person about your uncertainties or concerns.
 - Follow up to get more information if that will be helpful.
- ▶ **Review your notes of the meeting.**
 - If there is anything you don't understand, call someone who was at the meeting and ask them to explain it again.
 - If you are not sure what to expect next, call and ask for clarification.
- ▶ **Send an email to the people who were at the meeting.**
 - Describe your understanding of the major points and next steps.
 - Outline what decisions you believe were made.
 - State who you think is responsible for follow-up.
 - Keep a copy of the email.
 - Get help from a support person to assist you with follow-up if it will make you more comfortable.

Most importantly: ask as many questions as needed before, during, and after the meeting. Make sure you have adequate information. Only agree to decisions when you feel ready to do so.

Questions to Ask at Parent Teacher Interviews

- How is my child doing in your class?
- What topics was my child learning about this term? What skills and topics did my child grasp easily? What was more challenging? Can you provide examples? What can I do to help?
- How do you make learning culturally relevant for my child?
- What do you think are some of my child's strengths?
- Does my child get along well with the other students? If not, what do you think we should do about that?
- Does my child actively participate in classroom discussions?
- Is my child working at the right reading level for their age and grade? At the right level for math? If not, what will be done to make sure my child is performing at the right level? What can I do to support my child?
- How is my child's achievement in other subjects (First Nations language and culture, science, etc.)?
- Is my child on track to graduate with a Dogwood Diploma (which is the high school graduation diploma)? Is my child taking courses that are needed to go to post-secondary?
- Who is helping my child with education and career planning?
- What are the most important ideas or concepts my child has to understand by the end of the year?
- What are the most important things I can do to help my child be successful in school?
- What is the best way for me to contact you?
- Is there anything I am not asking that I should?
- How is the staff and school advancing reconciliation?

A Parent's Role in Special Education Planning

Note: The language used for this paper is complicated. Special education is sometimes referred to as inclusive education. Students who have diagnosed needs and require unique support services are sometimes referred to as students who have exceptionalities, students with special learning needs, students who have support needs, and students with disabilities and diverse abilities. The terms differ between systems and they are changing over time.

Family support is key to the success of all students. All schools and students benefit from family involvement – and parental and family input is especially valuable when planning interventions to assist students who have special education needs.

Families have knowledge, observations, and experiences that are vital for understanding students. Often, parents are most aware of their child's strengths and challenges. That information is very important in deciding whether a student might have a special learning need and, if so, what can be done to help.

- ▶ You should be provided full information about your child's education program so that you feel able to make good decisions.
- ▶ You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your child's learning.
- ▶ You should be involved in the design of your child's learning plan. You can help identify the best responses to your child's unique needs.
- ▶ You and school staff should work together to make sure that strategies used to support your child at school and at home are complementary. Consistency is crucial for the success of children and teens who have special education needs.

Who Supports Students Who Have Special Learning Needs?

Many types of professionals and resource people may be involved in supporting a student who has special needs. Depending on what each student needs, some of the following people may be asked to help.

- ▶ **Principals:** make sure that school staff receive the direction, information, and supports needed to ensure that all students are included and successful in school. Principals are

responsible for organizing relevant professional development for staff, and they advocate for necessary resources.

- ▶ **Classroom Teachers:** observe students regularly, so they can help identify the need for an assessment and implement strategies that build on students' strengths to help them succeed. Teachers are responsible for creating respectful classrooms that reflect the message that everyone belongs. If teachers don't know how to help a child, they must ask for appropriate assistance.
- ▶ **Learning Assistant Teachers or Resource Teachers:** may be employed in some schools to help classroom teachers. They may suggest strategies to support students, provide services to students, coordinate teams of professionals, and help the school set up structures to make sure all students can learn and develop to their full potential.
- ▶ **Education Assistants (EAs):** work with teachers to help students. They may work in a specific classroom, possibly with one child or with more children in groups. EAs are directed and supervised by the teacher or principal and they may help with personal care, learning activities, therapy programs designed by therapists, social interactions among students, and other activities.
- ▶ **Doctors:** can identify physical and mental health issues that might interfere with learning, and also recommend further medical testing and possible strategies that will help.
- ▶ **First Nations Education Directors, Coordinators and Family Resource Workers:** may help parents review relevant information, consult with professionals, and arrange appointments.
- ▶ **Education psychologists:** assess students' development in order to identify their strengths and any challenges that need to be addressed.
- ▶ **Psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers:** can help identify resources and ways to support children, teens, and their families.
- ▶ **Audiologists:** can test whether and how students hear different sounds, which impacts their learning.
- ▶ **Physical therapists:** diagnose and help promote healthy movement.
- ▶ **Occupational therapists:** help students with daily living and self-care skills.
- ▶ **Optometrists:** test and help strengthen students' vision.
- ▶ **Speech language therapists:** help build students' listening, speaking, and communication skills.

It may be overwhelming keeping track of all of the people who will be working with your child. But over time their roles will become clear and you can feel good knowing so many people are committed to helping your family.

More About the Role of Education Assistants (EAs)

EAs are critical for the success of students with exceptionalities. They can help convey the message that everyone belongs. Parents often report that the commitment and skills of EAs are key to their child's progress in school.

Given their importance, you may want to ask your principal the following questions if an EA is assigned to work with your child.

- ▶ How much time is an EA going to be spending with my child?
- ▶ How will the EA be supported so they have the specific skills needed to work with my child?
- ▶ How is the EA assigned to students / classrooms?
- ▶ Will union seniority affect the placement of the EA (for students attending a public school)?
- ▶ What happens when the EA gets sick? How will an appropriate substitute be arranged?

It may also be useful for you and the school to discuss and monitor the relationship of your child and the EA.

- ▶ EAs can be invaluable in helping your child. However, if an EA is overly attached to your child, it may be more difficult for your child to build their independence skills and learn to interact with others on their own.
- ▶ Parents and school staff can discuss how to balance your child's need for adequate supervision and safety, with opportunities for them to try things on their own or with help from their peers.

Who Identifies Children's Special Learning Needs?

- ▶ **Sometimes children are identified as having special needs before they enter school, perhaps by their parents, their doctor, or by daycare or pre-school workers.**
 - Early identification of a child's special needs can be very beneficial.
 - If you have concerns while your children are young, do not hesitate to reach out for help.
- ▶ **Once a child is in school, parents and/or teachers usually identify students' special learning needs.**
 - If you have questions or concerns about your child's achievement in school, reach out to their teacher.
 - All students are assessed regularly to determine whether they are performing at grade level. If your child's testing results concern you, raise the issue with school staff.

- ▶ Teachers or education assistants, based on their observations and/or student assessment results, may suspect that a child or teen might have exceptionalities. In that case, the school may suggest further investigation to find out for sure.
 - If school staff reach out to talk to you about your child's needs, try to listen calmly and thoughtfully. They are trying to help your child.
 - No one is to blame if a child has special learning needs. All that matters is combining efforts to make sure every child is successful.

Regardless of who first raises the possibility that a student might benefit from additional supports, you should be asked to provide your approval before any formal assessment of your child takes place. You should also be involved in planning any related follow-up

And remember that just being behind grade level does not mean that your child necessarily has a special learning need. Other factors may be impacting your child's learning. The school should discuss this with you if you have concerns.

Assessing and Identifying Learning Needs

It's important to identify a student's learning needs to ensure the right strategies and supports are put in place. The following information might be helpful.

- ▶ Early identification can be helpful to prevent challenges from growing, but some assessments are not always appropriate for primary students. Talk to your child's school about this issue.
- ▶ Assessments may be performed by different types of professionals.
- ▶ All assessment and diagnoses should lead to better learning opportunities for your child. *However, having a diagnosis is not needed for a student to receive supports. Your child has a right to receive all of the supports and services they need whether or not they have a formal diagnosis of a disability or exceptionality.*
- ▶ There may be a wait time before an assessment can be completed for your child. Talk to the school about why there might be a wait and what services your child will receive in the meantime.
- ▶ Assessments may need to be updated at various times throughout the student's K-12 education.
- ▶ School personnel should always consult and inform parents about assessments they feel are needed. Formal assessments need your written consent.

- ▶ Sometimes only you will know that your child has had a bad night or a medication change that may impact assessment results. It is in your child's best interests that you are informed of any assessments to be performed so you can provide important input.

Questions to ask about assessments

- ▶ What do you hope to find out from this assessment?
- ▶ Why is this assessment being done?
- ▶ Is previous information available about my child's strengths, learning style and needs?
- ▶ How is the assessment done? Has my child been told what to expect? Are they comfortable with the process?
- ▶ How long will it take to receive the results?
- ▶ Will I get a copy of the assessment report? Will I be asked to give approval before the report is shared with anyone? The answer to each of these questions should be yes!
- ▶ Can I speak to the assessor so that I can understand the results?

As a parent, you may have concerns about how well your child knows the person who will be doing the assessment. Unfamiliar situations and people can be overwhelming. You may wonder how well your child will do if the assessor is a stranger. You may also have concerns about when and where an assessment will take place.

You have the right to ask questions so you feel comfortable with the assessment process.

After an assessment, you should get a summarized report of the results. This report will be shared with others, including the school-based team and, as appropriate, the student.

- ▶ You must be informed about how the report will be made accessible to other people who will be working with your child.
- ▶ Ask to speak with the assessor if you need further information or help to interpret the results. It is your right to ask questions until you feel you fully understand the assessment results and what they mean for your child.

Working With Teams Who Support Your Child

Students who have unique learning needs often have a team of people who come together to support them in achieving their goals.

- ▶ Students can be involved on such teams in age-appropriate ways.
- ▶ You also have invaluable information about your child to bring to the teams. Do not underestimate your own knowledge and contributions.
- ▶ Many other people may bring important skills and knowledge to help your child, as well.

Different Types of Teams

Schools may use a variety of specific names for the groups of people who come together to help students with exceptionalities. The specific people involved in the teams may also vary.

