



Family Connections

A resource booklet about bonding with your child for First Nations and Métis parents in BC

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How Was This Resource Developed?

This series of resources is a response to a growing interest in parenting information for First Nations and Métis parents in BC. The resources share important parenting information. See the back cover for more themes in the series.

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*sk'wimémélt
means “baby” or “child”
in Secwepemc*

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Introduction

This booklet will help you learn about attachment and bonding. It describes what they are, why they are important, and what you can do to foster attachment and bonding with your child.

This booklet includes information about being the parent your child needs and shares the importance of strong connections with extended family and community. At the end of this booklet you will find resources and services for you and your family.

Child attachment and bonding develop in the first years of life and have an important impact throughout your child's life. Learning about healthy parenting skills early will help you and your child. This booklet will help you learn how to strengthen the connection with your child.



*You are home to your child,
the anchor that keeps
your child safe and secure.*



Traditionally, parenting was taught throughout life and parents formed strong attachments with their children. Parenting was learned first as babies, then as children, later as parents, and then as grandparents.

Bonding with Your Child

Bonding is the feelings and connection to your children that you form in the first few weeks after they are born. Over time, parents can do things to strengthen their bond with their children, such as caring for their children and playing with them. Here are some other things you can do to strengthen your bond with your children.

Respond to your child

For example:

- Watch your children. Turn off the television and computer, and put away your cell phone.
- Learn when your children are trying to tell you something. How do your children act when they are tired, hungry or need to be held?
- Respond to your children's needs in a caring way. Offer a hug.
- Play, sing and dance with your children.
- Talk about feelings with your children (yours and theirs). For example, ask, "Are you sad? Do you want a hug? How can I help?"
- Get down to their eye level. Look at them and respond to them when they are trying to tell you something.

Be close to your child

For example:

- Respond in a positive way to your children by using kind, caring and loving words.
- Use a calm, gentle and caring voice when you talk to your children. Get close to them so you do not have to raise your voice.
- Use actions that show how much you love and cherish your children. Laugh and talk with them. Tell them stories.
- Touch and hold your children. Sing to them.
- Be there to comfort your children when they feel tired and grumpy, upset or hurt.
- Focus on your children by giving them your attention.
- Tell your children that they are loved every day.

Be committed to supportive parenting

For example:

- Be consistent with routines and expectations.
- Be patient and repeat things, as often as necessary.
- Learn what to expect from your children at different ages and stages of their life.
- Use a positive approach to parenting. Teach your children by guiding them to healthy behaviours instead of punishing them for negative behaviours.
- Keep your children safe by making sure that your home is safe. Stay close to them when they are outside. Allow only safe people to be in your children's lives.

Learn how to interact with your child

For example:

- Take turns with your children when choosing what to play with them.
- Respond to your children and teach them to respond to you.
- Get to know your children's different moods and attitudes, and about the things that affect their behaviour. Be respectful of their individual personalities, wants and needs.
- Limit screen time and the time you spend on your cell phone when you are with your children.



Xwexpistsín!
means "I love you"
in Secwepemc

Forming a Secure Attachment

Traditionally, parents saw themselves as being entrusted with the spirit of the child. Children were sacred gifts and loved unconditionally. They were tended to immediately and were always comforted when they cried. As a result, children had strong roots to their family and community. They knew who they were and their place in society.

A secure attachment is different from bonding

A secure attachment forms as parents respond quickly to their young children when they are distressed, in an appropriate way. Helping your child develop a secure attachment is one of the most important things you can do as a parent. It becomes the foundation for all relationships in your child's life. It is how children see themselves in the world. A secure attachment helps children learn to manage their emotions and behaviours (self-regulation), and to bounce back from difficult situations (resilience).

Benefits of attachment

When a child has a secure attachment with a caring adult, there are tremendous benefits to the family and child. Attachment helps children to:

- Handle stress
- Learn new things
- Solve problems
- Develop self-control
- Trust others
- Develop caring relationships
- Seek help when needed
- Be confident and independent
- Feel good about themselves.

Forming a secure attachment is something all parents can learn to do

It is as simple as responding quickly and in a caring way when your child needs you. Here are some ways you can do this:

- Offer to pick up your child when they cry.
- Comfort your child when they are hurt, sad, or frightened.
- Protect your child when they are in danger.
- Encourage your child when they are frustrated.
- Recognize and respond to your child when they are angry.



*keesha kee tin
means "I love you"
in Michif*

Connections with Family and Community

Connecting your child with extended family and community will help your child have a sense of belonging. You can do this in many ways.

