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FNSA

FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE

FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

# TOOLKIT

*for* **FIRST NATIONS PARENTS AND FAMILIES**

**DRAFT FOR REVIEW AND FEEDBACK**





# TOOLKIT

## for First Nations Parents and Families

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

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- ▶ 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 vital for students' success in school and in life.

Parents are also central to promoting their children's access to educational opportunities that:

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- ▶ help them understand and practice their 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.
- ▶ prepare them for any opportunities they choose for higher learning, employment, and lifelong 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.



For parents, supporting their 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.***

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

The document includes a series of short, reproducible papers that can be pulled out, read and used separately. Each paper can be adapted and shared with parents to provide information about topics in five 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 Parents' Support for Schools

# 2.0

Understanding parents' rights, 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 The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- 2.2 Parents' Education Rights and Responsibilities
- 2.3 The Rights of Families to Racist-Free Educational Opportunities
- 2.4 Families' Privacy Rights
- 2.5 Roles and Responsibilities of Education Personnel
- 2.6 Suggestions for Meeting With School Staff
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- 4.19 Addressing Concerns about Violence and Gangs
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# 5.0

## Addressing technology use and online activities to keep children and teens safe and healthy

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- 5.2 Tips for Creating a Family Technology Use Plan
- 5.3 Keeping Up With Technology Issues
- 5.4 Helping Students Understand: What Goes Online Stays Online, and Everyone Can See It
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- 5.7 What is Meant by the Term Digital Literacy?
- 5.8 Signs Your Child or Teen May be Overusing Technology
- 5.9 Let's Talk About "Fake News"
- 5.10 Using Screen Time in Positive Ways

## 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 everyone who helps promote success of First Nations students.

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### 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.

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### Students With Exceptionalities

The majority of the information included in this Toolkit relates to all First Nations students and families. In some cases, however, issues might be specifically relevant for students who would benefit from carefully planned additional supports – commonly referred to as “students who have exceptionalities,” “students who have special needs,” or “students who have disabilities or diverse abilities.” Section Three of this Toolkit includes information about supporting these students specifically, and parts of this Toolkit might include references to how the school system and families can work together to help students who have exceptionalities achieve to their full potential.

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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](http://www.fnesc.ca)



**The First Nations Schools Association (FNSA)** has a mandate to support First Nation controlled 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](http://www.fnsa.ca).



# 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 Parents' Support for Schools



# 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 regularly talk about the benefits of a good education, students do better in school.
- ▶ 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, which families impact significantly.
  - Making sure your children arrive at school on time every day allows them to access learning opportunities and build positive relationships.
  - 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, healthy, and ready to learn – and you help make that happen.**
  - 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' achievement increases. What can you do to help achieve that goal?**
  - 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. Review any reports or messages from teachers to know whether your children are keeping up with school assignments. Follow-up with teachers if you have specific questions.
  - 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. You know your children better than anyone else. Feel comfortable asking schools to meet with you when you have information to share.
  
- ▶ **Students need routines and a space to help them study.**
  - Try to set aside regular times for your children to do homework, prepare for tests, read, etc. And don't wait until too late in the evening, when your children will be tired and they should be going to bed.
  - 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. This might be at home, or possibly in a place the community has set up for students to study. Or ask the school for help with this if needed.
  - Help your children organize the things they need for studying, so they don't waste time 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. Proudly remember that you are helping them learn and succeed each and every day.**

## The Value of Parents' Support for Schools

Family involvement in schools has a positive effect on student achievement. Education is a shared responsibility, and cooperative efforts lead to student 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 children and teens that you are interested in their education and that you think school is important. Your visibility in the school helps all students.
- ▶ Volunteering allows you to get to know school staff, which is really helpful if you need support or information.
- ▶ Family volunteers are essential for organizing all kinds of school activities. Volunteers are a valuable resource and they make schools better for kids.
- ▶ Volunteering reinforces to your children the importance of contributing to their school and 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 students advance to higher grade levels.



► **Parent volunteers can contribute to schools in many different ways. 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 coach a sports team.
- take photos at school events.
- help keep bulletin boards neat and up to date.
- talk with students using your traditional language.
- assist students with extra math drills.
- volunteer in the computer lab.
- organize or assist with an after-school club.

**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 share dozens of hours to make a real difference.**

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

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

**If you are not able to regularly volunteer in the school, that's fine, too! You can still make an important difference by visiting the school when possible.**

- **Students love seeing their families and community members attend special events or performances. Having an audience to support their efforts is exciting and builds students' self-confidence. And attending school activities is a great way to show your children that you care about their life at school.**
- **Attending the school for meet-the-teacher night, student concerts, family fun nights, sporting events, or other social gatherings will show your kids that you value the school and their 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.**

- ▶ 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. If your school doesn't have a PAC, you can ask why. 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 with the school, 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, but 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 just talk to other parents about an issue; let school staff know if 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 a very common practice most schools, as asking all adults in the school to have a check keeps students safe.



# 2.0

## Understanding parents' rights, 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 The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- 2.2 Parents' Education Rights and Responsibilities
- 2.3 The Rights of Families to Racist-Free Educational Opportunities
- 2.4 Families' Privacy Rights
- 2.5 Roles and Responsibilities of Education Personnel
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## The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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, including Canada.

### 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. That legislation:

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ sets out that there will be an accompanying action plan developed with Indigenous peoples in BC.
- ▶ requires the Province to produce an annual report, describing how the laws of BC 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.

The 2021-2026 Declaration Act Action Plan includes 17 action items specific to First Nations education and languages. The actions relate to self-determination and the inherent right of self-government, ending Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination, and social, cultural, and economic well-being.

The UN Declaration and the Declaration Act represent critical commitments related to the rights of First Nations people. Educators in BC should be encouraged to learn about this legislation, and it is important that students are taught about those landmark documents, as well.

In addition to these important commitments, it is important to know ...

In 1959, the United Nations adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of the Child*, which states the right of the child to receive an education that will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, individual judgment, and sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

In 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, a legally binding treaty that is intended to protect the rights of children around the world. It provides that “in those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of Indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is Indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.” Implementation of the convention is overseen by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which Canada ratified on December 13, 1991.

## Parents' Education Rights and Responsibilities

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

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

### Parental Rights and All Schools

For students attending any type of school (public, independent, or First Nation schools), parents can expect to:

- ▶ be informed about and involved in making decisions that directly affect their children, 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 their children takes place, and be informed about the results.
- ▶ have their concerns listened to, with a prompt and respectful response.
- ▶ be able to speak to school staff, such as teachers, education assistants, or the principal, when they have questions or concerns or if they need information, and have a support person help them in meeting with school representatives if requested.
- ▶ receive regular and understandable reports about their children's progress.
- ▶ be involved in planning and reviewing their children's Individual Education Plan (IEP), if they have one.

## If Your Child Attends a Public School

**The BC School Act sets out rules for how public schools must operate, and it 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 disabilities and diverse abilities.
- ▶ 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 of students who attend public schools 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, and information about First Nations programs and services.
- ☐ contact School Board members, who are called Trustees, to share their 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 in schools.
- ▶ what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour, including bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, intimidation, and threatening or violent behaviours.

**Codes of Conduct must outline consequences for unacceptable behaviours. Those consequences should be restorative (meaning healing and renewing), 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 to Confidentiality**

**All parents have the right to expect that their family's information 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 the following.**

- ▶ 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 how your information is being handled, ask questions. Schools must let you know what policies and procedures are in place to protect the privacy 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 BC 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](mailto:info@oipc.bc.ca)

**Web Site:** [www.oipc.bc.ca](http://www.oipc.bc.ca)

**Telephone:** (250) 387-5629

## Parental Responsibilities

**In addition to their rights, parents have very important responsibilities, including the following.**

- ☐ Ensure your children attend school regularly.
- ☐ Help make sure your children follow school policies, programs, rules, and procedures.
- ☐ 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 need to improve. You know your children best. Your knowledge is crucial for planning their education.

## The Rights of Families to Racist-Free Educational Opportunities

The information in this section is borrowed from a pamphlet created by the BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner and FNEHC. It is not intended as legal advice and should not be relied upon for that purpose.

Racism takes a toll on any First Nations person, including you and your children.

Parents and students have rights under the Human Rights Code. Schools have a responsibility to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of the students in their schools, including when they are on school property during the school day, on school field trips (including when they are away from school and outside of school time), and on school buses.

Also, “Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination” (United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 14.2). The provincial government passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) into law in November 2019.

These human rights mean that your child has the right to learn in a setting and in a way that is free from discrimination, racism, and hate speech.

## What Does This Mean?

- ▶ **Discrimination** – Means when someone treats you unfairly because of who you are, leading to unequal opportunities or harmful treatment. Types of discrimination:
  - **Interpersonal Discrimination:** involves one person's actions (or lack of action) toward another person.
  - **Systemic Discrimination:** when rules, policies, laws, or ways of doing things create a disadvantage or obstacle for another group of people.
- ▶ **Racism** – Any action or words that treat someone unfairly or differently based on their race, ethnicity, or ancestry.
- ▶ **Hate Speech** – Words or actions that promote hatred or violence against a certain group of people based on their race, ethnicity, or other characteristics. Hate speech is illegal and can be reported directly to the police.

## What can discrimination, racism or hate speech sound or look like in a school?

### Examples might include students, teachers, or other adults in the school:

- ▶ Calling a student names because of their heritage, race, or background.
- ▶ Bullying or harassing students.
- ▶ Mocking students for the way they speak or look.
- ▶ Denying or minimizing the impact of Canada's residential schools.
- ▶ Ridiculing First Nations' cultural practices or artifacts.
- ▶ Dismissing or not taking seriously complaints of racism.
- ▶ Blaming First Nations or other Indigenous peoples for changes in school programs or requirements.
- ▶ Blaming First Nations or other Indigenous peoples for problems in society, like crime.
- ▶ Making mean or incorrect comments about perceived advantages that First Nations people receive (e.g. housing, taxes, etc.).
- ▶ Making students feel uncomfortable because of stereotyping.
- ▶ Calling First Nations people cheats, criminals, or any other negative terms meant to provoke a strong reaction.
- ▶ Excluding students from extra-curricular activities because of their identity.
- ▶ *Automatically* placing students in non-academic courses or in a non-graduation program just because of their identity.
- ▶ Using classroom resources that demean or devalue First Nations cultures, peoples or histories.

## If you or your child has experienced discrimination, racism, or hate speech, what can you do?

Racism takes a toll on any First Nations person, including you and your children.

If your child experiences discrimination, racism, or hate speech, the first step may be ensuring that your child feels supported.

- ▶ If children and youth experience racism, they can internalize it in ways that are harmful to their mental health and developing identities.
- ▶ Asking your child how they feel and letting them know that they are supported is important.
- ▶ It may be a good idea to reassure your child that a racist experience was not their fault, and remind them about their strengths and what makes them proud of their identity.

If you experience discrimination, racism, or hate speech, you may need support from family, friends, or community members. You may be able to access support from education staff in your community. A provincial helpline for dealing with racist incidents is also available.

**Racist Incident Helpline:** People in BC who witness or experience a racist incident can call a helpline to receive trauma-informed, culturally appropriate support. Open 9:00am – 5:00pm weekdays, or leave a message for a call back outside these hours (if non-emergency). (Toll-free) 1 833 457-5463 (1 833 HLP-LINE) <https://racistincidenthelpline.ca/>

You can also report the incident by following the steps outlined in the Section of this Toolkit: What To Do If You Have a Concern.

The following organizations offer resources to support a human rights complaints.

**Human Rights Clinic** (<https://bchrc.net/>): Provides free services to help file a complaint to the Human Rights Tribunal. The Clinic can help you decide if a complaint is covered by BC's Human Rights Code, learn about the how to make a complaint with the Tribunal, and see if someone qualifies for free legal services to help.

**Indigenous Community Legal Clinic** (<https://allard.ubc.ca/community-clinics/indigenous-community-legal-clinic>). Provides free legal representation for Indigenous people who wish to file a human rights complaint, cannot afford a lawyer, and qualify for legal assistance.

## More information is available.

- ▶ **Understanding Racism:** Developed by the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, this document focuses on Indigenous-specific racism in Canada, beginning with an exploration of the concept of race, its history and contexts, and describing the various forms of racism within societies. <https://www.nccih.ca/docs/determinants/FS-Racism1-Understanding-Racism-EN.pdf>
- ▶ **Indigenous Experiences with Racism and Its Impacts:** Developed by the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, this document provides a brief overview of forms of racism, how it intersects with other forms of discrimination, and how it is manifested. <https://www.nccih.ca/docs/determinants/FS-Racism2-Racism-Impacts-EN.pdf>
- ▶ **Micro-Aggressions:** Some statements, actions, or interactions may not meet the definition of discrimination, racism, or hate speech, yet still have negative impacts on people. Micro-aggressions refer to indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group. What Are Micro-Aggressions? Video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho\\_WW7M5E3A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho_WW7M5E3A)
- ▶ Educators in BC are expected to follow *9 Professional Standards for BC Educators*. If you have concerns about an educator in BC, you can contact the BC Ministry of Education Teacher Regulation Branch for support.

### Examples of Professional Standards for BC Educators:

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

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

**Standard 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 cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

A video is available that shares voices of students and others about the importance and impact of Standard 9. Professional Standard 9 – Truth and Reconciliation, Moving Forward Together Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4sBNxiA7YI>



## Families' Privacy Rights

Parents and students have privacy rights that must be respected within the school system.

- ▶ In Canada, all organizations are accountable for their privacy practices.
- ▶ Legally, they have to follow appropriate privacy standards, and they must respond if complaints are made.

Privacy is about organizations taking reasonable steps for collecting, using, sharing, and protecting personal information – which means information that can identify you, which you might not want to be public.

Privacy laws are meant to balance the rights of individuals to have their personal information protected, and the need for organizations to have personal information in order to provide services. For example:

- ▶ Schools need to collect, use, and share certain student and family personal information so they can provide education programs and services.
- ▶ Schools are also accountable for carefully using and protecting that information.

## Parent and Student Rights

- ▶ You have the right to ask your school for a copy of their privacy policies.
- ▶ You can ask what the school does to protect your information, and how the school decides who can see it.
- ▶ Only people who need to see personal information should have access to it.
- ▶ Schools should only collect information they need. If you want to know what information the school collects about your family, you can ask.
- ▶ Schools should have clear and thorough procedures to keep your information safe.
- ▶ If you have serious concerns about the use of your information, talk to the school.
  - There might be good reasons why information is being collected. The school might be doing everything it can to protect information.
  - If you don't feel that's the case, speak up.
  - If your child is attending a public school, contact the school district. If your child attends a First Nation school, talk to the School Governing Authority.
  - Ultimately, families can contact a Privacy Commissioner if they can't resolve a privacy concern. The Commissioner has the authority to investigate concerns.
- ▶ In BC, the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (OIPC) is responsible for complaints about provincially regulated schools.
- ▶ For schools that are regulated by the federal government, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) is responsible.
- ▶ You can talk to your community representatives to find out more about what authority applies.

## Protecting Information is Best Done In Partnership

- ▶ It is best when schools and families work together to share and protect data in the best ways possible.
- ▶ With increasing online threats, everyone can help keep data and information in the hands of those who need it, and out of the hands of people who want to do harm.
- ▶ Talk to your school if you want to know more about how you can help keep information secure.

## 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 their schools. A principal's duties often include the following.

- ▶ 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 First Nation School Governing Authority.
- ▶ Overseeing the conduct of students.
- ▶ Managing the school budget.

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 the following.

- ▶ 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 unique interventions and services required by a student who has exceptionalities, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths to identify what will help the student learn and grow.

**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 in 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 time if you have questions or concerns, or if you wish to discuss anything about your children's education. Regular communications are very helpful.**

## Teaching Assistants (TAs) / Education Assistants (EAs)

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

- ▶ 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 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 learning, 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 the following.

- ▶ 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 behavioral 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, and they have the following roles.

- ▶ 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 (SLPs), occupational therapists (OTs), physical therapists (PTs), counsellors, and other professionals may sometimes support students and may be 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 have a right to 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, and it can sometimes involve meeting with other professionals and specialists, as well.