The following types of teams may exist to help your child.

You have the right to ask the school about what teams are supporting your child and how you can be involved with them.

An “educational team”:

- ▶ Includes all the people who work together to help children succeed in school
- ▶ May include teachers, EAs, therapists, medical professionals, counsellors, social workers, Indigenous workers, consultants, child care consultants, etc.

A “school-based team”:

- ▶ Differs from an educational team
- ▶ Is a small group of school-based personnel that has a formal role and comes together regularly as a problem-solving unit to address a child's specific needs
- ▶ Includes teachers, the school principal, and other professionals (e.g., counsellors, psychologists, speech and language psychologists) who come together to discuss how to support students and the classroom teacher
- ▶ Parents and the student, as appropriate, and representatives from community service agencies may also be involved

If your child has a school-based team, you should be informed and you should provide consent for their learning program. School-based teams are most successful when parents are included as partners.

If you learn that your child has a school-based team, you may want to ask the principal or teacher the following questions:

- ▶ Who are the members of this team?
- ▶ What is their role?
- ▶ What types of assistance does each member provide?
- ▶ How will I be involved in the school-based team process?
- ▶ How will I be informed of planning meetings?
- ▶ How often does this team meet?

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) team:

- ▶ Is a specific team set up to plan IEPs for children who need them
- ▶ IEPs are described more below

Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

If your child has been identified as having an exceptionality, the school should contact you to discuss the creation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and demonstrate learning.

- ▶ An IEP will be developed by a group of people who will combine their expertise for the benefit of your child. You will be an important member of that group. You have the most expertise about your child – what they do well, what is hard for them, what kinds of things they like to do most, etc.
- ▶ The IEP will outline any additions, changes, or adaptations to the regular school program that will help your child succeed – both within and outside of school.
- ▶ Parents must be consulted and should be involved in developing their child's IEP.
- ▶ Once written, the IEP will be the plan to help your child perform as well as possible in the classroom, and to transition smoothly from one setting to another or from one grade to another.

- ▶ The IEP will help you and the school monitor your child's progress and growth. It will provide an ongoing record of what services have been provided for your child.
- ▶ IEPs should be reviewed regularly throughout the school year and updated at scheduled reporting periods.
- ▶ Your child's goals will be outlined in the IEP. The goals should be based on reliable information about your child's strengths, skills, challenges and performance, all of which can evolve over time. This means each IEP will likely need ongoing changes to keep it relevant and up-to-date.
- ▶ Using the IEP, you and the school's staff can continue to combine your knowledge, experience, and commitment to work together in the best interests of your child.

Often when students have an IEP, a person is identified who coordinates the education services. This person is often referred to as an IEP Coordinator or Case Worker.

- ▶ You will want to develop a relationship with that person.
- ▶ You may want to ask the coordinator the following questions:
 - When and how often can we meet?
 - What is the best way to communicate?
 - How will I be notified of planning meetings?
 - How will I be involved?
 - Will my child be out of the regular class for any period of time. If so, why? How often?

Note: Some students who have an IEP may be placed on a modified program. A modified program may be appropriate for a few students with serious special needs, but it is not necessary for the majority of students who have an IEP.

- ▶ Modifications are changes made to instruction and assessment approaches that result in individualized learning goals and outcomes that are different from the regular learning outcomes of a course or subject.
- ▶ Students on a modified program will leave school with the School Completion Certificate, which is **not** a graduation certificate. This is a significant decision.
- ▶ If your child is going to be placed on a modified program, ask why. Make sure you fully understand the decision before you agree.
- ▶ If your child is on a modified program, remember that this does not always have to be a permanent or long term solution. The use of modifications can be reviewed to make sure you feel fully informed and comfortable with the decision.

- ▶ The critical decision of whether a student's education program should include modifications should be made carefully and thoughtfully, in consultation with parents. It should consider each student's educational, career, and life goals and plans.

OTHER RESOURCES TO KNOW ABOUT

- ▶ **Inclusion BC** is a non-profit provincial organization that advocates for the rights and opportunities of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Inclusion BC members include people with intellectual disabilities, their families, and organizations that serve them.

The Inclusion BC web site includes a free Parent's Handbook on Inclusive Education that provides a wealth of information for families. See <https://inclusionbc.org/resource-types/family-resource/>

Some of the information included in this section was borrowed from the Inclusion BC Handbook.

The Inclusion BC Handbook also includes an online template document for creating a one-page profile of your child. It can help you share a summary about your child at the beginning of every school year. Some parents find it helpful to create a one-page profile to introduce their child to new teachers. See https://inclusionbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2021-09_OnePageProfile_Sample.pdf

- ▶ **The Family Support Institute of BC** is a provincial society committed to supporting families who have a family member with a disability. It is a grass roots family-to-family organization with a broad volunteer base. Its supports and services are FREE to any family.

The Family Support Institute has created MyBooklet BC – a FREE online tool that families and people with disabilities can use to create a beautiful and personalized information booklet for a loved one or for themselves.

To consider whether this resource would help you, consider the following questions.

- Are you tired of constantly repeating your “story” to doctors, teachers, therapists, friends and family?
- Do you wish all your important information was in one document?
- Do you wish you could share more than just the medical and diagnostic facts?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you'll want YOUR OWN myBooklet now!

It's as easy as 1-2-3 to create a booklet

1. Create a FREE user account.
2. Fill in the forms you want.
3. Print YOUR OWN myBooklet and share! Or if you don't have a printer, ask the school or your Band Office to print it for you.

See <https://mybookletbc.com>

Helping All Students Build Connections

- ▶ When students experience positive social interactions and acceptance from their peers, they show improvements in social skills and self-esteem, transition and communications skills, and language and intellectual development.
- ▶ Children and young people who do not have exceptionalities often report that being with students who have disabilities improves their self-concept, social awareness, and acceptance of differences.
- ▶ Helping children develop healthy friendships is one of the most important goals that most parents have for their children.

But for some children making friends isn't always easy. It is a skill that everyone can improve with learning opportunities and practice.

- ▶ For children who have them, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) often include social and friendship related goals and strategies.

You can help with this important part of your child's health and wellness by working with your school on the following strategies.

Develop a Friendship Mindset

- ▶ Be aware of the quantity and quality of your child's social opportunities ... in the classroom, in school-wide activities, and in before and after school programs. Are the opportunities enough? Can more be done?
- ▶ Talk with your child's teacher about how your child interacts with other students. Ask questions and work together to make sure your child feels comfortable and included.
- ▶ Ask about whether your child is being encouraged to do the same things other students are doing in school and in the community. If not, why? What can be done to help them be included as much as possible?
- ▶ If your child has one, talk with the school team that helps your child about appropriate social goals to include in the IEP.

- ▶ Understand the importance of your child interacting with peers, not just spending time with adults, such as teachers and other school support staff. Work together with the school to make sure your child has opportunities to be independent and spend time with other students whenever possible.
- ▶ Talk to your child about how people are and are not alike. Emphasize that differences are not bad. Diversity is a strength.
- ▶ Talk with your child about how to interpret other students' behaviours. Help them understand body language and other ways people communicate that may not be obvious. Some students find it difficult to read non-verbal cues.
- ▶ Prepare your child for social interactions by practicing together what they can say to other students.
- ▶ Build your child's confidence by talking about their strengths. Reassure them that everyone finds it difficult to make friends sometimes, but we all get better at this when we try and practice.
- ▶ Believe your child can not only develop friendships, but would make a wonderful friend – and make sure school staff demonstrate the same attitude!

What To Do If You Have Concerns About Your Child's Education

It is very valuable for parents and teachers to get to know each other early in the school year. Clear communications and positive relationships can often prevent misunderstandings from arising.

It is important to know that there is a process to resolve concerns with the school.

If problems do arise, some general suggestions include the following.

- ▶ Begin by talking with your child so you fully understand their experience and what has made you feel concerned.
- ▶ Try to think about all points of view. Keep an open mind and try to calmly determine what happened.
- ▶ Decide if your child can handle the issue on their own or if your support is needed. Step in when you think it is necessary to do so.
- ▶ If you decide that you should act on a concern, remember to keep a record of the phone calls you make, letters or emails you send, and meetings that take place.

It is important to know that there is a process to resolve concerns with the school. In some cases, if you skip a step in the process, you may be asked to begin again by reaching out to someone else.

- ▶ Most concerns are best dealt with at the school level. You should always start there.
- ▶ The teacher is usually the first person you should approach with a concern. Remember, teachers are ultimately responsible for the education of every student in their classroom.
- ▶ If for some reason you can't reach the teacher or you can't resolve the issue together, then you can approach the school principal.
- ▶ If you don't get an adequate response at the school level, other options are available, as described on the following pages.

NO MATTER WHERE YOUR CHILD ATTENDS SCHOOL ...

STEP ONE: Meet With Your Child's Teacher

- ▶ You can send the teacher your concern in writing, or you can reach out by phone or in-person.
- ▶ If you need to meet, set up a meeting time that is convenient for you both.
- ▶ If it will make you feel more comfortable, bring someone with you as a supporter.
- ▶ When you meet, outline your concerns clearly.
- ▶ Listen carefully to what the teacher says. Take notes and write down your questions and the answers you receive.
- ▶ After the meeting, consider whether you are satisfied. Do you feel you made progress? Is another meeting necessary? Will it help to talk to the same person, or should you talk to someone else?
- ▶ If you do not feel that meeting with the teacher resolved the matter, let the teacher know how you feel. Perhaps suggest that you both meet with the principal to discuss your concerns. Let the teacher know that you appreciate their time, but you feel you need to take the matter to the principal.

