



A CHILD BECOMES STRONG:

Journeying Through Each Stage of the Life Cycle

2010

Miigwetch (Thank you)

Many generous people helped to create this resource. We say miigwetch (thank you in Ojibwe and Cree) to the First Nation advisory group who guided the process and to the key informants who contributed to the content. Many thanks to everyone for sharing their knowledge and experience. Your wisdom was incredibly valuable in developing this resource.

The Best Start Resource Centre acknowledges Terrellyn Fearn, Spirit Moon Consulting, for her role in developing this resource, through work with the advisory group, key informant interviews, and in researching and drafting this manual. Thanks also to Colleen Maloney (Ontario Native Women's Association) and Sandi Cornell (Dilico). Thank you to Melanie Ferris from the Best Start Resource Centre for editing and for sharing her knowledge of traditional teachings on pregnancy and parenting and Yolande Lawson of the Best Start Resource Centre for managing the final development steps for this resource.

FIRST NATION ADVISORY GROUP:

Evelyn Esquega, Ontario Native Women's Association
Lyndia Jones, Independent First Nations
Crystal McLeod, Dilico Child and Family Services
Laurie McLeod-Shabogesic, Union of Ontario Indians
Paula Naponse, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres
Lois Stoll, Grand Council Treaty #3
Wendy Trylinski, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation

KEY INFORMANTS:

Gail Anishinabie, AHBHC coordinator, Sandy Lake First Nation
Martha Benson, AHBHC coordinator, North Caribou First Nation
Jaynane Burning-Fields, traditional faith keeper, Niagara region
Joseph Cloutier, FASD advocate/speaker, Sudbury
Mary Elliot, Elder
Irene Goodwin, FASD coordinator, Sandy Lake First Nation
Sarah Kanakakeesic, AHBHC coordinator, North Caribou First Nation
Margaret Keesic, AHBHC coordinator, Peetabeck Health Services
Flora Klaswa, AHBHC and FASD coordinator, Eabametoong First Nation
Rachel Mamakwa, AHBHC and FASD coordinator, Wunnumin Lake First Nation
Paula Maurer, AHBHC and FASD coordinator, Beaverhouse First Nation
Lynn Mayor, FASD advocate, Sudbury
Pauline McKaay, AHBHC and FASD coordinator, Mattagami First Nation
Charlene Meekis, AHBHC coordinator, Deer Lake First Nation
Donna Meeseetawageesic, parent, Eabametoong First Nation
Lucy Meeseetawageesic, FASD coordinator, Eabametoong First Nation
Cynthia Moonias, AHBHC and FASD coordinator, Neskantaga First Nation
Michelle Perron, AHBHC, Ontario Native Women's Association
Pauline Shirt, Elder, Toronto
Lily Slipperjack
Elvira Strang
Beverly Sutherland
Jake Swamp, Elder
Members of the Aboriginal advisory group

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USE OF THIS RESOURCE

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CITATION

Best Start Resource Centre (2010). *A Child Becomes Strong: Journeying Through Each Stage of the Life Cycle*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

How to Use this Manual

As our awareness and knowledge of our First Nations cultures and traditions grows, so does our honour and respect for these traditional ways.

We created this manual to offer culturally specific teachings and information about First Nations child development/child rearing. It focuses on First Nations in Ontario. We developed this manual for a range of service providers who work with young First Nations families.

This manual has information about:

- First Nations child rearing practices;
- developmental milestones;
- healthy child development issues that are specific to First Nations people;
- strategies to promote healthy child development; and
- how parents can be positive role models.

This is all done within a First Nations context. It speaks to the wholistic approach to supporting families and provides supportive strategies for each family member at various stages of the life cycle.

We wrote this in a way that is strength-based. We try to respect a diversity of cultural values and beliefs. First Nations people led this project. The researcher/writers, key informants, advisory group, and Elders are all of First Nations heritage. The information in this manual only represents a small collection of the many cultural teachings that exist.

As First Nations people, we use our environment to explain life. Our cultural teachings vary from nation to nation and from one geographic region to another, just as the environment differs.

Our hope is that this manual will increase:

- awareness of how First Nations children develop, from a traditional perspective; and
- the practice and acceptance of traditional ways of helping children to develop, such as naming ceremonies, drumming, and fasting.

We structured the manual around the life cycle teachings and broke it down into each stage of life. Many of these teachings were passed on through key informants. Although we created this manual focusing on families with young children, we include all the developmental stages of life to reflect a wholistic perspective of family wellness.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS MANUAL?

THIS MANUAL IS USEFUL FOR PEOPLE SUCH AS:

- Counsellors
- Doctors
- Early childhood educators
- Midwives
- Nurses
- Program managers
- Teachers

We wrote this manual for service providers who have a role in supporting healthy child development in First Nations children.

1. Understanding the Life Cycle through the Medicine Wheel

When supporting families, remember to support the family as a whole – think about the health and wellness of each family member. This is important because First Nation families are generally very interdependent.

This manual gives you information and strategies for supporting each life stage. Many First Nations cultures use the wheel. We use the wheel to illustrate the life cycle, based on the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. To understand the life cycle teachings we must first understand the teachings of the Medicine Wheel.

THE MEDICINE WHEEL

For hundreds of years First Nation people have used tools from their environment (often referred to as Mother Earth) to teach lessons. These cultural tools help to pass on important teachings and information. Many First Nations teachings are based on the Medicine Wheel and the four directions.

From nation to nation across Turtle Island (this is how many First Nations people refer to North America) the details may differ but the spirit of the teachings is the same. The Medicine Wheel is a symbol used to show the cycle of life.

The round shape of the wheel represents the:

- Earth
- Sun
- Moon
- Cycle of life
- Seasons
- Four directions
- Four sacred colours
- Four human races
- Interconnectedness of all people and all things

The circle represents the never-ending cycle of life. Movement around the circle is usually in a clockwise motion in keeping with the rotation path of the earth.

HOW DO THE MOHAWK (HAUDENOSAUNEE) USE THE CIRCLE?

The Mohawk people move around the circle in a counter-clockwise direction. In their creation story, by walking counter-clockwise around the turtle's back, Sky Woman made the dirt turn into humans, and the turtle turned into the earth. She walked on the turtles' back singing the songs of her people. As she sang everything grew and the earth flourished with food.

In their Longhouse ceremonies they move around the circle in a clock-wise motion to ensure the earth is abundant with food and medicines for their people.

The Ojibwe believe in the seven sacred directions of the wheel. The four parts of the medicine wheel show the four directions of east, south, west, and north. The colours yellow, red, black, and white often represent these directions.

Blue represents Father Sky in the upper realm.

Green represents Mother Earth in the lower realm.

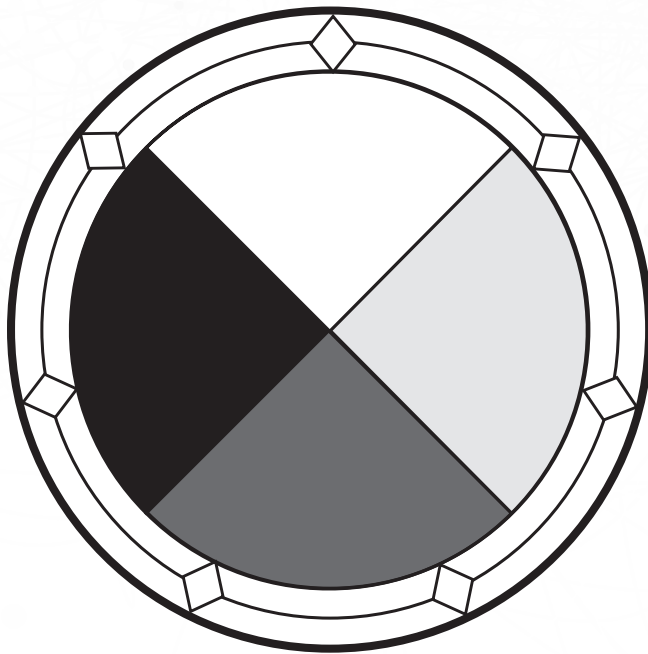
Purple represents the self in the middle of the wheel, the spirit who journeys through this physical world and through all the directions.

Some colours on the wheel may vary from nation to nation across Turtle Island, depending on cultural beliefs or traditions. For example, black may be replaced by blue, green, or purple. Some nations do not use black as they believe it resembles death and some nations do use black to specifically represent that western doorway.

The four parts of self represent the four parts of one's being:

- Body
- Mind
- Emotions
- Spirit

These are gifts from the Creator. Each person is responsible to maintain a healthy balance. Neglecting one part leads to an imbalance of the whole self.



The four directions teach us the need for balance in the world and also balance in our everyday lives. It reminds us of the importance of wholistic health.

THE FOUR DIRECTIONS

The four directions of the medicine wheel begin in the east.

The east represents the beginning, a new life, and babies.

The south represents adolescence.

The west represents adulthood.

The north represents elderhood.

Each direction carries a new set of teachings and medicine to assist and nurture those traveling along the red road. The “red road” is how First Nations people often refer to their life journey and path as a nation.

We move through life around the wheel beginning in the east until we complete our journey in the north.

All things are connected, whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth.

~Chief Seattle

The east

Our journey begins in the east. The body is associated with the east. The physical birth of the baby in the eastern direction of the wheel comes from the birth of the spirit. The east is where we come from, where we are closest to the spirit world. The east also represents the spring, a time of new life. It is where we begin our journey as human beings coming from the spirit world into the physical world.

As we travel through the eastern doorway we begin our physical journey on earth and begin our travels around the wheel. That is why the east also represents the physical aspect of self.

The south

The south represents the summertime, a time where everything is growing and coming to fruition. This direction also represents adolescence, a stage in life where we are learning new things, trying to figure out life's lessons, and understanding our place on this journey. That's why the south also represents the mental aspect of self.

The west

The west represents the fall, a time for harvesting, a time for self reflection and introspection. This is the stage of adulthood, a time when we think about our journey thus far and begin to make the positive changes needed to continue on the cycle in a good way. The west represents the emotional aspect of self.

The north

The north represents the fourth and final stage in the cycle of life. It is associated with the spiritual aspect of self. This is a place of wisdom and knowledge. This is where the Elders sit in old age, coming full circle from birth in the east, to Elderhood in the north. It represents the winter, a time when the Elders share their stories and teachings to pass on that knowledge to those journeying around the other stages of the wheel.



2. The Seven Stages of Life

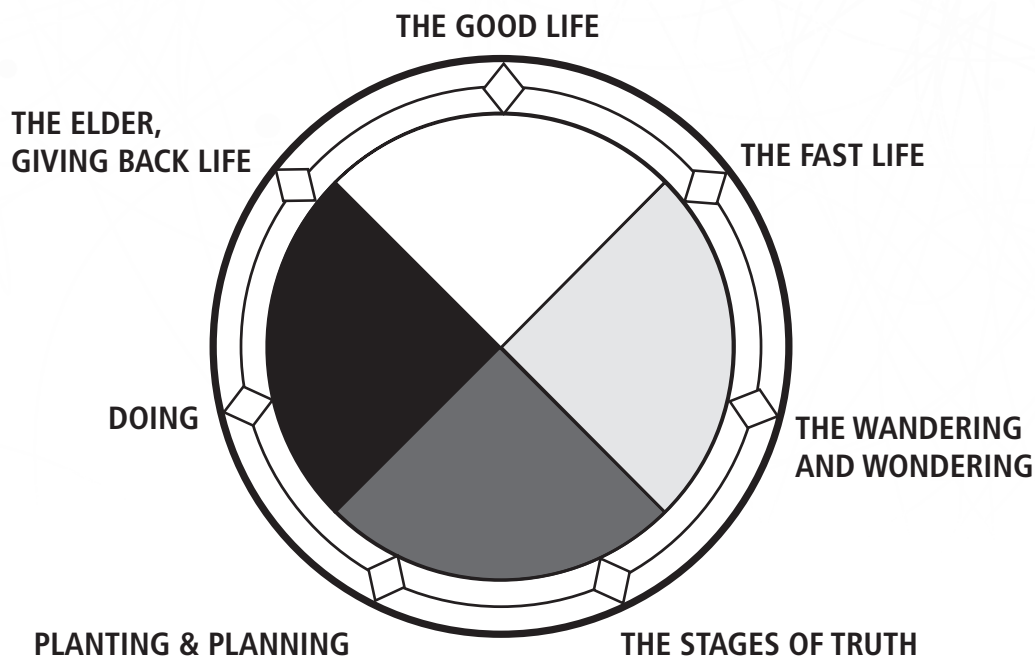
These teachings were shared by key informants, advisors, and Mark Philips (Turtle Clan) of Peterborough, Ontario.

The seven stages of life are different than the eight life cycle stages of development (discussed later in this manual). They begin in the east and move across the wheel to the west.

The seven stages of life are:

- The Good Life
- The Fast Life
- The Wandering and Wondering Life
- The Stages of Truth
- Planting and Planning
- Doing
- The Elder, Giving Back Life

As we journey through these seven stages we are also journeying through the life cycle, growing and learning along the way, understanding more about ourselves, and connecting more to our life's purpose that the Creator gave to us before we were born. It takes about seven years to journey through each stage.



WHAT IF MY CLIENTS DON'T HAVE THE SUPPORT OF EXTENDED FAMILY OR COMMUNITY?

Many First Nations families know first-hand the negative impact that government programs have on people. First Nations people have been routinely removed from their families for several generations to attend residential schools and to live with foster or adoptive families.

These programs mean that many of us grew up separated from our parents. We never really learned how children should be raised. Many of us were yelled at, belittled, or worse. It's hard for us to figure out what to do if we lack the first-hand knowledge of having traditional First Nation parents.

If you work with new mothers and fathers who have little or no support from their extended families, you can choose to help the client to get the support they need so that they can focus on raising a healthy child.

THE GOOD LIFE (BIRTH TO AGE SEVEN)

After birth, the first seven years of your life is the good life. During these first seven years there usually are Elders, grandmothers, and grandfathers around who support the parents in providing for all the needs of the child. This marks a very important time in child development.

We often hear Elders say that parenting is critical during this time. In addition to parenting our children, we also are parenting our grandchildren, those yet to be born.

Parenting choices made during this stage have more of an impact than most people realize. Because this stage is so important the family is often supported by the extended family with mothers and fathers being supported by their mothers and their fathers. Through their unconditional love and discipline, the child comes to know what life is all about. They become strong and confident. These teachings begin very early in life.

One of the things that was really important was being able to sing songs for my son before he was born and then again after he arrived. Thanks to taking part in a Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, I was able to learn to drum and hear songs from grandmothers and aunties. My son is now 4 years old and regularly sings his native songs to me, and I love it.