Meetings are often very helpful. They can allow parents 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 bring information and materials needed to make the discussions most useful.
  - 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 along, 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. Bringing notes can help you stay focused on what you want to know.**
- ▶ **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 to ask 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 ask about the school's privacy policy and procedures if you have questions. You have a right to expect that your family's personal information will be kept confidential.**

## 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 priority issues 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. And remember ... agree to decisions only when you feel ready to do so.**



## Questions to Ask At Parent Teacher Conferences

Parent teacher conferences are valuable opportunities to learn more about your child's experiences at school. Here are some questions you might want to ask when you are talking with the teacher.

- ☐ 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?



## What To Do If You Have Education Concerns

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.

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

- ▶ Begin by talking with your child so you fully understand their experience and what is making you feel concerned.
- ▶ Try to think about all points of view. Keep an open mind as you try to find out 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 for support.
- ▶ When you meet, outline your concerns clearly. Then focus on solutions.
- ▶ 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 needed? Will it help to talk to the same person again, or should you talk with 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. Or 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 effectively address 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's Governing Authority

- ▶ Involve the 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 Indigenous 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 friend, family member, or 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 or 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 about whether to provide a student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- ▶ Consultation about placement of a student with disabilities and diverse abilities.
- ▶ 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](http://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](http://www.bcombudsperson.ca)

### 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 and an Indigenous dispute resolution approach.

More information about the BC Human Rights Tribunal can be found at [www.bchrt.bc.ca](http://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](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/standards-for-educators/complaint_faq_tools.pdf)

### Professional Standards for BC Educators effective June 19, 2019

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](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).

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

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 the secondary levels 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 “Evergreen Certificate” (the British Columbia School Completion 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.* The Evergreen is meant to celebrate the achievement of students who are unable to complete the Dogwood, but who have completed personal goals that will allow them to transition to meaningful options after grade 12. The Evergreen will limit what choices are open to students after they graduate.
- ▶ 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. A modified program may be appropriate for *some* students who have very serious special learning needs, but it is not necessary for the majority of students. Students on a modified program will graduate with the Evergreen, not the Dogwood. *This will affect their future opportunities.*
- ▶ 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.

## 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 many 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.*

## HOW PARENTS CAN GET INFORMATION TO HELP WITH EDUCATION PLANNING

If you want to know more, you can talk to a counsellor or teacher for help with education 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.

More information about planning for post-secondary and careers is available in the FNESC and FNSA publication: *Guiding Your Education Journey: A Handbook for First Nations Families* (available from [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca)) That Handbook is intended to provide information to help families make the best decisions possible about what courses students need to take, and to help First Nations families plan for post-secondary education and training, and future careers.





# 3.0

## Supporting students who have exceptionalities and special learning needs

- 3.1 The Rights of Students Who Have Exceptionalities
- 3.2 Supporting Students Who Have Exceptionalities
- 3.3 Identifying Students Who Have Exceptionalities
- 3.4 What is an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?
- 3.5 What is Meaningful Consultation?
- 3.6 Helping Students Who Have Exceptionalities Build Self-Esteem, Resiliency, and Independence

**Note:** *The language used in this section is complicated.*

Different terms are used to refer to students who have unique learning needs and who would benefit from “**interventions**” to help them succeed in school.

- ▶ Some people have used the term “**students who have special needs.**” That term is generally being used less often.
- ▶ In some cases, families choose to use the term “**students who have disabilities.**” That is because this term is associated with specific protections from discrimination under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and people with “**disabilities**” have distinct rights according to the Accessible BC Act.
- ▶ Many students who need “**interventions**” (which are individualized supports, services, therapies, and learning approaches) haven’t been diagnosed with a disability or don’t identify as having a disability. Sometimes these students are referred to as having “**diverse abilities.**”
- ▶ The Province of BC uses the term “**students who have disabilities or diverse abilities.**”
- ▶ Sometimes people use the phrase “**students who have an exceptionality.**” That term includes students who have disabilities and other students who have unique education and health needs that require interventions. This Toolkit uses that term most often.

Sometimes programs and services to address the needs of these students are called special education, and sometimes inclusive education. Terms differ between schools and education systems, and they often change over time.

# The Rights of Students Who Have Exceptionalities

Classrooms are full of children and teens who have diverse learning needs. Some of those students require specific accommodations and additional supports to access their right to an education.

- ▶ Some students are said to be “gifted,” meaning that they might learn more quickly or perhaps more easily than some other children. These students often require special programs and services to keep them motivated and stimulated.
- ▶ Other students may have one or more learning, emotional, or physical challenges or difficulties. These students also require carefully planned interventions so that they can be successful in school.

Whatever their specific characteristics ...

- All students are unique.
- All students are capable of learning.
- All students, whatever their special talents and areas for growth, have a right to an education program that is designed for them.

**Education is a fundamental human right – for all students.**

- ▶ On December 13, 2006, the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The purpose of the Convention is to promote, defend, and reinforce the human rights of all persons with disabilities. Ratified by Canada in 2010, Article 24 of the CRPD prohibits discrimination against children with disabilities and mandates the right to inclusive education. This provision is focused on removing barriers to participation in typical classrooms in public schools.
- ▶ Canadian laws and regulations also protect the equality rights of people with disabilities.

- ▶ The 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination on the grounds of mental or physical disability. Charter of Rights and Freedoms Section 15 (1) states: Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability
- ▶ Further, every child has the constitutional right to access the benefits of education. This means that a person or an organization fails to protect a child's right if they discriminate against the child, or if they don't give enough attention to that child's unique needs ([www.aidecanada.ca](http://www.aidecanada.ca)).
- ▶ If your child attends a public school, under the BC School Act students have a right to:
  - learn in a safe and welcoming environment.
  - have their needs identified in a timely manner.
  - have their needs comprehensively assessed.
  - receive an appropriate educational program that responds to their strengths and needs.
  - when possible, contribute to planning of their education program, including transition planning.
  - help evaluate the services they receive, when possible.

Making sure that all students have their needs met is not a “nice to have.” It is a fundamental responsibility of schools.

## Some Questions Parents Might Ask

**Question:** Should parents be blamed for their children having exceptionalities?

**Answer:** Absolutely not! A child's physical, intellectual, and emotional needs can be the result of numerous factors.

- ▶ Some exceptionalities are thought to result from differences a child has at birth. No one can control those factors.
- ▶ Other exceptionalities may be linked to environment factors, which means that prevention programs can be useful.

But whatever the reason, meeting the needs of all students is the only thing that matters. Parents, family members, teachers, other school staff, and education specialists should focus on what will help a student, *not* what caused their challenges.

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**Question:** Does having an exceptionality mean my child cannot finish school?

**Answer:** No!! Some students with exceptionalities face specific difficulties. They also have many unique talents and gifts.

- ▶ Like all students, students who have an exceptionality may struggle with some parts of school and may require supports to help them find and make the most of their talents.
- ▶ However, many students with exceptionalities are very capable academically. Others have strengths in art, music, sports, or some other area that is of interest to them.

Students who have exceptionalities have a right to be accommodated by schools and the education system so that they can graduate. With the right help, this can happen.

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**Question:** Can my child achieve success?

**Answer:** Absolutely YES! All students with exceptionalities can achieve success. What success looks like will depend on the unique strengths, challenges and interests of each student. But that is true for all students.

- ▶ You, your child, teachers, and specialists can all work together to help think about what success can mean for your child.
- ▶ Planning and implementing the most appropriate program means helping children set and achieve goals that are right for them.



## Supporting Students Who Have Exceptionalities

Families have knowledge, observations, and experiences that are vital for understanding students. Parents are most aware of their child's strengths and areas for growth. 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 them access educational opportunities that will allow them to thrive.

- ▶ You should be provided full information about your child's education program in a clear and understandable way and in plain language, 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 match. Consistency is very beneficial for children and teens who have exceptionalities.

Family support is key to the success of all students – and parental and family input is especially valuable when planning interventions to assist students who have exceptionalities.

### What can schools do to support students who have exceptionalities?

Schools can establish structures or approaches that provide individualized supports and services for students who have exceptionalities – often called “interventions.” Schools should focus on helping all students learn – knowing that some students will benefit when learning opportunities are delivered in different ways.

Students who have exceptionalities should usually be educated in the classroom along with other students – which actually benefits all students. They might use special equipment, do things at a different pace, and have individuals help them with various tasks, such as taking notes or meeting behavioural expectations.

Sometimes, students who have exceptionalities might also spend some of their time in different spaces that offer a unique environment, such as a calming, quiet place when needed. Students also might spend some time out of the classroom getting help from specialists who can provide counselling, help with their speech or movement, or other kinds of assistance.

There is no common approach for all students.  
Strategies must always be designed for each individual student.

What is most important? Offering all children and teens every opportunity for success, no matter what experiences, skills, and needs they might have.

## Who supports students who have exceptionalities?

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

- ▶ **Principals:** make sure that school staff receive necessary direction, information, and support 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. Principals are often part of a student's education team and involved in overseeing Individual Education Plans (IEPs).
- ▶ **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 reinforce the message that everyone belongs. If teachers don't know how to help a child, they must ask for appropriate assistance.
- ▶ **Learning Assistance Teachers or Resource Teachers:** may be employed in some schools to help classroom teachers. They may suggest strategies to support students, help with interventions, 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 a teacher or principal. They may help with personal care, learning activities, or therapy programs that have been designed by specialists. They may help students participate in social interactions and other school and classroom opportunities. EAs can also provide general supports under the supervision of a classroom teacher, so that the classroom teacher can provide one-to-one support to students who need it.
- ▶ **Doctors:** can identify physical and mental health issues that might interfere with learning. They can also recommend further medical testing and possible strategies to promote the well-being of students and families.
- ▶ **First Nations Education Directors, Coordinators and Family Resource Workers:** may help parents review relevant information, consult with professionals, and arrange appointments.
- ▶ **Education psychologists and psychiatrists:** assess students' development in order to identify their strengths and any challenges that need to be addressed as it relates to learning and the school environment.
- ▶ **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 (PTs):** diagnose and help promote healthy movement.
- ▶ **Occupational Therapists (Ots):** help students with daily living and self-care skills.
- ▶ **Optometrists:** test and help strengthen students' vision.
- ▶ **Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs):** help build students' listening, speaking, and communication skills.

It can sometimes feel overwhelming keeping track of everyone 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. EAs often work directly with students who have exceptionalities, helping with some of their daily needs in school. EAs help students who have exceptionalities feel cared for and they help convey the message that all students belong in the school. Parents often report that the commitment and skills of EAs are key to their children's progress in school.

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

- ▶ How much time is an EA going to be spending with my child?
- ▶ What will an EA be helping with? Will my child also have opportunities to work with other students and get help from the teacher?
- ▶ How will the EA be supported so they have the specific skills needed to work with my child?
- ▶ How is the EA assigned to other students / classrooms?
- ▶ 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 a student, it may be more difficult for the student to build their independence 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 support, with opportunities for them to safely try things on their own or with help from their peers.
- ▶ Also, while EAs may help your child meet their learning goals, it is important to be aware that classroom teachers and Learning Assistance Teachers should be overseeing the curriculum, making modifications and adaptations, and monitoring your child's progress toward their learning goals.

## Working With Teams Who Support Your Child

Your child should be at the centre of a team of people who work together to identify, design, and provide the supports and services your child needs to grow and develop to their full potential.

- ▶ Students should be involved with these teams in developmentally-appropriate ways.
- ▶ You also have invaluable information 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 any teams that are created for your child.*

An **“educational team”** includes all the people who work together to help children succeed in school. It may include teachers, EAs, therapists, medical professionals, counsellors, social workers, Indigenous workers, consultants, childcare consultants, etc.

A **“school-based team”** differs from an educational team. It is a small group of school-based personnel who come together regularly as a problem-solving unit to address a child’s specific needs. It often includes teachers, the school principal, and other professionals (e.g., counsellors, psychologists, speech and language psychologists) who discuss how to support students and the classroom teacher. Parents, the student (as appropriate), and representatives from community service agencies may also be included on a school-based team.

- ▶ If your child has a school-based team, you should be informed and you should provide consent for your child’s 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 are their roles? What types of assistance does each member provide?
  - How will I be involved in the school-based team process? How often will the team meet? How will I be informed of planning meetings?

A **“transition-team”** might be established to help your child make plans their life after high school. Your involvement with this team is also crucial.

## Final Reminders

- ▶ You and your child's teacher, other school staff, and health and education professionals can work as a team to help your child or teen.
- ▶ Students who have exceptionalities achieve success when they are provided the right supports and are encouraged to reach goals that are designed especially for them.
- ▶ You have the right to ask any questions you have about your child's education.
- ▶ All children are unique. All children have a right to the best education possible. You can help make sure your child's needs are met by asking questions and being involved in planning their services, programs, and goals.

## Identifying Students Who Have Exceptionalities

It is important to identify a student's learning needs to ensure that the right strategies and supports are put in place for them.

Sometimes children are identified as possibly having an exceptionality before they enter school, perhaps by their doctor, or by daycare or pre-school workers.

- ▶ Early identification of a child's exceptionalities 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, teachers or EAs, based on their observations and/or student work in class, 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 should be focused on the best interests of you and your child.
- ▶ No one is to blame if a child has exceptionalities. All that matters is working together to make sure every student is successful.

### What if you have concerns?

If you think your child or teen learns or behaves in ways that are different from other students their age, or if you think your child might benefit from alternate approaches, say something.

- ▶ If you have questions or concerns about how your child is progressing with their learning, their behaviour, or other aspects of their development, you can seek out advice and input.
- ▶ If you think your child is bored and needs more challenge, tell someone. Ask for input.
- ▶ All students are assessed regularly to determine whether they are performing at grade level. If your child's test results concern you, raise the issue with school staff.

- ▶ You can talk to your school's principal or teacher; they see your child frequently and observe them with other students. It is their job to help you and your child.
- ▶ If one is available, you might want to talk to a First Nations Liaison Worker or Home School Coordinator, or an Education Assistant or Learning Assistance Teacher you know well. People in those positions can help you understand what options are available to help you learn more about your child's needs.
- ▶ You can also talk to your family doctor.

You should never be embarrassed to discuss your child's needs and any issues that might worry you. All children are unique, and all children have varying strengths and challenges over time. Your child's teacher should be a valuable source of help. Together, you can think about why your child might be experiencing difficulties or doing things in unexpected ways.

It is important to remember that all students develop at different rates. Students of the same age are not always able to do the same things in the same way. For example ...

- ▶ Many young children struggle to use scissors, other small devices, or complicated toys.
- ▶ Some children will learn to ride a tricycle later than others.
- ▶ Some children might learn to tie their shoes when they are 3 years old. Others might not master that skill until they are 4, or maybe even 5!
- ▶ Young children often learn to make speech sounds at slightly different ages.

- ▶ It is important not to over-react to minor developmental differences too early.
- ▶ Professionals who work in health, early education, and schools are trained to watch children's development and make sure it is consistent with some general "milestones." Milestones are skills that are typical for children within an expected age range (such as age 5 – 7) – not at one specific age. Professionals can help think about whether children and teens are not meeting common milestones. If they are not, it can be a reason to investigate further, but it does not necessarily mean that there is an issue.
- ▶ In thinking about whether a student might have exceptionalities, professionals will consider whether a student demonstrates ongoing ("*persistent*") and serious ("*significant*") differences that are unusual for their age and level of development.

Similarly, if your child is working behind grade level, it does not mean that your child necessarily has an exceptionality. Other factors may be impacting your child's learning.

- ▶ Sometimes a student's diet, sleep habits, or routines might explain a student's challenges, and relatively simple changes might resolve issues. For example, a child who is overtired may not do well on tests, and an earlier bed-time may help.
- ▶ If a child or teen has missed a lot of school, that might be a reason for their achievement being a bit behind other students in the class.

- ▶ Talking with school staff and making some relevant adjustments in your child's home or school environment might be enough to resolve concerns.
- ▶ But if you cannot find another reason for your child experiencing ongoing challenges, you can expect your child's school to help you take further steps to better understand your child's needs.

## Assessments

If families and school staff suspect that a student might have exceptionalities, it may be recommended that the student have a "formal assessment."

