



Parents as First Teachers

A resource booklet for First Nations
and Metis parents in Manitoba

In this issue:

- »» How Children Learn
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- »» How You Can Support Learning
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How Was This Resource Developed?

This resource is one of a series of four parenting resources for First Nations and Metis parents and caregivers in Manitoba. It was developed in response to expressed interest from Manitoba families and community partners for useful, culturally appropriate parenting information. The resources were first developed by the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health and the BC First Nations Health Authority, in partnership with Best Start Resource Centre at Health Nexus and Indigenous parents, family members, Elders and community partners in British Columbia.

The booklets in this series include:

- **Growing Up Healthy**
A resource booklet for First Nations and Metis parents in Manitoba.
- **Parents as First Teachers**
A resource booklet for First Nations and Metis parents in Manitoba.
- **Fatherhood is Forever**
A resource booklet for First Nations and Metis parents in Manitoba.
- **Family Connections**
A resource booklet for First Nations and Metis parents in Manitoba

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NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH



Manitoba 



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

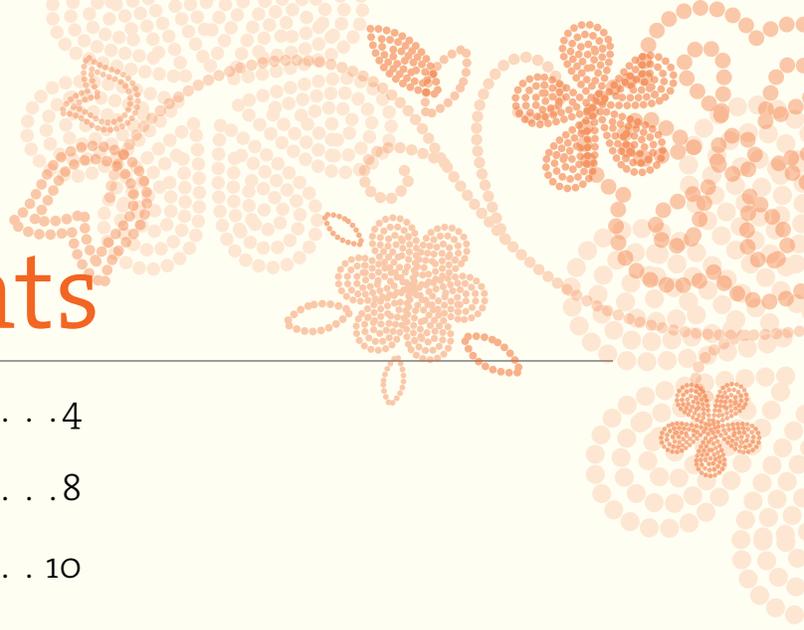


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nîhikomawâk
means “my parents”
in Cree

Introduction

The first few years of your children's lives are critical for their learning and development. Caring for children is a shared responsibility in Indigenous communities. Our children are our future. We must think of ourselves as their past. We want our children to look back with fond memories of feeling loved and safe. We can give our children a bright future. We can work toward healthier families in healthier communities. It is very important to expose our children to their First Nations or Metis languages and cultures during their early years. This will set the foundation for who they are, where they come from, where they go in life and where they belong.

This booklet shares stories, culture and knowledge about early learning. It is intended to help you strengthen your role as the first, most important and most lasting teacher for your children. Throughout this booklet, you will find highlighted textboxes with links to additional resources that you can check out for more information. At the end of this booklet, there also is a list of organizations that offer a wide range of culturally-appropriate programs, resources and services to help you achieve the best possible outcomes for your children.

“Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.”

– Sitting Bull





pearaan
means "parents" in Michif



Singing Our Stories

“Boozhoo, Wawataybenaysiik. Wauzhuk ndodem. Mitaanjigamiing First Nation nindonji. Hello, my name is Northern Lights Thunderbird. I’m from the Muskrat Clan. I come from Mitaanjigaming First Nation. My given English names are Brenda Marie. I am from Northwestern Ontario, but I also consider Winnipeg to be my home, as I have been raised in this city since I was an infant myself.

I have always known that I wanted to have children of my own and have longed for them for a long time. I love children and have been an Early Childhood Educator since I was 20. I have always considered my daycare children as my kids. In fact, I had the opportunity to be some of my nieces’ and nephews’ first teacher, besides their own parents. I have always felt fortunate to have been given a gift to be able to work with these precious little people. The children in my life were and continue to be very special to me. The children have touched my heart in so many ways and have also taught me so much about myself, love and life. Well, I’ll never forget the one little baby girl. Her name starts with an “S.”

In our Anishinaabe way, if a child is leaning forward on all four limbs and is looking at you between their legs, it is a sign that he or she is considered to be searching for a sibling and either you or someone in the family is expecting.

Well, when the baby looked at me like that I laughed and I thought...Uh oh, seriously? Is it me? I was not even sure if I could even have babies (although, my husband had expressed to me that he always knew we would have children together). I just put my trust in the Creator. If I was meant to be a mother, then I would be a mother when the time was right, if it was meant to be. Something inside my heart told me that it was me and that it was meant to be, but I just laughed it off.

Well, I couldn’t get that look of the baby girl, S, out of my head. I remembered that I had bought some pregnancy tests during the summer of 2011, just for fun! Well, I decided to try one out of curiosity. Guess what? The first test turned out to be positive. I didn’t tell my husband what I was doing. I just called him into the bathroom and showed him the test.



The next day I went into a walk-in clinic to get a doctor's confirmation. As unsure as I was, the doctor confirmed that the test was positive! I was finally going to be a mom!!!! All of my dreams were coming true!