~Melanie Ferris, Horse Clan, Toronto

Because the child is like a sponge during this time, absorbing all that is happening around them, it is important to role model “good” behaviour. Some examples of “good” behaviour for traditional First Nations people include:

- Being happy to see your child every time you are reunited
- Not yelling at your children, but by showing through example how to handle various situations—if you yell at your child, your child will yell as well
- Treating yourself and others as sacred—a part of this means not abusing drugs, food, alcohol, or other vices.

The first seven years are the most important

By the time they are seven years old, children are put out on their first day fast to make them realize that these are all their relations that they walk with. The child goes out to fast for a day, for a night, with all the support people. It is important to note, that families would have begun to prepare their children prior to their first fast. From time to time, they may have marked their child’s forehead with ash to signify that they are being prepared. Upon seeing this marking, others would know that this child is not to be fed, that they are missing a meal, to prepare them for their first fast.

At this point in time, a child may also have their first haircut. Our hair is an extension of our spirit. The cutting of the hair symbolizes a letting go of the past and preparing for a new beginning. After this, the child is prepared for the next leg of the journey, and that is called the fast life.

THE FAST LIFE (AGES 7 TO 14)

The fast life is from 7 to 14 years. This is when the child is being prepared for their 4-day vision quest at the time of puberty. It is a time of celebrating the transition into adulthood.

The men look after the boys during their vision quest and the women look after the girls during their berry fast. These rites of passage ceremonies help to nurture confidence and build healthy self-esteem.

As young people learn about the changes that are happening within, they also learn about their roles and responsibilities as men and women. After each of their respective fasts, boys are re-introduced to the circle as young men and girls, as young women.

THE WANDERING/WONDERING LIFE (AGES 15 TO 21)

The next part is the wandering/wondering years. This stage is from age 15 to 21. This is a time when young people begin to ask questions and challenge ideals and concepts put before them. As they strive to find themselves, this is also known as the Wandering Years. In their travels young people begin to find their teachers and to gain new experiences. Youth begin to question their life's purpose.

The wandering phase is also called the wondering stage as that is what happens when they make decisions and consider consequences. "I wonder if I did this, what would happen." It is a time for testing limits and discovering the consequences to behaviours and choices which shape your character.

TRUTH (AGES 21 TO 28)

When you finish going through the wandering/wondering life, you are guided to the next phase by Elders, teachers, and mentors. This stage is the Truth stage and is from ages 21 to 28.

During this time you find your true self, gifts, and strengths. You develop your own concepts of life, beliefs, and value systems. You start to question what your parents taught you and seek information from other sources to verify what you learned to be true.

In this stage, you become the teacher to your children.

PLANTING/PLANNING (28 TO 35 YEARS)

Next is the planting or planning stage. This stage is from ages 28 to 35. During this time in life you begin to nurture the seeds you have planted throughout your life thus far. You ask yourself questions, "What am I going to do with all of this information that I have?" "How will I accomplish what I want to do?"

DOING (35 TO 42 YEARS)

After the planting/planning stage comes the stage where you fulfill those plans. The Doing stage is where you practice all those things that you have learned on this life's journey. This stage is from 35 to 42. This is the time to do your work, a time to follow through with the Creator's plans for you. To fulfill the purpose you were given before you came to the world.

ELDER (AGE 49 AND ONWARDS)

The Elder stage begins at 49. This is the giving back stage where you gain family, clan, and community responsibilities. When you become an Elder, you come back and teach the young ones. You continue on that circle of teaching by passing on the knowledge to those coming from behind.

During this time your physical being dissipates and your spiritual side grows stronger. As you come full circle, you are now closer to being the spirit that you were at birth.

Grandparents are closer to their grandchildren in the circle.

Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves.

~Black Elk (Oglala)

3. The Seven Grandfathers Teachings

Ojibwe tradition tells us that there were Seven Grandfathers. The Creator gave these grandfathers the responsibility to watch over the Earth's people (Benton-Banai, 1988).

The Seven Grandfathers gave seven teachings, each grandfather providing an important gift. These gifts are the teachings of:

- *Wisdom*: He learned to use that wisdom for his people.
- *Love*: So that he would love his brother and sister and share with them.
- *Respect*: So that he would respect everyone, all humans, and all the things that are created.
- *Bravery*: To do things even in the most difficult times.
- *Honesty*: So that he would be honest in every action and provide good feelings in his heart.
- *Humility*: To teach him to know that he was equal to everyone else, no better or no less, just the same.
- *Truth*: The last gift that he received was truth. The grandfathers told him to be true in everything you do. Be true to yourself and true to your fellow brothers and sisters. Always speak the truth.

Many First Nations people use these gifts as a guide in walking and living in a good way as we journey through the different stages of the life cycle.

We cannot use the Seven Grandfather teachings in isolation. Each of these teachings must be used with the rest. For example, you cannot practice bravery and not speak the truth, you cannot use wisdom and be arrogant. Practicing all teachings allows you to walk in a good way.

We must go back to the knowledge that the Seven Grandfathers taught the first Elder. We must teach our children when they are young to value the teachings of their grandmothers and grandfathers. These teachings provide direction and root them in the cultural values needed to grow up strong and resilient.



4. The Life Cycle

The life cycle explains life through the passage of stages as follows:

- Babies and children
- Youth and young adults
- Adults
- Elders

We celebrate these stages of life. They correspond to the four directions of the medicine wheel, the four seasons, and the four parts of self.

The life cycle includes all members of the family at different stages of their lives. Each person has many gifts to bring and responsibilities to uphold. These gifts and responsibilities vary according to the stage of the cycle. In a healthy family, each member is able to share his or her gifts and assume their role and responsibility within that family.

EAST

Babies and children bring the teachings of joy, love, and happiness to their families. This is a time for bonding, learning, and nurturing during the child's formative years. The life cycle begins in the east as it is the eastern doorway that represents birth and new beginnings. This is where we celebrate and welcome babies and children, in the same way as a new day or a new season is welcomed.

SOUTH

Youth and young adults bring the teachings of understanding and enthusiasm for life. This is a time to make choices among the many paths in search for meaning and clarity. This south represents the growth youth and young adults experience throughout this stage.

WEST

Adults bring the teachings of love, hope, and nurturance. They have the responsibility to provide for children, themselves, and their extended families, in hopes to live a good life. As role models they make clear the vision for future generations. The west represents this as adulthood is a time for introspection or looking into one's spirit, a time to think about your influence on others that come behind on the wheel.

NORTH

Elders bring the teaching of wisdom and spiritual understanding in their roles as healers and keepers of the teachings and ceremonies. The north represents spiritual strength, goodness, and wisdom. It is here where the journey around the life cycle has come full circle and it is a time where the physical journey on earth ends as your spirit travels back to the spirit world.

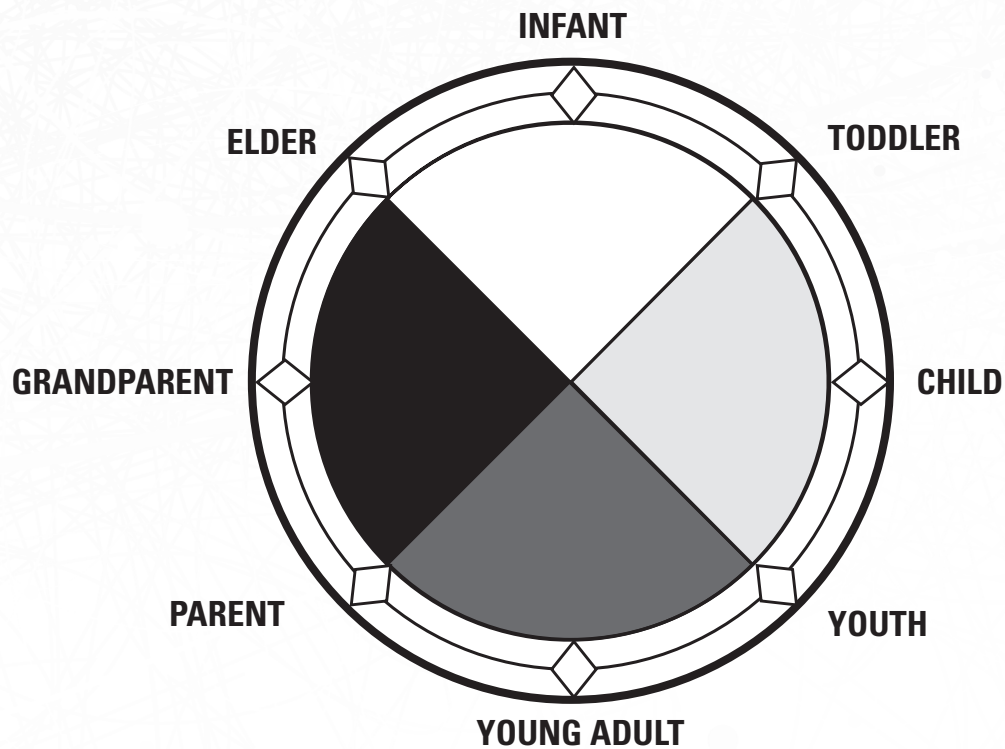
CHANGE IS A NATURAL PART OF LIFE

The world is always moving and changing. In a four-season cycle we see spring bringing birth and new life and ending with winter presenting death and dormancy. Birth and death are natural and necessary processes of the cycle.

Within the life cycle the energy changes with each stage of life just as the role and responsibilities of people in that life stage change. Change is a natural process. The stages of life follow a natural flow, generation after generation, from birth to death.

Some teachings say that the spirit of the baby joins the family upon conception. The spirit's journey continues throughout development in the womb until the baby enters the physical realm through birth.

After birth, the baby enters into the first stage of the life cycle; infancy, and continues to journey through each phase around the wheel. The continuous stages are the toddler, child, youth, young adult, parent, grandparent, and Elder.



During each stage, development takes place in the body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

The life cycle teachings differ from the seven stages of life. The life cycle teachings focus on development for each stage. They speak to the healthy development and traditional milestones of that stage and focus on the role a person has in each stage. The seven stages of life focus on the spiritual journey of a person and highlight their awareness in fulfilling their life's purpose at each stage.

The seven stages can overlap the life cycle. For example; in the seven stages, the Good Life is until you reach age seven. This Good Life stage encompasses the developmental stages of the baby, toddler, and child in the life cycle wheel because in that wheel you are a child developmentally until age seven.

Infants - Joy
Toddler - Safety
Children - Truth
Youth - Challenge
Young Adult - Wandering
Parents - Provider
Grandparents - Life Teacher
Elders - Spiritual Teacher

5. Pregnancy

A mother's joy begins when new life is stirring inside... when a tiny heartbeat is heard for the very first time.

Some teachings say that the spirit enters the woman's body at the moment of conception. The spirit decides on the mother and father that it needs to learn from in the physical realm before going back to the Creator. The Creator makes this choice, as the Creator has developed everything in that being before the spirit's arrival. Within it are all the orders of the Creator's purpose for that spirit. So the spirit occupies the body, acts as its protector, and helps it to grow into human form.

The care of a woman is of utmost importance during this stage of a child's development as she prepares her body, mind, emotions, and spirit for the birth of the baby. The unborn baby, aware of its surroundings even before birth, develops in the womb and can feel and hear the mother's heartbeat. This can be comforting because of the slow and steady rhythm, like the drum beating.

The time spent in the womb should be a time of peace, comfort, serenity, security, and joy. The baby's existence at this time is in both the physical and the spiritual realm.

When a baby is conceived both the man and woman are considered to be with child although the baby is developing in the mother's womb.

It is important for women and men to feel connected to that spirit growing inside them, it is only when they feel connected they will care for the spirit's health and well being and not drink.

~Joseph Cloutier, FASD advocate

Effects of prenatal care were recognized a long time ago as a child in the womb is already a being that has a way of communicating with the outside world through the mother. Women are treated with special care during pregnancy. Take care to speak quietly around pregnant women and ensure that they are nurtured and protected, as the child is also affected by a woman's emotions.

Women are the givers of life. All members of the community should think about the life in the womb to ensure that it is sheltered and happy.

Learning to be a parent begins when you start on your physical journey in the womb. All of the experiences you gain during your journey teach you how to parent. Children learn how to parent by how they are parented. Pregnant women also receive teachings on how to care for themselves and their children from the women in their families, Elders, and traditional people. These Grandmother Teachings pass on traditional information about prenatal child development. Parents learn that their child is always growing, developing, and learning, even before birth.

JOURNEY OF THE SPIRIT

Shared by Elder Pauline Shirt

Before our spirit enters the womb of our mother, we go on a spiritual journey. In the spirit world we sit with the seven grandfathers and the Creator. If we want to take the journey into the physical world we must first ask permission from the Creator to go on this physical journey. If the Creator grants us this request we then have to learn what our purpose will be on this physical journey, then we must choose our parents.

We choose who is to be our mother and father based on what our purpose is. We select a mother and a father who will be able to assist us in fulfilling this life's purpose. The Creator brings them together.

Once we choose our mother and father the seven grandfathers provide us with gifts and medicines to put in our bundle. This sacred bundle is with us throughout this journey. It provides us with the tools we need to fulfill our purpose. We can add to our bundle as we journey in the physical world, gathering items along the way that give us strength and guide us.

Gifts in our bundle include:

- the knowledge of the four sacred medicines;
- the spirit name and colours; and
- the family clan.

Items gathered along our journey might be a pipe, drum and/or a rattle, eagle feather, and family or clan songs.

YOUR ROLE WITH PREGNANT WOMEN

Pregnant women should have a positive mind, body, and spirit. They should not have to worry about things or think negatively.

As a service provider it is important for you to support the well-being of the family's mind, body, spirit, and emotions during this critical developmental stage.

It is best for service providers to give women a listening and supportive ear during this time.

TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS ON PREGNANCY

There are many teachings we hear from our grandmothers. They teach us about a good mind and body. Teachings vary from one First Nation to another. The underlying messages are the same: to be conscious of our wholistic health while carrying a spirit in the womb.