Connect with extended family

- Tell your child stories about family members.
- Have family meals or events that include extended family.
- Show your child pictures of family members.

Build ties with community

- Participate in community and cultural events.
- Talk about your traditional lands and about traditional ways.
- Learn from Elders.
- Practice traditions such as drumming or singing.
- Teach your child words from your First Nations or Métis language.
- Participate in traditional food gathering, food preparation and meals.

Growing connections

Imagine a rubber band as the bond between you and your child. When your child is first born, the rubber band is new and strong. Your child stays close to you, relying entirely on you for their every need.

As your child grows, the rubber band naturally gets bigger. The distance between you and your child grows too. As your child begins to move, the distance may grow to 1 or 2 metres before your child needs to feel close to you again. Your child will explore a bit further and further as they crawl and then walk. The distance grows with each new phase in your child's development.

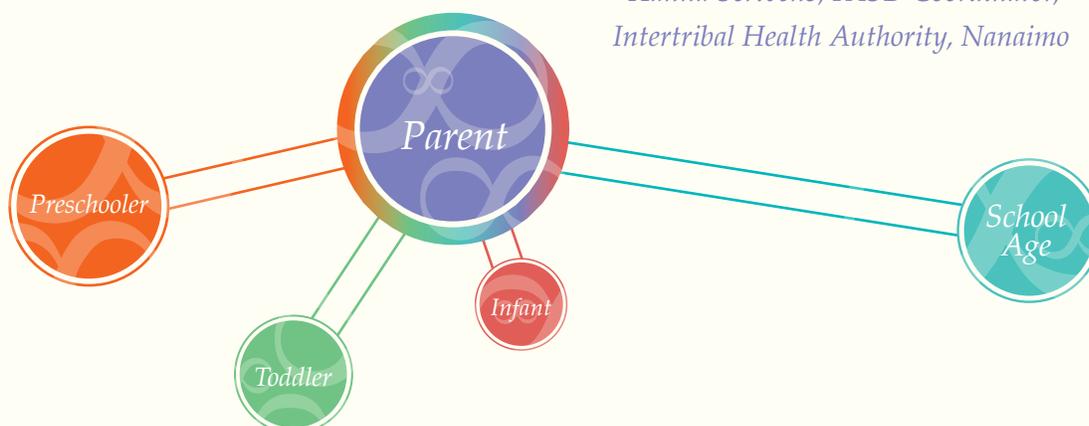
When you respond to your child's needs, your child learns that you provide safety and security. The connection with your child remains strong. If parents do not respond to their needs, the child will begin to feel unsafe, insecure and untrusting. The connection becomes weak and the rubber band breaks down.

If your child has developed a secure attachment with you, your child will know that they can turn to you for help, at any age. The rubber band may be small or large, but your child will know that you will be a support when required.

Fathers, mothers, other family members, and members of the community all have important connections with their children. To learn more about being a father, see the booklet, *Fatherhood is Forever*.

“In First Nations communities, there is often a connectedness that is not present in the larger society. Children have multiple attachment relationships and this is a strength that First Nations people may be able to draw upon.”

*– Hanna Scriver, FASD Coordinator,
Intertribal Health Authority, Nanaimo*



Becoming the Parent Your Child Needs

Healing

For many parents, bonding with their child is as natural as breathing. For others this bond may grow through spending time with their child, being close to one another. Some parents find it hard to form a strong bond with their children.

In the past, laws stopped First Nations and Métis parents from passing on their beliefs, language and culture to their children. Parents and children were separated from each other. Children were in the care of people who didn't love or cherish them. Generations of children were told that they had no value. Some of these children grew up to believe it. Many passed these teachings to their children and grandchildren. Some turned to alcohol and drugs to numb the pain of isolation and abuse.

Bonding can be more challenging for families affected by addiction, foster care, and special needs such as FASD (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder), trauma, or residential school. This cycle can end. Family circles can be repaired and families can become healthy and strong again. See section on "Getting Help" in this booklet.

Self-care

Self-care is an important consideration well before you begin your journey into parenthood. Taking care of yourself includes paying attention to your feelings, and drawing upon your personal strengths and the support of those around you to stay healthy and well, mentally, physically and spiritually. In order to love and nurture your child, you need to love and nurture yourself. To do this you need to find people who love, value and support you. Avoid people who hurt you and your feelings.

How did you feel when you found out you were pregnant or that your partner was pregnant? Happy? Worried? Trapped? And when you saw your child for the first time? Joyful? Scared? Numb? These feelings tell you a lot about how you were raised and how you feel about yourself and your current life situation.