We didn't want to find out the sex of the baby and we refused any tests of possible abnormalities. It was our child and we would love the baby just the way they were. We wanted to accept this wonderful gift Creator had given us – the opportunity to be parents!

Wow, it was such an exciting, yet lonely time in my life. As I was evolving into a mother, other relationships were breaking down. I had fall-outs with my best friend, cousins and my in-laws. I felt so alone. I knew I was not alone because someone was with me all the time, growing in my tummy, and the Creator was by my side! It was the best feeling in the world. I really enjoyed everything about my pregnancy. It was such an amazing experience and now it was finally my turn!

I was in labour for about 14 hours, but the hard labour lasted under 5 hours. The day my baby was born was one of the best days of my life. My sister and my husband stayed with me. My mom wanted to, but I knew I needed my sister at my side. My late brother, John, was there at the hospital with his common-law wife. An Elder who blessed us and performed our wedding ceremony just happened to be at the hospital for his son at the same time. I was

only allowed to have two people in the labour room. I knew if my mom came there with me, I would act like a baby, and I needed to be the mom now. It was comforting to know that they were there though!

Then, I was a mom. After the reality sank in that I was a mom, I cried. I cried about all of the other mothers before me, all of my friends who were moms, my mom, my grandma, my sisters and the new respect that I had for them, and the strength that they had for their children. I always thought it was easy to raise children. I had been touched by an angel, and my heart was now feeling a little remorseful for how ignorant I was before. I felt that I now had more compassion for the families that I worked with, and also a deeper understanding about where they were coming from. I was able to then be more sincere, compassionate and open-minded. I am proud of all of my little children and love them deep in my heart. Each child has given me a gift of their love. I am truly blessed by the Creator. I love my job as a mother and the daily challenges each new day brings within my own family circle and the larger circle of children that comes with the role of being an early childhood educator, because I can now relate to other parents and children.”

*– Brenda Ducharme,
Northern Lights Thunderbird
Mitaanjigaming First Nation*

The Circle of Support

How we live together as a family has changed over time. In the past, Indigenous peoples were rich with relationships and defined, not by wealth, but by size of kinship. This included immediate family, extended family through marriage, and others who earned their way into the family through close relationships. Today, there might only be two people living in a household – a parent and a child. Families may have moved away from their traditional lands, grandparents, aunties and other family members. Connecting to family and community will help your children learn and develop a strong sense of belonging.

Connecting to family

There are many different types of families, large and small. There are single-parent and two-parent families, blended families, foster families and families that include several generations. Parents may be biological or adoptive, extended relatives, step-parents, young or old, and single or married. They may be lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgendered, queer or two-spirited. Each family is different, and each child has different needs within the family. Families can provide a strong circle of support for you and your children.

Connecting to community

Connecting to community and family helps your children to learn and to develop a sense of belonging. By connecting your children to their community, they will learn to take pride in their cultural identity. Their identity is a symbol or story of who they are, where they come from, who their family is, and where they belong. Parents need support from each other and from all of the generations in their community. Your community can help

your children learn, and help you teach your children about their cultural values, traditions, languages, and ways of life and meaning to ensure they reach their full potential.

A community can be the place where you live, the groups of people you know, and the services you access. It is helpful to get to know the people and services in your community, and how they can help support you and your growing children. There are many places to go for help in your community. Family, friends and other parents can offer help. Doctors and nurses, friendship centres, parent-child coalitions, family centres in schools, health centres and nursing stations, family enhancement workers, and home visitors can play a role in the healthy development of your children. There also are early childhood development and parenting programs that you can attend at no cost. You can find these programs through the organizations listed at the back of this booklet, in community newsletters, and even through Facebook or other forms of social media. It is important to know that you are not alone.

Manitoba Parent Line
www.manitobaparentzone.ca
 Toll Free: 1-877-945-4777

Elders say:

- Every child is a gift.
- Every child needs to be treated with care and respect.
- Every child needs someone to tell them that they are loved.
- Every child needs someone to be good to them.
- As a parent, you are part of a larger circle of support.



The Naming Ceremony

“As Anishinaabe, one of the first responsibilities for our parents is to make sure that our children have their Anishinaabe name which is given through a naming ceremony. It is supposed to be done as soon it can for the child. When you talk about connection to the community, this is where that happens, at that ceremony. It is a day in which we celebrate the sounding of our child’s first name. It’s our responsibility as parents to hear that name, to know that name, and to make sure our children have that identity right from the beginning. With that name, they would have an identity that will be known to us and throughout all Creation. At that time we are reminded as parents that our children are gifts and that we need to look after them not only for that time but for the rest of our lives and their lives. It is not something that we do alone because even in that circle, in that ceremony that people have come to, there are uncles and aunties, even close friends of the family who would also be there to look after your child. Also thinking about extended family is having their clan. As Anishinaabe people we follow our father’s clan so they have that extended family no matter where they might travel across North America. So giving our children that strong identity is really important and I think that is one of the first responsibilities in being a parent. Parents are teachers; that is our responsibility to our children.”

– Jason Parenteau (Anishinaabe, Winnipeg)

How Children Learn

Every day, your children are learning. Just holding your baby, looking and smiling at your baby, helps your baby to learn. Did you know that babies can recognize the sound of their mother's voice from hearing it in the womb? Did you know that babies around 4 to 5 months old can recognize their name? There are many important ways that children learn, from newborn to school-age.

Care

How children are cared for impacts their learning. If their needs are met (food, clothing, safety, comfort, love, active outdoor play), children learn to feel safe, confident and valued. It is easier for children to learn and be positive about life when their needs are met.