STEP TWO: Meet With the School Principal

- ▶ If it will help you feel more comfortable, ask a support person to attend the meeting with you.
- ▶ State your concerns clearly and describe the steps you have already taken.
- ▶ State what you would like to happen next. What do you expect? What would resolve your concern?
- ▶ Listen carefully and take notes.
- ▶ At the end of the meeting, restate what you think will happen next. Make sure you agree about any follow-up to take place.
- ▶ Send a letter or email to confirm what you think is going to be done.

If meeting with the teacher and principal does not resolve your concerns, the next steps depend on what type of school your child attends.

IF YOUR CHILD ATTENDS A FIRST NATION SCHOOL ...

STEP THREE: Go To the School Governing Authority

- ▶ Contact the School Governing Authority and follow the procedures established by your community to resolve disputes about school matters.
-

IF YOUR CHILD ATTENDS A PRIVATE OR INDEPENDENT SCHOOL ...

STEP THREE: Go To the Independent School Board

- ▶ Involve your community's Education Director / Education Coordinator or other support person, if it will help.
 - ▶ Contact the Independent School Board. Ask for and follow the Board's policies and procedures to resolve disputes.
-

IF YOUR CHILD ATTENDS A PUBLIC SCHOOL ...

STEP THREE: Talk To School District Representatives

- ▶ At the school district level, there are a variety of people who you can contact, including the Superintendent, a First Nation District Principal, a Director of Instruction, or a representative of the First Nations Education Council for the district.
- ▶ Each school district is required to have a code of conduct and an appeal process for decisions or non-decisions that significantly affect the education, health, or safety of a student. Parents have a right to ask about the school district's appeal process. The process is different for each school district; it usually involves submitting an appeal in writing, meeting with a representative of the school district, a review by the Board, and formal communication of the appeal results.
- ▶ Many district appeal policies require that people try to resolve concerns at the school level before making an appeal to a School Board. That is why starting with the teacher and principal is best.

- ▶ You can have support people communicate with the school district with you, such as a close friend, or possibly a representative of your First Nation.
- ▶ Follow the same suggestions listed for meeting with the principal.

If you are still not satisfied after meeting with the School Board ...

STEP FOUR: Superintendent Of Appeals

- ▶ **If your child attends a public school, you can appeal to a BC Superintendent of Appeals, as long as the matter relates to:**
 - Expulsion from an educational program
 - Suspension from an educational program
 - Suspension from an educational program where no other educational program is made available
 - Distributed learning required as part of a disciplinary matter
 - A decision not to provide a student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP)
 - Consultation about placement of a student with special needs and the provision of an IEP
 - Bullying behaviours, including intimidation, harassment or threats of violence by a student against another student
 - Exclusion due to a medical condition that endangers others

You cannot make an appeal to a Superintendent of Appeals until you have completed an appeal to your School Board.

If you want to proceed with this appeal, you need to submit a Notice of Appeal form and a copy of the School Board's appeal decision. See more information at:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/student-disputes-and-appeals>

If you need to pursue a concern further ...

STEP FIVE: Office Of the BC Ombudsperson

If the appeal process is not satisfactory, the Office of the BC Ombudsperson can investigate complaints about public schools and all 60 school districts in BC regarding decisions made and services provided to students.

“Have a complaint and feel like no one is listening? Don't like the way you've been treated by a public organization? Having problems getting services you need? We listen. We investigate. We help find solutions.” www.bcombudsperson.ca

- ▶ The BC Ombudsperson Office is specifically committed to advancing and supporting reconciliation and ensuring all Indigenous peoples across BC are treated fairly.
- ▶ The Ombudsperson Office cannot make a binding decision, but it can make recommendations and will try to help resolve issues.
- ▶ The Ombudsperson Office website has a number of tools to help you access assistance. See www.bcombudsperson.ca

If you need to pursue a concern further ...

STEP SIX: BC Human Rights Tribunal

If a School Board makes a decision that you believe discriminates against your child on the basis of Indigenous identity, ancestry, race, disability, or other grounds, you can file a complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal. The Tribunal is responsible for accepting, screening, mediating and adjudicating human rights complaints. The Tribunal offers the parties an opportunity to try to resolve a complaint through mediation. If that process does not resolve the complaint, the Tribunal holds a hearing.

- ▶ To make a complaint, you begin by submitting a form. On that form, you can self-identify as Indigenous and ask the Tribunal to contact you. Then the Tribunal will call to:
 - explain the process and options for proceeding
 - talk about including Indigenous protocols in the process
 - talk about Indigenous ways to deal with the complaint
- ▶ The Tribunal has mediators who can help the parties agree about how to solve a complaint. Mediation is voluntary. An Indigenous person can tell the Tribunal that they want:
 - a traditional ceremony before or after the mediation, such as a smudge, prayer, or song
 - an Indigenous mediator
 - an Indigenous dispute resolution approach

More information about supports available through the BC Human Rights Tribunal can be found at www.bchrt.bc.ca

FOR ALL TYPES OF SCHOOLS

BC Ministry of Education Teacher Regulation Branch

If you have a concern about the conduct or competence of a teacher who has been certified by the BC Ministry of Education, you can make a written complaint to the Commissioner for Teacher Regulation.

The Commissioner for Teacher Regulation is responsible for overseeing how BC certified teachers behave and how well they do their jobs. The Commissioner does not have a role for other school staff.

Before submitting a complaint to the Commissioner, you should discuss your concerns with the teacher or principal. If relevant, you should also contact the School Governing Authority or School Board.

If your concerns about an educator are not adequately addressed at those levels, you can contact the Commissioner for Teacher Regulation and ask for assistance.

More information about reaching the Teacher Regulation Branch is available at: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/standards-for-educators/complaint_faq_tools.pdf

All BC certified teachers are expected to uphold the following professional standards. (See https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/standards-for-educators/edu_standards.pdf for more detail about the standards).

Professional Standards for BC Educators effective June 19, 2019

All BC Certified teachers are expected to abide by the following standards. If you have a concern about a teacher's conduct or behaviour, you can contact the BC Teacher Regulation Branch to make a complaint.

1. **Educators value the success of all students. Educators care for students and act in their best interests.**

2. **Educators act ethically and maintain the integrity, credibility and reputation of the profession.**

3. **Educators understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development.**

4. **Educators value the involvement and support of parents, guardians, families and communities in schools.**

5. **Educators implement effective planning, instruction, assessment and reporting practices to create respectful, inclusive environments for student learning and development.**

6. **Educators demonstrate a broad knowledge base and an understanding of areas they teach.**

7. **Educators engage in professional learning.**

8. **Educators contribute to the profession.**

9. **Educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and the future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and culture of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.**

What to Know About Choosing Courses

FNESC and FNSA have created Career Journeys First Nations Career Role Model Resource Guides to raise awareness about career possibilities, and to show examples of how to navigate education and training pathways to those careers. See <http://www.fnesc.ca/careerjourneys-2/> for more information.

The courses your child takes in school are very important. Your child's choice of courses will impact their future options after high school – including their access to a range of jobs, training programs, and post-secondary opportunities.

Parents have the right to know what courses their children are taking and if those courses are going to be changed for any reason.

Remember:

- ▶ The courses children take in early grades affect which courses they are able to take later. When your children are still young, ask school staff if they are on track to take the right senior level courses.
- ▶ Your support at the high school level remains invaluable. Teens continue to need help from their parents as they navigate school and prepare for their next steps after graduation.
- ▶ Students must take specific courses in grades 10, 11, and 12 in order to receive the BC Certificate of Graduation, usually called the “Dogwood Diploma”.
- ▶ A Dogwood Diploma is the high school graduation certificate students receive if they complete all of the provincial graduation requirements. The Dogwood should be the goal for almost all students.
- ▶ Parents should regularly check whether their children are taking courses that will lead to the Dogwood Diploma.

If students are not taking the required courses, they may receive the British Columbia School Completion Certificate (Evergreen Certificate) instead of the Dogwood Diploma. The Evergreen is intended to celebrate success in learning but it is not recognized as a certificate of graduation.

The Evergreen is intended for students who have very serious special learning needs. It is not meant for the majority of students. ***Many post-secondary programs will not accept students who finish grade 12 with a School Completion Certificate.***

Some students who do not meet the requirements of a Dogwood Diploma may receive an Adult Dogwood. The Adult Dogwood may not provide students the same opportunities for post-secondary. The Adult Dogwood is meant for adult learners (18 years of age and older) who want to complete high school with a diploma. ***The Adult Dogwood is not meant for school-age students.***

- ▶ **If your child is on a path for the Evergreen or Adult Dogwood Diploma, ask questions.**
 - Who made the decision and why? Why is your child not on a path to the Dogwood Diploma?
 - Your agreement is needed about any decisions that will impact your child's future choices.

- ▶ **It is also important to know if your child is on a modified program. An adapted or modified program may be appropriate for some students who have very serious special needs, but it is not necessary for the majority of students.**
 - If your child is going to be placed on a modified program, find out why.
 - Ask questions. Make sure you have a full explanation about the reasons for the decision before you agree.
 - Students on a modified program will graduate with the School Completion Certificate, not the Dogwood. This will affect their future opportunities.

And remember ...

- ▶ **Just because your child meets all of the course requirements to earn a Dogwood Diploma doesn't necessarily mean that they will meet requirements for post-secondary.**
 - For example, Workplace Math 11 meets the math requirement for graduating with a Dogwood Diploma. However, it does not meet the entrance requirements of most post-secondary institutions or specific post-secondary programs.

- ▶ **If you have questions about the courses your child is taking, talk to the school counsellor or the teacher.**

- ▶ Graduation requirements can change over time. Keep asking if your child is on track to graduate with the Dogwood Diploma and whether they are taking courses that will lead them to the post-secondary or training opportunities that are right for them.
- ▶ See the Dogwood Diploma at a glance on the Ministry of Education web site: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/graduation#dogwood>

A PARENT'S ROLE IN CAREER PLANNING

You may also want to talk to a counsellor or teacher for help with career planning.