- ▶ This would be very different from other types of assessments used with all students in schools, like quizzes, tests, or exams. Those types of assessments are used to make sure students are learning the skills and knowledge that are expected at each grade level.
- ▶ A formal assessment of a student who might have an exceptionality is used to find out how the student learns, and what "interventions" (which might be strategies, supports, services, or therapies) will help the student meet their full potential.

- ▶ Not every child who has an exceptionality needs an assessment from a specialist. You and the school staff may be able to make plans to address your child's needs without any kind of "formal testing."
- ▶ But if more information is needed, an assessment can be helpful for planning the education program that is best for your child.
- ▶ *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.*

## Types of Assessments

Formal assessments are recommended for students for many different reasons. If an assessment is recommended ...

- ▶ It does not mean a student is bad or not smart
- ▶ It does not mean a student has a mental health issue
- ▶ It does not mean a student won't be successful

An assessment might be completed by a physician, an educational psychologist, a speech and language therapist, an occupational or physical therapist, an audiologist, or some other individual who has been trained to understand students' development and health.

Some common types of assessments are described below.

### What is an Educational Psychology Assessment?

Often called an "ed-psych" assessment, a psych-ed or a neuro-psych assessment, this type of assessment measures how a student thinks, how they learn, and how they are able to behave. Because our brains and our bodies are all unique, we all think, learn, and are able to control our emotions in different ways.

An ed-psych is simply a tool to better understand what a student does well, the things they find more difficult, and what strategies will help them learn and interact with others more easily.

Ed-psych assessments are implemented by psychologists.

- ▶ Psychologists are professionals who are trained in how the human mind works.
- ▶ Some psychologists specialize in understanding how students think and behave, and what types of supports can help students be successful in the school setting.
- ▶ Those psychologists are trained to complete ed-psych assessments.

Ed-psych assessments usually take place at school. The psychologist works in a quiet, private area where other students aren't around.

As part of an ed-psych assessment, the psychologist interviews the student's teachers, parents, and other people who work closely with the student, like Education Assistants or counsellors. During the assessment, the psychologist also observes the student completing tasks and taking part in activities that are appropriate for the student's age and development. This might be playing games, using toys, or working on puzzles.

It's important to be aware that an ed-psych assessment is designed to find the points where your child may be struggling. Your child may find it frustrating and overwhelming to take part in challenging activities that are intended to be beyond their capabilities. For this reason, some psychologists will complete ed-psych assessments over multiple days, to reduce any stress for the student.



### What is a Speech Language Assessment?

Speech, language and communication skills are essential for daily life. These skills help students:

- ▶ participate in the school and classroom.
- ▶ be prepared for reading and writing.
- ▶ interact and build relationships with other students and adults.

Families, school staff, and specialists can all work together to address students' speech and language issues early. Doing so can lessen or eliminate the need for speech and language supports later in life.

In particular, speech language pathologists (SLPs), also known as speech therapists, are professionals who have been trained to help students with speech, language, and communication.

If a student is assessed, the SLP will usually begin by taking a few minutes to get to know the student. With young students, the SLP will often use age-appropriate toys or games to make the student feel more comfortable. The SLP will then use an assessment tool that is chosen to address the specific needs of each student.

Sometimes the SLP will start the assessment by examining a student's mouth. This is a quick and easy external examination. Sometimes children have physical features that impact on their speech – such as their tongue not moving in ways that produce clear speech. An SLP is trained to look for these types of issues.

The SLP will also use a variety of tests to help understand a student's challenges and needs. The tests will be chosen to match each student's age, as well as what the student finds easy and difficult to do. The tests are not used in a way that is stressful for students. For example:

- ▶ a student may be asked to describe pictures while the SLP writes down what they hear the student say.
- ▶ the SLP might ask questions to explore a student's language skills, often using fun activities so the student does not become bored or frustrated.

Throughout the assessment, the SLP will observe the student while they play with toys or games and during their school day (e.g. working in the classroom or playing on the playground). SLPs may also interview parents, teachers, or Education Assistants (EAs) to gather more information about the student's skills.

Depending on the results of the assessment, an SLP may continue to be involved in a student's education, helping to address any issues to help the student be successful.

### What is an Occupational Therapy Assessment?

“Occupational therapy” refers to services that can promote better health, including preventing or helping people better live with an injury, illness, or disability. Occupational therapies are provided to a wide variety of students, including those who have physical challenges, differences in their learning or development, hearing or visual difficulties, or behaviour or emotional needs.

Early identification and interventions to address these issues can lessen or even eliminate the need for occupational therapies later in life.

Occupational Therapists (OTs) can help parents and school staff consider if students who are experiencing challenges in their schooling would benefit from a full occupational therapy assessment. As part of an assessment, an OT might:

- ▶ play with the student and get to know them in a friendly, stress-free way.
- ▶ review the student’s records and work samples.
- ▶ observe the student play, interact with others, and learn in typical school settings and activities.
- ▶ assess the school environment to identify any barriers that can be eliminated, as well as supports that might help the student play and learn more easily.
- ▶ interview the student, teachers, parents, and possibly service providers who are helping the student.
- ▶ assess the student’s skills and performance to suggest what might help the student function better at school and in the home.

Depending on the assessment results, OTs can suggest ways to help students build on what they do well and address any areas for development.

### What is a Physical Therapy Assessment?

Physiotherapy (often referred to as physical therapy) refers to a range of treatments that are used to help restore, maintain, and enhance a person’s physical functioning and well-being. Physiotherapy services can be beneficial for helping people overcome a physical injury or access a variety of spaces and activities. Physiotherapy can also help promote overall health and fitness.

The professionals who provide these services are called physiotherapists (PTs). In schools, PTs can:

- ▶ help plan and create safe and accessible spaces.
- ▶ help teachers and other school staff effectively include movement and activity in the school-day for the benefit of all students – including students who experience challenges moving around.
- ▶ participate in Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings and help develop individualized goals and follow-up strategies for students who need supports.

To gather information and determine if physiotherapy services would be useful, a PT might use a variety of assessment methods, including the following.

- ▶ Reviewing relevant records, school files, and medical reports.
- ▶ Observing the student participating in the school setting and typical activities.
- ▶ Assessing any barriers and supports in the school setting.
- ▶ Interviewing the student, teachers, learning assistance teachers, EAs, parents, and possibly service providers who work with the student.

### What is a Functional Behaviour Assessment?

A functional behaviour assessment looks at a student's behaviour in their classroom and school community. The purpose is to identify things that cause students to have trouble controlling their emotions, such as doing things impulsively or having angry outbursts. Anyone of any age can have those types of difficulties at times, but a functional behaviour assessment can help identify why a student might be experiencing problems too often. It can also help inform a positive behaviour support plan, to give the child useful supports and strategies.

- ▶ Oftentimes, behaviour is a form of communication that students use to express their needs.
- ▶ Also, students can only meet behavioural expectations when:
  - they know what the expectations are.
  - they have the skills needed to meet the expectations.
- ▶ That's why it's important to focus on understanding what a student is feeling and experiencing, why they are acting in specific ways (what they are trying to communicate), and how they can develop skills that will help them express themselves in productive ways.

**Remember:** Responses to behaviour challenges should not be punishing. Students should not be secluded (put in a separate setting, left alone, and told to stay there) or restrained (held down so they cannot move). Educators are obligated to respect the dignity of all students, and to keep them safe from physical, emotional, or mental harm. If you have concerns that your child is being secluded or restrained at school, tell someone.

## Assessment Results

Following a formal assessment, the specialist who conducted the tests will prepare a report. That report should be shared with parents.

Sometimes, an assessment might show that a student does *not* have an “exceptionality” – meaning

a diagnosed learning need, or a different way of thinking or learning that will impact on their education and participation at school. However, the report might identify extra supports or alternate teaching approaches that can help the student be more successful.

In other cases, an assessment might include a “diagnosis” that confirms the student has a specific type of “exceptionality.”

- ▶ A diagnosis is not meant to label a child in a negative way.
- ▶ The goal of a diagnosis is to help understand what a child needs and the best ways to teach the child and support them at home and in school.

An assessment is only meant to help determine a child’s special strengths and needs, and help pinpoint which interventions would likely be most effective for them.

- ▶ Whatever the results, an assessment can be a very important tool in designing the best education program for a child.
- ▶ Depending on the assessment results, a diagnosis might also help the school access additional resources to support a student.

- ▶ *Formal assessment reports are confidential.* The reports are only seen by people who need the information in their work with a student.
- ▶ Specialists and schools are responsible for keeping the report and all related information secure.
- ▶ Files and other paper records should be kept in locked cabinets.
- ▶ Electronic records must be protected through computer passwords and other relevant procedures.

Parents and guardians have a right to ask what steps will be taken to protect information about their child.

## Your Rights Before and After an Assessment

- ▶ Parents and guardians are essential to a formal assessment process.
- ▶ Parents should be asked to provide written informed consent before any formal assessment takes place and before the results are shared.
  - Informed consent means more than a parent's signature on a piece of paper.
  - The assessment process should be explained in detail to parents or guardians.
  - Parents or guardians must be provided a copy of the assessment report.
  - Parents or guardians should decide how the assessment information is used within the school and shared with people who support their child. Allowing people who work with a student to see the assessment results can help everyone identify ways to help a child learn and get along with others more easily. But parents should always be asked to provide informed consent for how information about their child will be used.
  - Parents and guardians have the right to withdraw consent at any time, even after the testing has been done.
- ▶ 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. While waiting, school staff should continue to support students.
- ▶ Parents can expect that specialists will take the time to fully explain their child's assessment results and related suggestions. School staff also should meet with parents to review the information and to discuss next steps. It is best for students when everyone shares the same understanding of the assessment results.
- ▶ Assessments are complicated. Parents should feel comfortable asking questions or asking for information to be repeated if it is not immediately clear. If educational "jargon" is used (meaning terms that aren't used in everyday conversation), it is entirely appropriate to ask school staff to explain any language that is unfamiliar.
- ▶ It is most important to remember that appropriate follow-up on an assessment is the primary goal. The assessment results should be used to help each student be happier and more successful in their education and their everyday lives.

## Additional Things To Know About Assessing and Identifying Learning Needs

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ 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 the supports and services they need whether or not they have a formal diagnosis of a disability or exceptionality.*
- ▶ Assessments may need to be updated at various times throughout a 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.
- ▶ 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.

## Questions to ask about assessments

- ☐ What do you hope to find out from this assessment?
- ☐ Why is this assessment being done?
- ☐ How is information about my child's strengths, talents, learning styles and needs being considered?
- ☐ 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?

## What is an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

An IEP is a written plan describing the individualized services, approaches, therapies, and supports (interventions) required by a particular student. IEPs are based on a student's strengths and issues that affect the student's ability to learn, participate in school, and demonstrate their learning.

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).

### Things to Know About IEPs

- ▶ School staff are required to implement any approaches or interventions defined in an IEP. This makes IEPs important documents for ensuring that a student is being well supported by all staff.
- ▶ 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, etc.
  - Parents must be consulted and given opportunities to be involved in developing their child's IEP.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ 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 and supports have been provided for your child.

- ▶ 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.
  - IEPs should be reviewed regularly throughout the school year and updated at scheduled reporting periods.
  - IEPs can also be removed if a student has achieved their goals and no longer requires additional supports in order to access education. However, this should only be decided with you.
- ▶ 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.

**When students have an IEP, a person is usually identified to coordinate their education services. This person may be referred to as an IEP Coordinator, a Case Worker, or IEP Team Leader.**

- ▶ 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?

**Important 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 very serious exceptionalities, but it is not necessary for most students who have an IEP.

- Modifications are changes to instruction and assessment approaches that result in 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.
- A modified program should still have a clear structure with valuable and challenging goals that will help prepare your child for a fulfilling future. It is still an education program, and you should be regularly informed of your child's learning expectations and progress.
- If your child is on a modified program, remember that this does not always have to be a per-



manent or long-term solution. The use of modifications can be reviewed to make sure you feel fully informed and comfortable with the decision.

- The choice of whether a student's education program should include modifications has consequences, and it should be made carefully and thoughtfully in consultation with parents. It should consider each student's educational, career, and life goals.
- Ask if your child is on the path to graduation and, if not, why. Make sure you are fully informed and comfortable with the answer.



## What is Meaningful Consultation?

When important decisions are being made about your child's education program, you have a right to expect schools to "meaningfully consult" with you. What does this mean?

Adapted from BC Council of Administrators in Inclusive Education. *An Ecosystem of Support: A Guide to Meaningful Consultation*. 2024.

- ▶ Meaningful consultation means families, along with their children, are key decision-makers in education decisions.
- ▶ It involves transparent communications. It means being open about what is needed, what has been tried, what is working and what is not working, what else is possible ...
- ▶ It involves *ongoing* conversations about what will help students, versus a one-time information drop. It requires patience and commitment from everyone involved.
- ▶ It means taking the time to make sure that everyone feels informed and knows what options are available.
- ▶ It is about finding solutions that will lead to the best outcomes for students and their families.

If you are participating in meaningful consultations, you will feel heard, valued, and confident that your input will make a difference.

Meaningful Consultation IS ...	Meaningful Consultation IS NOT ...
<b>Inclusive.</b> It actively involves families in education decisions and planning with school teams.	<b>Telling families about a decision.</b> Families should not be brought in and told what the school is going to do.
<b>Open.</b> People will be honest. Everyone’s opinions will be welcome. Discussions will be cooperative.	<b>A “nice to have.”</b> Consultation isn’t a quick meeting to tick off a requirement. Meaningful consultation makes programs and services for students more meaningful. It makes schools more relevant. It is invaluable for school communities. It is essential, not optional.
<b>Transparent.</b> Information will be shared clearly. Everyone will understand why and when decisions have been made.	<b>About “one side winning.”</b> The focus must be on finding solutions, not who is right and who is wrong. When you find outcomes that are in the best interest of students, everyone wins! That must be the goal.
<b>Ongoing.</b> Consultation won’t happen just once. Parents should have regular input into their children’s education programs.	

What makes meaningful consultation work?

- ▶ **Including student voice and participation as much as possible.** Students learn to advocate for their own needs when they are given chances to share their thoughts and opinions. Students know their own goals best. They know what they want to learn to do better. Students can help direct their education journeys in ways that match their age and developmental abilities.
- ▶ **Valuing the expertise of families.** Families have unique understandings and insights that cannot be replaced. They love their children. They know their children best. Building on their knowledge is key.
- ▶ **Including everyone as equal partners.** All participants should feel free to share their perspectives. Everyone brings information that is important.
- ▶ **Fostering mutual respect.**
  - The needs and rights of students should be at the centre of all school-family efforts.
  - Parents’ rights and their fundamental role in their child’s life should be recognized.
  - School staff should be able to speak openly about what they can do, as well as any barriers that might need to be addressed. They play a key role in planning and implementing supports.
  - Everyone should be positive about working together in the best possible ways.
  - And each family and students’ unique identity, culture, traditions and values must be respected as the foundation for students’ success in school and throughout their lives.

## Helping Students With Exceptionalities Build Self-Esteem, Resiliency and Independence

All students, including those who have exceptionalities, have a right to self-determination. This means helping students be able to make their own choices and set their own goals. Students are better able to practice self-determination when they are supported in building their self-esteem, resiliency, and independence.

### What can you do to make a difference?

- ▶ Help empower your child to advocate for themselves. Tell them they can speak up for themselves. Their voice is crucial. They can be involved in discussions about their education and tell adults what they do well and what helps them learn.
- ▶ Help your child understand their own talents, strengths, and needs as a learner.
  - Talk about what they do well. What successes have they had? What is an accomplishment they are especially proud of? When did they try really hard to do something? Celebrate their efforts and achievements.
  - Discuss what they need help with. Everyone finds things hard sometimes. What will help them grow?

These questions are important for *all* students to think about, so they can contribute to decisions about their learning opportunities and their lifelong success.

- ▶ Turn mistakes into learning opportunities. Reassure your child that people grow when we try new things, sometimes fail, and learn from things that go wrong. Students with exceptionalities should be encouraged to take on challenges that are right for them, so they can achieve more than they thought possible.
- ▶ Encourage your child to focus on positive things – about themselves and others. Sometimes this takes practice and patience. Talk to your child about strategies that will help them be optimistic and not give up if things become hard.