Mental health is a core part of your personal wellness journey. There are many resources to support you and your partner's mental health and well-being prior to becoming pregnant and during pregnancy. If you feel like you may be mentally unwell, addressing this early on can make a positive difference for your overall health, as well as the health of your child after you give birth. Know that it is okay to feel anxious and perhaps even sad and depressed prior to pregnancy or birth. There are often valid reasons for feeling this way, and

you are not alone in these feelings. Don't hesitate to reach out to an auntie, elder, friend, counsellor or other health care practitioner whom you trust. For more information on mental health support before, during and after pregnancy, see:

- **Mothers' Mental Health Toolkit: A Resource for the Community**
iwk.nshealth.ca/mmh

Physical activity and healthy eating are also important to wellness and self-care. To learn more about physical activity and healthy eating, see the booklet, *Growing Up Healthy*.

Baby blues

About 4 out of 5 mothers will experience sadness and mood swings after the birth of their baby. This is sometimes called the "baby blues." Having the baby blues can make mothers feel sad, tired, overwhelmed and irritable which, in turn, may make fathers and other family members feel worried or upset.

Baby blues are caused by changes to the body, eating habits, sleeping patterns, emotions and social situations that happen after the birth of a baby. Baby blues usually occur 3-5 days postpartum and resolve within 1-2 weeks without needing any treatment.

Becoming a new parent is challenging and how it can affect you mentally, spiritually, and emotionally can be overwhelming. Talk to your partner, family, friends, health care providers and others about ways to keep healthy. Share your thoughts and feelings with others who you trust – share your experiences, learn from others who have had similar experiences and understand what you're going through.

If you feel unable to show your baby a range of emotions (for example smiling and laughing), or stay engaged with your baby (for example carrying your baby or responding to them when they are distressed), then bring friends or family around who can help you until you feel better and are more able to resume this parenting responsibility.



Even if you did not have the parenting that you wanted or needed, you can become the parent your child needs.



If these feelings last for more than 2 weeks, become more intense, serious or distressing, you may be experiencing something that requires more help.

Emotional, mental, spiritual concerns

During the time of pregnancy and after you have had your baby, changes can happen that affect your thoughts, feelings, reactions and well-being. These can be mild and temporary, or they can be serious and distressing and if not treated, can potentially be longer lasting. You may hear them described as postpartum mood disorders which are more serious and different than the baby blues. Postpartum mood disorders affect 1 out of 5 mothers and can last for a year after the birth of a baby, stillbirth or miscarriage. You may experience symptoms such as:

- Not feeling like yourself, like something is wrong
- Feeling sad and crying a lot
- Feeling tired and like you have no energy, but can't sleep
- Feeling irritable and overwhelmed, and unable to focus
- Not feeling joy or pleasure
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Feeling hopeless, angry or frustrated
- Having no appetite or eating much more than usual
- Having difficulty bonding with your new baby
- Feeling afraid or anxious about being alone with your new baby

If you have any of these symptoms or know someone who does:

- Know that this is not your fault.
- Do not feel ashamed, embarrassed or scared to ask for help.
- Find someone you can trust to help you take care of your baby and other children while you get the help you need.
- Talk to someone you trust and seek help from a healthcare provider (community health nurse, nurse practitioner, midwife, doctor, counselor).

However, if you have thoughts of harming yourself or your baby or you know someone who you are worried about, this is an emergency and you should seek help immediately. This can be done by contacting a doctor, community health nurse, midwife or 911, or go directly to the clinic or emergency department.

For more information on postpartum depression:

- **Celebrating the Circle of Life Resource**
perinatalervicesbc.ca/Documents/Resources/Aboriginal/CircleOfLife/CircleOfLife.pdf
- **Coping With Postpartum Depression and Anxiety**
healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/coping-postpartum-depression-and-anxiety
- **Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division: Postpartum Depression**
heretohelp.bc.ca/factsheet/postpartum-depression

Getting help

Get the help you need to become the best parent that you can be. There may be parenting support programs in your community or counseling resources that can help with parenting, healing and self-care. For more information about services, see the resources at the end of this booklet or call:

- **Mothers' Mental Health Toolkit: A Resource for the Community**
iwk.nshealth.ca/mmh

Physical activity and healthy eating are also important to wellness and self-care. To learn more about physical activity and healthy eating, see *Growing Up Healthy*.

“Find things about your kids that bring you joy and let them see it in your eyes, because each child needs someone who thinks they are absolutely wonderful.”