- ▶ Many jobs require specific post-secondary education programs or training.
- ▶ Often, specific courses are needed to access post-secondary and training programs.
- ▶ It is important that students find out early what courses they will need to achieve their goals. They also should know what grades they will need in high school courses to get accepted into the post-secondary or training programs that interest them.
- ▶ Math 12 and English First Peoples 12 or English 12 are required for most post-secondary options. Students should work toward those courses to allow them a range of choices later.

FNESC and the FNSA have published a document to help with career planning ideas.

- ▶ *The Career Journeys First Nations Career Role Model Resource Guides* are designed to raise awareness about career possibilities, and to show examples of how to navigate education and training pathways to those careers.

The materials are intended for intermediate and secondary grade levels. They include video interviews, a teacher resource book, a parent and student guide, and classroom posters.

See <http://www.fnesc.ca/careerjourneys-2/> for more information.

3.0

Thinking about how to create healthy and supportive learning environments at home

- 3.1 The Importance of Regular School Attendance
- 3.2 The Link Between Sleep and Success in School
- 3.3 Eating Together Can Help With School Success
- 3.4 Routines Can Help Kids Get to School on Time
- 3.5 The Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities
- 3.6 Tips for Creating a Family Technology Use Plan
- 3.7 Keeping Up With Technology Use
- 3.8 What To Know About Vaping
- 3.9 How to Talk to Your Children About Drug and Alcohol Awareness
- 3.10 Helping Children Deal With Traumatic News or Events
- 3.11 Talking With Children and Teens About Body Image
- 3.12 Addressing Concerns About Violence and Gangs



The Importance of Regular School Attendance

- ▶ Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school – and themselves.
- ▶ You can help your children start building this habit early so they learn that going to school on time, every day is important.

Good attendance will help your children do well in school, in post-secondary, and later at work.

Did you know?...

- ▶ By encouraging good attendance, you will make an important difference to the education of your children. Regular attendance and arriving at school on time is key to educational success.
- ▶ Challenges to daily attendance are unavoidable; illness and pressing issues arise, of course. But try not to let absences add up! Studies show that students who miss 18 or more school days each year usually suffer academically!
- ▶ It doesn't matter if absences are excused or unexcused. Being late and leaving school early also matter. They all mean lost time in the classroom, and that means a lost opportunity to learn.
- ▶ Attendance matters as early as kindergarten! Studies show that students who miss too many days in Kindergarten and Grade 1 are more likely to struggle with reading by third grade.
- ▶ Students with good attendance are more likely to graduate from high school.
- ▶ Students who have good attendance are less likely to be involved in behaviours that will get them in trouble. Studies show that students who attend school regularly are less likely to break the law and go to jail later in life.
- ▶ Children and teens are safer in school than out on the street.

What families do is key.

- ▶ A regular bedtime and morning routine can help your children make it to school on time and ready for the day ahead.
- ▶ Get to know your children's teachers! Learn about the school's attendance policies. Keep in regular touch so you know how your children are doing.
- ▶ Make sure you make plans for transportation to school before the school year begins, especially if you need to make arrangements for busing.
- ▶ Let your children know that attendance matters to you. By learning how to show up for school every day, your children are learning that it is important to show up for work every day later in their lives.
- ▶ Encourage your children to go to school unless they are truly sick.
- ▶ Try to avoid having older children stay home from school to care for their younger siblings.
- ▶ Try to avoid booking medical appointments during school hours if you can. Try not to schedule any family trips on school days unless you have to.
- ▶ Ask the community and school if attendance incentives are available, and how your child can be considered.
- ▶ Provide regular study times and a quiet area for doing homework so your children don't avoid school because their assignments are not complete.
- ▶ Ask for help if you need it. What services are available in your community? Can the school help you access any resources you might need?
- ▶ Join with other parents to make an attendance commitment. Agree to help one another if something comes up that will make getting to school difficult.
- ▶ Contribute to your school's efforts to address absenteeism. Do what you can to help improve attendance for all students.

The Link Between Sleep and Success in School

- ▶ Getting enough sleep is vital for students to succeed.
- ▶ Children who are well rested have fewer behavioural and emotional challenges, they are better able to cope with stress, and they generally feel more positive and happy.

If getting your kids to bed on time is a struggle for your family, you are not alone. Studies show that a majority of Canadian teens get less than the recommended amount of sleep.

Why does it matter?

Research shows:

- ▶ Adequate sleep raises students' academic achievement and participation in extracurricular activities.
- ▶ Children and teens who do not get enough sleep are twice as likely to be hyperactive, stressed, and report poor mental health compared to students who do get enough sleep.
- ▶ Over time, lack of sleep can contribute to anxiety and depression.
- ▶ Sometimes, student behaviours may be misunderstood because of a sleep issue. For example, students who need more sleep may appear to be aggressive, irritable, or disinterested in school – when really they are just overtired.
- ▶ Getting enough sleep is tied to healthy growth and development, and it can help children and teens maintain a healthy weight.
- ▶ Adequate sleep benefits immune function and lowers risk of accidents.
- ▶ Learning, memory, focus and attention are all connected to the quantity and quality of sleep children and teens get each night.
- ▶ Children and teens who get enough sleep are more creative and better problem-solvers. They also have more energy, and they are better able to build and maintain good relationships with others.

Getting more sleep can promote:

- ▶ Physical health
- ▶ Emotional well-being
- ▶ Quality of life

How much sleep is enough?

The Canadian Sleep Society recommends the following average amount of sleep, but every individual is different. Some children and teens need more sleep than average.

Infants	12 - 15 hours total, including naps
Toddlers (1-3 years)	12 hours, including naps
Preschoolers (3-5 years old)	11.5 hours
School-age children (5-12 years old)	9 hours
Teens	8 - 9 hours
Adults	6 - 9 hours

These family habits can help everyone in your household get enough zzzzzzz's.

- ▶ Try to go to bed at the same time every night. Going to bed a little later than usual once in a while for a special occasion is ok, but try to get back to your regular routine as soon as possible.
- ▶ Don't drink pop, tea or coffee with caffeine past noon.
- ▶ Exercise (run, jump and play) three hours before bed to help get ready for sleep.
- ▶ Avoid big meals right before bed.
- ▶ Create a bedtime routine that can act as a "cue" for sleep, like having a bath, listening to quiet music, reading, storytelling, etc.
- ▶ Turn off electronics 2 hours before bed and don't keep electronics in the bedroom.

References

- ▶ A Better Night's Sleep for All. Heart-Mind Online. <https://heartmindonline.org/resources/a-better-nights-sleep-for-all>
- ▶ Are Canadian Children Getting Enough Sleep? Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/canadian-children-getting-enough-sleep-infographic.html>
- ▶ Sleep: Benefits and Recommended Amounts. Aboutkidshealth. <https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/article?contentid=645&language=english>

Eating Together Can Help with School Success

It sounds easy enough ... sit down with your children to enjoy a good meal together. But we all know that busy schedules can make this simple goal a challenge.

Eating together and having a conversation with a close adult at least four times a week has been shown to have positive effects on children's health and social development.

Why does it matter?

Research shows that eating together regularly is an effective strategy for improving school performance and preventing high risk behaviours in youth.

The good news is you don't have to be perfect.

- ▶ Eating together and having a conversation with a close adult at least four times a week has been shown to have positive effects on children's health and social development.

What can you do to make this happen?

- ▶ If dinner together doesn't work out, try breakfast instead.
- ▶ If you don't have time to prepare a fancy meal, don't worry. It doesn't matter what you eat. Being together is what counts.
- ▶ When you have more time to cook, involve everyone. Cooking together teaches children and youth lifelong skills – and it shares the workload.
- ▶ Turn off TV and computer screens when you are at the table. Talking to each other is the critical part of the family meal.
- ▶ Avoid distractions by turning off phones and other devices.
- ▶ Focus on making your meal together stress-free. Leave difficult topics for another time.

- ▶ Use mealtimes to learn about what's important to your children.
- ▶ Ask your children to describe their day. Listening to what they say will tell you a lot about how they are experiencing school.
- ▶ Use your time eating together as an opportunity to encourage your children and tell them you are proud of their efforts and achievements. This simple practice will help your children succeed in school.

References

Adapted from *Family Meals Improve Connection and Confidence*. Heart-Mind Online.

<https://heartmindonline.org/resources/family-meals-improve-connection-and-confidence>

Routines Can Help Kids Get to School On Time

Give yourself and your children enough time to get ready for school each day. No TV on weekday mornings can help.

Set a regular bedtime schedule. Consider your child's age when choosing an appropriate time.

- ▶ **Plan ahead the night before.**
 - Plan and pre-prepare breakfast
 - Have your children choose their clothes and shoes the night before
 - Pack backpacks with completed homework and snacks/water
- ▶ **Set a regular bedtime schedule. Consider your child's age when choosing an appropriate time.**
- ▶ **If your children are often late for school, have them go to bed 10 minutes earlier and get up 10 minutes earlier.**
- ▶ **Have kids bathe or shower in the evening instead of the morning.**
- ▶ **Help your children relax before bedtime with a story or book. Avoid the stimulation of television.**
- ▶ **Have schoolwork and lunches ready and laid out, ready to go.**
- ▶ **Create a special folder for completed assignments so your children have their schoolwork organized and at hand.**
- ▶ **Have your child walk to school or the bus stop with another child who is always on time.**
- ▶ **Limit / balance extra-curricular activities. Don't let your kids become so busy that they don't have enough time to sleep and stay organized for school.**
- ▶ **Have a back-up plan for cold weather and organize cold weather gear the night before.**
- ▶ **Get proper rest and go to bed early yourself. Your health and well-being are important, too.**

The Benefits of Extra-curricular Activities

There are many reasons to encourage your children to take part in programs that take place outside of regular school hours. This might include sports, art, dance, and other types of programs that are offered by the community, or before or after-school “extra-curricular activities” that are sponsored by the school.