It is respectful to ask parents what their beliefs or traditional teachings may be. Some teachings you may hear include the following:

- *Be careful when taking traditional medicines.* Some help strengthen mother and baby for birth and help ease the birthing process. Others may have a negative effect on the developing baby. Traditional medicines may assist if there are complications but women should not use anything until she gets advice from an experienced traditional medicine person or midwife.
- *Be cautious if you are attending a funeral.* In some communities women are encouraged not to look at the body of someone who has passed on. If the person who passes is a close family member, women may be allowed to attend. There may be protective measures and medicines to help women. Also, women may be encouraged not to look at the body of an animal that has been killed.
- *Have a good mind, be in a good space, and be peaceful.* The baby will be peaceful and calm. Think positive thoughts. This is developing the emotional wellness of baby.
- *Food is medicine.* Eating well nourishes the baby's body and mind. What mom eats, baby eats. Good nutrition is essential for good health. Traditional foods are best. For example, the oils in whitefish and sturgeon promote brain development for baby. Raspberry tea strengthens the uterus for giving birth.
- *Try not to overeat or indulge in cravings.* Grandmothers may say that you need to teach the baby discipline from the time of conception, and that if you allow that baby to have all it wants to eat, the baby will learn that she can control you.
- *Sing songs, tell stories, and talk to baby.* This helps the baby develop their identity. It gives the baby a sense that it is entering the world in a loving environment.
- *Go to certain ceremonies if determined safe.* The baby starts learning those things about its identity. The baby begins to develop those relationships to creation and all that is.
- *Be careful of how you lie in bed.* Some grandmothers say that if a pregnant woman lies sideways in bed, the baby will position itself that way in the womb. This may cause difficulties in childbirth.
- *Caress your belly.* Some grandmothers say that this moves baby around so it doesn't get stuck.
- *Pray.* This helps strengthen the mother. Baby will learn how to nurture our connection to the Creator.
- *Do not kill.* Carrying a life inside the womb is sacred. When women are carrying life they are encouraged not to take a life. The expecting man in the family is also encouraged not to go hunting as he is considered to be carrying a life as well. The men in the extended family are responsible for hunting for that family during this time.
- *Stand near the drum.* Baby will hear the songs and feel the heartbeat of Mother Earth. It will become familiar with the drum and it will comfort them later in life.

- *Do not use drugs, alcohol, or smoke.* The baby consumes those things too. This affects their mind, body, and spirit. The child will want to use these things at a young age because it is already in their system. The child may also have developmental delays, breathing problems, or other health concerns.

Parents need to understand the traditional benefits of breastfeeding while the spirit is growing in the womb. When the spirit enters the physical world, parents will already be prepared to ensure that breastfeeding is encouraged and supported by the family.

~Elder Mary Elliot

- *Be cautious of who you are around.* Do not be around “mind changers” (people using drugs). The spirit of those mind changers will negatively influence the spirit of the baby.
- *Get up early, wake with the sunrise.* Get out of bed as soon as you are starting to wake up. The baby will wake up in the morning and won’t be lazy.
- *Get plenty of rest.* Go to bed early. Sleep gives the baby time to rest, time to be still. When the baby is born, he will not stay awake all night or late into the night.
- *Speak your native language.* It will be baby’s first language. They have the knowledge in their sacred bundle given to them by the seven grandfathers and the Creator. They will understand and find it comforting because it is what they know.
- *Exercise regularly and stay active.* Good health for the mother is good health for the baby. It makes pregnancy and labour easier. The baby won’t be lazy. Grandmothers may say that keeping active ensures that placenta or baby won’t get stuck to the uterus wall.

TRADITIONAL MIDWIVES AND THEIR ROLE IN HELPING MOTHERS

Midwives have been around forever. Before there were doctors, women relied on community midwives to help them bring their babies safely into the world.

Many First Nations midwives had teachings around which plants they could use to help women in childbirth. Midwives prepared things like special teas and other remedies to help with healing after childbirth. Midwives would provide guidance to community members on how to support women giving birth.

There were midwives, women who helped other women at birthing time. Women had the responsibility – if I can help you at that time, I will do it. We were not chosen, we were supposed to be there for everyone. We learned by watching. It is the responsibility of the mothers to teach their daughters.

~Dakota Sioux Elder Eva Mckay, from In the Words of Elders

Today, many First Nations women are returning to get care from midwives. Ontario has both traditional and registered midwives. One reason why traditional people enjoy using a midwife is because they know it means that they can probably give birth at home. Many people feel that a home birth is the traditional way and is empowering. It means you can do all the ceremonies you like – such as smudging, drumming, feasting, having extended family present, etc.

TEACHINGS ON BREASTFEEDING

The teachings of the Medicine Wheel speak of the four races of people on Earth. With each race comes a responsibility. The responsibility of First Nations people is to care for Mother Earth. In caring for Mother Earth we must also care for the water on earth.

Water is referred to as the life blood of Mother Earth. It is her nourishment to her children. Without it, we’d never survive. Women are a direct reflection of the earth. We carry the responsibility of looking after the water. Water is life and women are the life givers and carriers of water.

There are *four* waters:

- the waters that flow from the heavens to nourish and cleanse the earth;
- the waters that flow through the trees and provide us with medicine;
- the lakes, rivers and streams that form the lifeblood of Mother Earth, and
- the waters that flow within us and protect and nurture our babies.

Breast milk is part of the waters that flow within us. This nourishes the newborn with goodness and protection. It is important that babies be nourished by their mother's milk. It supports their connection with Mother Earth and all that is. It allows for the baby to bond with mother and with all that she represents.

By breastfeeding, the baby is connecting to all of creation, further developing their emotions and spirit and enhancing their sense of belonging and identity. The nutritional value of breast milk provides a good foundation for the healthy body and mind of baby.

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE AT THIS STAGE

Some common challenges during pregnancy include:

- Abuse in the home/with their partner
- Lack of prenatal care
- Substance use
- Poverty
- Lack of family support

See the following list of traditional tools and the following wheel for ideas on how to support pregnant women and their partners at this stage.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY PREGNANCIES

Every person is different. When helping pregnant people to learn, think about what types of ways they might like to learn. Some people learn well through reading about a subject, some people like to watch a video, other people like to do experiments with physical objects to help them understand an idea, and some people would simply like to listen to someone talking about a topic.

Try using and promoting some of the various tools to engage pregnant women and their partners/families in a good way:

- Sacred bundles
- Four sacred medicines
- Spirit names
- Colours
- Clans

SACRED BUNDLES

Many First Nations people have sacred bundles that they carry with them throughout their life journey. A bundle is filled with special items that provide strength, guidance, and direction to support them in fulfilling their life's purpose in the physical world.

Parents or grandparents may wish to make a medicine bundle for a baby. Some common things to put inside of a bundle include the four sacred medicines.

THE FOUR SACRED MEDICINES

The Creator gave us the gifts of the four sacred medicines. The medicines are an integral part of life for First Nations people. These medicines carry a healing energy. We use them in various cleansing, prayer, and healing ceremonies.

These medicines are:

- Tobacco: This medicine was the first gift given. Our teachers say that, "Tobacco is always first." We learn to offer tobacco first before seeking advice from our Elders or traditional people, asking for guidance from the Creator or ancestors, or when communicating with the natural world. We use tobacco in pipe ceremonies to send prayers from the physical world to the spirit world.
- Sage: This medicine varies in species throughout Turtle Island. We burn sage and use it in cleansing ceremonies to brush off negativity. It cleans the body, mind, and spirit. Many people refer to this as women's medicine.
- Cedar: This medicine is used in ceremonies to purify or cleanse the body, mind, emotions, and spirit. You can burn cedar but it is mostly soaked in water and the water is then used to bathe in or to drink. You can also use cedar branches to provide protection by placing them or hanging them in certain areas, such as above a doorway.

- **Sweetgrass:** This medicine grows in fields, along roadways etc. When picked it is braided and dried to use for ceremonial purposes. Sweetgrass represents the hair of Mother Earth, when braided it represents the coming together of mind, body and spirit. Sweetgrass represents kindness. It is burned in smudges to bring goodness and positive energy. Sweetgrass is sometimes called baby's medicine because it smells similar to a newborn baby.

SPIRIT NAME

The grandfathers give us a spirit name when we begin our journey from the spirit world to the physical world. This name is chosen just for us. Its meaning is associated with life's purpose on the physical world. A name is given to us in our language. It provides us with strength, protection, and direction.

COLOURS

Colours represent certain strengths. They provide guidance and encouragement when walking in a good way. You can wear your colours to give you strength during times of challenge or hang material in your colours to guide you in times of need and uncertainty.

CLAN

Your clan ("Dodem" in Cree) is given to you in the spirit world. Your clan represents your duties and responsibilities to your family and nation. Clans are named after animals that are symbolic and sacred to the survival of your nation.

WHEEL OF SUPPORT FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

Body

- Provide the pregnant woman a First Nations food guide to help her ensure she is eating a well balanced, traditional diet.
- Discuss the positives of exercise while pregnant. Ask her to come up with suggestions that she can do, such as walking or swimming. Suggest she ask her partner or a friend to go with her, or refer her to programs that include physical activity as part of a healthy pregnancy.
- Encourage your client to seek prenatal care to ensure her baby is growing well inside the womb. Help her find the right contacts in your community.
- If she is curious about traditional medicines and food that help with childbirth, connect her to medicine people in your community that carry this knowledge.
- Connect the family to Aboriginal services and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program. Attend with them as a support.

Spirit

- Give the pregnant woman a chance to learn about the journey of the spirit and how her unborn baby is alive and growing in the womb.
- Connect the pregnant woman to women and grandmothers who will share their knowledge on the sacredness of being a life giver.
- If appropriate, invite the pregnant woman to community gatherings where the drum is present. Share with her the importance of her and the baby feeling connected.
- Encourage the pregnant woman (and partner) to talk to the spirit growing in the womb. This encourages bonding and acknowledges that spirit.

Mind

- Connect pregnant women (and partners) to grandmothers or Elders to share childbirth teachings from a traditional perspective.
- Provide opportunities for the mother to learn about spirit names and naming ceremonies if she is interested.
- If she is stressed, provide support.

Emotions

- If your client is alone in her pregnancy, connect her to other pregnant women to build her support network.
- If your client wants to learn about traditional tools for babies, make a moss bag, rattle, or shaker with her or connect her with a traditional person who can help her.
- Talk with your client about breastfeeding early in the pregnancy so it will be more natural when the baby comes. Help her connect with other breastfeeding women so she has role models and a support network.

6. Babies (Birth to 12 months)

This life was born for a reason, protect it, provide a solid foundation and nurture their spirit to fulfill its purpose.

~Elder Mary Elliot

Babies teach us about the gift of joy. The family and community celebrate the birth of a spirit as a sacred time. Traditionally, the whole community would celebrate and give thanks to the Creator for honouring them with a gift of a newborn. The whole community understood how special this gift was and took responsibility for caring and nurturing this gift.

The ceremony of birth is very important. Grandparents usually have the honour of announcing the birth of the grandchild. Because there is joy and celebration throughout the community, babies are born with an immediate sense of belonging and acceptance.

HEALTHY BABY DEVELOPMENT

Look to see if the infant is happy and content. If the infant is happy and content, then they are in a good environment. A good environment is critical to healthy development.

~Jaynane Burning-Fields

The family and community are responsible for supporting the baby's health and development, for creating a good life. This phase usually lasts for about 13 moons or one year.

During this time of development babies need opportunities to fulfill their role. We need to provide these opportunities by ensuring the baby is a part of the community.

A naming ceremony is held to announce the baby and to introduce it to all things around them, to Mother Earth, to the animals, and to the plants and medicines. At this ceremony the baby's spirit name is announced. The name represents the baby's gift. To learn more about spirit names please refer to the Journey of the Spirit section of this resource.

The immediate sense of belonging is a very positive aspect for the child's emotional and social development. This is the beginning of the relationship with the community, as the whole community is responsible for raising the child. As the child grows and develops, the clan mother is responsible for watching them closely and for observing their strengths and challenges. This helps determine the role of the child in the community. For example, if the baby grows and develops skills in public speaking, is caring and compassionate, and lives a good life on the red road, she may show strengths of a great leader. It's the community's responsibility to nurture those strengths and guide the child in the path they were sent by Creator to walk. Relationships with extended family are also nurtured as many times the child is taken to them for care.

The baby stage is also a stage of dependence on people and the development of trust and personal boundaries.

Children begin to learn about healthy personal boundaries in the womb. When they are young begin teaching them in a good way about their bodies. Change their diapers in a private place, not out in the open, this teaches them about respecting their bodies.

~Terrellyn Fearn

This is a stage where intelligence and reasoning are not well developed. Learning takes place mainly through the use of the senses. Instinct is important. Many lessons are learned through experiences that cause joy as well as fear and pain.

PARENTS NEED TO RESPOND TO BABY'S CRIES RIGHT AWAY

A baby does not cry without reason; it is a cry for help, a cry to be heard when in need. Trust develops when a caregiver responds to these cries and satisfies the child's basic needs.

Because the child is totally dependant on adults, this is also a stage of dependence and trust. They have to trust caregivers because they are unable to meet their own needs, they have no language at this stage, and they use crying and screaming to let adults know of hunger, sickness, cold, pain, and other discomforts.

It is natural for a baby to cry. It is a way to express their needs, but it also develops their voice for learning to speak in later stages of life. It can be very stressful to hear babies cry. Understanding that it is a way of communicating can reduce the stress of new parents.

The baby relies on five senses. Parents need to do a lot of nurturing by touch, by seeing, and by doing. Through this the child comes to know and rely on the use of its senses as the baby needs security.

Parents will be grateful if they spend time with their baby during this stage. Discipline will be easier due to the security and trust that has developed at this stage. Children respond especially well to people who have been there for them. Developing positive personal boundaries begins with trust. Parents need to nurture the needs of a child's body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Respect these needs. When we meet the needs of a child's body and emotions, they can feel safe to learn and grow to be happy and healthy.

When the babies cord comes off, if it's a girl you take it to a birch bark stump and put tobacco there. A male baby's cord is placed on the track of an animal (moose, deer) so that they will be a good provider for their family.

~Lois Stoll, Children's Services Manager, Kenora Chiefs Advisory

YOUR ROLE WITH BABIES

This stage is extremely important for creating a strong foundation of trust and security for the baby. You play an important role in supporting families with babies. There are many things you can do to assist them with the health and development of their child. Below are suggestions to guide you in understanding what babies need from parents and caregivers at this stage of the life cycle.

The placenta is kept and buried in the community. By doing this, the infant will know they will always have a home. They will feel grounded and know where they came from.

~Paula Naponse, AHBHC Trainer, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR NEW FIRST NATIONS PARENTS

For many new parents, making the transition to being responsible for another little person can be a huge challenge. First Nations people face a unique challenge in becoming secure in their role as parents if they are affected by the residential school and foster care systems.

You can support First Nations parents by providing information about programs and services they can access in their community. Many times we assume that people know about the wide variety of programs, but this is not always true. Make sure you ask your clients about what they need to help make them feel more comfortable in their role.

Another issue to look out for is postpartum mood disorders. Provide information about these conditions to your clients and make sure to pay attention to any symptoms of depression.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE BABY WELLNESS

Every person is different. When we're working with people to help them learn something, we should try and think about how they like to learn. Some people learn well through reading about a subject, some people like to watch a video, other people like to do experiments with physical objects to help them understand an idea, and some people would simply like to listen to someone talking about a topic.

Try using and promoting some of the various tools to engage with babies in a good way:

- Moss bag
- Cradle board
- Rattle, shaker, or drum
- Medicine pouch (bundle)
- Cedar bath

MOSS BAG

The moss bag has many uses. It helps in the healthy development of First Nations children. The pregnant woman usually creates a moss bag while the baby is growing in the womb. While she is making the moss bag she is thinking positive thoughts about her baby and putting all her good wishes for the baby into the creation of the moss bag. The moss bag not only symbolizes but also emulates the feeling of security felt in the womb.