- ▶ Make sure your child or teen has opportunities to be independent at school. If they need support with their daily needs, school staff can still try to find ways for students to do as much as possible on their own. Or maybe sometimes they can do things with support from another student, rather than an adult.
- ▶ Be alert to how you and your child are included in goal-setting at school. Is there space for your child's voice? Do people ask your child what they want? Do they have chances to communicate what will help them achieve the things that are most important to them?
- ▶ Make sure your child is involved as much as possible in choosing strategies and options that are right for them. Everyone needs different things at different times. You and your child know best what works well and what might need to be changed.
- ▶ Talk to school staff about how you will all know when your child has met a goal. How will your child have opportunities to talk about their successes? How will everyone know when your child feels ready for new goals? How will successes be celebrated?
- ▶ Listen to your child. Try to put away distractions sometimes and give your child your full attention. Notice what your child is saying, and how they are saying it – what they might be feeling.
- ▶ Being a parent isn't always easy. There are always many things that keep us busy. We all get tired. Be proud that you are your child's best advocate and their greatest source of support. Celebrate your own efforts.

## 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 [www.inclusionbc.org](http://www.inclusionbc.org).

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.

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**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.

You and your child will meet many new people during their education. Communicating the same information to different people can be exhausting! 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>





# 4.0

## Creating healthy and supportive learning environments at home

- 4.1 The Importance of Regular School Attendance
- 4.2 Helping Your Child Feel Connected to School
- 4.3 Helping All Children Build Friendships
- 4.4 The Link Between Sleep and Success in School
- 4.5 Eating Together Can Help With School Success
- 4.6 Routines Can Help Kids Get to School On Time
- 4.7 What Parents Should Know About Bullying
- 4.8 The Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities
- 4.9 Helping Your Children Become Career Ready
- 4.10 Reframing Our Thinking
- 4.11 The Value of Optimism
- 4.12 Helping Young Children With Everyday Anxiety
- 4.13 What To Know About Vaping
- 4.14 Should I Be Concerned About Energy Drinks?
- 4.15 How to Talk to Your Children About Drug and Alcohol Awareness
- 4.16 Helping Children Deal With Traumatic News or Events
- 4.17 Talking With Children and Teens About Body Image
- 4.18 Does Your Child, or a Child You Know, Need Support? The Kids Help Phone is Available
- 4.19 Addressing Concerns about Violence and Gangs
- 4.20 Building Your Children's Early Literacy Skills



FNESC and FNSA have also created a guide to Fun Activities For Learning Together At Home, to share ideas for learning opportunities families can enjoy together outside of school. See [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca) for a copy.

## The Importance of Regular School Attendance

- ▶ Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school – and themselves.
- ▶ You can help your children start building good attendance habits early, so they learn that going to school on time, every day is important.
- ▶ Your child's attendance can also positively impact other students and the whole school! They can feel proud to be a role model for others and contribute to making the school a place where everyone can learn and have fun.

**Good attendance will help your children do well in school, in post-secondary, and when they enter the world of 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 will arise sometimes. But try not to let absences add up!
- ▶ Being in school as much as possible is an essential part of the learning process.
  - It doesn't matter if absences are excused or unexcused, and being late and leaving school early are also important.
  - What matters is helping all students be in the classroom as much as possible, so they can access lots of opportunities to learn.

### Research shows ...

- ▶ Students who have the best chance to succeed in school are those who attend school regularly.
- ▶ Students who regularly attend school receive more hours of instruction, are better able to keep up with their schoolwork, and they usually stay in school longer.

- ▶ Studies show that students with good attendance have a greater chance of graduating, and they often finish high school with higher grades. That means they will have a wide range of options for post-secondary education and careers.
- ▶ Students who graduate from high school are more likely to be employed and earn more money later in their lives.
- ▶ Students who attend school regularly have more opportunities to build positive relationships with adults and other students in the school. School helps students practice and improve their behavioural and social-emotional skills.
- ▶ There is evidence that students who attend school more often are less likely to be negatively affected by challenges outside of school, such as substance abuse or other risky behaviours.

- ▶ *This does not mean that students who experience attendance challenges cannot catch up and go on to graduate and be successful. They can!!*
- ▶ It does mean that helping all students attend school regularly is very important.
- ▶ It also means that students who are experiencing attendance challenges should be provided support as soon as possible.

## 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 too sick.
- ▶ Try to avoid having older children stay home from school to care for their younger siblings.
- ▶ Ask the community and school if attendance incentives are available, and how your child can be considered.

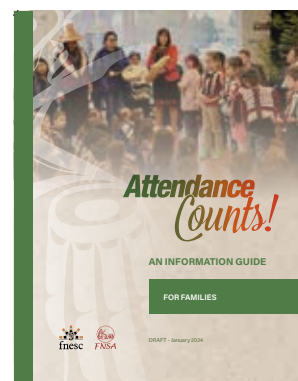
- ▶ Provide regular study times and a quiet area for doing homework so your children don't avoid school because their assignments are not complete.
- ▶ Ask for help if you need it. What services are available in your community? Can the school help you access any resources you might need?
- ▶ Join with 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.

### Do you want to learn more?

**FNESC and FNSA have created a more comprehensive *Attendance Guide for First Nations Families*. It includes more information about why attendance is important, and how families and schools can work in partnership to address this critical component of school and student success. Contact FNESC and FNSA for copies.**

That document includes input from First Nations parents who participated in a number of attendance capacity building sessions. What did those participants say families can do to help with attendance?

- ☐ Tell their children they value education and want to support them in school.
- ☐ Start each school day in a positive way; share positive messages before children leave for school in the morning.
- ☐ Set routines at home so kids are healthy and well-rested.
- ☐ Share the message with students that "education = independence."
- ☐ When possible, try to avoid having older children stay home from school to care for younger siblings and try not to book medical appointments or trips during school hours.
- ☐ Limit screen time and take away phones at bedtime (not always easy).
- ☐ Talk with other families and the school about how to help address students' anxiety about attending school.
- ☐ Regularly check in with teachers.



- ☐ Contact the school (for younger students) or help students reach out to their teachers when days are missed, so children and teens don't fall further behind.
- ☐ Text each other when they need or can share help, such as transportation supports, and encourage each other on the rough days when their children don't want to go to school.
- ☐ Text the teacher, when appropriate, to share "my child is having a rough day today," so everyone is aware when students might need some extra attention, patience, and support.

## Helping Your Child Feel Connected to School

Evidence shows that positive and caring relationships fuel student success.

- ▶ Your guidance and support are key to your children doing well in school, being healthy, and choosing positive behaviours.
- ▶ Education staff can also be important partners in helping your children feel a sense of belonging at school – which is often described as *school connectedness*.

Connected students believe their families, teachers, and school staff care about them and are partners in helping them feel safe, valued, and capable of achieving great things.

### Why is it important for your child to feel connected to school?

- ▶ Helping students feel connected is one of the most important ways schools and families can improve student attendance. Students come to school more regularly when school is a place they want to be.
- ▶ When students feel that school staff care about their education and well-being and feel a strong sense of belonging, it leads to higher student performance, greater motivation, safer learning spaces, improved student behaviour, and lower school drop-out rates.
- ▶ There is more and more research showing that students experience improved health outcomes when they believe adults in the school care about them.
- ▶ Studies show that high levels of school and family connectedness help students who have exceptionalities feel less emotional distress and improves their overall well-being.

## What Can Families Do?

Families can take important actions at home and with the school to help build their children's feeling of connectedness.

1. Encourage your child to talk openly with you, their teachers, counselors, and other school staff about their ideas, needs, and any worries they might have.
2. Find out what the school expects your child to learn and how your child should behave in school. You and the school can work together to help your child meet expectations, which impacts their "connectedness." Meet regularly with your child's teachers to discuss their grades, behaviour, and accomplishments. *You know your child better than anyone else and your input is key.*
3. Try to help your child access the books, supplies, and a quiet space they need to do their homework. This might be at home or possibly at an afterschool program or community space. If you need assistance, reach out to the school so they can help.
4. Encourage your child to help others in your community. Volunteering and community service build students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and feelings of connectedness.
5. Read school newsletters, attend parent-teacher-student conferences, and follow the schools' social media messages so you keep up with the latest news. When your child sees that you are interested in school events, they will feel like their school and family are working together to help them succeed.
6. Encourage your child to participate in school activities. Students who participate in extra-curricular activities are more likely to feel part of the school community.
7. When you can, help in your child's classroom, attend school events, participate in a school committee, or offer to share your cultural understandings in the school or classroom. When students see their families in the school, they feel a stronger sense of connection.
8. Ask your school to offer programs or classes that would help you become more involved in your child's education. For example, families might benefit from the following.
  - Ideas for talking with children and teens about critical topics, such as Internet safety, screen time, health and wellness issues ...
  - Information about how to help children and teens learn.
  - Opportunities to ask about school programs, assessment approaches, report cards, etc.



9. Suggest simple changes that can make the school a more pleasant, culturally-relevant, and welcoming place. For example:
  - Do you think families would enjoy a space in the school for them to come and meet with each other or with school staff?
  - What do you think could increase attendance at school events?
  - What kinds of cultural and on-the-land activities would you recommend for students? Students are more successful when schools reflect who they are.
10. Help your child communicate to the school what works best for their learning. Some students know what will help them feel like they belong at school, but they might not know how to share that understanding. When schools know what students want and need, they are better able to respond.

Your ideas are important. You can feel confident about your special and unique understandings.

**What you do matters. You can help your school make sure all students feel like they are part of a learning community. And that will help all students achieve and succeed.**

Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Interventions. <https://encouragehopeandhelp.com>. Connectedness-Parents.pdf

## The Voices of First Nations Parents

Input provided at November 2024 Capacity Building Sessions for First Nations Parents

### What can SCHOOLS do to help students feel connected to school?

- ☐ Host a welcome circle every morning with drumming, singing, and prayer.
- ☐ Bring culture into the school and use land-based learning opportunities.
- ☐ Create culturally safe spaces for students.
- ☐ Focus on relationship building.
- ☐ Host staff versus student sporting events.
- ☐ Encourage student involvement in school activities, such as music, plays ...
- ☐ Greet every student, and check in on them throughout the day. Know and use students' names.
- ☐ Organize a homework club and tutoring so kids feel successful.
- ☐ Model good behaviour and teach social emotional skills.
- ☐ Make sure the school is safe and accepting of everyone.
- ☐ Meet students where they are and help them get where they want to be.
- ☐ Acknowledge and celebrate student's achievements.
- ☐ Be adaptable (flexible with students).
- ☐ Focus on community engagement; come to the community to meet people and have fun.
- ☐ Ask students for feedback about how they feel at school.

**What can FAMILIES do to help students feel connected to school?**

- ☐ Ask kids questions about their day.
- ☐ Be as involved as possible. Connect yourself. Role model connections.
- ☐ Encourage attendance and involvement in clubs.
- ☐ Show up! Show interest. Participate in school activities, assemblies, concerts, awards days ...
- ☐ Check-in with students to see if they feel safe at school. Do they have a sense of security?
- ☐ Wear school swag. Show school spirit! Talk positively about education. Help students feel proud of their school.
- ☐ Reach out to the teacher; communicate with the school about how our kids are doing and what they need.
- ☐ Help with after-school activities, or create programs of interest if possible – such as language and culture clubs.
- ☐ Help out with school meals or events.
- ☐ Read school communications and ask questions.
- ☐ Support a positive start in the morning.
- ☐ Help kids set out good intentions for the day.
- ☐ Demonstrate excitement about our children's learning.

## Helping All Students Build Friendships

Building positive relationships with others is important for all children – including students who have exceptionalities and special support needs.

- ▶ Enjoying friendships helps increase students' sense of connectedness to school and improves their attendance.
- ▶ When students experience positive social interactions and acceptance from their peers, they show improvements in their social skills and self-esteem, communication skills, and language and intellectual development.
- ▶ Helping children develop healthy friendships is one of the most important goals that most parents have for their children.

For some children, making friends comes easily. For others, it can be more difficult.

The good news is, making friends is a skill that everyone can improve with learning opportunities and practice.

**You can help with this important part of your child's well-being by working with your school on the following strategies.**

- ▶ 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? Be aware of their opportunities for shared activities and talk to the school if you are unsure.
- ▶ Find out if students are being deliberately taught friendship skills. Are there ways you can reinforce what they are learning at home?
- ▶ Talk with school staff about how your child interacts with other students. Ask questions and work together to make sure your child feels comfortable and included.
- ▶ Talk to your child about how people are and are not alike. Emphasize that differences are not bad. Diversity is a strength.

- ▶ Help your child be prepared for social interactions. Practice what they can say to their peers and how they can act with others. Help them learn to share interesting things about themselves.
- ▶ Build your child's confidence by talking about their strengths. If your child needs some encouragement, reassure them that everyone finds it difficult to make friends sometimes. Tell them we all get better at this when we try and practice.

## What About Students Who Have Exceptionalities?

**Sometimes, making friends can be more challenging for students who have some types of exceptionalities or diverse abilities.**

- ▶ For children who have them, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) often include social and friendship related goals and strategies. If your child has an IEP, talk with the school team that helps your child to find out what social goals might be right for them. You can request that the goals focus on things that are important to you and your child.
- ▶ Understand the importance of your child interacting with other students – 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 their peers. Simply being in a classroom may not be enough to help all students with friendship building. Talk to school staff about how they can create structured, intentional opportunities for your child to interact with one or two positive peers.
- ▶ Talk with your child about how to interpret other students' behaviours. Some students find it difficult to read "non-verbal" cues, like body language and other ways people might communicate.
- ▶ Ask about how the school encourages other students to engage with your child in ways that foster understanding and celebrate the diversity of children and teens.
- ▶ 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?
- ▶ Believe your child can not only develop friendships, but would make a wonderful friend – and make sure school staff share the same attitude!

## The Link Between Sleep and Success in School

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

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 the following.

- ▶ Adequate sleep raises students' academic achievement and participation in extracurricular activities.
- ▶ Children and teens who get enough sleep are less likely to be hyperactive, stressed, and report poor mental health.
- ▶ 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 positive 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 and avoid sugary snacks or treats in the evening.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Get proper rest and go to bed early yourself. Your health and well-being are important, too.

## 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-info-graphic.html>

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## Who Knew?

# 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 this 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. It also shows them that what they say matters – which will help build their self-confidence.
- ▶ Use your time eating together as an opportunity to tell your children you are proud of their efforts and achievements. This simple practice will help your children succeed in school, and throughout their lives.

### References

Adapted from *Family Meals Improve Connection and Confidence*. Heart-Mind Online. <https://heart-mindonline.org>

## Routines Can Help Kids Get to School On Time

- ▶ Routines can be profoundly comforting. They give children and teens a sense of security and control over their lives and their environment.
- ▶ Establishing and following routines helps young people develop good habits that can last a lifetime, including organizational and time management skills.
- ▶ Having daily routines can help get children to school on time each day.

Many children and teens benefit from predictable and regular routines.

### What can your family do?

- ▶ Give yourself and your children enough time to get ready for school each day. No TV on weekday mornings can help.
- ▶ Provide your children their own alarm clock. Teaching kids to set and use an alarm can help them learn responsibility.
- ▶ Plan ahead the night before.
  - Plan and pre-prepare breakfast and lunches as much as possible
  - 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 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.
- ▶ Create a folder for completed assignments so your children have their schoolwork at hand.
- ▶ Have your child walk to school or the bus stop with another child who is always on time.

- ▶ Balance extra-curricular activities. Being involved in activities outside of school has numerous benefits, but 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 bad weather days, and organize cold weather gear the night before.

## What Parents Should Know About Bullying

Bullying is aggressive behaviour. It occurs when a child or teen is targeted with repeated negative actions over a period of time.

- ▶ Bullying is meant to cause discomfort or injury, and it can include name-calling, obscene gesturing, malicious teasing, exclusion, threats, rumors, physical hitting, kicking, pushing and choking.
- ▶ Cyber-bullying is also a real and growing problem today. Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. Online threats and mean, aggressive, or rude texts, tweets, posts, or messages all count. So does posting personal information, pictures, or videos designed to hurt or embarrass someone else.

**Bullying of any kind is a form of violence that should not be tolerated.**

Many students experience bullying, either as a target or a perpetrator, and most teachers and students have witnessed bullying in their schools.