Extra-curricular activities can reinforce the lessons students are learning in their classrooms. They also offer an opportunity for students to apply their academic skills in a real-world context.

These opportunities are far more than just fun activities that keep students busy. They have been shown to:

- ▶ improve student-school connections, which is very important for student achievement;
 - ▶ improve students’ social skills and teamwork;
 - ▶ build students’ self-confidence and sense of self;
 - ▶ teach leadership, time management, and organizational skills;
 - ▶ enhance students’ self-discipline, commitment, and ability to stick with tasks and get them done;
 - ▶ help students explore their interests and expand their perspectives; and
 - ▶ encourage physical activity, engagement, and healthier habits.
- ▶ **Well-planned extra-curricular activities can reinforce the lessons students are learning in their classrooms. They also offer an opportunity for students to apply their academic skills in a real-world context.**

- ▶ Many extracurricular activities can provide meaningful opportunities to integrate First Nations' language, culture, and traditions into students learning – which is extremely valuable for many, many reasons.
- ▶ Working hard and mastering new skills in a fun, relaxed – and sometimes competitive – setting allows students to be successful without the pressure of getting a good grade. It can help students learn to take risks and be resilient – which means being able to better cope with challenges and bounce back when things don't go as planned.
- ▶ Research has shown that students who participate in extra-curricular or school-based enrichment activities have:
 - higher grades
 - better attendance
 - more positive attitudes and perceptions toward their school
 - fewer behaviour issues
 - higher learning goals

Of course, it is important to avoid picking too many activities. Schoolwork and sleep are important, too.

So strive for balance, and encourage your children to find an extra-curricular activity that matches their interests. Then enjoy watching them have fun ... knowing that they are also learning valuable skills and healthy habits at the same time.

References

Ahmad, M., Rahman, M.F., Rahman, A.M., and Al-Azad, MAS. 2015, December. *Effect of Extra-curricular Activity on Student's Academic Performance*. JAFMC Bangladesh, Vol. 11, No. 2.

Council for Children's Rights. 2019. *The Effects of a Positive School Environment*. www.cfcrights.org.

Crimson. 2015. Top 8 Benefits of Extracurricular Activities for High School Students. www.crimsoneducation.org.

Tips for Creating a Family Technology Use Plan

In a world where children are “growing up digital,” it’s important to help them learn about healthy technology use so they remain safe and healthy.

Aim for a balanced approach to technology by deciding as a family how much screen time is appropriate and what “screen-less” activities are important.

- ▶ When used thoughtfully and appropriately, digital media can enhance daily life.
- ▶ When used inappropriately or without thought, technology can displace many important activities, such as face-to-face interactions, family-time, outdoor-play, exercise, unplugged downtime, and sleep.
- ▶ Limiting children’s use of devices can also help ensure they are well rested and able to attend school regularly, on-time, and ready to learn.
- ▶ Consider making a family plan to ensure that technologies work well for you and your children.

Some ideas for creating a family technology use plan are outlined on the following pages.

SCREEN FREE ZONES

CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ **Keeping screens away from the dinner table and limiting technology use when visiting others helps to encourage important conversations and build invaluable relationships. Keeping devices outside the bedroom is important for many reasons.**
 - Incoming messages and calls will interfere with sleep; both audio and vibrating alerts can wake up children and teens.
 - It is important to help children avoid the temptation to use or check devices when they should be sleeping – during the night or too early in the morning.
 - Light emitted by TVs or mobile screens can affect the quality of sleep.

OUR PLAN

Mobile devices and TVs are not allowed in the following screen-free zones:

- At the table when we eat
- When we are visiting grandparents and other family members
- In bedrooms
- Other _____



SCREEN-FREE TIMES

CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ Using a mobile device or watching TV before bed can interfere with sleep. Too much screen time can also distract from other important activities, such as interacting with others, staying fit, and getting ready for school.

OUR PLAN

We will limit our screen time to _____ hours per day.

If we are using screens in the evening, we will:

- Turn the brightness on the screen down
- Not play games or watch videos or TV shows that are intense or scary

Mobile devices and TVs are not allowed:

- One hour before bedtime
- At dinner time
- At breakfast when we should be getting ready for school
- Other _____

SCREEN-FREE SICK DAYS

CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ Research shows that children and teens often want to stay home from school so they can use their devices.

OUR PLAN

Mobile devices and TVs are not allowed:

- When we stay home from school

SCREEN “SHOW AND TELL” TIMES

CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ For safety reasons, it is important to talk about the kinds of things your children are exploring online. It is even better to review their online activities together to learn what they are watching, reading or playing.

OUR PLAN

We will sit together to discuss what we are doing with technology:

- At least once a week
- Every Saturday morning
- Other _____



ACCEPTING SCREEN MISTAKES

CONSIDERATIONS:

- ▶ Many people accidentally click on an inappropriate website or video, or join an online activity before knowing it is wrong. Encouraging honesty and being patient when that happens will help children be open and honest about their technology use, which is critical for safety reasons.

OUR PLAN

If you accidentally make a mistake online, you will:

- Notify us immediately
- Avoid making the same mistake a second time
- Learn from the mistake to avoid a similar problem in the future
- Other _____

Aim for a balanced approach to technology by deciding as a family how much screen time is appropriate and what “screen-less” activities are important (such as listening to or playing music, enjoying time in nature, reading, tossing a ball around, etc.).

Try discovering together what works best for your family.

Keeping Up with Technology Use

Raising children in a digital era can seem overwhelming at times.

The Internet can offer incredible possibilities for kids — as long as parents, children and teens are aware of the risks.

- ▶ Apps and technological devices are changing all the time and it can be hard to keep up.
- ▶ With more and more people regularly connected to technology and meeting online, there are new responsibilities for parents to protect their children and teach them responsible and appropriate uses of technology.

Internet Safety and Digital Parenting Tips

- ▶ It is increasingly important for parents to teach their children how to use technology safely and supervise their children's online activities. Many apps offer free tutorials for parents to learn more about them.
- ▶ Parents should also try to set a good example by thinking about how much time they spend online.
- ▶ Overall, moderation is helpful for managing technology use in homes.
 - It is increasingly difficult to limit access to devices and the Internet, but appropriate rules and boundaries are vital.
 - Finding the right balance of online and offline activities for your family is key.

Other Safety Tips

- ▶ **Keep phones and devices out of bedrooms. If possible, keep a charging station in a central location in the house and make sure your children’s devices are plugged into it before bedtime.**
- ▶ **Know your children’s login information, passwords and email addresses. Parents should also be aware that some teens set up second accounts to show their parents. It is important to ask questions.**
 - It is important that you are able to randomly check how your children are using their devices as a safety measure.
 - Ask what username or character names your children use. Make sure they do not contain any information that could identify your children.
- ▶ **Try to build a trusting technology relationship with your children.**
 - Talk openly about devices and social media.
 - Communicate often with your children about their technology use and what they are doing online. Children need to know they can come to their parents when challenging issues arise in their digital lives.
 - Explain to your children that there is a lot of really good information on the Internet, but the internet is uncensored and there is a ton of inappropriate material online. Finding it can be very uncomfortable and upsetting. Make sure your kids know they can talk to you anytime.
 - Tell your children what to do if they find something or connect to someone that makes them feel uncomfortable. Reassure them they can tell you about problems without losing their internet privileges or getting in trouble.
- ▶ **Do your homework! Some video games can benefit children, such as improving hand-eye coordination and problem solving skills. However there are a growing number of video games that include content that is inappropriate for children – and even for teens! If you can, download an app first and try it out. If your child already has an app or game, ask them to show you how it works.**
 - Check out what games your children are playing, looking for content that is violent, sexual, or dehumanizing.
 - Reinforce positive games that enhance children’s creativity and thinking skills. The key is watching what your children are doing and making decisions together.

- Explore the online games your children play. Are they age appropriate? Is the game moderated? Is there a chat component? Are avatars used?
 - Closely supervise the features offered by the games your children play.
 - Ensure your children get your permission before chatting with other online gamers or connecting via social networking sites, instant messaging, etc. Or consider games that allow you to block or restrict individuals who can play with your child.
 - Learn how to adjust / increase privacy settings and monitor how they are set up on your child's devices. Most apps and social networking sites have privacy settings that determine who can and can't view a user's profile and information. Learn how to use and increase privacy settings.
 - Monitor your child's instant messaging (IM) logs (e.g. Skype®, Facebook® Messenger, Google® Talk, KIK® Messenger, WhatsApp® Messenger, textPlus®).
 - Assist your children with the creation of online profiles when they join social networking or gaming sites. Teach them to fill in only what is necessary, leaving out identifying or revealing information.
 - Don't allow your children to participate in unmonitored chat rooms that are included with many online games. Closely supervise the interactions that occur in moderated chat rooms, as well. Know what your children are up to – for their safety.
- ▶ **Teach your children to only have online friends who they also know offline. Explain that the Internet isn't a good place to make new friends. Talk with your children about what friendship is and isn't. For example ...**
- Friends will not insist that you keep your online relationship a secret from your parents
 - Friends will not ask you to share information or photos that make you feel uncomfortable
 - Online friends will not ask you to provide confidential details about where you live, how to find you, private information about your family, etc.
- ▶ **Monitor how your children are using their smartphones. Discuss all the things to think about before sending text messages, updating social networking profiles, sending photos/videos, accessing apps or downloading online content.**
- ▶ **Put tape or a sticky over the laptop or iPad camera when it's not in use.**
- ▶ **Restrict your children's use of adult search engines. Show your children how to use child-safe search engines instead (e.g. Yahoo! Kids, KidRex®).**
- ▶ **Google yourself and your family. Look for your address, emails, phone numbers, social media usernames, etc. See what shows up before others do.**

- ▶ **Remind your children that anything they post online or send electronically is permanent.**
 - Children and teens need to understand that how they represent themselves online will be evaluated and assessed by future employers or post-secondary institutes.
 - Explain to your children that pictures / videos should only be shared between family members and friends.
 - Explain that once photos are on the Internet, or sent through mobile devices, it is easy to lose control over what happens to them.
 - Encourage your children to check with you before sending or posting any pictures / videos online or through a mobile device.
 - Check your children's files in "My Pictures" to see what images they are sending, receiving, and saving.
 - Monitor your children's webcam use. Find out whether they are posting or sharing pictures / videos using their smartphone.