Creating the moss bag strengthens the bond between the mother and the unborn child. It puts positive energy into the bag. This protects and nurtures the baby while they are snuggled inside.

When the baby is born the baby is placed inside the moss bag. The moss bag gets its name from just that, a bag with moss in it. Before the days of cloth and disposable diapers First Nations people used moss bags made out of animal hide with moss lined at the bottom. The moss was placed between the baby's legs and all around the bottom. When the baby pees, the moss would absorb the urine and not cause irritation to the skin. The baby was taken out and fresh moss was then placed in the bag again.

Today, we place our baby in the moss bag with their diaper on. There is no need for moss, but placing the baby in the bag is still beneficial. When a baby is wrapped in a moss bag they become calm. By securing their arms, legs, and full body, they are comforted. When the baby is wrapped snug in the moss bag we then can place the baby into a cradleboard for further development.

CRADLE BOARD (TIKANAGAN)

We place our babies in a cradle board (also called a Tikanagan in the Algonquin language) after they've been wrapped in a moss bag. We place the baby inside the moss bag and then attach and secure the bag to the cradle board. The board secures the baby and creates a feeling of safety, like being in the womb. It relaxes the baby, allowing them to sleep or to watch quietly what is going on around them.

A cradle board is a bonding tool that keeps babies close to their mothers. The board allows the baby to develop in a healthy way. They have a chance to use their eyes more. They use other senses to explore the environment around them when they are snuggled and wrapped securely and are unable to use their hands. Their sense of sight and hearing sharpen early. Also by looking around, the baby has to use his/her brain to try to figure out what they are seeing.

Children brought up on a cradle board tend to wait and look over situations before reacting. Babies do not spend all of their time in a cradle board, and most parents see when their babies are ready to get out of the cradle board.

Cradle boards are decorated with designs and special items so that the child's spirit will be happy and protected. Great care goes into creating a board. This reflects the great care for the baby.

RATTLE/SHAKER

A rattle or shaker is a useful tool to use with babies and small children. It encourages emotional bonding between baby and caregiver when used together. It also promotes the development of the spirit and body in babies. The baby can take part in singing family clan songs and songs of their people. These songs strengthen the baby's spiritual connection to the Creator and Mother Earth.

MEDICINE POUCH

A medicine pouch might also be called a sacred bundle. A mother, father, or any other person who cares about the baby can create a simple medicine pouch for the baby using leather or other fabric. People who care for the baby can put special things in the pouch such as the stump from the baby's umbilical cord, special rocks, feathers, sacred medicines, or anything else that has significance for the baby's family.

CEDAR BATH

Some Elders say to give your baby its first bath in cedar water. You prepare this by boiling fresh cedar leaves in water for about 10 or 15 minutes, and then allowing the tea to cool. You can do this before baby comes and save it in a glass jar. A parent simply needs to add a bit of tea to bath water to get the good effects of the medicine. Or the tea can be put onto a wash cloth for the first time you're washing your baby.

While our new babies and young children did not attend residential schools, this system has long-term impacts on families. Cedar baths at birth clear the baby's path in a good way. Cedar baths are also important throughout a person's life. An Elder may tell you to take a cedar bath when you're sick or out of energy. Elders say the cedar is a good medicine because it stays all year, does not fade in the winter... so it has lots of good qualities in it.

The Cedar bath is getting rid of the abuse as a child, to let these go. It makes you see where it's coming from and what's happening and you can deal with it. That's what a Cedar bath does.

~Odawa Elder Liza Mosher, from In the Words of Elders

WHEEL OF SUPPORT FOR BABIES

Body

- Provide opportunities for the caregiver(s) to learn new skills that encourage healthy physical development, including wrapping the child and baby massage.
- Encourage parents to hold and cuddle their baby.
- Offer support for breastfeeding. Connect the mother to support services such as a breastfeeding circle or public health clinic.
- Give the father ideas on how to support a breastfeeding partner, such as by telling him to always give her healthy snacks and plenty of water to drink when she's nursing the baby.

Spirit

- Ask the parent if they would like to pursue finding their child's spirit name. Connect them to Elders who hold the gift of naming so they will learn more.
- Encourage parents to bring baby to ceremonies. This nurtures that connection to the Creator.

Mind

- Offer to make a moss bag and cradleboard with the parent(s). If you are unable, try to connect them with someone who can.
- Encourage the parent(s) to take baby on walks to explore different environments like outside or grandma's house.
- Provide the parents with options of parenting programs.

Emotions

- Talk with the parent about how to play with babies. Show them little ways to connect and build bonds with them such as singing, finger games, tickling, hugging, and using the rattle.
- Check in with the mother to see how she is feeling. Provide her and her supports with information on signs of postpartum mood disorders.

When I was newly pregnant, I went to go and see a nurse practitioner to figure out what to do. One of the things she did was to refer me to a midwife, and also to the local Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program. I'm so thankful that the nurse was able to connect me with both the midwives and the program because these things helped me to re-connect with my culture and help me nurture my baby before he was even born.

~Melanie Ferris, Horse Clan, Toronto



7. Toddlers (13 months to 2 years)

The toddler stage of the life cycle is all about safety. Toddlers are curious and love to learn. They explore and test their environment so that they can better understand it. Toddlers need a safe environment while they learn. All caregivers have a responsibility to meet their needs.

Toddlers thrive in a stable and nurturing home that is safe from any harm or abuse to their body, mind, emotions, and spirit. The toddler phase lasts for about 13 moons or one year. Although the first two stages (Infant and Toddler) are similar in length, each stage is very flexible depending upon the child and their sex.

HEALTHY TODDLER DEVELOPMENT

Toddlers learn through observing. They see what those around them are doing and they want to mimic every action. They are like little sponges soaking up influences that are healthy and unhealthy.

Ensure that toddlers are around positive influencing adults. Parents and caregivers must live by example. It is at this stage that a child begins to show their gifts, their strengths, and challenges.

Knowing children's capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, interests, and limits is important so that parents can support their strengths and nurture their weak spots. Through this practice children develop self-esteem, an important foundation for healthy development.

Teaching by role modeling is of utmost importance as toddlers learn very quickly that they cannot believe you if you do not do as you say. You should not say one thing and do another in front of a toddler. For example if your toddler hits another child and you slap your child on the hand and say, "No hitting," you are sending a mixed message to that child saying it is really okay to hit.

Being a role model is a contribution. Being a role model, you're teaching your children. My grandchildren do not abuse drugs or alcohol, they've never seen me use alcohol or drugs, so I've been a good role model for them.

~Odawa Elder Liza Mosher, from In the Words of Elders

Parents should do the things they say they are going to do. Following through is important. Trust breaks down when promises are broken. Children feel that they are not important enough for parents to fulfill their commitment.

As the toddler grows, their bones and muscles become stronger. They are eager to get moving and walking. Usually between 12 months and 2 years toddlers begin to pull themselves up in a standing position and then venture into taking their first steps by holding onto furniture or adults hands.

Some First Nations people always carry the newborn during the infancy stage. Their feet are not introduced to the ground until they have conducted their Walking Out Ceremony. In this ceremony a grandparent places the child's feet on the ground outside and introduces them to Mother Earth. They take the child on a walk about so the toddler can feel Mother Earth on their feet for the first time. They are introduced to the plants, trees, and medicines during this walk so if the child needs help from the medicines one day, they will recognize the child.

YOUR ROLE WITH TODDLERS

This stage is very important for reaffirming trust and safety for the toddler. You play an important role in supporting families with toddlers. There are many things you can do to help them with the healthy development of their toddler. Below are suggestions to guide you in understanding what toddlers need from parents and caregivers at this stage of the life cycle.

COMMON CHALLENGES AT THIS STAGE

One growing issue in our First Nations communities is childhood obesity. Much of this is connected to the fact that children are developing unhealthy eating habits from an early age. In addition, many children are just not getting the physical activity they need.

To help encourage parents, remind them that everything they're doing now will help the child to develop life-long habits. If children are exposed to lots of healthy fruits and vegetables as well as plenty of opportunities for exercise, they will carry these habits into adulthood. Many studies show that if children are able to make it into their early childhood without being overweight, they are more likely to grow into healthy young adults who will not struggle with obesity as an issue (Wabistch, 2006; Fisher and Hodges, 2006).

One teaching that stuck with me is something I learned from Plains Cree Elder Pauline Shirt. She told me that we should never throw our baby's clothes on the floor, because that is their *dodem* (their lodge). We don't know what was on the floor, so let's be careful to keep their lodges clean and with good energy. I like this teaching because it helps parents teach their children about the importance of taking care of their things and tidying up!

~Melanie Ferris, Anishnawbe mother

TRADITIONAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE TODDLER WELLNESS

Try using and promoting these tools to engage with toddlers in a good way:

- Moccasins
- Drums
- Dancing

MOCCASINS

Toddler's first moccasins are symbolic of their first connection to the earth. Parents or a family member make the moccasins. Toddlers wear them when they take their first step. This significant time strengthens the bond between the child and Mother Earth as the child is beginning their journey with her and all that lives off of her.

DRUMS

The drum symbolizes the heartbeat of Mother Earth. Having access to drum music helps a toddler develop comfort with the sounds of his native language. Many children are able to fall asleep to loud drum music because it helps them feel safe and secure. There are many ceremonies connected to both hand drumming and the men's larger drums. Exposing toddlers to both types of drums helps them to learn their place in the community.

DANCING

It's not always easy to teach a toddler to dance, but rhythm is innate in every person. Simply exposing a child to the drum music helps them get ready to dance. Toddlers watch other people in the community and are encouraged to dance into the circle when they are ready. Dancing is a really great way to encourage the use of culture during physical activity.

ASSESS WHERE THE TODDLER IS AT

Early intervention is important in young children. It is critical that potential challenges are identified as early as possible.

The Nipissing District Developmental Screen is a tool used with children from one month to six years of age. The checklists help parents, health care and child care providers to consider the development and progress of infants and children. The checklists should be used with all children, not just children with potential challenges.

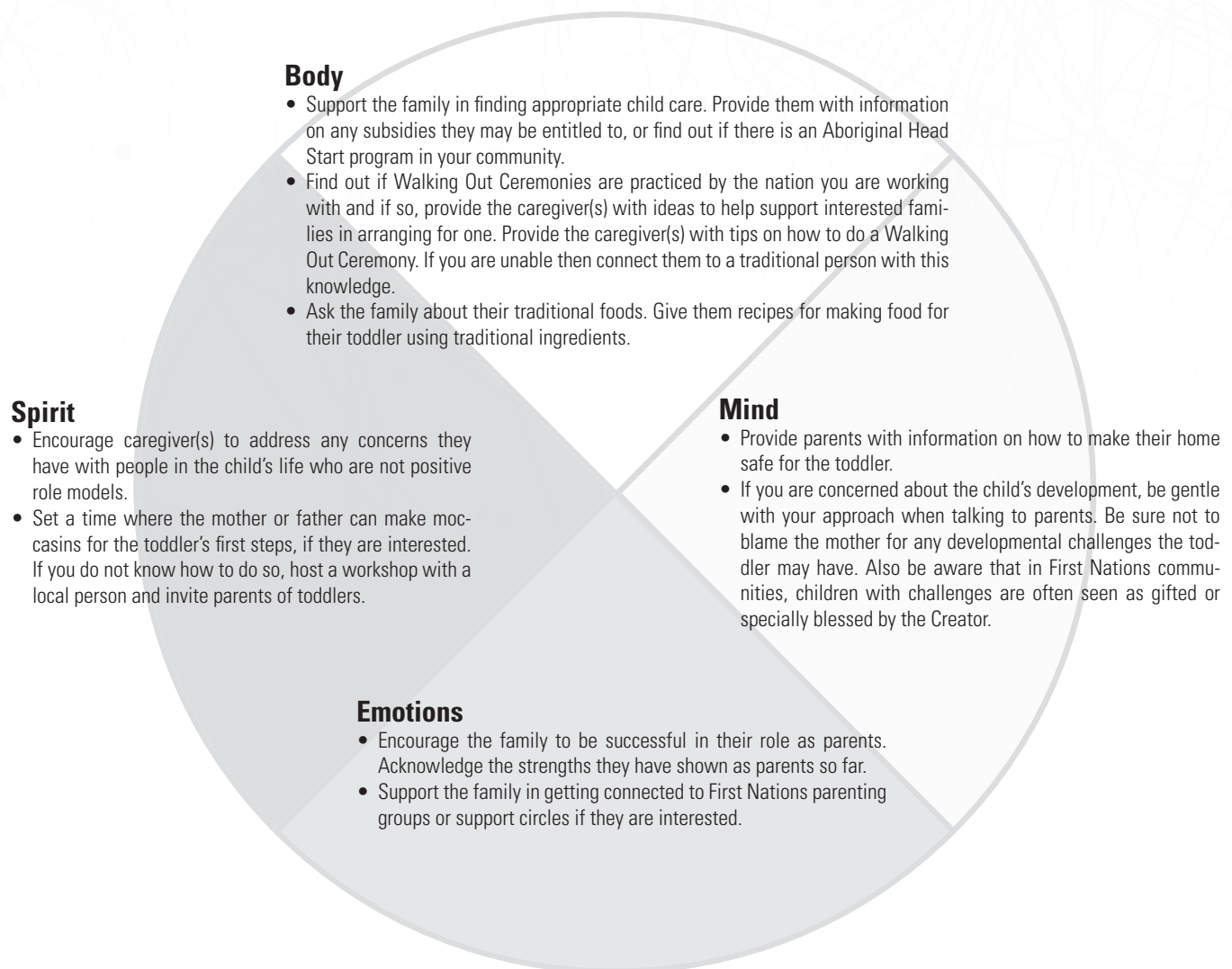
The checklists include some of the most critical skills that a child should master by a specific age. The checklists are completed by parents. The information helps to determine the areas where a child is doing well and where a child may require some extra help. It is not a diagnostic tool and does not replace a formal assessment. Age appropriate activities are included to promote overall development. The screens coincide with immunization schedules as well as key developmental stages up to age six.

The screens address the following developmental areas:

- Vision
- Hearing
- Communication (speech and language)
- Large muscle skills
- Small muscle skills
- Cognitive
- Social-emotional
- Self-help skills

For more information on the screens, visit www.ndds.ca/ontario/home.html.

WHEEL OF SUPPORT FOR TODDLERS



8. Children (2 to 7 years)

Children learn about truth. During this stage, good relationships with other children and adults help children learn how to trust and feel secure. This helps them to figure out what the truth is in a future situation. The community and caregivers are responsible for teaching the children about honesty and consequences for actions.

Let the child make their own decisions by giving him some choices. Allow the child to make mistakes by accepting them calmly. This will help show the child to solve problems. Always provide encouragement, comfort, and love, especially at times of sadness.