And not all children who are bullied report it. Too many students are concerned that no one will help them.

**If your child tells you about a situation and you aren't sure if it's bullying, use this checklist:**

- ☐ Does your child feel hurt, either emotionally or physically, by the other child's behaviour?
- ☐ Has your child been the target of the negative behaviour more than once?
- ☐ Does your child want the behaviour to stop?
- ☐ Is your child unable to make the behaviour stop on their own?
- ☐ If the response to one or more of these questions is "yes," it is likely that the behaviour would be considered bullying.

Both boys and girls bully. Boys bully more often and are more likely to experience physical bullying. Girls are more likely to experience emotional bullying and sexual harassment.

Bullies often pick on others out of frustration with their own lives. They may have low self-esteem and feel bad about themselves.

While they may feel uneasy about it, many children tease their peers simply to go along with the crowd.

## How can I tell if my child is being bullied?

As a parent, it's important to be aware of the signs that your child may be experiencing bullying. Some signs include:

- ▶ Unexplained injuries
- ▶ Loss of personal belongings
- ▶ Signs of anxiety and depression
- ▶ Lower academic performance
- ▶ Avoiding social situations / becoming isolated
- ▶ Changes in eating habits – loss of appetite or over-eating as a sign of distress

If you notice any of these signs, talk to your child to find out what's going on. Let your child know that you are there to support them, and talk to the school about ways to intervene.

## What can parents do about bullying?

- ▶ Start talking to children about this issue early.
  - Families can help teach kids to respect others before they start school, and continue talking about this topic as their children progress through school.
  - Even small acts of teasing should be addressed.
  - Encouraging positive behaviour early can help prevent challenges later.
- ▶ If your child or teen is being bullied, start by asking how they are feeling and what's been going on at school. Give your child the opportunity to talk openly and honestly about what they have been experiencing. Let your child know that you understand how they are feeling and that you are there to support them. Tell them it's not their fault, and you will work together to find a solution.
- ▶ Teach your children how to be assertive – but not aggressive. Fighting back can make bullying worse. Instead, tell children and teens ...
  - It is best to try to ignore a bully, so walking away and going to a place of safety is a good strategy. If that isn't enough, young people should tell the bully to stop in a loud and firm voice, and then leave to find safety.

- Encourage children to express their feelings clearly, stand up for themselves, and speak out if they are being bullied.
  - Let your children know that they don't have to put up with bullying and they need to tell an adult if they feel threatened or unsafe.
- Stop bullying when you see it . Adults must speak up when we see bullying occur.

**“Within our household, we have an “open-door” policy. Bullying has been a problem for some of the children in our community, so we invite families over when kids are involved in conflicts. We talk together about how we can all get along as community members. We discuss how we don't need to resort to bullying.”**

**Input from a parent at a November 2024 First Nations Parents Workshop**

- Listen and support children who speak up. Telling an adult about bullying is not easy. If a child seeks assistance with bullying, or if they have observed bullying, listen to them. Provide them with support before taking action.
- Recognize the signs of depression. Youth who experience persistent bullying can develop signs of depression like sadness, poor concentration, isolation, and sleeping problems. These symptoms can affect their relationships and school performance. It isn't always easy for children to recognize or talk about their emotional needs. If you have concerns, reach out and get help if you need it.
- Tell your children to take action when they see bullying behavior. They should inform an adult about what is happening.
- Work with the school to ensure there are clear anti-bullying policies and consequences. Bullying is less likely in schools where adults are involved and firm about stopping bullying behaviors.
- Team up . Work with others to support students who are being bullied, who witness bullying, and who are showing bullying behaviours themselves. If the bullying is happening at school or the bully is a fellow student, talk to your child's teacher, principal or school counsellor about what's been happening and work with them to address the situation. They may be able to provide additional support or interventions to help your child feel safer at school.

**“Communications between parents and school staff, and with other parents, can help to resolve a lot of bullying issues. Communication is where solutions are.”**

**Input from a parent at a November 2024 First Nations Parents Workshop**

- Help your child recover. Being bullied can lessen a young person's self-confidence and self-esteem. Seeing bullying can make students feel confused and anxious. Bullying can make students feel guilty or upset. Affected students should be encouraged to participate in activities they enjoy and spend time with friends and family members who love and support them.

**Most importantly, show your child that you care and that you are there to support them no matter what.**

**BullyingCanada has expertise in bullying intervention, and has professional counsellors to help kids who have been pushed past the point of being able to cope with bullying. Reach out if you need more information! [www.stopbullying.ca](http://www.stopbullying.ca)**

**Sources:**

[www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)

<https://www.preynet.ca/bullying/for-parents-and-caregivers/>

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



## 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. These are often called extra-curricular activities, which might be:

- ▶ sports, art, dance, and other programs offered by the community.
- ▶ before or after-school “extra-curricular activities” that are sponsored by the school.

There are many reasons to encourage your children to take part in extra-curricular activities.

**Extra-curricular 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 and healthier habits.

**Well-planned extra-curricular activities can reinforce the lessons students are learning in their classrooms. Many extracurricular activities can also 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 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**

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## Helping Your Children Become “Career Ready”

The information included in this section has been adapted from the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care (MECC): 2024 *Guide for Parents and Caregivers About Career Education in BC*. FNEC and FNSA appreciate MECC’s permission to borrow parts of that guide for this section.

**“Career education” is about preparing children to set and follow a career path that is right for them – and parents can have a profound influence on their children’s career planning success.**

- ▶ Families have an essential role in inspiring children and helping them navigate an ever-changing world of work.
- ▶ The role of families in shaping their children’s future employment choices begins at an early age. Then, as students move through school, teens and families can explore new and interesting career pathways together.

### Planning for a Future Career is a Journey

**Career planning and preparation can be a long and winding path. Sometimes it is complicated to know the best way forward.**

- ☐ Work and career opportunities continue to change. Career education is therefore evolving all the time.
- ☐ There are an expanding range of options for post-secondary education and training.
- ☐ There is an increasing amount of career information available.
- ☐ Career education cannot be a one-size-fits-all model. Helping students prepare to meet their career goals must be customized to match the unique needs of each student.

**Given these factors, it is useful when students, families, and school staff make the career journey together.**

- ▶ Beginning when they are young, families can start helping children understand the possibilities open to them. Families can help children identify their talents and passions – which are at the heart of their career journey.
- ▶ As children grow into teenagers, their understanding of careers and the world of work grows, and is often shaped by who and what are part of their lives.
- ▶ Family members, friends, teachers and employers all play an important role in encouraging students to explore options for their futures.
- ▶ And your role, as a parent, is the foundation for it all.

## Defining Jobs, Work, and Careers

In this paper, you will find references to different terms.

- ▶ A **job** is a specific position you hold within an organization or as someone who is self-employed (e.g. a small business owner, a school secretary, an Education Director, etc.).
- ▶ An **occupation** is a type of work (such as nurse, teacher, accountant, carver, IT Technician ...).
- ▶ A **career** encompasses a lifelong journey.
  - A career may include one or more jobs. For example, a nurse could work for a health clinic, and then in a school, and then in a hospital.
  - A career may include one or more occupations. For example, a social worker could return to school to become a teacher.

## Career Education in the School System

Many schools teach career education. For example, BC schools are expected to help students grow through their career journey by integrating personal and career exploration into every level of education.

- ▶ Students are introduced to a variety of occupations at a young age.
- ▶ As they progress to higher grades, students are exposed to more occupations, and they participate in activities to show how a variety of occupations might match their interests and skills.
- ▶ Students eventually begin developing education and career plans that will help them reach their goals.

To support this growth, schools may offer career counselling, career resources, and information fairs and events.

Students can also take specific career-related courses. If you want to know more, ask your school for details.

## What Can Families Do to Help?

Here are a few questions to help you start a conversation with your children about their education and career choices.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What are your goals?   | <input type="checkbox"/> What interests you? What do you like to spend your time doing? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What do you think are your unique strengths and special talents? |   |

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you want to stay in your community to work after high school? Do you want to live in a few different places over time? | <input type="checkbox"/> Do you like working inside, on-the-land, on-the water ...?<br><input type="checkbox"/> What do you want to contribute to your community? To the world? |
|--|---|

**You can also share the following messages with your children.**

It is ok if you are not certain what you want to do right now. Most people don’t have an exact career path right away, and people often change occupations several times throughout their lives. That is completely normal.

- ▶ Most people spend two-thirds of our lives working – on average, 80,000 hours! It’s important to choose an occupation that will help you feel fulfilled and make you feel good about yourself.
- ▶ Thinking about a career path involves considering what will make you feel satisfied and happy in your work. While money may be one important consideration, it is also important to think about your values, what kind of life you want to lead, where you want to live, who you’ll spend time with, and in what kinds of environments.
- ▶ There are many paths you can choose to create the kind of life and future you’re envisioning for yourself. There are many learning options after secondary school. You could try university, a community college, or an apprenticeship. There are many different opportunities for people who have all kinds of goals and interests.
- ▶ Remember, you’re not deciding your entire future right now. You’re simply choosing a path to start down. You can always change course as you go through life. And it’s always a good idea to have a backup plan, whether it’s for a chosen program, school, or career journey.

## Career Conversations and Activities For Every Age

In the early years of career education, career conversations can be attached to any activity at any time.

- ▶ When you’re travelling through your community or through town, talk about the people who work in all kinds of jobs. What seems to grab your child’s attention?
- ▶ If you’re reading a book or watching a show together, talk about the jobs the characters are doing.
- ▶ Whether you’re sitting down for a planned discussion, chatting while you’re out going places, or helping with homework or a project, look for opportunities to talk about your child’s interests and what types of careers might match those interests.
- ▶ Consider looking up information online together to learn more.
- ▶ Encourage your children to try new things and ask lots of questions.

### In Elementary School

- ▶ Find out about your child’s passions. What do they like to do? What do they talk about a lot?
- ▶ Expose your child to new experiences and chat informally about different kinds of jobs.
- ▶ Review your child’s report card, or ask their teachers about their special strengths and what they seem to enjoy most in the classroom.

#### Sample Conversation Starters

- ▶ While reading a book, ask your child to name the main character’s interests and talk about what kinds of jobs might match those interests. Or point to illustrations in the book and try to brainstorm together a range of careers that relate to those illustrations (e.g. a tree = tree planter, landscaper, forester; a car = mechanic, race car driver, car designer, etc.). Then ask: *Would any of those jobs interest you? Why or why not?*
- ▶ If you are travelling somewhere, point out different buildings and ask your child if they know what kinds of jobs people do in those building (e.g. a hospital = doctors, nurses, administrators, etc.; a bank = tellers, financial planners, etc.). Then ask: *Would you like to do any of those kinds of jobs?*

### In Grades 7 – 9

- ▶ Find out if your child’s interests have changed since leaving elementary school.
- ▶ Continue to talk about a variety of different career options.
- ▶ If you can, attend field trips and open houses, and participate in other activities that can expose your child to options and ideas for their future.
- ▶ Find relevant posts on social media that you can share with your child. Invite your child’s feedback about what you share.
- ▶ Use extra-curricular activities as a way to start conversations about what excites your child and what talents they have. Do they excel in leadership, working well with others, making things, creating art, writing ...?
- ▶ Stay up-to-date on career education activities at the school so you can have follow-up conversations at home.
- ▶ Introduce your child to friends and other community members who are open to talking about their career paths.

**Sample Conversation Starters**

- ▶ If you watch TV or movies together, make a point of commenting on the characters’ interests, passions, or jobs. Ask your child if they like similar things. This can be a great way to learn about their evolving likes and dislikes, which will impact their choices. Then ask: *Are you interested in learning more about this job? If yes, maybe we can learn more about it from the Internet.*
- ▶ Find a social media clip or meme that relates to a career or industry your child is interested in. Share it with your child. Then ask: *What do you think about the post? Do you have any questions about the career they were talking about?*

**In Grades 10 – 12**

- ▶ Encourage your child to explore a diverse range of career options and look at a variety of resources to help start planning next steps.
- ▶ Encourage your child to meet with their career educator or career counsellor / advisor, if one is available.
- ▶ Encourage your child to create a vision board to help them visualize their interests and goals. They can do this by cutting and pasting together images that represent their vision for the future.
- ▶ Help your child research post-secondary opportunities that match their interests, skills and abilities.
- ▶ Attend relevant events and information sessions with your child whenever possible. Then talk about what you saw and heard.
- ▶ Begin talking about funding for post-secondary and what steps they want to take next.

**Sample Conversation Starters**

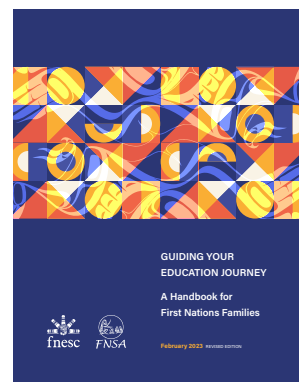
- ▶ If you drive your child (and their friends) to activities, take the opportunity to chat about their goals and interests, and their plans for after graduation. Ask the teens: *What are your thoughts about your next steps after high school?*
- ▶ Together, research potential learning opportunities by visiting post-secondary institutions’ websites. Many offer virtual video tours and introductions to their programs. Talk with your children: *What are your thoughts on the video tour you watched? Could you picture yourself there?*

## What Else is Possible?

- ▶ If you can, take your child to see post-secondary campuses. Find out if the school offers any related opportunities. There is nothing more inspiring than seeing a setting first-hand. Talk about: *How did you like the campus tour? What were your favourite places to explore?*
- ▶ Contact your child’s school to ask about what career projects and activities are happening in classrooms. If they are offered, attend parent information sessions, career fairs, and post-secondary information events.
- ▶ Reach out and get to know your child’s teachers and school staff. They can pass on valuable information about career and work experience opportunities and post-secondary options.
- ▶ Help your child find opportunities to gain real-world experience and build skills outside of the classroom through volunteering, work experience programs, and part-time work. Trying things is the best way to find out what interests us.
- ▶ Look into potential scholarships, grants and awards.

### Being a coach in your child’s career education process means asking yourself how you can:

- ▶ help your child discover and explore their values, skills and interests, all of which may change over time.
- ▶ help them explore potential occupations and learning options.
- ▶ help them set and pursue goals.
- ▶ introduce them to people and resources that match their interests.
- ▶ encourage them to consider various opportunities to gain knowledge and experience.
- ▶ help them research post-secondary learning paths.
- ▶ More information about planning for post-secondary education and careers is available in the FNEsc and FNSA publication: *Guiding Your Education Journey: A Handbook for First Nations Families*. That Handbook is intended to provide information to help families make the best decisions possible about what courses to take – especially in Grades 10, 11, and 12, and to help families plan for post-secondary education and training.





## Reframing Our Thinking

**Children and teens may sometimes feel that the adults in their lives have all the power, but really their own thinking has a significant impact on their experiences and achievement.**

- ▶ Most students don't regularly reflect on the stories they choose to tell themselves, but their own patterns of thinking affect their effort, persistence, and learning.
  - ▶ Studies show that what we think can have a powerful influence on how we feel emotionally and physically, and on how we behave.
- 
- ▶ For many children and teens, a challenge or a mistake can cause negative thoughts, and sometimes they might shutdown.
  - ▶ They may wait for an adult to help them fix a mistake, walk them through each step of fixing a problem, or they may become frustrated or disengage.
  - ▶ A discouraging inner voice can create stress and discourage children and teens from trying new things.
  - ▶ But research shows that harmful thinking patterns can be changed.