Experience

Early life experiences shape the brain's wiring. Experience teaches children about the world and their place in it. Even before birth, early experiences set the foundation for learning, behaviour and health. Every day of a child's life is spent learning, growing and developing. Try to include positive experiences and opportunities for learning in your children's daily life.

Senses

Senses are used for learning. The best way for children to learn is by using all of their senses. Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting all create brain cell connections and early brain development. The brain connections that are used often will become permanent. Those that are not used as often will disappear.

Activities that use the senses can include reading to your children or telling stories about the pictures in books or photo albums, finger-painting, dancing and singing together, listening to music and other sounds, smelling and tasting new foods, and touching interesting things or new surfaces such as stone, leaves, bark, grass or a raw hide drum. Your children can learn about numbers by counting each berry as they eat them. They can develop fine motor skills and learn about emotions through sensory play with sand, water and other natural and manmade materials.

Play

Children learn while they are playing. Find time to interact with your children and play with them every day. You do not need to have organized games with rules to play with your children, and you do not need to buy expensive toys for them. In the first years of their life, you are their best toy. Young children love playing with simple household items, like pots, pans, cardboard boxes, tubes and plastic cups or containers. Young children love playing with these simple household items. Free play is important for children's learning and healthy development. It is the way they practice life skills.

Play outside with your children every day, if it is safe to do so. Children learn about the richness of the world and develop connections to their natural environments by playing outdoors. Allow your children the freedom to be active, to run and explore their interests. Bring your children to a playground or a parent-child program where they can interact with other children and get along with them.

Starting Early, Starting Strong: A Guide for Play-Based Early Learning in Manitoba, Birth to Six
www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/ece/ece_birthto6_playbased.pdf



Emotions

Emotions can have a powerful impact on children's learning. Children are happier and more ready to explore and learn when they feel emotionally safe and secure. Your closeness, eye contact, smile, voice and touch help your children to feel loved and safe. Be predictable in your expectations and reactions. Repeat rules and what you expect from your children in a calm voice. Find time in the day for quiet, peaceful activities or reflection. Praise your children for things they have done well. Talk about things that might be bothering them. Give feedback that is positive and supportive. Be respectful, encouraging and understanding.

Structure and Routine

Children thrive on structure and routine. They function best when they know what to expect and when to expect it. Eating breakfast soon after waking up and getting dressed each day is a routine that promotes healthy habits and helps children feel safe and secure.

Routines are predictable, but flexible. They are predictable because they happen regularly, but they are flexible because they do not always depend on the clock for activities to change. For example, if you are playing outside with your children and the weather is really nice, you might stay outside a little longer and adjust the nap time accordingly.

Develop a healthy daily pattern for your children, starting from their birth, but allow for some flexibility in their day. Everyday routines like having breakfast, eating dinner as a family, and having regular bath time, reading time, free play time and bed time give children stability. When children are calm and relaxed, they are able to focus on learning.



*Think of ways to make learning fun.
Remember that you make all the
difference. You are your children's
most important person. You are your
children's first teacher.*



Health

Health also sets the stage for learning. Children who eat healthy foods, have daily, active outdoor play experiences, and get enough sleep every day have an easier time with learning. Seeing your doctor, community health nurse or family support worker regularly is another part of staying healthy.

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide
– First Nations, Inuit and Métis
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/pubs/fnim-pnim/index-eng.php



How Children Learn (Cont'd...)



Early Brain Development

The first 3 years of life are crucial for children’s healthy brain development and learning. Between birth and 3 years old, our brains are twice as active as when we are adults. This sensitive period of brain development is an important time because this is when your children are more ready to learn and develop certain skills. The stronger the brain’s connections, the better the ability to think and learn. Through positive, repeated interactions with your children, and by talking with them and spending time with them, it is easier for them to develop the basic skills of life, such as seeing, talking and showing emotions. If children are not given the chance to build their brain connections during sensitive periods of early brain development, it is harder for them to think and learn later on. Interact with your children often and consistently to help shape their future.

A Parent’s Guide to Early Childhood Development
www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/publications/Guide_ENGLISH_ext.html

A sense of belonging

A sense of belonging also helps with your children’s learning. Talk with your children about family, community and culture. Teach your children their First Nations or Metis language or learn your languages together. This will help to link them to their traditional lands and relations, and make them feel connected through a sense of belonging. Involve your children with extended family, community and cultural events. Local friendship centres, family rooms in schools, parent-child coalitions, and other parents in your community can keep you informed and help connect you and your children to cultural activities and opportunities for learning.



Young children need 10-13 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night. If you put your children to bed every night at 8 o’clock, you will have some quiet time to yourself at the end of each day.

Teach and Guide Your Children

The guidance and teachings that you give to your children will help them grow up to be happy and caring, with good self-confidence and self-esteem, strong values, respect for others, and the skills needed to solve problems.

Understanding unwanted behaviours

Recognize that behaviour is children's way of communicating with the people around them. Your children may behave in a negative way if they are feeling tired, stressed, hungry, afraid or full of energy. They may misbehave because they need your attention and will show this with behaviours you do not want. Daily routines and positive interactions with your children are important and helpful in avoiding unwanted behaviours from them. Think about the reasons for your children's unwanted behaviours and, in a calm and understanding manner, talk with them about why these behaviours are unwanted and what you can do to help them change their unwanted behaviours. Positive guidance reinforces good behaviour. Role model positive behaviours for your children.

Guiding behaviours

Guiding children's behaviours is effective when it is based on their stage of development, what they are able to do, and their personality. Guiding children's behaviours always should be positive, consistent and fair. It should never involve physical or verbal violence such as yelling, hitting, threatening, or any other actions that will cause your children to feel any type of fear, pain or discomfort. These actions raise your children's stress level and prevent them from learning. It also teaches them that it is okay to do the same to others. Never hurt your children.