~Lois Stoll, Children's Services Manager, Kenora Chiefs Advisory

HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Children need special care through individual relationships with a parent or caregiver(s). Setting time aside to build on this relationship is essential. We can help many children who have behavioural problems through caring and taking time to develop a long-term relationship that includes shared activities and talking. We should not bribe children with money or video games in place of quality time with parents. These only bring temporary happiness and the child will expect this on a regular basis.

Structure is also very important in this stage of the life cycle. Structure is having a routine for your child. Having breakfast everyday, going for a walk before school, having a healthy snack after school, and reading a book at bedtime are all examples of structure. When there is structure at home, children develop a sense of security that helps them to better cope with any situation outside of the home.

Acknowledging children on a daily basis is important. Children need attention. Parents can easily give this by asking questions about their daily activities, friends, and interests. Parents need to discipline in a friendly way such as pointing out wrong doings in a gentle manner and not yelling or screaming at the child.

Readiness is also an important concept during this stage. Children should not be forced to do a new task or to control their bodies until they are ready. Weaning, toilet training, and learning new skills are done when the child is ready.

Children in this stage are school aged. Learning is important for them to grow and develop their mind. When a child's physical and emotional needs are met, it is easier for them to learn. Organized activities and responsibilities are important for children as they provide opportunities for teaching and esteem development. Young boys learn things like tracking, hunting, and fishing with their uncles and grandfathers. Young girls spend time with aunts and grandmothers learning how to gather berries, medicines, and prepare food. Through all this children are given responsibility and made to feel like an important part of the family.

Character building also continues at this stage. We tell stories to allow children to use their imagination to understand morals and life lessons. From these stories they gain insights into life and grow in understanding.

YOUR ROLE WITH CHILDREN

This stage is extremely important for shaping self-esteem and for affirming truth for the child. You play an important role in supporting families with children. There are many things you can do to assist them with the health and development of their child. Below are suggestions to guide you in understanding what children need from parents and caregivers at this stage of the life cycle.

The little ones, from the time that they are here, when you're carrying them, when you bring them up, teach them in your language and culture, so they'll be proud of who they are. A lot of kids are not even proud because they don't know nothing about themselves. Teach them who they are, Indian, Ojibwe, Maliseet, Passomoquady, or whatever, so they'll start talking about it.

~Passomoquady Elder Margaret Paul, from In the Words of Elders

TRADITIONAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE CHILD WELLNESS

Try using and promoting these tools to engage with children in a good way:

- Storytelling
- Humour
- Discipline

STORYTELLING

Storytelling plays an important role in First Nations child development and parenting. First Nations people have been using stories as a way of teaching ever since time began. Stories were told during winter. That was the time for teaching because it was the time the children were inside the longest.

The storyteller is one who is respected in the community. Sometimes they are parents or grandparents. They work well with groups and are able to sense the needs of the audience. They understand each child by observing them. Storytelling is a means of teaching children important lessons about life, relationships, and how to behave.

Storytelling brings generations together. Elders, parents, and children all take part in the storytelling process. There are no generation gaps in First Nations culture mostly because social functions are not age exclusive, everyone is welcome. Storytelling is an example of this.

Storytelling is essential for the proper growth and development of balanced children who can laugh at life's problems, laugh at themselves, and learn to overcome everyday challenges. It is a tool used for teaching children of all ages to be good listeners and observers. Children need to have learning experiences that are fun, engaging, and challenging. Storytelling offers that. Storytelling is also a valuable means of transferring cultural knowledge, traditional teachings, and values.

HUMOUR

Laughter is important for everyone, not just children. Laughter releases chemicals from our body. It relieves stress and grief. Since children have a hard time identifying what causes their feelings, releasing through laughter is a good way to keep emotionally healthy.

Laughter must not be confused with teasing. In many communities we find teasing to be an everyday practice of parents. They tease their children for many things. The motive may be to poke fun and have a few laughs, but the act of teasing damages the child's emotional self.

Children who are brought up with teasing often feel shamed and ridiculed. They feel insecure about themselves and may find it difficult to relate to others. Teasing has been around our communities for a long time and does carry on from generation to generation. We need to recognize that teasing does not contribute to the health and wellness of children.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline is never separated from teaching the right way of doing things. Self-control is as important as social control. Children are taught to have good judgment skills early in life. Children know what is expected of them because the rules are clear and consistent, most often defined by the community as a whole.

Children should never be belittled or talked down to. There is no power imbalance as in other cultures where there may be the "I'm the adult" attitude. Children hold their place in the family circle and are treated equally.

WHEEL OF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

Emotions

- Encourage parents to take their children out in Mother Nature for walks. Get them away from the business of everyday life and enjoy quietness.
- Encourage caregiver(s) to praise their children.

Body

- Support the family in coming up with physical activities they can do together.
- Connect the family to traditional people who can teach the parent and the child cultural activities.

Mind

- Share with parents the importance of storytelling. Encourage them to tell their children stories and to read to them.
- Invite an Elder to provide a storytelling circle for children.
- Encourage caregiver(s) to talk with their children. Ask children how their day was, what their favourite part was, etc.
- Assist caregiver(s) in finding appropriate child care or school settings that nurture the child's cultural self.
- Encourage parents to allow the child to solve their own problems wherever it is appropriate, and praise when they do well.

Spirit

- Provide opportunities for the whole family to take part in community events, such as dinners, luncheons, workshops, feasts, etc.
- Explore with the family different spiritual practices they can do with their child to encourage that connection with the Creator i.e. prayer, smudge.



9. Youth (7 to 11 years)

The youth phase is between childhood and adulthood. It is a time to prepare for adulthood. This preparation is very critical as youth often challenge the beliefs and attitudes held by family, community, and the larger nation. They have their own ideas about how things should be. At the end of this stage, they will be mature, caring, knowledgeable, and skilled young adults. Their role at this stage is to develop their own value base or belief system.

EMOTIONS

This stage teaches us about the importance of patience. Youth at this time challenge everything that they have learned so far in their life. They may test us to see if we are truthful when we said we would be with them and love them unconditionally.

Youth must learn to move with the flow of mother nature to stay away from trouble. For example; if you are thirsty for water and bend down to a stream for a drink, decide what direction the water is flowing, drink with the same flow as the current...working with nature's flow. If you go against the current you will get into trouble.

~Jake Swamp, Elder

Youth face many changes when journeying into adulthood. These changes influence every part of their being; their bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits.

BODIES

Physically, their bodies change. They grow hair on certain body parts, girls grow breasts, and boy's voices begin to change. They develop a curiosity for sexual interests. It is important to teach them about respect for their bodies.

Understand how to support youth through this challenging time. There are specific rites of passage ceremonies for male and female youth that support them as they journey into the next stage of the life cycle.

YOUR ROLE WITH YOUTH

This stage is extremely important to reaffirm love and understanding for the youth. You play an important role and may support families with young children who may have youth as siblings. The relationships and behaviour of the youth impacts the health and well-being of the younger siblings in the family.

There are many things you can do to help the family with the healthy development of their youth.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE YOUTH WELLNESS

Try using and promoting these tools to engage with youth in a good way:

- Sacred bundles
- Grandmother's bag
- Fasting
- Berry fasting for young women
- Vision question for young men
- Other ceremonies

SACRED BUNDLES

If the youth doesn't yet have one, you can give them a sacred bundle to encourage them to have strength and perseverance during this stage of the life cycle. There is more information about bundles in other sections of this manual.

GRANDMOTHER'S BAG

A young woman makes a grandmother's bag when she is on her berry fast. She carries her eating utensils in this bag during the next year as she journeys on her fast. These items are sacred as she is conscious of her body and what she is eating while she is changing and moving towards womanhood.

FASTING

People take part in fasting as a ceremony to seek answers and receive direction in their life's journey. A fast usually lasts one to four days depending on the purpose of the fast and how long it takes for the vision to take place. There are many different types of fast; a berry fast for girls entering womanhood; a vision quest for boys entering manhood; and fasts for people seeking information for clarity.

BERRY FAST

A girl takes part in a berry fast as she journeys into womanhood. This berry fast begins when she starts her first menstrual cycle. Teachings vary from nation to nation.

One common practice is that of seclusion, where a young girl goes into seclusion for 10 days, under the guidance and care of her grandmothers or traditional woman helpers. In modern days seclusion would be her room or a room made especially for her in the home. Towards the end of her seclusion, the girl may also be placed out to fast.

Women are responsible for preparing her bed by placing cedar under it and creating an atmosphere that has no outside interference or distraction. No television, radio, or books. This time for her is a time of reflection, a time to think about moving into womanhood, thinking about what type of woman she wants to be. During these 10 days she will receive many teachings about her moon time, her roles and responsibilities as a woman, and respect for her body.

During this time she would not be allowed to wash herself, this teaching her about humility, one of the seven grandfather teachings. Men were not allowed to visit her, not even her father or brothers, only women who have already received their cycle.

During this time, she creates her grandmothers' bag to carry her eating utensils.

When she comes out of seclusion there is a big feast and a give away to celebrate and acknowledge her womanhood. She is brought into the circle covered up and walks four times around the circle escorted by her grandmothers. When this is complete she is re-introduced to the circle as a woman. Her name that was given at birth is said.

Even a long time ago, when a woman or a young girl goes through the woman stage, when she first gets her period, they put them way out alone in a camp, because they are not allowed to touch the ground.

~Slavey Elder Martha Rabesca, from In the Words of Elders

ONE YEAR BERRY FAST

The second part of this rite is the one year berry fast where she would stop consuming berries during that time. Her sacrifice at this time has a great impact on the people. She is healing the nation and honouring her ancestors. In some nations the girl is not allowed to date or wear makeup during this one year. She is expected to use this time to stand back and observe other women in the community. The young woman may also be required to complete key tasks (such as the creation of moccasins, birch bark bowls etc.) to be completed while she is on her fast. This is intended to impart traditional skills as well as to help prepare her for her give away at the end of the year-long fast.

Youth often worked with their parents, and that was considered part of their education. Chores and other activities that keep youth active, will help teach them responsibilities. Responsible children become responsible adults.

~Lois Stoll, Children's Services Manager, Kenora Chiefs Advisory

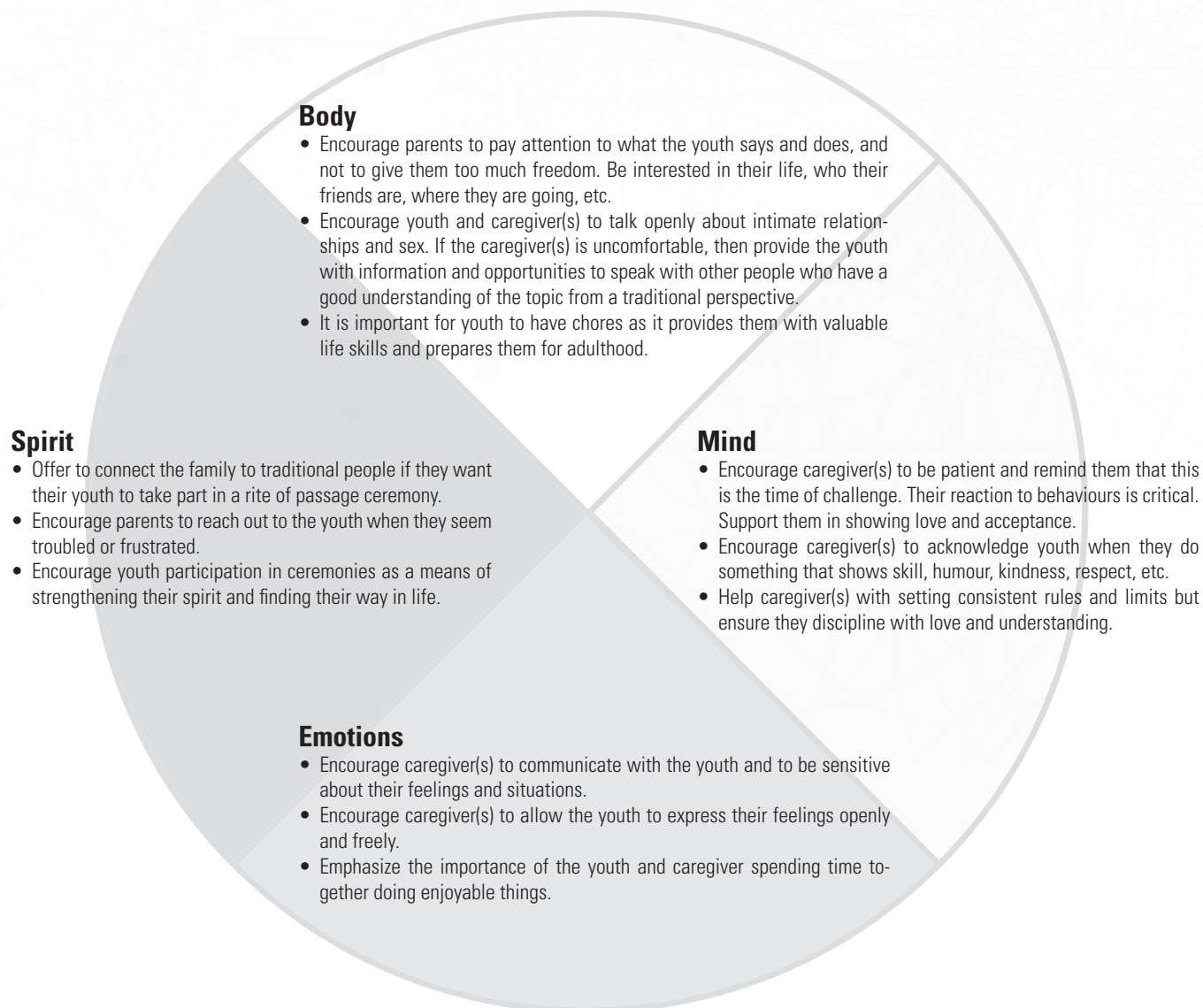
VISION QUEST

For boys, their rites of passage may not last a year. Depending upon the teachings of their nation, they may also go into seclusion for 10 days in the bush. There they fast for four days for a vision quest. They learn about courage. Men need to teach them about their responsibility in the community, to their future partner, and to their nation.

THE FIRST HUNT

Young men enter into manhood once they have completed their first kill. When a boy kills his first animal, the entire community celebrates with a ceremony. At the feast, all of the people receive a small part of the meat as acceptance of the offering of the newest hunter among them. The ceremony marks the movement from boyhood to manhood and a confirmation of another provider in the community.

WHEEL OF SUPPORT FOR YOUTH



10. Young adults (11 to 18 years)

This stage of the Life Cycle is all about establishing yourself within your role in life. We call this stage the wandering stage as young adults are responsible for taking all their insight gained from the youth stage and applying it to the world by exploring, making their own decisions, and creating their own path. They have the knowledge, skills, and respect for life to lead healthy lifestyles and be responsible within the community.