– Hanna Scrivens, FASD Coordinator, Intertribal Health Authority, Nanaimo

What You Can Do

during pregnancy



Connecting starts before birth. Let your baby know you care, even before they arrive!

Connect with your unborn baby

Your unborn baby responds to touch, sounds, light and taste. Throughout pregnancy, create a loving space for your baby. Touch or rub your tummy. Use caring and loving thoughts when thinking about your unborn baby. Encourage your partner to get to know your unborn baby. Sing, read and talk to your unborn baby. Choose music that inspires or celebrates. Tell traditional stories or jokes. Speak your First Nations or Métis language if you know it, or ask someone to talk to your unborn baby, near your belly.

“In the first months after he was born I always had the feeling I had no idea what I was doing. I read a lot of parenting books because I got home from the hospital and discovered I didn’t have the faintest idea how to get a baby to fall asleep. I didn’t have any family around when my baby was born and my friends didn’t have babies. I had missed all that baby talk. This was the priority in the beginning, then getting enough sleep, and then getting fit again. I joined a few groups and made a lot of nice new friends, all with babies the same age as mine. I have people to talk to and help me. We have a good time.”

– Monica Pinette, Métis Olympic pentathlete from British Columbia

0 to 6 months

Welcome your baby

When your baby is born, welcome your baby and celebrate their arrival.

Respond to your baby's needs

Your baby relies on you for every need. Show your love for your baby. Pick up your baby when they cry or reach their arms out to you. Copy the happy noises your baby is making. Share smiles and show you care. Let your baby know you will be there when needed. It will give your baby the confidence to explore and learn.

Comfort your baby

Comfort your baby, especially when sick, hurt or upset. Be there when your baby is sad, lonely or frightened. You can't spoil your baby by picking them up too often. Babies cry to let you know they need you. Always comfort your baby when they are upset. It will help your baby learn that you will be there when needed.

One of the hardest times for a new parent is when their baby won't stop crying. Some babies cry more than others. Babies cry when they are hungry, scared, overtired, teething, need to be burped or need a diaper change. Babies don't cry to annoy you. Babies just need lots of love and attention. Here are some things you can do to comfort your baby:

- Check to see if your baby needs to be burped or needs a clean diaper.
- Check to see if your baby is too warm, or not warm enough.
- Is your baby hungry? Babies don't always follow a set schedule; sometimes they get hungry earlier or later than other times.
- Hold your baby close. Try making a soft and gentle sound such as "shhh, shhh, shhh" over and over. Sounds like this may remind your baby of being in the womb where there is a similar soft and constant sound.



There is no such thing as a bad baby or a spoiled baby.

Babies who have special needs or were exposed to drugs or alcohol during pregnancy may cry more than other babies. They may need to be comforted in different ways. Doctors, nurse practitioners, midwives or community health nurses may have suggestions.

The crying time will pass. There are videos and tips to help parents learn about and cope with crying babies. To learn more about crying, see this online resource:

- **The Period of Purple Crying**
purplecrying.info

If your baby keeps crying and you begin to feel really upset, take a time-out. Put your baby in a safe place, such as their crib, and shut the door. Walk away for a moment until you are calm. Take a short shower or listen to music. Call a family member or friend and talk about how you feel. They may be able to come over to give you a break. Never shake or hit your baby. If you feel you can't control your emotions and might hurt your baby, call:

- **Healthlink BC**
Phone: 8-1-1
KUU-US Crisis Response Services
Phone: Toll Free (BC) 1-800-588-8717
fnha.ca/wellness/sharing-our-stories/circle-of-care-kuu-us-first-nations-and-aboriginal-crisis-line-support-available-24-hrs



What You Can Do

0 to 6 months

Stay close to your baby

Your baby was in the womb for 9 months. It was a warm and tight space. It is comforting and familiar for your baby to feel your warmth and your heartbeat. Babies want to be close to their parents and caregivers. Develop a warm, caring and trusting relationship with your baby.

- Hold your baby. Talk to your baby. Look at your baby.
- Use a wrap, cradleboard (tikanagans) or mossbag to help keep your baby close and feeling secure. (The use of a wrap can soothe a baby but should not be used when baby is sleeping).
- Keep your baby nearby at night. Your baby should sleep in your room, in a safe crib, baby bed, or bassinet that is certified by the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act (CCPSA). Make sure there are no bumper pads, pillows, toys or heavy blankets in the baby's sleep area.