Handling problems well, as soon as they come up, is an important part of guiding children's unwanted behaviours. In the long run, it is best to prepare your children for good behaviours before there are problems. This gives them the skills they need to do alright in the world. Teach your children about communicating, getting along with others, knowing what is expected, and how they can deal with stressful situations. The following are some strategies you can use with your children to encourage good behaviours.

Best Practices for Guiding Children's Behaviour
https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/resources/pubs/bp_childrens_behaviour.pdf



Teach and Guide Your Children (Cont'd...)

Positive Discipline

Your children may behave in a negative way if they are tired, hungry or afraid. Routines and positive interactions are important to children and helpful in avoiding unwanted behaviour. Discipline is effective when it is based on the stage of development your children are in, what they can do, and their personality. Discipline should always be positive, consistent and fair. It should never involve physical violence or any other actions that cause your children to feel pain or suffering. It should be used in a calm and understanding manner. Positive discipline reinforces good behaviour, and helps children change their unwanted behaviour. Following are some positive discipline methods you can use with your children.

Praise

Tell your children what they have done well. For example, praise them when you see them getting along well with others, or thank them when they help out without being asked. It is better to use praise or thank you than to buy your children gifts or give rewards for positive behaviour. When children hear positive praise comments, they want to do more of that good behaviour because it makes them feel better about themselves and builds up their self-esteem.

Time-in

Use time-in to encourage good behaviour through positive interactions and by talking with your children when they are misbehaving. Instead of distancing yourself from your children when they are having a hard time, focus on their needs and the source of their unwanted behaviours. This can help you and your children figure out, together, what is wrong and how to make things better. For example:

- Talk about feelings and emotions (yours and theirs). Ask, "Are you mad? Are you feeling sad or afraid?"
- Give your children a hug and show them that you care about them.
- Talk about different ways to deal with the same kind of problem next time.

Children often become flooded with emotions and cannot remember rules or focus on others until they get their feelings under control. Being calm enough yourself and sitting near or with your children until they calm down, and then talking about what happened will help them feel safe, know that they can count on you to be there for them, and be prepared to learn about what got them so upset.



How many caring and encouraging phrases can you think of? Practice using them every day. Encourage your children to use them with each other.

Distraction

Use distraction as a way to draw your children's attention away from something that is beginning to upset them to a new activity or conversation. For example, if your children are upset because it is bath time and they are in the middle of playing with something, you may be able to distract them by talking about the toys you are putting in the tub. If one of your children is reaching for your coffee, you can let your child know that your coffee is hot and should not be touched because it may burn. Give your child a plastic cup to play with, instead. Do not use distraction when your children are really upset or having a tantrum. Try offering them a choice, instead.

Choice

Another strategy to change unwanted behaviour is to offer choices to your children. Giving children choices empowers them to think things through and make good decisions. It helps them learn to understand and manage their behaviour. Try bringing your children to you and saying, "Let's go do something together for a bit." Giving your children choices empowers them to think things through and make good decisions. For example, an 8 o'clock bedtime is not negotiable, but giving your children the choice between wearing red or blue pyjamas, or letting them choose between skipping or hopping to bed, gives children a sense of control over their actions. It also helps you to put boundaries on your children's behaviour.

Tips to help calm your children:

- Hold your children in a comforting way until their spirit is calmed.
- Bring your children to you and say, "Let's go do something together for a bit." Take them outside to look at the stars.
- Go to a quiet place in your home or outside and do a craft together, read a story or tell stories about pictures in a book, magazine or photo album.
- Sing a gentle and loving song to your children.
- Soothe your children until you can see they are calm and THEN discuss what was going on before.



*nitaawigi'aawaso means
to "raise children" in Ojibwe*



How You Can Support Learning

Learning and the love of learning begins at home. The teachings your children receive from you and the people around them will help them think and learn. Involving your children in celebrating special family times and traditions builds pride in them. Positive early childhood experiences can help your children to be ready for school and to reach their full potential.



hun kake
means “parents” in Dakota



You are your children’s protector, teacher, role model and nurturer. Everything you do with your children is a gift. Not all children are the same. They have different interests and unique personalities. Parenting also is a very individual experience. Everything you do with your children is a gift. Love and cherish each of your children. Give them positive early childhood experiences that include:

- **Attachment**
Your children need to feel they can rely on you for comfort when they need it, and for you to be alongside them emotionally when they are engaged in play and learning.
- **Bonding**
Love, hug, comfort and tell stories to your children.
- **School readiness**
Encourage talking, singing, dancing and free play to explore and learn new things.
- **Physical development**
Give your children a balance of activity, rest, nutrition, routine and structure.
- **Speech and language development**
Talk, read and listen to your children. Make eye contact with them when they are telling you something.
- **Connectedness**
Teach your children about their connections to the land and waters, their traditional languages and cultural practices, their community and their ancestors. Use storytelling, participate in family and community gatherings, and talk to your Elders to help build these connections.

You cannot turn back time, but you can move forward and do the best you can to parent your children in a good way. How can you do this?

- Take things one day at a time and don’t give up.
- Share parenting stories with other parents or Elders, and learn from your parenting mistakes.
- Get in touch with your local friendship centre, parent-child coalition, or family centre in school for support with parenting your children.
- Ask your family members, friends or home support worker for help when you need it.

What You Can Do

DURING PREGNANCY



Your role as your children's first teacher begins during pregnancy. Your children's brains start developing before they are even born. They start learning early in pregnancy.

Babies respond to what their mother hears, smells, feels and experiences. They can hear when they are in the womb and language skills start to develop before they are born. Talk, sing and use kind and caring words for your unborn baby. Rub or stroke your belly in a gentle and caring way.