During this stage, young adults begin to understand their responsibilities to their family, community, and nation. They wander at this stage out into the world to develop a better idea of their responsibilities and roles. It is during this stage that they do the work of the people and contribute to the betterment of the nation. It is time to put to use their strengths and skills that have been nurtured by their caregivers and family during their upbringing and to decide where best to apply their talent. Some young adults may choose to be involved in ceremonies; others may dance, take part in sports, or excel in their educational path.

Young adults will have a better resistance to alcohol and other drugs if they feel they are part of the community. Value them as they are a great resource.

~Elder Jake Swamp

YOUR ROLE WITH YOUNG ADULTS

Support for young parents may include connecting them to traditional people who can teach about their new role and also allow them to experience it as well.

Continue to be supportive, encouraging, and accepting of the young adult as they make these choices. It is okay for them to make mistakes as it is only through this they will have a chance to learn another way.

You play an important role in supporting:

- Families with children who are young adults
- Young adults who are pregnant or parenting

The relationship and behaviour of the young adult impacts the health and well-being of the younger siblings in the family, and their own children if they are young parents.

There are many things you can do to assist the family with the healthy development of their young adult.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY LIVING FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Try using and promoting these tools to engage with young adults in a good way:

- The drum
- Eagle feather
- Smudging
- Dancing
- Making traditional crafts

THE DRUM

The drum is known as the heartbeat of Mother Earth. When we hear the drum we are reminded of our time in the womb when we heard our mother's heartbeat. It is the connection to the earth and all that is. Many people feel safe and connected when they hear the drum. Indigenous cultures around the world know the importance of rhythm and the drum, especially in creating joyous moments.

Use the drum to sing your family and clan songs, to bridge your connection to the spirit world, and to grow strong. You can use it for celebrating and to bring people together in prayer. The drum is a sacred item. Don't bring it around drugs or alcohol. You should honour your drum and have a special feast for it once every season. It is also an honour to your drum and self if you choose to keep your drum away from drugs or alcohol, including when you are under the influence of harmful substances.

EAGLE FEATHER

The eagle is sacred to the First Nations people of Turtle Island. To receive an eagle feather is considered to be the highest honor that can be bestowed upon someone. Use a feather in a talking circle to provide strength or use it as part of dancing regalia to represent honour. Carrying an eagle feather shows your commitment to walking on this earth in a positive healthy way.

SMUDGING

Smudging is a practice that allows you to cleanse your body, mind, and spirit. Encourage parents to smudge by helping them access the four sacred medicines of cedar, tobacco, sage, and sweetgrass. Smudging is usually done by burning medicines in a small shell. It provides an opportunity to connect with the Creator through prayer and use of traditional medicines. It is healing.

DANCING

First Nations dancers are hard-working and talented. Dancing is one way of praying and giving thanks in our cultures. There are ceremonies around getting your regalia ready for the powwows.

Dancing in the First Nations way is a good workout for the body, and it's also uplifting for the mind and spirit. Encourage young adults to get involved in learning the different dances of their nation. If there is no dance or weekly social then try and see if you can get one started so the young people have something positive to do every week.

MAKING TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

One factor in doing things such as drumming and dancing is having the proper regalia. Preparing regalia for dancing is like a ceremony in itself. Elders say that when we do beading, we are putting our prayers into all the work that we are doing.

When people don't grow up with their traditions, the traditions may seem complicated. Try and encourage your young people to learn their traditional crafts, and see if they can pass them onto others. You may be surprised to find that you take a special interest in creating some wonderful crafts yourself!

YOUNG ADULTS WHO BECOME PARENTS (TEEN PARENTS)

According to the teachings of the Life Cycle stages, once a spirit enters the womb of a woman, the man and woman journey into the next stage of the life cycle. This journey into parenthood may be a stage that some young adults are not prepared to handle.

Young adults who are not prepared to be parents and who become pregnant face many challenges when they are expected to assume their new role and responsibilities. If they have not done the work in their wandering stage and are not prepared to journey forward with a good mind, this can negatively impact the unborn spirit in the womb. These young adults are like children raising children. Their need for nurturance and guidance may equal the needs of their children.

Refer to the prenatal section of this manual for more strategies on how to explore pregnancy with a young adult mother who is expecting. First Nations people believe that when a woman is carrying life, both the male and female are pregnant during this time. It is important to provide an opportunity for both expecting young adults to express how they feel about their role.

WHEEL OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Spirit

- Connect the young adult with traditional people or Elders who are familiar with the practices they are interested in, such as a sweat lodge.
- If the young adult is expecting refer to strategies in the Conception and Life in the Womb section.

Body

- Support the young adult in setting realistic goals.
- Provide and encourage opportunities for volunteering, such as shopping for Elders or doing peer counselling.
- Encourage the youth to take part in community activities.
- If the young adult is expecting refer to strategies in the Conception and Life in the Womb section.

Mind

- Offer to connect them to the appropriate services if they want to seek education or a job.
- Provide choices, suggestions, ideas, and strategies.
- If the young adult is expecting refer to strategies in the Conception and Life in the Womb section.

Emotions

- Encourage participation in community decision-making.
- Ensure the young adult has a strong support network. If they do not, help them to develop those supports to encourage success.
- If the young adult is expecting refer to strategies in the Conception and Life in the Womb section.



11. Parents

“Children require guidance and sympathy far more than instruction.”

~Annie Sullivan

Parents are the providers and caregivers of their family and community. They provide for the well-being of the body, mind, emotions, and spirit of the people. Parents draw upon the knowledge, teachings, and experience they have received through their own life to share with their children. Parents learn to parent from those who raised them.

Parents have a huge responsibility and need to be guided in a good way.

~Elder Jake Swamp

Every new generation faces the difficult job of raising its children. Although we live in a time that is very different from when our parents were raising us, we have the same parenting responsibilities as they did.

Parents must:

- nurture and protect their children;
- help children learn beliefs and values; and
- teach children the skills they need to survive and grow throughout the life cycle stages.

For hundreds of years, First Nations parents were guided by traditions that never left parenting to chance. These traditions were passed from one generation to the next. Although they varied from nation to nation, they shared the same purpose in ensuring the nations' future through its children.

YOUR ROLE WITH PARENTS

The role of the service provider is like an auntie/uncle. Provide support where the parents need it. Think to yourself, “If this was my sister, what would I do?”

~Jaynane Burning-Fields

Continue to be supportive and encouraging of parents. As a service provider who offers support to parents and caregivers, you cannot teach people to do things they cannot feel. If a parent has never been nurtured, they will not be able to nurture their newborn. For parents to meet their children's needs, they in turn have to have their needs met.

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR FIRST NATIONS PARENTS

One challenge you may come across when dealing with First Nations parents is “native pride.” This means something different to everyone, but Dr. Lynn Lavallee explored the topic of physical activity and wellness with Aboriginal parents to find out what native pride means. She found that many First Nations people are slow or reluctant to accept gifts, handouts, help, food, etc. Many of us also have feelings of underservedness (Lavallee 2007).

An issue with native pride is that some Aboriginal parents may be reluctant to attend your program if they think that they do not deserve it. This is true of Aboriginal people from all socio-economic backgrounds.

Ways of dealing with this:

- Be private about gifts – you don't need to give vouchers or ask if they need them in front of everyone else.
- Ask personal questions about financial issues behind closed doors.
- Arm clients with information about where gifts come from – share the message that this is their right.
- Develop trusting and consistent relationships – this happens over time. You can share gifts/vouchers with people more easily once they trust you. Plus, you can make sure that you're having a dialogue about the types of food they're buying with those vouchers to encourage healthy choices.
- Make sure to reach out to Aboriginal people who you do not see as at risk as well as those at risk. We need educated and secure Aboriginal people to come to our programs too. Oftentimes these people are a good support and role models for those who are trying to improve their lives.

WHEN PARENTS DON'T TREAT THEIR CHILDREN AS SACRED

Unfortunately we don't practice many of these traditions today because of the influence of western society. Many of us feel the impact of residential schools and other government laws of assimilation.

They didn't learn how to be a parent, because they were raised in these schools. I suppose we could talk about it, so they can learn how to be a parent. They have some of those Native parenting workshops, I've heard, not too long ago, I hear him saying, 'I got to go to my, how to be a parent.' Which is good I think.

~Passomoquady Elder Margaret Paul, from In the Words of Elders

Residential schools were followed by the 60s scoop—a time when massive amounts of First Nations children were forcibly removed from their families to be adopted or fostered by non-Aboriginal families. The government was trying to get rid of the "Indian problem" by removing the children from their families. This interrupted the normal cycle of the child learning to parent from their parent.

Instead of having a kind, nurturing, and strength-producing home, children learned institutional living and to be ashamed of who they were. These children missed the opportunity to learn to parent, especially when they were taken to the schools at a young age.

Although we cannot go back in time we can still talk about and share what we know about traditional ways of raising children.

One common sentiment I've heard from some of my Cree and other friends is that they now are so focused on nurturing and raising their children in a good way because it is one way that they feel they can nurture their ancestors.

Our Elders say we have "blood memory" – this means that we carry the feelings and memories of our ancestors in our blood and DNA. We can feel the hurt they felt when they were removed from their parents and placed into the schools. We can feel how sad they were to be separated from their brothers and sisters, and not being able to speak their language. In this way, you'll see a lot of parents today who wish to heal that legacy of hurt through doing a great job in raising their own children.

~Melanie Ferris, Anishnawbe

As a service provider, use the resources in your community to help support families in learning more about their traditional ways and how these positively influence their children's development. In many cases, you will be able to see a real difference in people's lives once you start helping them and encouraging them to understand who they are and where they come from.

It's our role as parents to let the child know it's wanted.

~Jaynane Burning-Fields

Extended families usually help parents to provide for their children. For parents and caregivers living in urban areas, away from families, it can be very hard to fulfill the responsibility of being a parent without that extended family support. Parents are left to come up with their own way of parenting without direction and support. This also speaks to single or step parents or parents who have children with special needs.

Both men and women carry different gifts; men have the voice of thunder for discipline and women's gentleness nurtures the child. Together in relationship they balance each other.

~Laurie McLeod-Shabogesic, Union of Ontario Indians

ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO BUILD SUPPORT NETWORKS

All people need support. Parents who do not have a partner to rely on often have to assume the responsibilities of that partner. Parenting can be overwhelming without a partner to help make decisions or provide respite, money, or share duties. Depending on the availability of other supports such as extended family, single parents may be overburdened with the day to day care.

Your role as a service provider is to encourage and help the parent to create a support network that allows the parent to share some of those responsibilities.

A parent, caregiver, or person in charge of raising children always needs to pray for themselves, their families, families that they are working with, and for instances that might happen that are beyond their control. This is our way of accepting the way that we are, the way that we learn, our relationship to our spiritual selves, and our relationship to the land and our history.

~Lois Stoll, Children's Services Manager, Kenora Chiefs Advisory

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

It is important for people to understand that FASD children grow into human beings. Their body and spirit both grow and they contribute their gifts to the world.

~Joseph Cloutier, FASD Advocate

First Nation cultures view children with special needs differently from western culture. In Western culture, children born with special needs or physical challenges are viewed as "not normal." Everything in western child development is rated on a scale from exceptional to below average. A child born with a special need may be viewed as:

- a burden;
- not healthy; or
- below the norm.

We need to view all children as gifts from the Creator, each bringing their own teachings. Children with special needs are viewed as gifted children and are able to grow and learn in a healthy way. They are able to make choices within their own ability. Do not compare them on a developmental grade.

Support parents with children who have special needs in understanding that their children are precious. Help them learn not to fear these differences but to embrace them. Encourage parents not to segregate these children and to allow them to be their own individual selves. It can be challenging for parents who have limited supports and more than one child in the family.

Parents of children with special needs prefer, when talking about their children, to say "child/children" first, as the most important thing is the child, not the special need. So they prefer "children with special needs" and are not comfortable with "special needs children."

THE MAN'S ROLE WITHIN THE FAMILY

It is important to discuss the role of First Nations men within family and community. We focus a lot on the roles of women (ie; in pregnancy, birth, teachings and rights of passage for girls, youth who become parents at a young age, etc.). We provide this section on men for completeness and balance.

Parenting today is challenging. That challenge is even harder when youth and young men have a lack of understanding of the role of a father or if there is an unwillingness to fulfill the roles of a parent.

In many communities today, children are being raised by their mothers or grandparents. Some men, both young and old, are not active as parents. Sometimes it is because the father does not understand his role or it may be that he does not want that responsibility. It may also be possible that this man is dealing with mental or other health issues.

Men, however, taught the children. When babies are small, mothers are a bit weak, so the men would do all the work like cooking, gathering of diaper moss. In the wintertime the moss is hard to find, you look at the lay of the land and you find it in the valley. Men would go in the bush to get this, they would thaw it dry and clean it. Babies would be fed broth, moose or fish, besides mother's milk.

~Slavey/Dogrib Elder George Blondin, from In the Words of Elders

YOU MAY FIND IT CHALLENGING TO ENGAGE MEN

Relationships today are not based on the fundamentals of survival as they were hundreds of years ago. Because of the breakdown in the family system through the residential schools, some young men have grown up not understanding their cultural teachings or traditional roles that they have in their community. If a young man is not aware of his role within community he will not understand his role within the family.

Many parents are confused about their identity. This makes it hard to pass on a healthy and firm sense of identity to our children. Today many young parents are seeking out programs and hobbies that get them involved with their cultural heritage. Learning more about their cultural roles helps parents to build healthier relationships. This is especially important when there is a pregnancy and children involved.

Traditionally, a couple would stay together like eagles but that is not always the case today. Many children are being raised by one parent. To engage men in their role in raising children, use some of the strategies and teachings in this manual to help them understand of their roles and responsibilities.

A Father's responsibility is to imitate the sun; get up early everyday with the east shining light; protect and provide for all life (family); work all day long and when the sun goes down he may rest. And like him, the sun is expected to be there again tomorrow morning.

~Elder Jake Swamp

Men are responsible to create, maintain, and protect the fire in the home, community and the "fire of life" that grows in a woman's womb when she carries a child within her. When a woman becomes pregnant, so does a man. He is to behave in a way that protects and nurtures the spirit growing in the woman's womb, providing a safe environment free of negative influences.

When the spirit is born, the man's role within the family continues to be that of a provider and protector. His role is that of a helper, he continues to help with nurturing and raising the children. He is there to assist the woman with ensuring things are running smoothly. Men are also physical beings, more so than women. Women are the first teachers and show how to love and use emotions. Men are the second teachers for the child and show how to do more of the physical things in life as the child grows.

Discipline is also the man's role. Men were given this role because they have the "voice of thunder," that deeper voice to which the child listens. He provides discipline in a nurturing way, teaching the child the right way of doing things, not forcing or abusing his power.