Safe sleep environments include:

- Putting your baby to sleep on their back every time (at night and for naps).
- Placing your baby on a firm surface that is free of hazards (no toys, animals, bumper pads, etc.).
- Always use a safe sleeping surface for your baby when baby is sleeping away from your home. If you don't have a crib or bassinet, a laundry basket or a drawer are good options.
- Keeping your baby warm but not hot (avoid hats, blankets, or swaddling indoors).
- Avoid smoking in areas where your baby sleeps.
- Sharing a bed or sleeping on the couch with your baby is not recommended.



*Give your baby attention
and time, not things
they do not need.*



*Babies who are comforted
quickly cry less than babies
who are not.*

To learn more:

- **New Safe Infant Sleep Toolkit: Honouring Our Babies Safe Sleep Cards and Guide**
fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/new-safe-infant-sleep-toolkit-honouring-our-babies-safe-sleep-cards-and-guide
- **HealthLinkBC: Safe Sleeping for Babies**
healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/safe-sleeping-babies
- **HealthyFamiliesBC: Risk and concerns around bedsharing**
healthyfamiliesbc.ca/gsearch/bedsharing
- **Safer Sleep for my Baby: Helping Parents and Caregivers Create a Safer Sleep Plan**
health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2017/safer-sleep-for-my-baby.pdf

Play with your baby

Some people are not sure how to play with their baby. Here are some things to try. Learn from your baby. All babies have things they like and don't like.

- See if your baby will copy you. Try sticking out your tongue, making a circle with your mouth or smacking your lips.
- Tell your baby a story using different sounds and voice, high and low, fast and slow.
- Pretend that you are your baby. What would you say about how you are feeling or what you need? When your baby begins to look hungry, say, "Oooh, I'm so hungry. My tummy hurts and I feel sad. I would tell you but I can't talk, so I'll just cry right now." Then, you can respond, "OK beautiful, I will feed you, hold you and comfort you because I love you so much!"

7 to 12 months

Babies' circles widen as they learn to roll over, sit up, crawl and stand. They begin to be able to tell the difference between people they know and strangers. Babies may cry and hold on tight to parents, or turn away from strangers. Babies learn about depth and distance as they drop and throw things.

Do things together

Grocery shopping can be a great time to learn and connect. There are so many colours, shapes and words. Keep your baby safe by doing up the harness when your baby is in a shopping cart or baby stroller. When shopping, your baby may want everything or may be over stimulated. If you begin buying everything your baby wants, you will set up a pattern that may be hard to break. If your baby cries for something, distract them or wait in the car until the crying stops. Let your baby know you understand what they want and that they are disappointed.

Respond to your baby

When your baby is frightened, worried or frustrated, respond in a calm and caring way. It is important for your baby to learn to trust that you will be there when they need you.

Keep your baby safe

Make sure safe, reliable, caring people are taking care of your baby if you are not able to. Safety becomes more important as your baby begins to move. All babies need a safe place to explore and learn, for example:

- Remove poisons or cleaners from lower cabinets. If there is no other place to put these products, put safety locks on the cabinet doors.
- Keep bathroom and closet doors closed.
- Put child gates at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Think about things that your baby will soon be able to reach. You can see potential dangers by getting down to the child's eye level.
- Put away things that could break or might hurt your baby.
- Make sure cords for blinds are out of reach.
- Find out about window safety devices.
- When visiting other homes with your baby, make sure they are also baby proofed.

For more information on baby proofing your home, talk to staff at your local parent program, Friendship Centre, nursing station or health clinic. To learn more, see this online information:

- **HealthLinkBC – Quick Tips: Baby-Proofing Your Home**
healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/te7335

Make transportation safe for your baby. Keep your baby safe while driving in a motor vehicle by using seat belts and child car seats correctly. It is the most effective way to prevent injury and death in motor vehicle collisions. To learn more, see the following links:

- **BCAA – Child passenger safety**
bcaa.com/community/child-car-seat-safety
- **Transport Canada – Choosing a child car seat or booster seat**
canada.ca/en/services/transport/road/child-car-seat-safety/buying-child-car-seat-booster-seat.html

Talk and listen

Your baby is beginning to make more sounds and connect sounds to people and things. Even before they can use words, babies can tell you what they want through sounds, their faces and body language. Can you tell what your baby wants and what your baby is feeling? What are the cues your baby is giving? Talk to your baby. Describe the things and people around them. Talk about what you are doing and what you are going to do.