- ▶ **Many mobile digital devices have GPS that allows us to use map Apps to find our way around. That brings with it some dangers. Children should turn off location services on their smartphones / digital device cameras to avoid being tracked.**

- ▶ **Vault apps have now come into the social media / application scene. Vault apps give users the ability to hide content (pictures, videos, chat conversations). It is important that parents learn more about this new technology.**

- ▶ **Visit the website of the operating system used on your children's computer (e.g. Microsoft® Windows 8, OS X Mountain Lion™, etc.) and the gaming system used by your child (e.g. Microsoft Xbox 360®, Nintendo® Wii, etc.) to find out about the parental controls you can activate to keep your children safer.**

- ▶ **Let your children know that you will monitor their online activities because the Internet is a public place.**
 - Discuss the difference between public and private information. Personal information is private, and shouldn't be shared on the Internet without parental permission.
 - Teach your children the safety strategy; "If Asked to Share and Your Parents Aren't Aware — SAY NO!" Help your children understand that they should tell you before sharing personal information online. Talk about what they might be asked to share. Practice how they will say no.

- Explain that not everyone is who they say they are online. People can pretend to be older, younger, or a different gender. Make sure your children know that they should be cautious about what people say online.
 - Explain that appropriate behaviour offline and online is the same.
 - Encourage your children to trust their instincts and block anyone who asks questions online that seem ‘weird’ or inappropriate (e.g. questions about puberty, sex, etc.). Explain why it is important to tell an adult if this happens.
 - Make sure your children understand that they need to be cautious about sharing personal information online, because personal information can be misused.
 - Explain that it’s illegal to threaten someone, and your children should tell a safe adult if they are threatened online.
- ▶ **Teach your children to create secure passwords that others can’t easily guess. Make sure they know to use a combination of numbers, characters and letters (both upper- and lower-case). Remind them regularly – do not share passwords with anyone.**
 - ▶ **Tell your children not to open any email attachments if they don’t know the sender.**
 - ▶ **Create family Internet guidelines. Discuss them with your children regularly.**

For more information and detailed tips, see the following sources that were used in producing this paper.

<https://bccpac.bc.ca/upload/2017/02/Internet-Safety-Guide-10-12-yr-olds1.pdf>

Raising Digitally Responsible Youth. A Parent’s Guide. <https://bccpac.bc.ca/images/Documents/Resources/Raising-Digitally-Responsible-Youth---Parents-Guide-Ministry-of-Education-2018.pdf>

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection. *The Door That’s Not Locked. Safety and the Internet.*

What to Know About Vaping

The use of vaping products by youth is becoming increasingly common. The following information may help you discuss this issue with your child.

- ▶ Vaping products have many names, such as: e-cigarettes, vapes, vape pens, mods (box or pod), tanks, e-hookahs, or other various brand names.
- ▶ Vaping devices do not contain tobacco and do not involve burning. They are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid solution in order to deliver an aerosol (meaning a vapour or a cloud) that is inhaled. The liquid solution, commonly called e-juice, vaping liquid or e-liquid, is flavoured.
- ▶ Most vaping products contain nicotine and other harmful substances.
- ▶ Youth vaping is threatening to addict a new generation of young people to nicotine.
- ▶ Currently, the long-term health effects of vaping are not fully known.
- ▶ Vaping is costly, and the products are not meant for children and teens. There are restrictions on the sale of vaping products and they can only be sold to adults.

Why Do Many Youth Use Vaping Products?

- ▶ The flavours are appealing (e.g. fruit, candy, mint)
- ▶ Their friends are vaping and they feel it helps them fit in
- ▶ Out of curiosity and/or boredom
- ▶ They consider vaping to be harmless
- ▶ They like the “hit” from nicotine
- ▶ They think it will help them quit or cut down on smoking tobacco products
- ▶ The devices seem trendy

What Can You Talk About With Your Child?

▶ **If you smoke cigarettes or use vaping products, you can still have a meaningful conversation with your children by being honest about your habit.**

- Do you regret that you started smoking?
- Do you experienced any negative health effects as a result of smoking?
- Do you hope your children will avoid the habit?

Be patient and ready to listen. Try to avoid criticism and encourage an open dialogue.

▶ Remember to keep the discussion going. Do not expect to make an impact with just one conversation.

Following are some questions your child may ask about vaping products, along with suggested responses.

■ “Why shouldn’t I vape?”

- Vaping products contain toxic and addictive ingredients that could harm your health.
- When people breathe in vapour, they inhale tiny particles that get trapped in the lungs.
- Vaping e-juice, which contains nicotine, can be delivered to the brain and lead to nicotine addiction.

■ “Isn’t e-juice just water and flavourings?”

- E-juice typically contains chemicals as well as flavourings. These chemicals and flavourings are safe for use in food, but the health effects of breathing in the chemicals are unknown.
- Most e-juice on the market contains nicotine, which is highly addictive.

■ “What is the big deal with nicotine?”

- Nicotine use can make it hard for children and teens to concentrate, learn, and maintain control.
- Once you start using nicotine, you can become addicted and physically dependent.
- Over time, your body will want more nicotine to feel comfortable.

■ “Is vaping nicotine-free e-juice safe?”

- Studies have found that many vaping products labelled “nicotine-free” still contain nicotine.
- Inhaling nicotine-free vapour is a health concern.

■ “Isn’t the cloud produced when vaping just water vapour?”

- Once e-juice is heated, a number of toxic chemicals are created. Many are cancer causing.
- If you are around friends who vape, the cloud they exhale exposes you to chemicals that may not be safe to breathe.

■ “Isn’t vaping safer than smoking cigarettes?”

- Vaping is less harmful than tobacco products such as cigarettes, but it is not harmless.
- Short-term health effects are increased coughing, wheezing, inflammation of the lungs, and increased heart rate.
- The long-term health effects of vaping are currently not known.
- Vaping products can explode and cause fires that may result in burns and injuries.

Adapted from

Vaping Education from the BC Lung Association.

https://bclung.ca/sites/default/files/1168-Vaping_Parent%27sHandout_Final_R2.pdf

How To Talk to Your Children About Drug and Alcohol Awareness

For many parents of teens, drug and alcohol use is high on the list of concerns.

If this is an issue for you, it is important to know that what you do matters. Parents are their children's most important role model and their best defence against drug and alcohol abuse.

Think prevention first.

By talking openly with your teen about drugs and alcohol, you can strengthen your relationship with them and make communications easier for everyone. In doing so, remember:

- ▶ **As teens grow they need to be able to speak their mind.** If your teen talks back and argues with you, it does not mean they are rejecting you. By asserting their independence, your teen is just behaving in an age appropriate way.
- ▶ **It may often seem like teens are not listening to their parents, even though they really are.** Talking about difficult issues requires patience and perseverance.

There are a number of factors that can decrease or increase the chances that teens may experiment with drugs and alcohol.

Some key factors that can help teens make positive choices include:

- ▶ strong attachment to their family
- ▶ a strong sense of identity and connection to their traditional values and beliefs
- ▶ positive involvement in the community
- ▶ positive connections at school
- ▶ good social skills
- ▶ strong self-esteem
- ▶ positive friendships

What often causes a teen to use drugs or alcohol?

- ▶ Curiosity – when they see others using things, teens generally want to try drugs or alcohol to find out what they are like.
- ▶ Many teens are inclined to take risks but have little understanding of possible consequences.
- ▶ Peer pressure is a strong motivator for teens. They may want to be seen and accepted as a member of the group.
- ▶ Using drugs or alcohol may seem to offer an escape valve or a way to dull stress and pain caused by problems or pressures at home, at school, or with peers.

This final point is often the reason behind chronic use or addiction.

You can help empower your teen to avoid drug and alcohol misuse by:

- ▶ nurturing their self-confidence and pride in who they are as a First Nations person
- ▶ supporting them to be a good student
- ▶ sharing a sense of hope and optimism
- ▶ ensuring they grow up in a safe environment and are involved in extracurricular activities
- ▶ making sure they have the supports they need

It is useful to talk about drugs and alcohol before you are worried, ideally well before your child enters their teen years. Here are a few tips to keep in mind to maintain open communications with teens.

- ▶ **Think first. Act second.** Try to stay clear and focused and don't get too emotional. Keep an open mind.

- ▶ **Keep an eye on your children’s behaviour.** Ask them every day what they are doing. Don’t be afraid to set limits. Teens need boundaries.
- ▶ **Encourage your teen to work with you to set rules,** but don’t be afraid to adopt a strong position when you need to.
- ▶ **Enforce the boundaries you have set.** Let your teen know that you are enforcing rules because you love them and want to keep them safe.
- ▶ **Focus on building trust and understanding.**
- ▶ **Talk regularly and talk often.** Many “mini-conversations” about drugs are better than long boring lectures.
- ▶ **Keep the conversation positive** rather than waiting for an opportunity to criticize your teen for bad behaviour.
- ▶ **Take advantage of “teachable moments,”** like driving in the car together, discussing a situation at school, or talking about a current event in the news.
- ▶ **Eat dinner together as often as possible.** Family meals provide excellent opportunities for dialogue.
- ▶ **Focus on messages about how drug and alcohol use affects** sports performance, health and appearance. These messages have more impact on teens.
- ▶ **Have a two-way conversation.** Listen to your teen and respect their opinion.
- ▶ **Provide information that is meaningful and balanced,** so that your teen feels empowered to make healthy choices about drugs.