### How can we help children and teens reframe their inner critic into an inner champion?

- 1. Model how we ourselves approach challenges. Our words and actions can model healthy responses.**
  - Show how you process your feelings.
  - Take a slow, deep breath, and talk through your response to a challenge out loud. For example, you might say “Darn. That didn’t go the way I wanted it to. That’s not great. I guess I’ll have to try another way.”
  - Show you can stay optimistic when things don’t go as expected.
- 2. Help your children step out of their “comfort zone” into the growth zone.**
  - One great activity with young people is to make this concept concrete.
  - Place a hula hoop or a mat on the ground to represent the “comfort zone.” For example, that might be staying home from school because there is a test that day.
  - Have your children step in the hoop or on the mat. Talk about what is keeping your child in the “comfort zone.” Talk about what might help them step out.
  - Ask your child to step out of the hoop or off the mat. Talk about how your child feels when they step outside that space. Does it feel a bit frightening? That’s ok. What can they do when they are stuck in the “comfort zone” versus being outside of it?
- 3. Emphasize that your family views mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.** Help your children take on new challenges that might not come easily at first. Let them know that if they don’t succeed right away, that only means they are stretching themselves in new ways – which is great!
- 4. Celebrate effort and growth.** Children and teens may be more willing to try new things when their parents notice and praise times when they extend themselves. Tell your children you are proud of them when they overcome a challenge – no matter how big or small.
- 5. If your children need a confidence boost, remind them of times in the past when they’ve done something hard.**

Together, education staff and parents can help students send themselves new types of messages. This can build their self-esteem and their resilience (which means their ability to deal with difficulties and bounce back when things have gone off-course).

### Possible questions that parents and educators can discuss ...

- ▶ Do we think the children and teens in our school tell themselves more positive or negative stories about their abilities? Why?
- ▶ What can we all do to help students reframe their thinking and recognize and celebrate their talents? How can we help them feel confident that they can take on challenges and accept mistakes as learning opportunities, not failures?
- ▶ How can we show students it is possible to tell ourselves optimistic stories about our lives and our futures?



## The Value of Optimism

Optimism involves expecting positive outcomes, and seeing set-backs as temporary and a normal part of life. Optimism influences how people respond to life's difficulties.

- ▶ Children who have more optimistic thinking are more resilient and less likely to give up in the face of challenge. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from a difficulty, which is a critical factor in long-term success and well-being. Children who are more optimistic are also more likely to feel a sense of control in their lives, which can lead to less anxiety and greater self-confidence.
- ▶ Optimism isn't something you either have or don't have. It can be taught and practiced..

One of the most important habits that children can develop is optimism.

"What is one thing I do each day to help my children succeed? I am positive in the morning when my kids are getting up. I reinforce the good for the day ahead."

**Input from a parent at a November 2024 First Nations Parents Workshop**

"I think one of the best things we can do to encourage educational success is to focus on the positives. We have to be optimistic. If our kids feel hopeful, they will do better. When we believe in our children's talents and what they can do, they will believe in themselves, and others will believe in them, too."

**Input from a parent at a November 2024 First Nations Parents Workshop**

## What can parents do to encourage an optimistic outlook?

- ▶ **Model being optimistic.** If children hear lots of optimistic comments, they are more likely to develop this way of thinking themselves.
  - Look for and point out the bright side of experiences.
  - Try to find the positive even when things haven't gone well.
  - When children are regularly exposed to optimistic thinking, they are more likely to believe in their own abilities and develop stronger problem-solving skills.
- ▶ **Use positive self-talk.** When things are difficult, say out loud things like, "Wow. This is tough. I might make a mistake. But I can do my best and if things don't work out perfectly, I can always try something else."
- ▶ **Practice gratitude.** When we talk positively about what we are thankful for, it helps shift our thinking from problems to positives.
- ▶ **Focus on solutions, not problems.** When challenges arise, don't dwell on what went wrong; talk about how your children can overcome a mistake.
  - Whether things have gone well or badly, the most important question that parents can ask their children is "What will we do differently next time?"
  - Mistakes are just a natural part of learning. Point out what your child did well and help them self-evaluate: "What went well?" "What would I change if I could?"
- ▶ **Encourage children to set their own goals – even small ones.** When children are anxious about failing, encourage them to set reasonable targets and work out for themselves how to achieve them. Setting and achieving goals on their own gives children a sense of competence and builds their experience of success.
- ▶ **Focus on what you can control, and talk about solving issues.** If children are feeling frustrated or upset about something that has happened, it is important and beneficial to let them talk through what happened and how they feel. Learning to understand and sort through our emotions is a lifelong skill. But in time, it's useful to change focus to what you can do to move forward in a positive way.
- ▶ **Celebrate effort.** Noticing children's hard work reinforces that achievement isn't everything, and we can grow when we try.

Teaching optimism is one of the most important things that parents can do to help children's emotional well-being and self-esteem. A child who believes in their own ability to make changes and be successful, even in the face of mistakes, will have a positive view of themselves and their opportunities.

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## Helping Young Children With Everyday Anxiety

Adapted from resources created by Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Early Years (EASEY) at Home.  
<https://healthymindsbc.gov.bc.ca/everyday-anxiety-strategies-early-years-at-home/>

As young children grow and develop, they encounter many new experiences, and they also face many new feelings. Sometimes when they are doing something that is unusual or different, children may feel fear, stress or anxiety.

Families can help their children deal with these feelings by noticing and responding to their needs, and guiding them through safe experiences.

### Common signs of anxiety in young children can include:

- ▶ Anger, yelling, or over-reacting to minor upsets or small problems
- ▶ Getting really upset when routines or plans are changed
- ▶ Refusing to participate in something – perhaps saying no, withdrawing, or becoming very quiet
- ▶ Becoming more clingy than usual, or trying to get your attention all the time
- ▶ Talking a lot or asking a lot of questions
- ▶ Expressing worry and talking about what things might go wrong
- ▶ Physical complaints, such as a headache or sore stomach
- ▶ Changes in eating habits or difficulty sleeping

### This might sound like:

- ☐ “I don’t want to .... Please don’t make me ...”
- ☐ “I feel sick. I want to go home.”
- ☐ “Can’t I stay with you instead?”
- ☐ “But what if .... ? What would I do?”

- ▶ Anxiety can come and go, and it is normal for young children to feel anxious or worried sometimes.
- ▶ However, if your child shows several signs of anxiety that interfere with their daily life and last for a long time, it may be helpful to look for some extra support.

**The following tips may also be useful for helping young children avoid or deal with mild to moderate levels of anxiety and stress.**

- ▶ **Play and time outside can create a sense of calm for children (and adults, too).**
  - Playing helps improve our mood, and can allow children to explore new things in safe ways.
  - Playing outside especially relieves stress. Using our senses to smell, touch, taste and listen in nature helps us be mindful. Parents can encourage children to take a deep breath and notice what they see, hear, and smell.
  - Taking small risks, like climbing over a log, rolling down a small hill, or sledding in the winter, can build self-confidence for young children.
  - Connections to the land build children's resilience, healing, and overall mental well-being. Families help relieve anxiety just by being together on the land, talking about the plants, animals, birds, and the natural setting.
- ▶ **Responses from adults can help calm feelings of anxiety. Sometimes young children show their anxiety by behaving in negative ways. Rather than getting upset, adults can try to pause, take a deep breath, and react in a supportive way.**
  - Use warm and confident phrases, such as "I'm right here. You're safe." Or "We all feel scared or nervous sometimes. But we can handle this." Or "I remember when you felt nervous doing ..., but then you faced it, and things went well." Or "Let's take some deep breathes and watch for a bit. Then maybe you'll feel ready to ..."
  - If a child doesn't respond well to verbal encouragement, singing, slow breathing, or distraction might be soothing.
  - Parents can help their young children gradually face scary situations, so their confidence grows as they see that they can try new things without negative results.
- ▶ **Try to establish a comforting home environment.**
  - When possible, try to avoid rushing from one activity to the next. Schedule some down time. A major cause of stress for everyone is having too much to do. Set priorities and do things that are the most important and give you more happiness.
  - Family routines can help create a sense of security. When you can, follow a calming bedtime routine, eat meals together without electronic devices, and – if possible – let your children know ahead if routines and plans will change, so they aren't surprised or disappointed at the last minute.

- Try to balance your family life, fitting in time for work, rest, and play. And make time for fun social activities with friends and family.
- Use physical activity as a mood booster for the whole family. Family walks, time in a garden, sports or games, etc. reduce stress.
- Look after your own well-being by giving yourself permission to relax. As a family, try to eat healthy foods and get plenty of sleep.
- Be aware of your family's use of media and what content your children are seeing and hearing. Is it age-appropriate? Would it be disturbing for young children?

► **Try some creative activities to help children feel more calm.**

- Have your child draw a picture of something they find comforting, like a pet, a family member, a place they like ... and hang it on the fridge. Tell your child it is always there if they need to look at it.
- Trace your child's hand, and in each finger write something they are good at or a strength they have. It might be "kind," "fast runner," "good drummer" .... Hang it up to remind your child that they are capable and strong.
- Make a comfort box. Put some special items in a box your child can use when they need something soothing, such as a favourite calming book, a stuffed toy, a small blanket, or maybe some play-dough. Some children find it calming to work with dough. Some children also find it calming to look at a snow globe, or a small plastic bottle filled with some warm water and some glitter glue, which can have the same effect of gentle movement.
- Draw pictures or use craft materials (such as paper bags, empty paper towel rolls, small tubs ...) to create monsters, and make them silly – such as adding clown noses, crazy glasses or hats, funny hair, googly eyes, etc. Talk to your child about how they can use their imagination to make things seem less frightening, such as spiders wearing clown shoes, tripping over their eight big feet.
- Use simple props to help your child practice ways to ease their worries. For example, give them a cape to practice having superpowers to fight their fears. Or make a pretend wand so they can make something scary disappear from their mind. Or give them special glasses that can help them see the good parts of something that makes them nervous, like the fun they will have if you leave them in pre-school where they can play with the other children.
- Play calming music and let your child colour or do some other quiet activity. Ask your child to think about how the music makes them feel. Could they think about this feeling when something makes them worried?

The good news is that little brains are constantly learning and growing, and with more experience and understanding they will become better able to cope with new things. Until then, your support can help them explore and enjoy the world around them with more security and confidence.

## What to Know About Vaping

Adapted from Vaping Education from the BC Lung Association.

[https://bclung.ca/sites/default/files/1168-Vaping\\_Parent%27sHandout\\_Final\\_R2.pdf](https://bclung.ca/sites/default/files/1168-Vaping_Parent%27sHandout_Final_R2.pdf)

- ▶ 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 vapor or a cloud) that is inhaled. The liquid solution, commonly called e-juice, vaping liquid or e-liquid, is flavored.
- ▶ 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.

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

## 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 experience 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 vapor, 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 flavorings?”

- ☐ E-juice typically contains chemicals as well as flavorings. These chemicals and flavorings 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 vapor is a health concern.

### “Isn’t the cloud produced when vaping just water vapor?”

- ☐ 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.





## Should I Be Concerned About Energy Drinks?

- ▶ Teens and young adults are the target market for energy drink manufacturers.
- ▶ But although sports and energy drinks are widely available and popular among Canadian children and youth, they can pose serious health risks.

More and more kids are reaching for energy drinks, thinking they will help them feel less tired and ready to perform their best.

### Did You Know?

- ▶ Energy drinks are packed with sugar, and many also have high levels of caffeine.
- ▶ Sugar is a fast energy source for active children. However, when kids use sugary drinks to replace other healthier choices, it can lead to a crash, leaving them tired and irritable. This may make them want to have another energy drink.
  - Feeling tired during the day usually means your body needs a nap, not an energy drink. Teens need 8-10 hours of sleep per night, but most get less.
  - Encouraging better sleep habits — like regular sleep routines, turning off screens before bed, and keeping the bedroom dark— are much better ways to beat tiredness.
- ▶ Excessive sugar intake can also contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, and tooth decay.

The American Heart Association recommends no more than six teaspoons of sugar per day for children, yet a single energy drink can have up to 15 teaspoons!

- ▶ Many energy drinks are loaded with calories. If children and youth aren't active enough to burn off the extra calories, they may wind up gaining weight, which increases their risk of diseases like Type 2 diabetes.

A balanced diet with regular meals, including fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, can help maintain steady energy levels and promote long-term health.

- ▶ **Many energy drinks have high levels of caffeine, and too much caffeine can have negative impacts on health; it can lead to insomnia, irritability, headaches and nervousness.**
  - Energy drinks can have anywhere from 50 mg to more than 200 mg of caffeine per can. One energy drink could have more caffeine than the safe daily limit for children and teens.
  - Caffeinated energy drinks are generally not recommended for children and youth.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has had to recall some caffeinated energy drinks for a variety of reasons, including too much caffeine and improper labelling – such as missing cautionary statements.

- ▶ **Children and teens are more at risk of side effects from energy drinks. They can cause:**
  - fast heartbeat
  - high blood pressure
  - headaches
  - impulsive behaviour
  - anxiety
  - irritability
- ▶ **Children with certain physical or mental health conditions may be at higher risk of side effects from energy drinks. Caffeine can also affect how some medications work.**

**Energy drinks might provide a temporary boost, but they come with risks like anxiety, poor academic performance, and chronic sleep deprivation.**

- ▶ As a parent or caregiver, it's important that you discuss the risks of using these beverages with your child or teen, sharing these messages:
  - Mixing energy drinks with alcohol can be dangerous.
  - Even taken alone, energy drinks can have serious side effects.
  - Taking energy drinks on an empty stomach can make side effects worse.
  - Energy drinks are not a meal replacement.
  - The best hydration is water.
- ▶ Adults can also be role models. If we make healthy drink choices, our children are more likely to make those choices, too.
- ▶ If you do choose to consume caffeinated energy drinks, follow the cautionary statements that appear on the label, such as “Not recommended for children or youth” or “Do not drink more than XX serving(s) per day.”

**When we support healthy routines for our children, like balanced diets, consistent sleep, and time for relaxation, we can reduce – and hopefully eliminate – the need for these stimulants.**

### Sources Used:

Canadian Paediatric Society. Caring for Kids. Energy drinks and sports drinks. [www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)  
Government of Canada. Caffeinated energy drinks: what you should know



## How To Talk to Kids About Drugs and Alcohol

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 models and their best defence against drug and alcohol abuse.

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

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

## What often causes a teen to use drugs or alcohol?

- ▶ Curiosity — when they see others using things, teens generally want to try drugs and 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; speak second. Take a breath and try to stay clear and focused when talking together. 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
- ☐ big changes to their usual behaviour and activities
- ☐ 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.
- ▶ 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.

**Sources:**

Talking to Teens About Drugs and Alcohol. 2021. Lifeworks.

<https://wellbeing.lifeworks.com/ca/newsletter-content/talking-to-teens-about-drugs-and-alcohol/>

How to Talk with Your Teen about Drugs - Communication Tips for Parents.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/reports-publications/alcohol-drug-prevention/talk-your-teen-about-drugs-communication-tips-parents.html>

See also a companion to the booklet [Talking with Your Teen about Drugs](#) and Web site for parents: [drugprevention.gc.ca](http://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](http://drugprevention.gc.ca)



## Helping Children Deal With Traumatic News or Events

- ▶ 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.

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.

### 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 have an 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 a friend to be part of the conversations if it 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

NYU Child Study Center: [www.aboutourkids.org/articles/talking\\_children\\_about\\_difficult\\_subjects\\_illness\\_death\\_violence\\_disaster](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/talking_children_about_difficult_subjects_illness_death_violence_disaster)

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## Talking With Children and Teens About Body Image

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.

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

### 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 the following.

- ▶ 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, taking diet pills, or using other unhealthy products.

Spending time worrying about their bodies and how they measure up also takes time away from positive 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 online, 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 their posts 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, an obsession with calories, unusual concern about weight, 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.**

### Sources:

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Tips to support young people with body image. January 2022. [Kidshelppohne.ca](http://Kidshelppohne.ca)

Promoting a positive body image. Sickkidsstaff. [www.aboutkidshealth.ca](http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca)

Soussi, F. 2021. Social Media Filters Adversely Affect Our Mental Health. <https://medium.com/invisible-illness/social-media-filters-adversely-affect-our-mental-health-3eec79db6383>



## Does Your Child, or a Child You Know, Need Support? The Kids Help Phone Is Available

Kids Help Phone provides millions of youth a safe, trusted space to get support through phone or text, and access self-directed tools in any moment of crisis or need.

Kids Help Phone is Canada's only 24/7 e-mental health service that offers free, confidential support to young people.

**Phone:** Free professional counsellors are available, who recognize the strengths of young people by helping them find solutions to their own struggles and take steps towards resolving their own challenges.

1 800 668-6868 press 3

[KidsHelpPhone.ca](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

**Text:** Volunteer Crisis Responders provide real time support, listening and supporting young people to find their own approach to a cooler calm through text. First Nations youth and adults can connect with an Indigenous Crisis Responder, when available, by texting the words FIRSTNATIONS.