Plan your routines

Routines help babies feel safe. They know what to expect and not to worry about what will come next. Try to set a routine around your baby's needs. How much sleep does your baby need? When does your baby get hungry, tired or need to be changed? You help form the routine by doing the same things at the about same time each day. If your baby naps from 1 to 3 each day, then try to plan other activities for the morning.

Play with your baby

Playing is how babies learn. Watch your baby's reaction during games. If your baby likes it, do it again. If your baby turns away, try something else. Follow your baby's lead. Here are some things you can try:

- Teach your baby traditional games and stories.
- Play peek-a-boo by covering your face or hiding a toy. This helps your baby understand that objects and people still exist even when they can't see them.
- Show your baby how to clap to the music or bang on a drum.
- Try to imitate your baby so they learn that communication goes both ways.
- Sing songs that teach about body parts.
- Sing songs and tell stories in your First Nations or Métis language, if you can.

What You Can Do

1 to 3 years

The toddler years (1 to 3 years of age) bring huge changes. Toddlers learn to talk. They begin to discover their own power by saying no and seeing what happens when they do something. They want to explore and do things themselves. Toddlers are busy people. Parents can enjoy taking a fresh look at the world through a toddler's eyes.

Talk with your toddler

Toddlers are great mimics. They will say and do exactly what you say and do. Sometimes this can be quite eye opening for parents. It can also be a great time to role model good choices and healthy living. To learn more about healthy children, see the booklet, *Growing Up Healthy*. It is also a good time to think carefully about the words that you use.

Parents often say to their children what they heard from their own parents. The words and emotions just come out without thought. In order to change your words, you need to listen to what comes out and when. Is this what you wanted to tell your toddler? If not, stop right there and change it. It may feel weird or uncomfortable. That is okay and normal. Eventually, it will feel normal and good to speak only kind and loving words to your toddler.

If you find that you are having a hard time being kind and loving toward your toddler, seek help. All parents can benefit from support and information about parenting. See the last page of this booklet for resources to help support parents.

Be consistent

As parents, it is important to agree on what you expect from your toddlers. If one parent says "yes" but the other parent says "no," your toddler will get confused. If you are a single parent, it is equally important for you to be consistent in your expectations of your toddler.

- Agree on what behaviours are and are not okay.
- Decide when, if ever, certain things are allowed, such as having a treat, watching TV or playing computer games.
- Talk about issues and limits with your children, before something happens. If you never had limits when you were a toddler, it may be hard to say "no" to your toddler.
- Plan for challenges before they happen so you can be prepared for them and can act calmly when dealing with your toddler.

Be positive

Parents need to agree on what should be disciplined and how. Discipline should not hurt your toddler physically, emotionally or spiritually. Teach and guide your toddler, instead of punishing them. Hurting your toddler makes them mistrust you or become afraid of you. To learn more about healthy discipline, see the booklet, *Parents as First Teachers*.

Toddler's brains are growing and developing. Things that make perfect sense to you may not make sense to your toddler. They can get frustrated and angry, causing bursts of emotion or tantrums. It is okay for toddlers to be upset, but not okay to hurt someone else or themselves as a result. Help your toddler find ways to express emotions without being hurtful.

Do you both need a few minutes to calm down? What tools can you use – breathing, quiet time or taking a break? Each meltdown is an opportunity for you to share a new coping tool. Create a safe space for your toddler to relax. Try to see things from your toddler's point of view. Sometimes it is as simple as a toddler needing a nap or a snack. Other times it may be that too much is going on. Sometimes toddlers sense their parent's stress long before the parents. Try to be aware of your own stress level. Learn how to cope with stress and to minimize the impact on your toddler.

It is important to honour and acknowledge how your child is feeling. No feeling is a bad feeling. For example if your child is crying, acknowledge that your child is sad. As a parent, you are role modeling how to get through a challenging moment.



Laugh as often as you can as laughter is good medicine for both of you.

what is said

what children hear

what can be said instead

"Get out of my way."

"I'm a bother. They don't want me. They would be better off without me."

"Sit here, while I do this. You are such a good helper and a good listener."

"Why are you crying? Stop acting like a baby."

"I shouldn't have feelings. Hide them. I am not safe."

"I see that you are upset. Come sit with me and I'll comfort you."

"Shut up."

"No one cares about me or what I say."

"Can you play a quiet game for a bit? I want to hear what you are saying, but I have to listen to someone else right now. Your turn is next."

"I told you not to do that. You are bad!"

"I am bad, worthless. I can't do anything right. I am a burden."

"I'm afraid you might get hurt. Here's what we can do to keep you safe."