Signs of possible alcohol or drug use may include:

- ▶ bloodshot eyes
- ▶ listless, unhealthy appearance
- ▶ weight loss
- ▶ changed sleeping or eating habits
- ▶ increased anger or aggression
- ▶ greater susceptibility to sickness
- ▶ skipping school, poor grades
- ▶ acting emotionally withdrawn and secretive
- ▶ increased requests for money
- ▶ theft from the home of money or articles that could be sold

Signs of alcohol or drug overdose requiring emergency hospital treatment may include an inability to speak or walk properly, severe vomiting, loss of consciousness, or a threat to harm themselves or others.

If you've just discovered or have reason to believe your child is misusing alcohol or drugs, the first thing to do is sit down and take a deep breath. Pause and prepare yourself for the important conversations ahead.

- ▶ **Talk with anyone else who shares parenting responsibilities with you.** Make sure you agree about how you will work together to address the situation. Remind each other that no one is to blame and the focus should be on helping your child.
- ▶ **Expect the discussion with your child to be difficult.** Prepare yourself to respond to any anger with patience. If the conversation becomes heated, take a break and pick it up again later. Remind your child you love them and you are concerned for their welfare. Involve a family member to help you and your child with difficult discussions.
- ▶ **Be honest.** If your teen points to your habits as a defense, don't shut down. Talk calmly about how you want to help your child avoid making mistakes.
- ▶ **Talk about clear rules and realistic consequences that you will be able to enforce.** Involve your child so they understand the reasons.

Remember to keep the lines of communication open with your teen. Start early and get ahead of the drug questions. Teens should learn about drugs and alcohol awareness from their parents first.

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See also a companion to the booklet Talking with Your Teen about Drugs and Web site for parents: drugprevention.gc.ca

How to Talk with Your Teen about Drugs - Communication Tips for Parents is available on Internet at the following address: drugprevention.gc.ca

Helping Children Deal With Traumatic News or Events

We all face difficulties at times, and sometimes it can seem that the news is full of troubling stories. Forest fires, flooding, the pandemic ... many unsettling events can affect how we feel.

- ▶ Taking care of our children’s mental health, especially during difficult times, is just as important as ensuring they have a healthy body.
- ▶ Here are some ideas that might help you and your children cope with difficult situations.

Help your children build strong, caring relationships to prepare them for challenges

- ▶ Children and youth who have strong relationships with family and friends are usually better able to deal with difficult events.
- ▶ You can help make that happen just by spending time with your children, such as eating breakfast or dinner together or doing things you all enjoy whenever you have the chance.
- ▶ More than anything else, your children will benefit from your love, attention and acceptance.

Build your children’s self-esteem to increase their resiliency

- ▶ Children and teens who feel good about themselves are often more “resilient,” which means they are able to recover from difficulties more easily. To help ...
 - Praise your children when they do well.
 - Recognize their efforts in addition to what they achieve.
 - Ask your children questions about their activities and interests to show you care.
 - Help your children set realistic goals and learn how to solve problems. That will help them experience successes and feel confident about what they are able to do.

Be aware of your children's emotions

- ▶ If your children have been exposed to an upsetting situation or difficult news, pay attention to their emotional state.
 - Do they seem distant?
 - Do they seem more quiet than usual?
 - Are they more anxious?
- ▶ Invite your children to talk about their feelings so you understand how they are doing.

Be aware of your own emotional state

- ▶ Children are usually very aware of their caregivers' feelings. They often notice tone of voice, body language, and conversations going on around them. They can tell when others are stressed, afraid, or sad.
- ▶ While it's important to be honest with your children, try as much as possible to avoid overwhelming your children by your own reactions.
- ▶ It can be helpful to share your own emotions, but in a controlled and reassuring way. For example, you might say: "Yes, I am worried about this situation, too. But we'll find a way through this together."

Share clear information and encourage open-ended conversations

- ▶ It's always best for children and teens to get information about a traumatic event from a safe, trusted adult.
- ▶ Invite your children to ask you questions and tell you what they need. Don't assume that your children are worrying about the same things you are.
- ▶ Ask your children direct, open-ended questions and show your sincere interest in hearing what they have to say.
 - You might ask "Have you heard about ...?" or "Do you know that ..."
 - Then you can ask questions like: "What did you hear about it?" "Is there anything you don't understand?" "Are you feeling ok?"
 - Your children may have heard misinformation that you can help correct. They may have exaggerated fears that you can address.
- ▶ If needed, be patient and repeat information a few times.

Be honest

- ▶ Children and teens often know when adults aren't being honest.
- ▶ Tell the truth about how you're feeling. If you're scared, say so, while being as calm and reassuring as possible.
- ▶ It's also okay to say that you don't know the answer to a question.

Don't avoid tough subjects

- ▶ Sometimes, parents try to protect their children by avoiding upsetting subjects. But most children are exposed to more than we think, and their fears can grow bigger if they are not addressed.
- ▶ If your children ask you about an upsetting situation and you avoid the topic, it might reinforce their worries. Children often believe that if a subject is too scary to talk about, it might be even worse than they think.
- ▶ It is important that your children know you are available to help them make sense of their experiences – good and bad. Children need to know that strong emotions do not mean they have to feel helpless or overwhelmed.
- ▶ It is normal to feel sad and confused when problems arise. Let your child know that it is ok to ask you questions, now and in the future.

Don't provide too many details or information your children don't need to know

- ▶ While you don't want to shield your child from the truth, be age appropriate in your discussions.
- ▶ Younger children can take in less information. Some details may be too upsetting and not necessary for them to know. Give simple explanations.
- ▶ Try to limit how much news coverage your children see. Repeatedly seeing disturbing events on TV or hearing about them on the radio can make problems seem even worse. Children who believe bad events are temporary can recover from them more quickly.

Think about the right time and place

- ▶ Although it is important to respond to your children's questions, try to talk about troubling issues when you aren't distracted.

- ▶ You need adequate time and attention to discuss your children's understandings, fears, worries and concerns.
- ▶ If your children ask a question at an inappropriate time, like when you are grocery shopping or rushing to get to school, tell them the topic is important and you want to discuss it at a better time. Then follow-up as soon as possible.
- ▶ And don't force your children to have a conversation before they're ready. Open the door for them to talk, but don't push.

Be sympathetic and non-judgmental about your children's reactions and feelings

- ▶ Children's reactions will vary depending on their age and past experiences. There is no right or wrong way to react to traumatic news or to grieve.
- ▶ Reassure your children that there are many ways people respond to difficulties, and let them know that their response is fine.
 - Some children prefer not to talk much. Maybe your child will want to talk later.
 - Other children need to express their feelings, and you can listen.
 - Some children like to have time alone to deal with their emotions. Others want to be around people.
 - Let your children know that people behave in all different ways. Some people cry when they are sad or afraid, but other people don't. It's all okay.
 - You can also try other ways to express feelings, such as drawing or writing.

Be reassuring

- ▶ Feeling secure is critical for children and teens.
- ▶ Even if you're afraid or sad, let your children know you will do everything you can to keep them safe.
- ▶ Try talking about a time in the past when they were brave in the face of a scary situation. Talk about how they coped with fears before.
- ▶ Remind your children that no matter what happens, you'll be there for them, and that together, you will get through the situation.

Try not to minimize your children's fears and concerns

- ▶ Do not dismiss or ignore your children's feelings. For example, simply saying "it's not so bad" can make children feel embarrassed or wrong for feeling the way they do.
- ▶ Listen openly and talk about positive ways your children can manage their fears and anxieties.

Maintain routines as much as possible

- ▶ Doing things in the usual way helps restore a sense of safety. It reassures children that life will be okay again.
 - Try to maintain regular mealtimes and bedtimes.
 - If you are temporarily relocated, establish new routines as quickly as you can.

Encourage your children to do things they enjoy

- ▶ Distraction is good for children. Doing something relaxing and fun gives them a sense of normalcy. It will give you a positive break, as well.

Help your children relax with breathing exercises

- ▶ Breathing deeply can help children calm down.
 - Try practicing slow, deep breathing.
 - Say, "Let's breathe in slowly while I count to three, then breathe out while I count to three."
 - For young children, you can place a stuffed animal on their belly as they lie down. Ask them to breathe in and out slowly and watch the stuffed animal rise and fall.
 - Stop for a moment and take several deep breaths yourself if you are feeling anxious and overwhelmed.

Reach out for support yourself

- ▶ Children are not alone in feeling sad, upset, angry, and anxious when times are difficult.
- ▶ If you can, talk through your own feelings with someone you trust.
- ▶ Bring in a trusted family member or friend to be part of conversations if that will help.
- ▶ Sometimes helping your children requires helping yourself, as well.

Remember that your children can recover and you can help

- ▶ Be positive about what is ahead. Don't assume that a traumatic event is so upsetting that your children will never recover.
- ▶ Don't worry about knowing exactly the right thing to say or do – sometimes there is no answer that will make everything okay right away. Know that you are making a real difference by listening to your children, accepting their feelings, and being there for them.
- ▶ Try to eat healthy foods, drink enough water, get outside when you can and walk around, and get enough sleep. Your physical health is connected to your emotional health.
- ▶ Pay close attention to how your children are responding and seek professional help if you need it.
 - Talk to your school about counselling services.
 - Talk to your doctor about what might help.
 - Do not be afraid to seek assistance.

Adapted from

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Talking With Children and Teens About Body Image

Today's children and teens face a lot of pressure to meet unrealistic and even harmful stereotypes of beauty, body shape, and weight.

More and more children and teens are unsatisfied with the way they look, and it is an important issue for both boys and girls.

- ▶ Studies show that approximately 90% of women and girls are dissatisfied with their looks. Between 40% and 60% of men and boys feel this way.
- ▶ “Body dissatisfaction” has been seen in children as young as 5 years old.

The following considerations may be useful for helping your child develop and maintain a healthy body image and positive self-esteem.