A man's role in the community is also of protector and provider. He hunts for his family and community members who need support. Fulfilling his role within the family and community are vital for the health and wellness of the nation.

WAYS OF ENGAGING MEN

- **Consult with men** to see what their needs and interests are in terms of learning about parenting and their roles and responsibilities as men.
- **Seek male role models**, including Elders and other traditional people, to lead the discussions, workshops, and ceremonies.
- **Create opportunities to come together at times**, doing things and going places that are fun for men. Some men may enjoy traditional activities such as doing a sweat lodge, drumming and singing, hearing stories from local Elders, camping or going fishing.
- **Approach men directly**, on issues and requests. They need to hear clearly what their responsibilities are around the family, community and ceremonies.
- **Involve men in meaningful ways** that promote and support their active involvement. So, if you're planning events for First Nations fathers, ask fathers in your community what types of things they would like to do with their new baby or young child. You might ask about the traditional ceremonies in their home community.

- **Get men doing hands-on activities.** Provide chances for men to come together and engage in activities where they create something. This creative process nurtures their connection with their children. You might get a man to make a drum for his child, learn how to carve something beautiful, learn how to make moccasins or medicine bags, and other fun activities. Not all men are artistic, but there may be roles that they would be interested in taking on. Men like to share their physical gifts in the home, community and ceremonies for example in sacred fires where older men pass on these responsibilities/teachings to younger men.
- **Find out what their strengths are.** Have them share their gifts with others. For example, if someone is a great artist, see if you can get them to lead a painting or art class with the other fathers. Often, this type of request will give a young man a boost of much needed self-confidence. If you're able, try to provide the teacher with a small gift of tobacco, money, and/or a gift card.
- **Find gentle, non-judgmental ways of teaching.** This is sometimes a challenge, so an easy way of teaching might be to have an Elder come in to facilitate a session on Fire teachings to help men connect with their teachings and responsibilities.
- **Connect men with traditional people in your community.** Many people recognize the link between culture and health. This means that today we value our Elders and other traditional people in helping us to re-connect with our cultures. Your community likely has at least one Elder or someone who knows a lot about First Nations way of living. Connecting men with a traditional person helps them to learn about and connect with the traditional roles of men in the family and community.
- **Recognize men who are good fathers.** Tell them that their child is lucky to have them for a father. Help them understand that fathers are a gift. Also provide verbal encouragement to a man if he is being supportive of his partner.
- **Provide opportunities** for men to get involved in positive ways with others. You can encourage men to help seniors in the community by running errands and doing helpful things. You can arrange group outings to help with community events such as drum socials, school events, community dinners, church services, sports tournaments, pow wows, etc.
- **Provide or connect them to opportunities** to learn the skills and knowledge that develops self-esteem and allows them to be a productive member of their family and community.

STEP-PARENTS

The health and wellness of the parents directly impact the health and wellness of their children. Support parents in getting access to what they need.

~Laurie McLeod-Shabogesic, Union of Ontario Indians

Step-parenting can present its own issues and challenges. Many families today are blended families. One or both parents are often step parents to the other's children. Developing these new relationships and fulfilling parental responsibilities demands time and a lot of patience from each member of the family.

Children may not have a good relationship with the step parent. They may resent them or feel the need to compete for attention. Step parents may have a different parenting philosophy which can confuse children and cause conflict.

As a service provider, support the family in a wholistic way. Value each member of the family. Consider how each is being affected and how each is willing to contribute to making change.

KEEP ASSESSING THE FAMILY FROM A WHOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Each family member plays a role in the health and wellness of the family. Supporting the health and wellness of the parents or caregivers directly impacts the health and wellness of the children in that family. There are many things you can do to assist parents with the healthy development of their children.

TIPS FOR PROVIDING CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

1. Combine healthy doses of negative and positive feedback. Remember that everyone has positive qualities and strengths you can emphasize to soften the criticism.

2. Stay specific and on task. Discuss the person's actions, and point out what they can do to improve. Don't allow the conversation to wander in other directions, and avoid bringing up unrelated issues from the past. Focus on the subject at hand and get the proper message out.
3. Stay calm and cool when criticizing someone. Avoid pointing out personal character traits and don't let the conversation degenerate. Humiliation will get you nowhere and reflects negatively on you and your reputation. Keep your emotions in check, neutral and nonjudgmental.
4. Do your homework and have any facts you might need close at hand. Make sure that your facts are true.
5. List specific opportunities for improvement.
6. Give the person time to respond to your criticism. They might want to explain or clarify. Give them an opportunity to speak, and be a good listener.
7. Remember that a little empathy goes a long way. Recognize that there may be other contributing factors that you may not be aware of. Put yourself in the moccasins of the person you're about to criticize. Remember that they will feel vulnerable or under attack. Reminding yourself what that feels like will help you deliver criticism in a sensitive way.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE PARENT WELLNESS

Try using and promoting these tools to engage with parents in a good way:

- Role modeling
- Smudging
- Singing
- Sweat lodge

ROLE MODELING

Parents are role models who influence our behaviour and thought patterns. Young children need positive role models in their lives so that they grow up making healthy decisions. We begin role modeling the very moment the baby's spirit enters the womb. With positive influence from close adults, children can learn how to walk in a good way. They can learn to face challenges, express emotions, and grow to be nurturing and accepting adults.

SMUDGING

Smudging is a practice that allows you to cleanse your body, mind, and spirit. Encourage parents to smudge by helping them access the four sacred medicines of cedar, tobacco, sage, and sweetgrass. Smudging is usually done by burning medicines in a small shell. It provides an opportunity to connect with the Creator through prayer and use of traditional medicines. It is healing.

SINGING

Encourage parents to learn their clan songs or the songs of their nation. This is one way to keep connected to identity and all of creation. Singing songs can ground us in our roles as parents. Singing songs and drumming open the lines of communication to the spirit world. It is a form of prayer to help get advice, direction, and give thanks.

SWEAT LODGE

The sweat lodge is a powerful ceremony for men, women, and children. It cleanses one's spirit and body at the same time. The sweat lodge is a ceremony that can be difficult to explain in writing. Everyone gets something different from a sweat, but many people like to do them over and over once they start using them as a healing tool. The people who organize sweat lodges are called the conductors. They work closely with fire keepers who help to get the sweat lodge ready for participants. It's common for the drum, berries, and sacred medicines to be used in this ceremony. Sometimes there are also special sweat lodges for children.

WHEEL OF SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

Body

- Always be willing to listen.
- Provide constructive criticism and ideas when necessary, helping the parent learn how they might do things differently next time.

Spirit

- Set up time for the parent to speak to an Elder about any concerns they have about their parenting.
- Host a workshop for parents to come together to discuss their parenting challenges.
- Create a parent support group to increase support networks for parents.

Mind

- Encourage positive communication between parents and children. Offer to connect the family to experienced traditional person or professional to host a family circle if there is a communication breakdown.
- Provide opportunities for parents to learn positive parenting skills by hosting a workshop or providing one on one support.
- Believe in the parent's ability to do well: "I know you can..."
- Encourage parents to come up with their own solutions first, then provide choices, suggestions, ideas, and strategies when necessary.

Emotions

- Encourage the parent to have positive realistic expectations of their children.
- Identify the parent's strengths and acknowledge their efforts in parenting.
- Talk with parents about the positive things in their lives even when things go wrong.



12. Grandparents

Grandchildren are the dots that connect the lines from generation to generation.

~Lois Wyse

We need to respect grandparents and care for them. Through wisdom, grandparents are the life teachers to all those who come after them. They share and teach cultural knowledge, life skills, history, and personal knowledge they have gained on their own life journey.

Grandparents are keepers of the knowledge, sharing their wisdom through storytelling.

~Terrelllyn Fearn

Historically, the responsibilities of raising a child belonged to a communal circle of adults who were close to the family. Today grandparents often act as primary guardians and caregivers of their grandchildren. This shows the importance of extended family support. Children who are parented in this extended family model grow up with a strong sense of belonging and connection to family.

Grandparents play a large role in raising their grandchildren. They are responsible for teaching them many things. In some nations the grandparent has the honour of introducing the newborn to the community and also is responsible for observing that newborn as it grows and journeys along the life cycle.

The grandparent observes the child's behaviours and strengths to get a keen understanding of that child's role within the community and nation. It is their responsibility to inform the family of these strengths so the child can be nurtured to fulfill its purpose in life.

My grandmother, she would come in and she... wanted to be sure that I would learn some of what she knew. She tried to teach me some of what she knew of Native medicines. We would go out in the woods around, and she would know where to pick various kinds of medicines.

~Mohawk Elder Ernest Benedict, from In the Words of Elders

YOUR ROLE WITH GRANDPARENTS

Today some grandparents take on more of a role in supporting families. The demand on them can be overwhelming. With high levels of family break down, grandparents will often raise or adopt their grandchildren. There can also be conflict when parents and grandparents disagree on how to raise the child.

Be gentle in your support with grandparents who play a large role in raising their grandchildren. Look at the health and wellness of the grandparent. Are they overwhelmed? How can you support them?

Supporting the health and wellness of the grandparent as a caregiver directly impacts the health and wellness of the children in that family. There are many things you can do to assist grandparents with the healthy development of their grandchildren.

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR FIRST NATIONS GRANDPARENTS

It's likely that most grandparents today have either gone to a residential school, or are the descendants of people who went to the schools. This means that they may need to do a lot of healing.

Even though grandparents should play a big role in the lives of children, this doesn't always happen. If you have clients who are grandparents, it might be helpful to ask them about their relationships with their grandchildren. Encourage them to fulfill their roles of grandparent – remind them to look out for the well-being of their grandchildren.

Another challenge can be a myriad of health issues. First Nations people have shorter life expectancies than other Canadian groups. Some grandparents may have limited mobility because of issues such as diabetes. In these cases, it may be more dif-

difficult for grandparents to maintain healthy relationships with grandchildren. There may also be financial challenges associated with raising a child on a fixed/retirement income and also physical challenges, particularly if the child has special needs.

TRADITIONAL TOOLS TO PROMOTE GRANDPARENT WELLNESS

Try using and promoting these tools to engage with grandparents in a good way:

- Storytelling
- Ceremonies
- Singing

STORYTELLING

Storytelling is used for teaching children as well as young adults. Grandparents share stories of their past experiences, myths, and legends as well as cultural teachings created to teach life lessons and pass on knowledge. Storytelling is a chance for grandparents to give back. It encourages positive relationship building and bonding for both grandparents and children.

Many of the tools already mentioned may be used by grandparents to assist them on their journey through the life cycle.

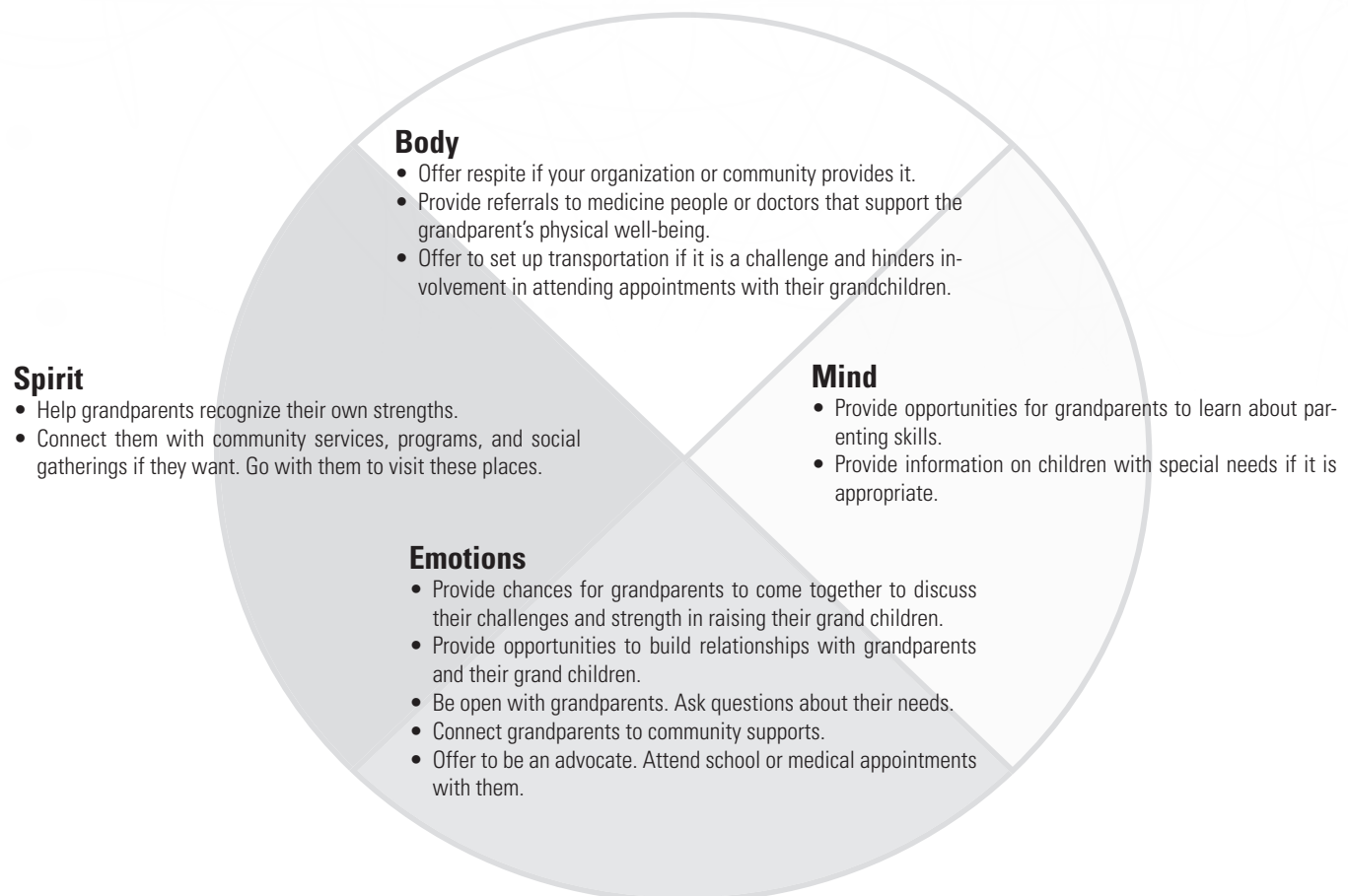
CEREMONIES

Every nation has different teachings. Engage the grandparents in your community by asking them to share their ceremonies and teachings with your clients. Offer tobacco to them if you're asking for help, and see if you can find an honorarium to thank them for their time.

SINGING

Again, every nation has different teachings and songs so ask your grandparents to share songs with your clients. Many grandparents may also have teachings around the connections between singing, early childhood development, and healing.