Comfort your toddler

As toddlers get older, they become more aware of their surroundings. They may be fearful about sleeping alone. Help your toddler feel safe by providing comfort and easing fears. Name-calling and yelling do not ease fears. They just teach toddlers to keep their fears to themselves and that they are alone in handling their fears. Ask your toddler, "What makes you feel safe?" Explain common household noises or help your toddler to identify noises. Special toys can provide comfort at sleeping times. Monitor any television shows or movies as toddlers have difficulty separating reality and imagination. The content may make your toddler frightened, or your toddler may copy unwanted behaviour. Most importantly, when your toddler is afraid, believe your toddler, listen to and comfort your toddler. You are your toddler's secure base.

Play with your toddler

This is a wonderful stage to teach patience, empathy and sharing. To get more ideas, see the booklet, *Parents as First Teachers*.

Games and activities that teach patience

Not only are games fun, but they are critical to a toddler's development. Play through games is their way of learning about the world around them. Through play, toddlers develop new skills, explore with their imagination and express their creativity. This is also an opportunity for toddlers to learn about relationships with other people. To minimize toddler frustration, play games or activities that are age appropriate and watch for cues that your toddler has had enough.

- Hide and seek – Hide a toy or several toys, and then search for the toys together.
- Play "Eye Spy."

"If you can give your son or daughter only one gift, let it be enthusiasm."

– Bruce Barton

- Have a race – Create a starting place and have your toddler wait for your cue to start the race. The race ends with you at the finish line. You can acknowledge when your child demonstrates positive attributes, such as patience when they wait.
- Bake together or make playdough.
- Plant something together and watch it grow. It is fun to grow beans or herbs for the kitchen.

Games that teach empathy

- Use puppets or toys and ask, "How would it feel if one puppet took another puppet's toy? How would it feel if one puppet hit another puppet? What can they do to play together with kindness?"
- Make faces and have your toddler guess the emotion. Ask what would make someone feel this way.
- When reading books together, ask questions about how the characters are feeling and why they chose to do what they did.

Games that teach sharing

- Toy exchange – have your toddler pick out a few toys and hand them to you and others. After having the toy for a few minutes, let them know it is time to trade toys. Each person can take turns choosing who gets what toy. Make sure that each person gets a chance to have each toy.
- Hot potato – Pretend a toy or ball is too hot to touch and must be passed on as soon as possible.
- Play games where people have to take turns.

What You Can Do

4 to 6 years

The preschool and early school years (4 to 6 years of age) are a time of learning, growing and going places. Some parents find it hard to imagine their child going to school, outside of their care. Friends and teachers become a part of your child's expanding world with stories and experiences outside of the home.



siip'in'
means "to love somebody"
in Nisga'a

Learn about guiding behaviour

Children want to please their parents. They also need to learn and explore. Children learn about limits, and about what happens when they test the limits. Often it is more useful to guide children's energy into wanted behaviour, rather than disciplining unwanted behaviour. For example, energetic children can be taken to the park to play ball, instead of feeling restless at home.

Take a moment to reflect on why your child is behaving with unwanted behaviours. Is this a symptom of something else? For example, is your child tired, bored, stressed, overstimulated or hungry? As a parent you need to read the cues since your child may not be able to identify how they are feeling in that moment.

Teach responsibility

Help your child understand what their role is in the family. Talk about what happens if someone doesn't do their job. Make sure jobs fit with what your child is capable of doing, such as picking up clothes and putting them in a hamper, putting toys into a toy bin, sorting socks, or setting the table. Show your child how to do the chores. Be specific when you ask your child to do a task. Instead of telling your child to clean up, tell your child to put the stuffed animals in the toy box. Remember, your children generally do the best they can because they want to please you. Teaching your child responsibility is an opportunity to teach them a life skill, creating a positive attitude about taking care of oneself, and it fosters a positive self-image by making your child proud of their accomplishments by completing a task.

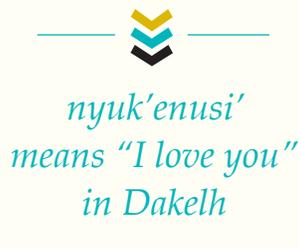
Talk about feelings

This is a great time to help children learn how to solve problems. They are learning about their own feelings. They can also learn to identify the feelings in others. When you help your children learn how to express their feelings and emotions, you give them the social and emotional tools to understand themselves better and how to respond to the emotions of their peers. Adults are the best role models to show the children how they can deal with their feelings. Here are some questions you can ask your child to help them understand feelings:

- How do you think that person is feeling?
- What do you think that person needs?
- What do you need when you feel that way?
- Who can help if you are feeling that way?