What is Body Image?

Body image is how you think or feel about your appearance and your body. It is about how you see yourself, and how you think others see you.

- ▶ Children who have a healthy body image feel good about how they look, how their body moves and grows, and what their body can do.
- ▶ A healthy body image grows over time. It starts in babyhood. It builds as kids grow. It changes when kids go through puberty. It is shaped by what we hear, what we see, and what others say.
- ▶ At every stage of their children's lives, parents can do things to help support their children develop a healthy body image.

Body image in growing kids

Children usually feel good about their bodies when they are young. They are often proud of what they can do with their growing bodies.

As they get older, some kids begin comparing themselves with others. They want to be able to do what other kids can do.

If children receive negative messages during this time, they can begin to feel bad about themselves. But if they are encouraged to feel good about their abilities and their unique shape and size, they begin to build a positive body image.

To help kids build a healthy body image, you can:

- ▶ teach your children about their bodies and say nice things about how they look.
- ▶ be positive about the fact that everyone has different looks and abilities.
- ▶ let your children show you what they can do and tell them you're proud of their efforts.
- ▶ be active with them and encourage them to be active every day.

Body image in teenagers

Maintaining a healthy body image during the teen years, a time of physical and emotional changes, can be difficult.

- ▶ Some kids are excited to look older.
- ▶ Other teens feel shy about their changing body, especially because teenagers' bodies develop at different times.
- ▶ It can take time to get used to looking and feeling different.

Factors that might harm a teenager's body image include:

- ▶ Natural or expected weight gain, skin blemishes, and other changes brought on by puberty
- ▶ Peer pressure to look a certain way
- ▶ Social media and other media images that promote one right way to look, which for many people is unattainable
- ▶ Being around other people who are overly concerned about their own weight or appearance
- ▶ Being told by others that they should bulk up, lose weight ...
- ▶ Being teased or picked on because of their appearance
- ▶ Seeing materials that depict teens as objects, rather than independent, thinking people who are worthwhile no matter what they look like

Consequences of a negative body image

Children and teenagers who have negative thoughts about their bodies are at increased risk of:

- ▶ Low self-esteem
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Nutrition and growth issues
- ▶ Eating disorders and other dangerous behaviours to control weight
- ▶ Having a body mass index of 30 or higher (obesity)

In addition, some teenagers try to control their weight by smoking or using other unhealthy products.

Spending time worrying about their bodies and how they measure up also takes time away from other healthy thoughts and activities.

Helping to address body image

Talking about body image with your children can help them become more comfortable in their own skin. Parents might also consider the following tips.

Be a role model.

- ▶ How you accept your body and talk about how other people look will have a major impact on your teen.
- ▶ Be aware of your own talk about weight. Hearing adults talk about losing or putting on weight can affect how children and teens feel about themselves.
- ▶ The best way to teach your children to be happy with their body is to show that you are satisfied and accept your own size and shape.
- ▶ Focus on health, not appearance. Talk about exercising and eating a balanced diet for health reasons, not to look “better”. Reinforce that wellness is possible and the best goal for people of any size and shape.
- ▶ Think about the things you read and watch and the messages they send.

Use positive language and celebrate all people.

- ▶ If you are talking about how people look, say nice things.
- ▶ Communicate respect for diverse bodies, sizes, appearances and abilities.
- ▶ Remind your children that a person’s worth is never determined by how they look.

- ▶ Try not to point out negative things about anyone's appearance – including your own. Don't allow hurtful comments or jokes based on physical characteristics, weight or body shape.
- ▶ Rather than focusing on physical attributes of your child or others, praise personal characteristics such as strength, persistence and kindness.

Explain the effects of puberty.

- ▶ Make sure your child understands that weight gain is a healthy and normal part of development, especially during puberty.
- ▶ Remind your child that teenagers often have skin blemishes and sometimes acne during puberty; this stage passes.

Praise your child's efforts, skills and achievements. Build their self-esteem and resilience.

- ▶ Help your child value what they do, rather than what they look like.
- ▶ Support your teen's talents and skills that have nothing to do with how they look -- like music, sports, arts, and volunteer activities.
- ▶ Show an interest in their passions and pursuits.
- ▶ Praise the things you love about your child, like how they can make you laugh, how hard they work in school, how they show respect for their grandparents, how kind they are to others, or the way they look out for their siblings or cousins.

If your child is being teased, bullied, or shamed about their looks, do something.

- ▶ Teasing and bullying can make kids feel deeply hurt and can harm their self-esteem. This is a serious issue.
- ▶ If this is happening at school, make sure school staff are aware and taking action.
- ▶ If needed, ask for help to get counselling for your child.

Talk about media messages.

- ▶ Social media, movies, television shows and magazines often send the message that only a certain body type or skin colour is acceptable and that maintaining an attractive appearance is the most important goal.
- ▶ Too often, false messages are sent that connect "thinness" as successful and "fatness" as a failure. These types of biased communications can have negative mental health impacts on the majority of people who don't fit an unrealistic mold. For example, studies show that only about 5% of people have the type of body often portrayed in the media. What we see in the media really doesn't represent most of us.

- ▶ Talk to your child about how social media and magazine images are commonly altered using special photographic techniques and airbrushing; the people in the images often don't look that way in real life. Teenagers might be trying to meet ideals that don't even exist in the real world.
- ▶ Remind your children that images in the media are created to sell products. Often the goal is to make people feel dissatisfied with their own lives so they will buy something.
- ▶ Check out what your children are reading, scrolling through or watching on TV and discuss it with them. Studies suggest that the more reality TV girls watch, the more they worry about appearance. Encourage your children to question what they see and hear.

Monitor social media use.

- ▶ Teens use social media to share pictures and they often get feedback. If comments about what they are posting are not positive, it can make them feel bad.
- ▶ Research suggests that frequent social media use by teens might be linked with poor mental health and well-being. Set rules for social media use and talk about what your children are posting and viewing.
- ▶ It is also important to talk with your children about taking and sending selfies. For example, filters give users the chance to make themselves look the way they want, sometimes giving them the chance to change their appearance in unrealistic ways. Studies show that filters and selfies can contribute to the development of an unhealthy focus on imagined flaws in a person's own appearance. Many times, the flaws can be so minor that other people can't see them. It can lead to extreme anxiety, feelings of shame and harmful behaviours. It's important for children and teens to understand that the image they see on their phone does not always reflect reality. For example, a 2018 study showed that a person's nose can look 30% bigger in a selfie.

Other strategies to promote a healthy body image

- ▶ Ask the doctor to help your child set realistic goals for body mass index (BMI) and weight based on their personal growth history and overall health.
- ▶ Teach your children about healthy eating. Offer a wide range of foods. Talk about the harms of fad diets. And try to eat together. Family meals lead to teens who are better adjusted and less likely to engage in risky behaviours.

- ▶ Talk about people you admire because of their achievements — not their appearance. Read books or watch movies about inspiring people who have persevered to overcome challenges. Talk about people being more than numbers on a scale or measuring stick; every person is a unique individual with admirable talents, skills, and abilities.
- ▶ Help your child find activities and groups where they feel a sense of belonging. That might be community groups, sports teams, or volunteering. These groups teach children about values that are more important than appearance.
- ▶ Promote physical activity. Participating in sports, traditional dance, and other physical activities — especially those that don't emphasize a particular weight or body shape — can help promote good self-esteem and a positive body image. Studies show active teens have a better body image regardless of their weight.
- ▶ Encourage positive friendships. Friends who accept and support your teen and who are comfortable with their own bodies can be a healthy influence.

Get help if you need it

- ▶ Ask your family members to help send positive messages about different body types.
- ▶ If other parents you know are worried about body image issues, talk to the school about whether they can offer lessons to address the issue.
- ▶ If your child is struggling with negative body image, consider talking to your teen's doctor or a mental health professional. Additional support is sometimes needed to give children and teens the tools they need to counter social pressure and feel good about themselves because of the great people they are.
- ▶ Even in happy, supportive families outside pressures can lead teens to eating disorders. Watch for warning signs like rapid weight loss, extreme changes in eating habits and an obsession with calories, unusual concern about weight and continued comments about "feeling fat", withdrawing from social activities, regularly going to the bathroom right after meals, using medicines or fad diets to lose weight, or excessive exercise. If you are concerned, get medical advice.

And remember the good news ... as a parent, you have more influence than you think to help your teen create a positive self-image, no matter their size or shape.

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Addressing Concerns About Violence and Gangs

Many families are increasingly concerned about children becoming involved in violence and gangs.

The following are some research-based recommendations for addressing these serious issues.

- ▶ **Strong and emotionally positive relationships with parents and family members are among the best protections against children and teens becoming involved with violence or gangs.**
 - Families can help prevent problems by spending quality time with their children.
 - Letting your children know how much you love and care about them will make a tremendous difference.
- ▶ **When parents are actively involved with their children and build relationships with their children's friends, they are more aware of risks and early signs of involvement with gangs or violence.**
 - It is often helpful to encourage teens to participate in activities that will help them prepare for a positive future, such as career planning and skills development programs.
 - Young people are less likely to become involved in gangs and violence if they feel hope and see exciting opportunities ahead.
- ▶ **Sharing traditional experiences together, such as participating in land-based and community activities, is invaluable.**
 - Youth who have strong connections to their culture and the land are less likely to become involved in gangs and violence.
- ▶ **Parents should try to be aware of where their children are and what they are doing.**
 - Parents can have a meaningful influence just by asking their children questions and showing they care.
 - It is especially important to discuss any changes in behaviour, or the use of gang hand signals, symbols, language, or gang-related graffiti on notebooks or arms.

- ▶ **Get help if you are concerned.**
 - Speak with a trusted friend or family member to get advice or support.
 - Reach out to the school or a community agency to prevent problems from becoming more dangerous.
 - Do not hesitate to ask for assistance if you need it.