Parents and caregivers have a sacred duty to the gifts that they have brought into this world. Give thanks for your children.

Your health during pregnancy is important to early learning

Many things can affect the healthy development of your unborn baby's brain. Alcohol, for instance, can change the way your baby's brain develops during pregnancy. It can cause your children to be born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, which may include a range of lifelong physical, mental, behavioural and/or learning disabilities.

There is no safe time or safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy or when you are planning to become pregnant. Smoking also limits how much food and oxygen your unborn baby gets. Both drinking alcohol or other substances and smoking can negatively affect your children's ability to learn throughout their lifespan. Drug abuse is harmful to the baby's developing brain and it should be avoided.

It is best to quit smoking and drinking alcohol before you start trying to get pregnant. If your pregnancy is unplanned, it is important to quit drinking alcohol and smoking as soon as you think you might be pregnant. For more information about drinking and smoking, see:



Directory of Adult Addictions Services in Manitoba
www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/addictions/adult.html

InSight Mentoring Program
www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/insight.html

During pregnancy, see your doctor, midwife or community health nurse regularly. Find out what medicines are safe to take when you are pregnant. Ask about healthy foods and vitamins that you should be taking during pregnancy. Apply for the **Manitoba Prenatal Benefit** for financial help with buying healthy foods during pregnancy. Participate in Healthy Baby, Families First, Strengthening Families or other community support programs to prepare for the arrival of your new baby. Work towards making your home happy and healthy. These actions all help to give your unborn baby the best start in early learning.



You are your baby's first teacher, even before your baby is born.

What You Can Do

BIRTH TO 6 MONTHS

You have an important role in your children's lives. You are their first teacher. You will care for and support your children, and you will introduce them to the world.

Babies are born ready to learn and have many skills

In order to develop their skills and abilities, babies need to use their brains often. A baby's brain makes new connections with each new learning, new word, new lullaby, new kiss on the cheek and with every smile, hug or snuggle. Babies learn by each new experience and repeated experiences. They need positive interactions with loving, caring parents and caregivers. These experiences build the foundation for understanding and learning.

Babies do not learn well if they are put in front of the television or are left alone in a crib or playpen. You need to provide a lot of warmth and attention to your babies to set up their early brain connections. These actions will help your children be ready for more learning later in life.



As a newborn, your babies' needs are simple

What you can share with your newborn babies is simple too. More than anything, your babies need your love, time and attention. It is your simple, everyday actions that will make the most difference in the healthy development of your babies. Do a lot of little things with your children when they are babies. Respond to them. Talk and sing to them. Touch and play with them. Repeat the same action or game over and over, as long as they show interest. With every little word and gesture, you are helping your babies to learn. With every repetition, you help make strong connections in their brains. Babies thrive on attention and affection. You can't spoil them by responding to their needs in a loving way. They cry to let you know that they need you. This is their way of communicating with you.

Babies need to know someone will always be there for them

Show your love for your babies. Pick them up. Cuddle them. Share smiles with them. Comfort and hold your babies, especially when they are sick, hurt or upset. Be there when your babies are sad, lonely or frightened. Let your babies know you will be there when needed. It will give your babies confidence to explore and learn. The way you relate to your children when they are young teaches them how to treat other people in the future. To learn more, see the parenting booklets *Family Connections*, *Growing Up Healthy* and *Fatherhood is Forever*.

Help your babies learn:

- Make play part of your everyday routine. Bath time, meal time, dressing your babies are good times for play and learning.
- Massages or other forms of skin-to-skin touch promote bonding and use the senses.
- Sing to your babies as they drift off to sleep.
- Comfort your babies.



One of the first gifts a child should receive is a dreamcatcher. The story behind it is that the child's dreams first pass through the web of the dreamcatcher. The dreamcatcher filters out all the bad dreams and lets the good dreams go through.

– Delores Wallbridge, Peguis Family Centre Head Start Program

“Start signing with your baby at 6 months old. That’s their language. That’s how they communicate with you.”

*– Lianna Wanbdiska,
First People’s Child Care Association*

What You Can Do

7 TO 12 MONTHS

As your babies grow, so does their cognitive, emotional, spiritual and physical development. They learn to roll over, sit, crawl, stand and walk. They learn to reach for things, pick things up, and pass things from hand to hand.

At this stage, your babies are curious and want to learn about the world around them. It can feel like a miracle watching their skills and interests grow with each day.



Every baby is unique

Each baby reacts and learns differently. Watch for signs that tell you what your babies like and need. Follow their lead. Babies show you what they are interested in and when they are ready to learn. You will soon be an expert in knowing what each of your babies wants and likes.

The brain develops connections for seeing and hearing early in life

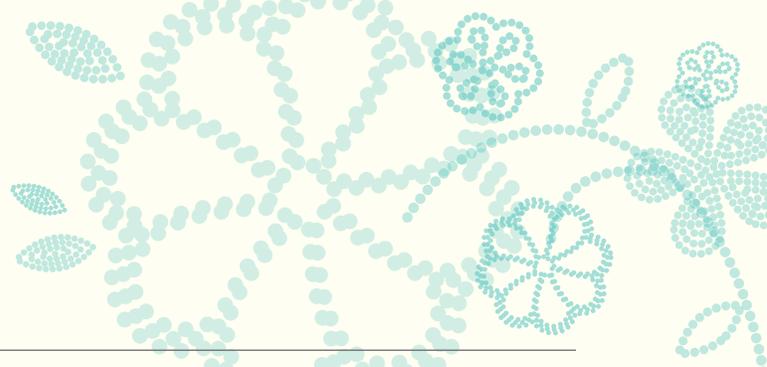
Even before your babies can talk, they learn language skills. It is important to talk, sing and read or tell stories to your babies. Point to interesting things and to moving objects around them. Describe them.