Youth text: 686868      Adults text: 741741

**Website:** Kids Help Phone's website offers support to young people by providing content (both youth-facing and adult-facing) on various topics affecting young people and information on our services.

[KidsHelpPhone.ca/Indigenous](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Indigenous) (for youth)

[KidsHelpPhone.ca/FindingHope](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/FindingHope) (for supporters)

**Resources Around Me:** Kids Help Phone maintains an online database of mental health and support resources for youth across Canada. With over 20,000 community services, this database allows counsellors and crisis responders to provide timely and accurate referrals and can filter for First Nations resources.

[KidsHelpPhone.ca/ResourcesAroundMe](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/ResourcesAroundMe)

**Brighter Days:** A virtually delivered Indigenous Wellness Program that gently introduces Indigenous youth (ages 6 – 29) to Kids Help Phone services, and provides an opportunity for youth to engage virtually with a Kids Help Phone Indigenous Wellness Specialist in a culturally safe and fun conversation. After an introductory session, participating groups have the option of hosting additional sessions focused on wellness topics such as managing anxiety, self-care and more.

#### Who is eligible for the program?

Any group of at least 5 Indigenous youth (school classes, community programs, etc.) age 6 – 29 (grade 1 to post-secondary). Session length varies by age: ages 6 – 10 have two, 30-minute sessions; ages 11 – 29 have one, 50-minute session. Indigenous youth can register individually to participate in a group with other youth by choosing “register individually” on the registration page. There is no cost for participation.

[KidsHelpPhone.ca/BrighterDays](https://KidsHelpPhone.ca/BrighterDays)

#### What is required?

1. Register for sessions at [KidsHelpPhone.ca/BrighterDays](https://KidsHelpPhone.ca/BrighterDays)
2. Speak with the Indigenous Wellness Specialist ahead of the session
3. Play the provided introductory video featuring an Indigenous influencer
4. Connect by video or audio at the selected time and date for the session
5. Distribute the provided gifts, promotional materials, and evaluation forms after the session

## Volunteer Opportunities For Interested Youth

**Weaving Threads Indigenous Engagement Program** is a network of volunteer Champions and Ambassadors (ages 15 and older) who connect youth to resources and critical supports including Kids Help Phone.

#### Weaving Threads Champions:

- ▶ Support the inclusion of community resources in Resources Around Me
- ▶ Build awareness of resources available to youth, including the Kids Help Phone
- ▶ Provide input on Kids Help Phone’s programs, services and initiatives
- ▶ Connect with Kids Help Phone in times of community crisis
- ▶ Engage with youth in a Kids Help Phone Peer-to-Peer Community (youth only)

#### Weaving Threads Ambassadors:

- ▶ Fulfill the responsibilities of Champions, plus ...
- ▶ Attend information booths
- ▶ Represent Kids Help Phone in the media (18 years old and over)
- ▶ Give community presentations on behalf of Kids Help Phone

See [KidsHelpPhone.ca/WeavingThreads](https://KidsHelpPhone.ca/WeavingThreads)



## 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 the serious issues around violence and gangs.

- ▶ **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 hopeful 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.

## Building Your Children's Early Literacy Skills

Before starting school, children begin building their first literacy skills through their interactions at home and in their play time.

Families, are essential in setting up children for success in the early grades (Kindergarten to Grade 3), when young students continue to grow and become readers and writers.

### How can families help children develop a strong literacy foundation?

- ☐ Use your First Nation language as much as you can. Practicing more than one language is extremely beneficial for children's brain development, their self-esteem, and their love of learning.
- ☐ Talk to your children. Oral language is the beginning of learning to read and write. Have conversations, ask your children questions, tell them stories, and ask your children to tell stories to you.
- ☐ Play with language. Sing, make up silly rhymes, try to name an animal or food beginning with each letter of the alphabet ... Have fun with sounds.
- ☐ Read to your children ... anything and everything. Read signs, recipes, packages, picture books ... Label items at home so your children see words all around them. Or listen to audiobooks. And talk about what you are reading or listening to – which helps build understanding. Ask your children questions about the story, invite them to make guesses about what might happen next, and discuss any new words you come across.
- ☐ When it's time for your child to read on their own, choose books that interest them. Using early reader books, your children can start to read with your help.
- ☐ Play together. Through play, children learn, build their language skills, and get to express themselves creatively.

- ☐ Use letter and number toys and games. Puzzles, magnets, and board games are fun ways for kids to practice their letters, words, and numbers.
- ☐ Have your child draw, craft, or play with playdough. These activities help to strengthen children's hands, which is important when they begin to form written letters. Making marks and shapes on paper is the start of writing. Later they will practice forming letters correctly.
- ☐ When your child is ready to write, encourage them to write regularly. They can write lists, keep a journal, write funny poems, express their ideas freely. If possible, give them fun writing materials like colorful pens, paper, and notebooks.
- ☐ Share new words. Talk about new ways to describe things. Which fish is big, which is huge, which is giant, which is massive?
- ☐ If you have questions, talk to the school or childcare provider.

# 5.0

## Addressing technology use and online activities to keep children and teens safe and healthy

- 5.1 Using Social Media in Healthy, Positive Ways
- 5.2 Tips for Creating a Family Technology Use Plan
- 5.3 Keeping Up With Technology Issues
- 5.4 Helping Students Understand: What Goes Online Stays Online, and Everyone Can See It
- 5.5 Play Safe: Tips for Online Gaming
- 5.6 What is AI, and Why is Everyone Talking About It?
- 5.7 What is Meant by the Term Digital Literacy?
- 5.8 Signs Your Child or Teen May be Overusing Technology
- 5.9 Let's Talk About "Fake News"
- 5.10 Using Screen Time in Positive Ways



## Using Social Media In Healthy, Positive Ways

Today, almost all youth use social media. Some researchers estimate that up to 95% of young people between the ages of 13 and 17 use a social media platform. Many younger children regularly use social media, as well.

People are affected by social media in different ways.

- ▶ Social media can provide benefits for some youth by allowing positive connections with other young people who share their interests.
- ▶ Social media can help teens find information, and possibly help them access mental health supports if needed.
- ▶ Social media sometimes offers a space for young people to express themselves and be creative.

The impact of social media on youth mental health is shaped by many complex factors, including:

- ▶ the amount of time children and teens spend on platforms.
- ▶ the type of content they access.
- ▶ the activities and interactions they experience.
- ▶ how much it disrupts other activities that are essential for their well-being, like sleep, in-person interactions, and physical activity.

There are many questions about the impact of social media on youth mental health, and there is limited information about whether social media is sufficiently safe for children and teens.

- ▶ It is important to remember that children and youth are in a highly sensitive period of brain development.
- ▶ That means they may be vulnerable to social pressures, the opinions of their peers, and comparisons to other people.

**Some common concerns about social media use include the following.**

- ▶ More and more evidence is suggesting that *too much* social media use may be related to mental health challenges, including depression and anxiety.
- ▶ Too much social media use can result in poor sleep, a greater chance of online harassment, poor body image, and low self-esteem.
- ▶ Social media can expose children and youth to inappropriate and harmful content.
- ▶ Social media platforms can be sites for predators who target children and teens, such as adults who try to sexually exploit children, sell them drugs, or harass them.
- ▶ Social media platforms are often designed to maximize user engagement, which has the potential to encourage excessive use.

**In response, families and educators can act together to help kids use social media in safer and healthier ways.**

## **What Parents and Caregivers Can Do**

- ▶ Create a family social media plan. Talk together about family rules for social media use. Determine how much time online is reasonable, what types of content should be accessed, and what everyone will do to protect personal information.
- ▶ Create tech-free zones. Electronics can distract students after bedtime and can interfere with sleep. It is therefore helpful to limit the use of phones, tablets, and computers for at least 1 hour before bedtime and restrict the use of technology throughout the night. You may also want to make family mealtimes and gatherings device-free.
- ▶ Help your children and teens develop social skills and relationships by making “unplugged interactions” a daily priority. Encourage your children to build in-person friendships.
- ▶ Model responsible and positive social media use. Develop healthy practices as a family. You can:
  - track the amount of time everyone spends online.
  - block unwanted contacts and content.
  - learn about and use available privacy and safety settings.
  - talk together about the difference between fact and opinion.
  - balance time online and in-person experiences.
- ▶ Teach your children to be cautious about what information they share. Personal information has value.



- ▶ Everyone should be selective about what they post and share online; it is often public and can be stored permanently.
  - ▶ If your children and teens aren't sure if they should post something, they should talk to a family member or trusted adult for advice.
- 
- ▶ Discuss the benefits and risks of social media in age-appropriate ways.
    - Talk about who your children are connecting with, their privacy settings, what information they are sharing, their online experiences, and how they are spending their time online.
    - Empower your kids to seek help if they need it.
  - ▶ Talk to your children and teens about what they should do if they feel unsafe online. Problems can arise in email, text messaging, direct messaging, online games, or on social media. It might involve trolling, rumors, or photos passed around for others to see – and it can leave people feeling angry, sad, ashamed, or hurt. Tell your children and teens ...
    - They can get support, without judgment, if they are uncomfortable.
    - They should report anyone who asks them to share their image or contact information.
    - They should not keep online harassment or abuse a secret. They should reach out to someone they trust, such as a close friend, family member, counselor, or teacher, who can give them the help they deserve.
  - ▶ Talk with your children about whether they can believe all of the information they find posted online. They need to know that they can't rely on "facts" that are shared through social media. It is important to consider who is sharing information and why.
    - Many young people prefer to get their news from social media, and they do not always consider how reliable the sources are.
    - Social media is flooded with untrue stories and claims, and there is research showing that children and teens may be more likely to believe false information because their brains are still developing.
- 
- ▶ New research from the News Literacy Project, an organization that works on media literacy, found that eighty percent of teens see conspiracy theories on social media – and about half reported seeing them at least once a week.
  - ▶ Of the teens who reported seeing conspiracy theories, 81 percent said they believed at least one, the report found ([www.newslit.org](http://www.newslit.org)).

- ▶ Work with other parents to establish shared practices for healthy social media use. It can be easier when families have similar guidelines.
- ▶ Reach out for help yourself, if you need it. The world of technology is changing fast, and it can be difficult to know how to handle every situation. While adults and children can benefit from social media, we also face challenges when we use it. If you or someone you know is being negatively affected by social media, talk to a family member, friend, or education staff for help.

## 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. We might join an online activity before knowing it is wrong. Being patient when that happens will help children be open and honest about their technology use, which is critical for their online safety.

### OUR PLAN

**If you accidentally make a mistake online, no one will be angry. 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.).

You can also role model to your children that change can be challenging. For example, if your family is used to looking at phones during meals, and now you are trying not to do that, it can take time for everyone to adjust. It can be helpful to acknowledge that. And maybe share when you are adapting. You might say something like, “At first I found it hard not to look at my phone at the table, but now that we’ve been trying that for two weeks, I hardly even notice it even more! I am just enjoying focusing on my time with you.”

Try discovering together what works best for your family, and celebrate your efforts to make technology work for you





## Keeping Up with Technology Issues

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 devices are changing all the time, and it can be hard to keep up.
- ▶ With more and more people regularly connected and meeting online, there are new things for parents to think about as we try to protect our children and teach them responsible and appropriate uses of technology.

### Internet Safety and Digital Parenting

- ▶ It is increasingly important for parents to teach their children how to use technology in healthy and safe ways. It is critical that parents supervise their children's online activities.
- ▶ 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.

## Key Health and Safety Tips

- ▶ Keep phones and devices out of bedrooms. Many children and teens lose out on sleep because of using technology at night. 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.
  - 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.
- ▶ 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®).
- ▶ Try to build a trusting technology relationship with your children.
  - Talk openly about the benefits and risks of technologies.
  - Communicate often with your children about their use of devices 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 that material can be confusing or even upsetting. Make sure your kids know they can talk to you anytime.
  - Tell your children what to do if they connect to someone or find something that makes them feel uncomfortable. Reassure them they can tell you about problems without losing their internet privileges or getting in trouble.
- ▶ Make updates on your devices automatic; they add up-to-date "patches" to block threats.
- ▶ 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. Once things are sent, they are out of your control.
- ▶ Put tape or a sticky over laptop or iPad cameras when they're not in use. People can find ways to access your images remotely.
- ▶ Many mobile digital devices have GPS, which allows us to use map Apps to find our way around. But that brings with it some dangers. Children should turn off location services on their smartphones / digital device cameras to avoid being tracked by strangers.
- ▶ 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 option.

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ 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. Hackers are always looking for ways to spread viruses and get into our devices in sneaky ways.
- ▶ 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.*



## Helping Children and Teens Understand: What Goes Online Stays Online ... and Everyone Can See It

Children and teens need to understand that how they represent themselves online will be evaluated and assessed by future employers or post-secondary institutes.

- ▶ They should be very thoughtful about what they share through social media.
- ▶ They can't control how other users will share their information.

Explain that once photos are on the Internet, or sent through mobile devices, it is easy to lose control over what happens to them.

- ▶ Explain to your children that pictures / videos should only be shared between family members and friends.
- ▶ Encourage your children to check with you before sending or posting any pictures / videos online or through a mobile device.

**Remind your children that anything they post online or send electronically is permanent.**

- ▶ Discuss the difference between public and private information. Personal information is private, and shouldn't be shared on the Internet without parental permission, because personal information can be misused. Take care before you share.
- ▶ 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 and should not trust strangers.

- ▶ **Let your children know that you will monitor their online activities because the Internet is a public place.**
  - 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 or videos using their smartphone.
- ▶ **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' (e.g. questions about puberty, sex, etc.). Explain why it is important to tell an adult if this happens.
  - 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 connect with online friends who they also know offline. Explain that the Internet isn't the best 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.
- ▶ **Assist your children with the creation of online profiles when they join gaming sites or social networks. Teach them to fill in only what is necessary, leaving out identifying or revealing information.**
- ▶ **Google yourself and your family. Look for your address, emails, phone numbers, social media usernames, etc. See what shows up before others do.**

## Play Safe: Tips for Online Gaming

**More and more children and teens enjoy video games, but in this area, families need to do their homework together!**

- ▶ Some video games can benefit children, such as improving hand-eye coordination and problem-solving skills. Games are enjoyable – and all children need some fun in their lives! Some games that are not too intense or overly stimulating can help resolve stress once in a while.
- ▶ However, there is a growing number of video games that include content that is inappropriate for children – and even for teens! And too many teens are spending excessive time gaming.

Parents should try to reinforce positive games that enhance children's creativity and thinking skills, but limit access to games that are not safe or healthy.

- ▶ Parents should also monitor how much time their children are playing games, and when.
- ▶ The key is knowing what your children are doing and for how long, and making good gaming decisions together.

### Tips for Making Gaming Fun and Safe

- ▶ If you can, download an app first and try it out. If your children already have 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, racist, or dehumanizing.
  - Explore the online games your children play. Even if you found it on a reputable app store, that doesn't guarantee it is safe. Look for online reviews. Is the game age appropriate? Is the game moderated? Is there a chat component? Before downloading a game, make sure it is legitimate.
  - Find out about and closely supervise the features offered by the games your children play. For example, are avatars used? That is better than sharing a photo or turning on the webcam. Online gaming friends don't need to see each other.

- ▶ **Talk to your gamers about their passwords. They should be long, complex, and unique. If you can't remember all of your passwords, use a password manager.**
- ▶ **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, games, and social networking sites have privacy settings that determine who can and can't view a user's profile and information. But many game makers default to the least secure settings. 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®, Snapchat®).
  - 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. People of all ages are connecting in those virtual settings – and not all of them are interested in only the games. Know what your children (even teens) are up to – for their safety.
  - Teach your gamers to block anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable. Hurtful comments and bullying online have a serious impact on mental health.
- ▶ **Be aware! Cybercriminals often entice gamers into clicking bad links or downloading malicious files by offering cheats or hacks – which is known as “phishing.” Teach your kids ...**
  - Be wary of clicking on links or downloading anything that comes from a stranger or that you were not expecting.
  - Verify links before clicking on them by hovering over them with your cursor to see the links' true destination.
  - If an offer seems too good to be true, chances are it is.
- ▶ **Downloading cheats or mods from websites other than the official game website can be dangerous. Mods can contain viruses that will damage your computer or mobile, and give hackers access to your personal data. Whenever you can, always use the app store or official websites.**
- ▶ **Share with care. The more information you post, the easier it may be for a criminal to use that information to steal your identity, access your data, or commit other crimes.**
  - Monitor how much personal information your children and teens provide on gaming account profiles.
  - Your gamers can use a cool and safe game name that doesn't include their real information.
  - Teach them to share less online. If a stranger asks them to share personal information, they should say no.