SUPPORT WHEEL FOR GRANDPARENTS



13. Elders

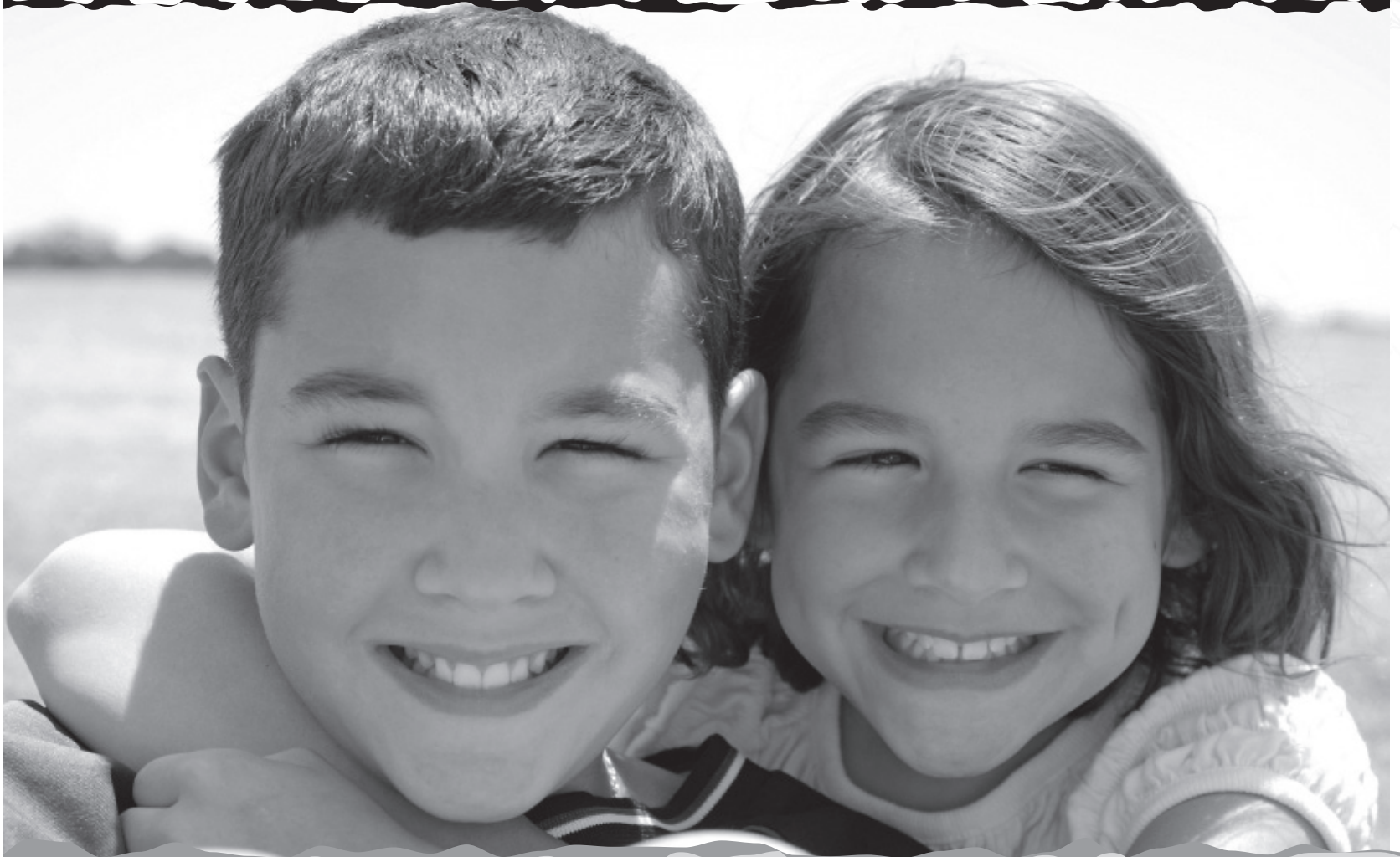
We respect Elders for their wisdom, knowledge, and life experience. They have journeyed through all the stages of the life cycle and have come full circle along the wheel. They are the spirit teachers and support us in understanding the interconnectedness of our spiritual purpose on earth and the physical journey.

Elders bridge the connection between the past and the present. They provide guidance and visioning for the future. They teach important traditions and pass on their knowledge, wisdom, and personal experiences to make positive change for the people. It is for these reasons that we treat Elders with respect.

When you seek the guidance or direction of an Elder, remember that tobacco comes first. Offering tobacco when asking for help is a respectful way to approach an Elder. People may also give a bottle of cedar tea to Elders when they go for a teaching.

A person has many problems if he loses one of his children, they will know they have to go soon. Today there are many young people who wander around at night. The Elder must step in to teach the young people. It is not right for the Elder to ignore the young people.

~ Mushkegowuk Cree Elder James Carpenter, from *In the Words of Elders*



Resources for Your Aboriginal Clients

This section provides you with a list of organizations, services, and programs that your clients may find useful. We've divided the resources into those for:

- Aboriginal parents and the entire family
- Babies and young children (ages 0 to 6)
- Youth and young people (ages 7 to 18)

FOR PARENTS AND THE WHOLE FAMILY

Aboriginal Health Access Centres are similar to community health centres. They are located across the province. They offer culturally appropriate primary care to Aboriginal people. Programs may include family medicine and nurse practitioner sources, nutrition counselling, health education, disease prevention, mental health counselling, and traditional healing.

Web: www.ahwsontario.ca/programs/hac.html

Phone: 416.326.6905

Anishnawbe Health Toronto has developed a set of excellent and free cultural brochures you can download on topics such as moon time, traditional healing, the four sacred medicines, etc. If you're in the Toronto area, this health centre can also provide your client with access to a wide range of excellent Elders and medicine people.

Web: www.aht.ca/traditional-teachings

Phone: 416.360.0486

An Easy Guide to Breastfeeding for American Indian and Alaska Native Families shares the benefits of breastfeeding, risks associated with not breastfeeding, answers to questions, and tips for success all within a First Nations context.

Web: www.4women.gov/pub/BF.AIAN.pdf

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care provides a range of programs for Anishinabek people. The agency cares for the physical and mental health, and the health of the communities where Anishinabek people live by promoting wellness, preventing illness and trauma, and providing diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation. Dilico's programs and services are available for Anishinabek residents of any age in Dilico's jurisdiction, and for children in the care of Dilico and their caregivers.

Web: www.dilico.com/

Phone: 807.623.8511

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada has information about healthy pregnancies.

Web: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/famil/preg-gros/index-eng.php

Health Canada's Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis (2007) is available in six languages on the Internet. Download an English, French, Inuktitut, Ojibwe, Plains Cree, or Woods Cree version online.

Web: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/fnim-pnim/index-eng.php

Phone: 1.866.225.0709 (toll free) or 613.957.2991 (Ottawa area)

The Parent Resource Centre has information on resources for all parents, caregivers, and those who support them. This web-site offers info about programs, workshops, professional development, and resources.

Web: www.parentresource.on.ca

Phone: 1.888.565.2466 or 613.565.2467

Raising the Children is a training program for Aboriginal parents. It has information, training modules, and resources on Aboriginal parenting.

Web: www.raisingthechildren.knet.ca

Phone: 807.737.2627

Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto is a clinic with some First Nations midwives. It attempts to provide culturally appropriate care. Women can give birth at home using one of these midwives. The clinic is in downtown Toronto and gives priority placements to Aboriginal clients.

Phone: 416. 530.7468

Tsi Non:we lonnakeratstha Ona:grahsta, Six Nations Maternal and Child Centre provides pre-conception services, pre- and post-natal care, and birthing services to women with low-risk pregnancies in the southwest Ontario area. Traditional Aboriginal midwives provide services that incorporate traditional midwifery practices. As required, referrals are made to and medical back up is available from local obstetricians and hospitals.

Web: www.snhs.ca/bcBackground.htm

Phone: 519.445.4922

BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN (0 TO 6 YEARS)

Aboriginal Children's Circle of Early Learning is a web-based network and clearinghouse with information on Aboriginal early childhood development, an interactive website, and database.

Web: www.accel-capea.ca

Phone: 1.877.602.4445 (toll free) or 613.237.9462 (Ottawa area)

Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities is an early intervention program for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children and their families living in urban centres and large northern communities. It is a pre-school program that prepares young Aboriginal children for school by meeting their spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical needs.

Web: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/ahs_main-eng.php

Phone: 416.973.0003 (general inquiries)

Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve is an early intervention program for First Nations children (age 0 to 6) living on reserve, and their families. It prepares children for their school years by meeting their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs.

Web: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/famil/develop/ahsor-papa_intro-eng.php

Phone: 613.946.9744 (ask for your regional Head Start representative)

Aboriginal Healthy Babies, Healthy Children improves the long-term health prospects of children aged 0 to 6 years. The program includes pre- and post-natal screening and assessment, home visiting, service co-ordination, and support for service integration.

Web: www.ahwsontario.ca

Phone: 416.326.6905

Brighter Futures is a federal program that funds First Nations communities to develop and manage programs targeting the physical, mental, and social well-being of children. Some projects include parenting skills training, community mental health, and youth initiatives.

Web: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/mental/brighter_grandir-eng.php

Phone: 613.952.0114

Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program targets pregnant women who may be at risk of nutritional problems during their pregnancy and during the first six months after the baby is born, through on- and off-reserve community projects. These include community kitchens, community gardens, nutrition classes, food buying clubs, support, education, referral, and counselling to pregnant women at risk.

Web: www.kanen.on.ca

Phone: 613.952.8377 (for on-reserve programs) or 807.344.9006 (for off-reserve programs)

Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) targets off-reserve Aboriginal children up to six years of age. It has community-based programs that improve the body, mind, emotions, and spiritual well-being of children and their families. CAPC targets prenatal issues, baby and child nutrition, parenting skills, cultural development and retention, and community development and healing. There are 58 off-reserve CAPC projects.

Web: www.kanen.on.ca

Phone: 807.344.9006 or 1.800.361.0563 (toll free)

Canadian Childcare Federation

Web: www.cccf-fcsge.ca

Phone: 613.729.5289

First Nation Child and Family Caring Society of Canada is Canada's only charity dedicated to helping First Nations children. It has information, links, resources, training, and publications.

Web: www.fncaringsociety.ca

Phone: 613.230.5885

Let's Be Healthy Together is a website developed by the Best Start Resource Centre that focuses on healthy weights in Aboriginal children.. This website has video, audio, and practical tips for parents.

Web: www.letsbehealthy.ca

Phone: 416.408.2249

FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Native Women's Association of Canada

This national organization has a variety of different programs that aim to get young Aboriginal people (especially girls) involved in healthy lifestyles. They have done work on preventing suicide amongst youth.

Web: www.nwac-hq.org

Phone: 1.800.461.4043 (ask for youth department)

Native Youth Sexual Health Network

This network engages with Indigenous communities across the United States and Canada to advocate for and build strong, comprehensive, and culturally competent sexuality and reproductive health education programs in their own communities.

Web: www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/

Useful Websites and Services

Aboriginal Canada Portal lists Canadian Aboriginal online resources, contacts, information, government programs, and services.

Web: www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca

Phone: 1.888.399.0111

Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy provides resources to those who administer or support Ontario-based programs and services that improve Aboriginal health and reduce family violence.

Web: www.ahwsontario.ca

Phone: 416.326.6905

Eat Right Ontario is a free service where people can get advice from a registered dietitian. It includes information in many Aboriginal languages, including Inuktitut and Cree.

Web: www.eatrightontario.ca

Phone: 1.877.862.8483 or 519.753.1185

Good Minds has information on Aboriginal educational resources for schools, libraries, and the general public, for kindergarten to the post-secondary level.

Web: www.goodminds.com

Phone: 1.877.862.8483 or 519.753.1185

Grand Council Treaty #3 is the political territorial organization for the 28 First Nations members in the treaty area. The treaty area covers 26 First Nations in Northwestern Ontario and 2 First Nations in Manitoba.

Web: www.gct3.net/

Phone: 1.800.665.3384 (toll free) or (807) 548.4214 (Kenora area)

Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres is part of a national movement with 27 centres throughout Ontario. For more information on its programs, services, and site locations

Web: www.ofifc.org

Phone: 416.956.7575 or 1.800.772.9291

Métis Nation of Ontario has information about Métis culture, programs, and services. For more information on their services and program sites throughout Ontario

Web: www.metisnation.org

Phone: 1.800.263.4889 or 613.798.1488

Native Indian and Inuit Community Health Representatives Organization has a range of resources and toolkits on maternal and newborn health related topics.

Web: www.niichro.com

Phone: 450.632.0892, ext. 21

Native Women's Association of Canada enhances, promotes, and fosters the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of First Nations and Métis women within First Nation and Canadian societies.

Web: www.nwac-hq.org

Phone: 613.722.3033 or 1.800.461.4043

Nishnawbe-Aski Nation

This organization represents the socio-economic and political aspirations of its First Nation members to all levels of government in order to allow local self-determination while establishing spiritual, cultural, social, and economic independence.

Web: www.nan.on.ca

Phone: 1.800.465.9952 or 807.623.8228

Union of Ontario Indians has a program for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder that provides culturally based training and resources to First Nations frontline workers throughout the Anishinabek Nation. Four program workers provide capacity-building training and support services to 40 First Nations. Workshops are held on a wide range of FASD related topics. There is a resource library and culturally based resources.

Web: www.anishinabek.ca

Phone: 705.497.9127 or 1.877.702.5200

Za-geh-do-win Information Clearinghouse collects, compiles, catalogues, and distributes Aboriginal-specific information, research, documents, and materials on family violence, family healing, and health.

Web: www.za-geh-do-win.com

Phone: 1.800.669.2538 or 705.692.0420

DIABETES

Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative provides information about diabetes in the Aboriginal community and funding for community-based prevention and treatment programs.

Web: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/diseases-maladies/diabete/index-eng.php

Phone: 613.946.0373

National Aboriginal Diabetes Association provides information and resources specific to Aboriginal people.

Web: www.nada.ca

Phone: 1.877.232. 6232 (toll free) or 204.927.1220 (Winnipeg area)

Southern Ontario Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative provides culturally appropriate education, promotion, and prevention resources as well as advocacy.

Web: www.soadi.ca/

Phone: 905.938.2915 or toll free at 1.888.514.1370

Sandy Lake First Nation School Diabetes Prevention Program provides information to preschool children on healthy nutrition and physical activity. It has a school curriculum component.

Email: diabetes@sl.lakeheadu.ca

Phone: 807.774.1485 and 807.774-1216

FASD

Best Start Resource Centre publishes an online magazine called FASD Ontario News twice a year.

Web: www.beststart.org/projects/index.html

Phone: 416.408.2249

Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres: FASD Toolkit for Aboriginal Families

Web: www.accel-capea.ca/pdf/FASDToolKit.pdf

Phone: 416.956.7575 (general office)

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*A wide range of traditional teachings were gathered from our key informants and advisory members for this project. You can find their names listed in the Acknowledgement section of this manual.