Help your babies learn:

- Talk to your babies as you carry out different tasks or activities. Tell them what you are doing and why you are doing it.
- Encourage your babies to copy you. Try making faces, noises with your mouth or clapping your hands.
- Encourage your babies to learn new skills. They may fall many times before they are skilled at walking.
- Teach your babies to wave and point, and respond to their gestures.
- Listen to the noises your babies make, and respond to the noises. This will help your babies learn to speak.



Before babies can even say a word, hundreds of words can be stored in their brains.



1 TO 3 YEARS

Children learn to talk and explore farther away from their parents. They begin to understand that they are a separate person from their parents and learn to do things on their own.

Children learn best if they participate in activities, instead of just watching others doing activities. They learn to say, “Me do it,” “No,” and “Mine.” During their toddler years, you can help to teach your children important skills that they will need and use throughout their life, including executive function and self-regulation, resilience, language and problem-solving.

Executive function and self-regulation

Executive function and self-regulation are crucial for children’s learning and development. They influence positive behaviour and allow us to make healthy choices throughout our lives. Children will develop these skills if they are exposed to

structure and routine, modeling good behaviour and supportive and reliable relationships. It’s important to help your children learn to adjust their emotions and behaviours, to cope with their experiences in a positive way.

Executive function and self-regulation teach children how to deal with life obstacles in a healthy way. They help keep children in a calm and alert state that is important for learning. How you can get to feeling or remaining calm are behaviours that you will model and pass on to your children. By helping them adjust their emotions and behaviours, you can help your children:

- See what is around them.
- Listen to others.
- Understand consequences.
- Use words and actions to explain their needs.
- Learn to solve problems.



What You Can Do (Cont'd...)

1 TO 3 YEARS



Resilience

Resilience is the ability to steer through serious life challenges and find ways to bounce back and thrive in spite of these challenges. We work on building this skill throughout our lives, so we need to start as early as possible. Our children need to practice having some stress, with supports, in order to become resilient. When we pass on our fears to our children, it keeps them from being able to try new things. People who respond to hardships with resilience are healthier, live longer, are happier in their relationships, are more successful in school and at work, and are less likely to get depressed. Parents can help build their children's resilience through:

- A secure bond with a caring adult.
- Relationships with positive role models.
- Taking part in activities and learning new skills.
- Building self-control, thinking skills, confidence and a positive outlook.

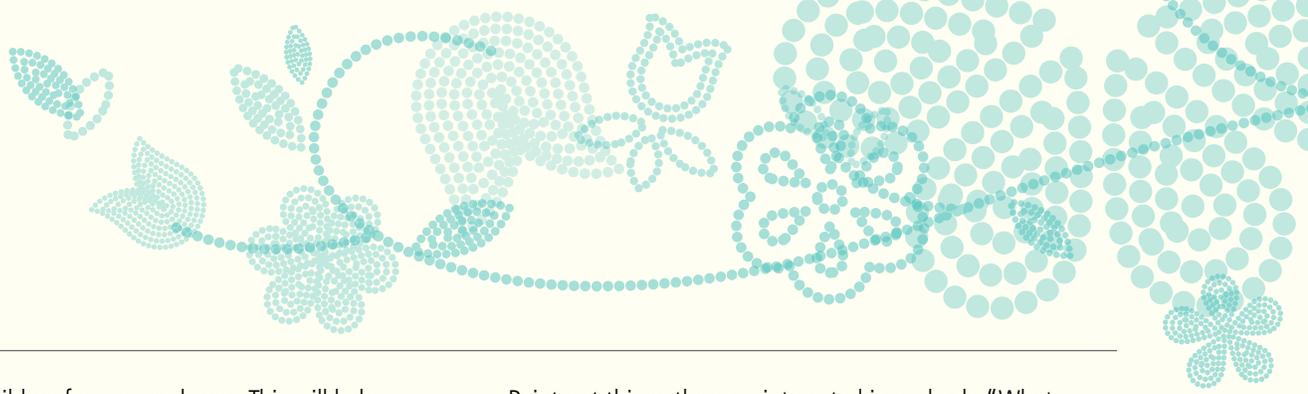
Building Resilience in Young Children: Booklet for Parents of Children from Birth to Six Years
www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/pdf/BSRC_Resilience_English_fnl.pdf

Language

Language is another important skill that children should begin to develop in early childhood. There is a window of opportunity for learning to talk between 1 and 2 years of age. This is a time when children easily learn to understand and speak new words. Talk with your children often and use new words to point out objects, people and interesting things. Children need to hear words and see the things that relate to the words, before they can begin to speak the words. They will learn the words, and then say them when they are physically able to do so. Encourage your children's reactions and questions with engaging answers. Speak to your children in the language you are most comfortable with. If you are learning your First Nations or Metis language, share with your children what you are learning.



tââtsi or bebí mean “baby” in Dené



Read books to your children from an early age. This will help them learn to read and develop a love for reading. Rather than simply reading the story, add to your children's reading experience. Ask them questions about what is in the book. Encourage them to think about words and objects. If you have difficulty reading, or can't get books in your own language, make up your own story using the pictures in a book or talk to your children using family photo albums, magazines or catalogues. As you flip through the pictures, describe what you see, or make up a story.