- ▶ **Talk to kids about when playing games is no longer fun.**
  - Are they being bullied or hurt?
  - Do they feel like they can't stop? Gaming addiction is a real thing – for people of all ages.
  - Is online gaming interfering with other important activities – sleep, in-person fun, exercise, homework ...?
  - Do they feel like things are becoming too competitive?
  
- ▶ **Make sure your children and teens take breaks from gaming. Make sure your children take a break if they're:**
  - not enjoying the game as much.
  - getting angry or upset at other people or the game.
  - feeling tired or hungry.
  - starting to ignore things they need to do, like homework.

**Create rules and boundaries around gaming together. And when you need to, remind your children about the things you agree to.**



## What is AI, and Why Is Everyone Talking About It?

**AI means “Artificial Intelligence.” AI is created when people teach machines to think, solve problems, and make decisions. These are things only people could do previously.**

- ▶ AI can be useful and fun. AI can help us do tasks more easily and efficiently.
- ▶ But just like any tool – we need to be smart when we use it.
- ▶ We also need to help our children understand how AI will affect their learning.

**People teach machines by giving them a lot of information and repeated opportunities to practice. This is similar to how humans learn.**

- ▶ For example, machines can learn to tell the difference between cats and dogs by looking at masses of images of cats and dogs to build an understanding of their different characteristics.

**AI is becoming a part of our daily lives. People use AI to find information and play games. In fact, you are likely using AI already.**

- ▶ Sometimes when we use the Internet, ads pop up for things we have searched for when we were previously online. AI makes that happen.
- ▶ Many people use APPs with fun filters that add features to photos, like rabbit ears, horns, crazy wigs, etc. That is AI at work.
- ▶ Sometimes AI is used to create written or audio materials we use at home or at work.

**Here are a few things you might want to know about how AI is available and used in schools – and things we should all consider to use AI effectively in our lives outside of school.**

## AI may be used in your child's learning.

- ▶ AI is becoming more and more common, and it may be used in your child's classroom. What AI tools are used and how they are used will differ, depending on each teacher's practices.
- ▶ Some students who have exceptionalities may use different kinds of AI to help them access information and learning activities.
- ▶ All students may be allowed to use AI to find information or create materials.

## It is always helpful to be thoughtful and ask questions about changes in technology.

- ▶ If you want to know more about AI and how it is being used in your child's school, you can ask the principal or teacher. It is their job to help you understand the tools your child is using to learn.
- ▶ Schools and families can work together to help students learn skills and become prepared to use new technologies effectively, safely, and responsibly.

## Schools and families can work together to teach students the following lessons about AI.

### Stay Safe

- ▶ Students should never share personal information when they are using AI, the Internet or an APP.
- ▶ It is useful to tell children and teens over and over: "if you are asked to share private information when using AI, stop! Then let your teacher, a parent, or another adult know."
- ▶ It is important to understand that AI can change pictures, videos, audio recordings, and words that are shared online. Everyone needs to think very carefully about what information and images they are sharing. AI might use your child's information and images in ways that could be embarrassing or harmful.

### Ask For Help

- ▶ If students ever feel confused or uncomfortable using AI, they should stop and ask the teacher or another adult for help.
- ▶ Families can encourage children and teens to ask questions if something does not seem right.

### Learn More

- ▶ Learning more about AI can help everyone use it more effectively.
- ▶ Students and families can build their awareness of what AI can and cannot do, so students can match the right AI to their needs.
- ▶ Knowing how AI works will also help all of us understand its biases and limitations.
  - AI is based on limited data and the information may not be current.
  - The information used to “teach AI” may not represent everyone, and so the products created by AI may be unfair. AI could generate stereotypes or racist materials. Students and families should watch for these problems.

### Learn Using AI, Not From AI

- ▶ AI is a tool. It is like a pencil, a calculator, or other materials and resources we all use regularly.
- ▶ AI can support learning and help students complete a variety of tasks, but students always need to think and learn themselves in order to grow and develop.
- ▶ AI should complement students’ thoughts and creativity. Children and teens should be encouraged to add their own ideas when they are using AI.

### Use Other Tools, Too

- ▶ Reading books, having conversations, working with others, doing cultural activities, being active or artistic, and coming up with our own ideas are just as important as AI.
- ▶ Teachers and families can help children and teens explore and use different sources of information, and participate in a variety of activities to learn new things.

### Use AI Appropriately

- ▶ If students use AI-generated content or materials, it is important that they do not misrepresent it as their own work.
- ▶ Families can remind their children and teens to credit AI tools properly when they have used AI to complete assignments and other schoolwork.

### Be Careful!

- ▶ We all need to remember that AI sometimes makes mistakes. It can give incorrect answers, wrong information, or make things that don’t work properly.
- ▶ Families can help schools teach students to think for themselves. Students should critically evaluate AI-generated content. They can double-check information generated using AI by looking at other sources.
- ▶ All students need to use good judgment and ask an adult if they think something is not right.



## What is Meant By the Term Digital Literacy?

The term “digital literacy” means being able to use technology in effective and intelligent ways.

Many people are familiar with the term “literacy.” It means being able to use printed and written information to learn, grow, and be successful in our lives.

Now the term “digital literacy” is being used more and more. It means being able to use technology in effective and intelligent ways.

Some people also talk about “media literacy.” That includes being thoughtful about the information we read and see online and in social media.

When we use all kinds of technologies, we need to think about:

- ▶ Protecting personal information.
- ▶ Avoiding online scams.
- ▶ Using technologies safely and responsibly.
- ▶ Communicating with others respectfully.

- ▶ You can also evaluate technologies as a family. Talk about your family’s values. What shows, games, online behaviours etc. match those values?
- ▶ Talk with your children and teens about the information they see online. We can’t believe everything we read and hear. Much of it may be false.
  - Young people need to think critically about information they read and hear.
  - They need to think about various perspectives, not just one opinion on an issue.
  - Can they spot advertisements? Some information is trying to sell something.
  - Checking more than one source helps confirm information is reliable.
- ▶ Families can ask schools what they are doing to teach students digital and media literacy. They can also ask how everyone can help. Schools might be able to share resources or host information nights for parents to help them be more informed about digital literacy. Ask what is possible.

- ▶ Building digital literacy skills is a moving target. Technology and online activities continue to evolve. The key is to keep communications open. Conversations and regular reminders can help students be safe and successful in their education journey, and throughout their lives.

See [www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org) for parenting tips and frequently asked questions by age group, by topic, and by platform.

- ▶ Families may want to talk about a “pledge” their children can sign. Maybe this would be posted near a computer. See the sample on the following page.
- ▶ Or parents can come up with other creative ways to help students think about the following issues.



## Sample Kids Pledge

(borrowed from [www.safekids.com](http://www.safekids.com))

1. I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address or telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
2. I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
3. I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my parent along.
4. I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
5. I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do, I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the service provider.
6. I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.
7. I will not give out my Internet password to anyone (even my best friends) other than my parents.
8. I will check with my parents before downloading or installing software or doing anything that could possibly hurt our computer or jeopardize my family's privacy.
9. I will be a good online citizen and not do anything that hurts other people or is against the law.
10. I will help my parents understand how to have fun and learn things online, and teach them things about the Internet, computers and other technology.

**I agree to the above:**

**I will help my child follow this agreement and will allow reasonable use of the Internet as long as these rules and other family rules are followed:**

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Child signs here

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Parent(s) signs here





## Signs Your Child or Teen May be Overusing Technology

Adapted from [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)

**It seems that everyone  
loves using technology.**

Our phones, devices, and computers help us access information more and more easily, and almost all of us enjoy taking a break from our work and responsibilities to watch TV, play video games, and surf the Internet.

But too much screen time is an increasing problem.

**Here are a few warning signs that technology use may be a concern.**

**Be careful if children ...**

- ☐ **Are not doing other important activities because of their screen use. Are they ...**
  - Not getting enough sleep because they are using screens? Some children become “tired but wired;” they are tired, but they can’t sleep, like when they have had too much sugar or caffeine.
  - Not attending to their own health and well-being, such as not brushing their teeth or showering because they are glued to their computer?
  - Not eating at the table with the family, because they are watching TV or gaming instead?
  - Not doing their schoolwork or homework?
  - Missing school so they can stay home to use screens?
  - Becoming withdrawn from family and/or friends?
- ☐ **Are uncomfortable or angry when they can’t access the internet or use their devices. Do they ...**
  - Find it hard to stop using screen media?
  - Become overly upset / throw a tantrum when they are told to shut down their devices? Does asking them to take a break turn into a battle?
  - Constantly talk about their devices, even when they aren’t using them?
- ☐ **Regularly use their phone at the dinner table, while other people are talking, or even when they are driving.**

- ☐ **Seem to be happier in their virtual world than they are in real-life interactions. Do they ...**
  - Seem unmotivated by anything other than technology. (Socializing with others is critical for learning empathy, developing non-verbal communication skills, and learning to interact with a diverse range of people)?
  - Rarely talk about anything other than their screen media?
  - Seem uninterested in participating in other forms of entertainment – even fun, exciting opportunities?
  - Prefer to spend time alone watching TV, playing video games, or surfing the internet, rather than doing things in the outside world?
- ☐ **Want to use screen media more and more all the time.**
- ☐ **Are starting to be sneaky about screen time – meaning they are developing an unhealthy relationship with technology. Do they ...**
  - Use devices in secret, even when they have been told to put them away?
  - Sneak devices into their bedroom or after lights out?
  - Play games or surf the net when they tell you they are doing homework?
  - Try to hide what they are looking at or playing online?
- ☐ **Seem to rely on screen media to help them feel better when they have had a bad day. Do they ...**
  - Use screens as a mood booster when they are feeling sad?
- ☐ **Have blurry eyes, head-aches, back pain, or other symptoms of sitting in front of a screen too long.**

Too much screen-time is bad for our physical, mental, and emotional health.

It can be difficult to start limiting screen time. However, it is worth the effort to try to prevent your child or teen becoming addicted – and missing out on other healthy habits as a result.

## What can you do if you have concerns?

- ☐ Your child's total screen time might be greater than you realized. Start monitoring it. Keep track of the hours they spend online.
- ☐ Remember that the amount of time we use screens is important, but so is the impact. Some people are negatively affected by less or more time online. Think about how it is impacting on your child's relationships, health, and behaviours.
- ☐ Talk to your child or teen about the importance of sitting less and moving more.
- ☐ Don't let your kids eat in front of a screen. This habit also encourages mindless munching – often on unhealthy foods.
- ☐ Work with your child or teen to create reasonable boundaries around technology use, and hold each other accountable.
- ☐ Create new household rules and routines, and role model putting down devices.
- ☐ Keep the TV off when you aren't deliberately watching something. Background TV still catches children's attention.
- ☐ Be pro-active in providing opportunities to do other fun things. Try to engage your child or teen in extra-curricular activities. Go on family outings ... walks, bike rides, etc.
- ☐ Talk to other families. How can you work together to help kids step away from their computers and put away their phones?
- ☐ Gradually make small changes in your child's activities to reduce screen time and its potential effects.

Find out what supports your child's school can provide. How do they support students in managing their technology?



## Let's Talk About "Fake News"

We all hear about fake news more and more. It is increasingly important to be thoughtful about what we see and read online. Made up stories are passed around quickly. Even images can be unreal. It can feel overwhelming.

An experiment conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that adults believed false "news" reports about 20 percent of the time.

Meanwhile, a poll by Common Sense Media found that less than half of kids surveyed said they could tell false stories from real ones.<sup>1</sup>

If you are struggling to keep up with scams and misinformation, you are not alone!

### What can families and students think about when using online sources?

**1. Look carefully at the design of the site or images.**

- Fake news sites often don't look professional. They often have an unusual number of ads.
- Images might initially seem familiar, but closer inspection might show they have been altered slightly.
- Look at photos to see if you spot weird things. For example, in a fake image, a person might have six fingers.

**2. Think about the source.**

- If you haven't heard of the source, search online for more information.
- Double check the information by looking at sources you know have good reputations.

**3. Check the web domain. Does it look odd?**

- Many fake sites end with ".org.co" or ".kl" or some other strange ending. For example, it might be "fnesc.ca.co"

1

<https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/parents/how-to-spot-fake-news/>

4. **Look at the author of the information you are reading.**
  - If there is no author, think twice.
  - If there is an author, but it is a name you don't know, search that name on the internet. What else have they written?
5. **Consider who is quoted in the information you are reading.**
  - Are they anonymous sources? Are they unreliable, or people or organizations you have never heard of? Are there no sources at all?
  - If you feel unsure, double check.
6. **Check the messaging.**
  - Oftentimes, fake articles push one point of view.
  - They may have an angry tone or include information that seems hard to believe.
  - Think critically.
7. **Look at the writing style.**
  - If there are many typos, misspelled words, or too much punctuation, think twice about the source. For example, if the sentences all end in !!!!!, be suspicious.
8. **Look to other sources to confirm the information. It never hurts to look at a number of sites for information on a topic.**
  - Getting a variety of views helps us be better informed.
  - See what others are saying about an issue until you feel confident about what you see and read online.
9. **As AI becomes more sophisticated, reverse image searching is an important tool for confirming the reality of photos. There are many tools online and in App stores that you can use to find out when and where a photo was taken, who took it, and where it appears online.**
10. **Think carefully about information you receive from people you know, as well.**
  - Almost a quarter of adults have shared a false news story, and we're least likely to fact-check news and other things that come to use through people we know and trust.
  - It is easy for any of us to share false information by mistake.

**Sources used:**

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

[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)





## Using Screen Time In Positive Ways

Adapted from [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)

Depending on what is accessible, a typical day for most children includes a mix of TV, Internet, social media, video games, and cellphone use. This is a lot of media exposure.

It is very important to make sure you know the type of content your child is viewing regularly, and determine if it is age-appropriate.

Families can also use viewing time together as an opportunity to talk about values.

When you are watching TV, playing video games, or looking at YouTube videos, you can talk with your children about what you see and the characters that are portrayed. This works with reading books together, too!

### What could you talk about?

Here are a few questions you can adapt, depending on what you are watching, playing, or reading.

#### Teamwork

- ▶ How did the characters work together to get things done?
- ▶ How did each person contribute, and what are some of the ways they supported one another?
- ▶ How can you use teamwork in your own life, like in school or with friends?

#### Staying Calm

- ▶ How did the characters keep their cool when things got tough?
- ▶ When did they have to make choices to stay calm or focused?
- ▶ How can you practice self-control, especially when you're online or playing games?

### **Stick-to-it-ness**

- ▶ What obstacles did the characters face, and how did they push through?
- ▶ What helped them keep going, even when things were hard?
- ▶ How can you show perseverance when you're working on something challenging?

### **Character**

- ▶ What does it mean to do the right thing, even when it's not easy?
- ▶ How did the characters show honesty and fairness?
- ▶ How can you be truthful and fair, both online and offline?

### **Gratitude**

- ▶ How did the characters show they were thankful for what they had?
- ▶ What are some ways you can show appreciation for the people and things in your life?
- ▶ How can you use social media or digital platforms to spread gratitude and positivity?

### **Courage**

- ▶ How did the characters show bravery when things got tough?
- ▶ When have you needed to be brave, either in person or online?
- ▶ How can you stand up for what's right, even when it's not popular?

### **Thoughtfulness**

- ▶ How did the characters show kindness and care for others?
- ▶ What are some ways you can help others, both in your community and online?
- ▶ How can you support people who are struggling, whether in person or through social media?

### **Sharing**

- ▶ Did the characters share their thoughts and feelings in a clear way? If so, how did they do that?
- ▶ What are some ways you can improve how you communicate, both in conversations and online?
- ▶ How can you use digital tools to communicate respectfully and effectively?