You are also an important role model for your child and you can demonstrate how to talk about feelings by acknowledging your own. Being mindful of your feelings, parents can model healthy self-regulation. Self-regulation is being the boss of your behavior, emotions, attention, and body. It develops when caring adults respond sensitively to a child. The following statements are some examples:

- "I am feeling sad right now and because I feel this way I want to take a few minutes to myself. We can play again after that."
- "I am feeling frustrated about something else that does not have to do with you. I am going to take a few deep breaths and calm down."
- "I am feeling very happy because I just learned that your Auntie is going to visit us next week."



"If we have a twinkle in our eye and some warmth in our voice, we invite a connection that most children will not turn down. When we give children signs that they matter to us, most children will want to hold on to the knowledge that they are special to us and are appreciated in our life."

– Gordon Neufeld, Vancouver Psychologist,
in Hold on to Your Kids

Play with your child

Children learn through play. Play is important in preschool and school age children. Here are some suggestions:

- Let your child choose the game and take the lead.
- Shake the sillies out – Sing and dance to get out excess energy and help your child focus.
- Animal matching game – Decide on 3 animals. Stand back to back. Choose 1 of the 3 animals. Say ready, set, go. Turn around and act out the animal. See how many times you and your child match.
- Make up a special handshake or greeting.
- Put down your phone/tablet and pick up your child. YOU are your child's best teacher.
- Spend one hour of quality time every day talking, reading, and playing with your children.
- Spend time in nature; green time instead of screen time. Go for a walk to the beach, park, or forest trails every day.

For more information about technology and your child, see:

- **Nature Canada - Screen Time vs Green Time**
naturecanada.ca/news/blog/screen-time-vs-green-time
- **ScreenSmart**
screensmart.ca/Earlyyears
- **Zone'in Programs Inc.**
zonein.ca

How You Can Learn More

Crisis intervention and mental health supports

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prenatal and maternal health

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

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

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

Infant health

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

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

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

Early childhood development

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

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

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

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

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

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



min-sipsiip'in(t)
means to love each other in
Nisga'a

Family health resources

First Nations Health Benefits

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

HealthLink BC is a health information and advice phone line to find health information and services or connect with a registered nurse, a registered dietitian or a pharmacist.
Phone: 8-1-1
healthlinkbc.ca

HealthLink BC Dietitian Services can answer your questions about food and nutrition.
Phone: 8-1-1
healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating/email-healthlinkbc-dietitian

Immunization Schedule

[bccdc.ca/health-info/immunization-vaccines/
immunization-schedules](http://bccdc.ca/health-info/immunization-vaccines/immunization-schedules)

Jordan's Principle

[fnha.ca/what-we-do/maternal-child-and-family-health/
jordans-principle](http://fnha.ca/what-we-do/maternal-child-and-family-health/jordans-principle)

British Columbia Drug and Poison Information Centre (BC DPIC) – call immediately if you think that your child has been exposed to poison.
Phone: 604-682-5050
Toll-Free: 1-800-567-8911
dpic.org

Parenting and family resources and supports

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) often have programs for pregnant women, parents and children.
Phone: 250-388-5522
bcaafc.com

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

First Nations Parents Clubs help support parents to help with educational success.
Phone: 604-925-6087 or
Toll-Free: 1-877-422-3672
fnsa.ca/parentsclub

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

Public Libraries will have books about parenting and child development.
[gov.bc.ca/gov/content/sports-culture/arts-culture/
public-libraries](http://gov.bc.ca/gov/content/sports-culture/arts-culture/public-libraries)

Métis Family Services provides services for parents.
metisfamilyservices.ca/programs-services

The **National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAHA)** is a source of reliable, current information on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis child, youth, and family health.
nccah.ca

The booklets in this series include:



Fatherhood is Forever

This booklet about fathering is for First Nations and Métis parents in BC.



Growing Up Healthy

This booklet about healthy children is for First Nations and Métis parents in BC.



Family Connections

This booklet about bonding with your child is for First Nations and Métis parents in BC.



Parents as First Teachers

This booklet about how children learn is for First Nations and Métis parents in BC.

You can view all of the English booklets online at nccah.ca or at fnha.ca

Aussi disponibles en français: ccnsa.ca

For more information:



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Health through wellness

501-100 Park Royal South
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604-913-2080 | info@fnha.ca
fnha.ca



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250-960-5250 | nccah@unbc.ca
nccah.ca