Directory of Certified Adult Literacy Programs & Adult Learning Centres
www.gov.mb.ca/mal/all/directory/index.html
Helping Your Child Learn to Read: A Parent's Guide
www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/parents/learn/read.pdf

Problem-solving

Problem-solving skills start developing early in life. Activities that include having conversations and exploring ideas such as patterns and sorting will help your children learn how to solve problems. Games that include stacking things, sorting things by colour, size and shape, making patterns with things, and counting things are a good way to start developing your children's numeracy skills. Songs and rhymes with numbers are a fun way to learn as well, such as *Ten Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. These kinds of songs and play help your children learn about numbers and counting, so that problem-solving and math skills will be easier to learn later on.

Help your children learn:

- Create a safe place for your children to learn and explore. Young children need to know you are there to keep them safe. They need to know they are loved.
- Let your children make simple decisions, like choosing between two healthy snacks or two different colored shirts.
- Point out things they are interested in and ask, "What colour is it? Is this bigger or smaller than that? What sound does it make?"
- Ask your children to hold two blocks of different shapes behind their backs and tell you about the shapes of the blocks. Then change the blocks. This will help your children learn through touch and not just sight.
- Teach your children about emotions and empathy. Show your children photos of people. Ask them what the people in the photos are feeling.
- Do household tasks together. Encourage your children to imitate you, using child-sized tools: shoveling snow, washing dishes, sweeping the floor or shopping.
- Show your children photos of people they know well (parents, friends, neighbours). Encourage them to name the people and talk about them with you.
- Tell a story using your children's stuffed animals, toys or other objects.
- Sort, stack and count plastic containers with your children. Make music with them using pot, pans or metal bowls.
- Use a big cardboard box to make a pretend boat together.



What You Can Do

4 TO 6 YEARS

Children aged 4 to 6 years learn more about themselves as a person. They begin to make their own choices outside of the home and begin to develop their own circle of friends. They learn about likes, dislikes and getting along with others.

All children are different, even in the same family

All children have their own personalities and enjoy different things. In families with more than one child, each child needs special attention and time to follow his or her own interests.

- Learn to understand each of your children's personalities, needs and skills. Respond to your children's individual needs and interests.
- Set clear expectations for your children, based on their own personality, needs and skills.
- Set expectations for when your children are playing together.
- Respond to your children's interests.
- When you play together, let your children take the lead, and try to add to their experience.

There are many changes for children as they enter school

You can help your children get ready for school by talking about school, reading or talking about the pictures in books about going to school, by walking by the school or visiting the pre-school or kindergarten classroom at school. You can help your children adjust to school by participating with your children in early childhood programs that are offered at your children's schools. After they start school, ask about what happened at school, every day. Encourage your children to talk about their school experiences by asking them about specific things, such as gym, music, special guests, and their friends. Listen with interest and respond to what they have to say. Watch for any changes in their eating, sleeping, energy and behaviour. Ask your children what they need from you to help them with their learning.

You are still your children's first, most important and most lasting teacher, even though your children are learning many new and important things in school and from their friends.



You can teach your children about family, friendships, plants, animals and traditional practices. Follow your children's interests, and help them with their school learning.

Help your children learn:

- Be involved in your children's learning at school. Visit their classrooms and share stories about your family, community and traditions, such as crafts, gathering medicines, fishing and hunting.
- Engage in cultural practices with your children.
- Speak your First Nations or Metis language with your children, or learn together how to speak your language.
- Put up signs in your house in your First Nations or Metis language. For example, put a sign on the door that says: Door (in your First Nations or Metis language). You can use English words if you do not know the word in your First Nations or Metis language.
- Find out how your children are doing at school by talking about their learning with their teachers, and help them as needed. You can play counting games, help your children learn to write their names, or go to the library and get books to read together.
- Leave loving messages for your children in a place where they will find them, such as "I love you." Try using letter magnets of the fridge.
- Teach your children about the world around them. Help them learn the names of trees, plants, bugs and animals. Talk about the features of the plants and animals, like the color and texture of the fur or feathers, and the number of leaves or legs you see.
- Find out what interests your children. Help them learn more to explore and widen their interests. If your children are interested in an animal, visit a library and get a book about the animal. Make up stories about the animal. Draw the animal together. Count animals.



*Our Elders say our children
don't come in pieces, so we
should look at the whole child.*

Children with Additional Support Needs

Elders say that each child is a gift to their community. They are present in their community to teach the community something. A child with additional support needs or a disability is to be viewed as someone to learn from rather than as someone who is a problem.

Every parent hopes for a healthy baby, but this does not always happen. While children develop in their own way, there are common patterns, ages and stages of development. If you think your children may be struggling with learning, hearing, speaking, walking or any other part of their physical, mental, emotional or spiritual development, talk to your doctor, community health nurse or family support worker about your concerns, as soon as possible. Schools also play a role in helping to identify when a child has additional support needs or a disability.

Learning that a child has additional support needs can cause parents to feel shock, disbelief, grief, guilt, shame, blame, and even confusion, depression or disappointment. You may feel defensive if someone points out to you that there is something wrong with your child, but getting help early is important for you to get the proper care and supports in place to help meet the needs of your child.

Parenting a child with additional support needs can be enriching and bring great joy. There are services throughout Manitoba that can help you with caring for children with additional support needs. Your family and community may also provide a good support system for you.

Every Day is an Adventure: What Parents and Caregivers Need to Know About Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/fasd_caregivers.pdf

Stay positive

Children with additional support needs can overcome incredible obstacles. Patience is important. It may take time for you and your children to learn new skills for dealing with additional support needs. Love your children for who they are and for the gifts that they have to offer and bring to your life.

“Jordan’s Principle was developed to meet the needs of First Nations children with disabilities. It ensures that we don’t have to put our children in care to make sure that they have the same right to health programming as any non-First Nations child. The implementation of Jordan’s Principle is crucial in making sure that every child has equal access to health services and programs they need wherever they live.”

– Gilbert Fredette, Vice Chief/Councillor, Norway House Cree Nation



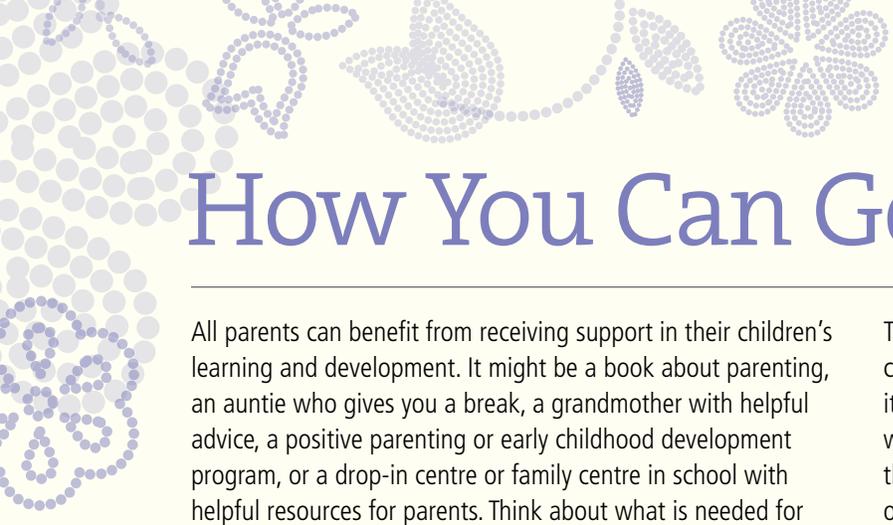
Our Spirited Child

“There were many moments when I had to just scoop up my kid up and quickly walk home down the sidewalk, as he screamed at the top of his little lungs and hit me. I remember vividly, my partner and I shopping in a store when our son needed another time out. His father had to carry him out of the store over his shoulder, our son screaming so loud that I caught people stopping to watch and wonder if this was a child abduction in progress.

What we have is called a ‘spirited child.’ Our boy has big emotions that are worn open on his sleeve, vulnerable buttons that can be easily pressed, and wild tantrums that make you remember ‘The Exorcist.’

A friend once counseled me about giving our son a ‘time-in’ versus a time-out. It changed everything — well most things. This warm embrace soothes both of us. It is in that moment that we know everything will be ok. We’re a family with a spirited child, who does everything big. That just means we’re a family made up of big love.”

– Martha Troian



How You Can Get Support

All parents can benefit from receiving support in their children's learning and development. It might be a book about parenting, an auntie who gives you a break, a grandmother with helpful advice, a positive parenting or early childhood development program, or a drop-in centre or family centre in school with helpful resources for parents. Think about what is needed for you to raise healthy, happy children who are ready for learning.

Here are some helpful hints to support your children's learning and early childhood development:

- Get pre-natal health care and family support during pregnancy and after your children are born.
- Make healthy foods choices for you and your children, whenever possible.
- Show your love for your children and encourage them to do the same. Hug each other often. Tell them that you love them.
- Try to keep your home environment as safe and pleasant as possible for your children.
- Teach your children with love, patience and a good understanding of their learning interests and abilities.

You are not a bad parent if you cannot afford a nicer place to live or a vehicle to get around. More important than having material items in your life is giving your children many loving and caring moments to remember as they grow up. Your children will remember the teachings that you give them, especially when they are connected to fun and enjoyable moments. Think about what is best for your children. Ask for their help when you need it and encourage them to share their ideas with you.

Think about your past

Parenting is learned through what you saw, heard and felt throughout your life. Most of us have some good memories of growing up, and some unhappy memories. Unfortunately, the residential school system and Sixties Scoop separated many families. The child health, education, welfare and justice systems played a part in dividing our families. Each of these systems may influence how we view ourselves and how we relate to others, particularly to our children.

Think about what kind of parent you want to be. You can choose to revisit the past when you want to share or reflect on it. Make sure that you are safe and supported if you decide to work through troubling memories. It may be helpful to work through your healing with a counselor, family support worker or Elder.

The Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support program provides access to counseling and cultural and emotional support services for Indigenous peoples.
Toll Free: 1-866-818-3505
Toll Free: 1-866-925-4419 (24-hour national crisis line)
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/services/indiresident/irs-pi-eng.php

Moving forward

As a parent, the present is your place of strength. All of your thoughts, feelings, ideas and choices happen right now, in the present. You can't do anything about what happened in the past, but you can learn from it. You will grow to be a good parent by learning from your own parenting mistakes, and from the mistakes made by your parents and grandparents. You don't have control over the future, but you can plan for it. You can start changing how you live, now.

Ask yourself

- What will help your children learn, feel loved and be happy every day?
- How can you be the best caregiver and first teacher for your children?
- Who can provide you with support during difficult times (family, friends or local services)?

Write down some things you can do to care for yourself. Write down some things you can do to be your children's first and best teacher. Practice making your home loving and safe for your children, every day.

How You Can Learn More

There are several organizations that offer a range of culturally appropriate programs, resources and services to help parents and families throughout Manitoba achieve the best possible outcomes for their children. Some of these organizations are listed below.

Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve – Manitoba helps to prepare First Nations children (0-6 years) for school and strengthen parenting skills that contribute to children's healthy development.

Phone: 204-983-4605 or 204-984-5173
www.ahsormb.ca

Aboriginal Health & Wellness Centre of Winnipeg provides a range of cultural based health and social programs and supports for women, men and families living in Winnipeg.

Phone: 204-925-7504
www.ahwc.ca

Adult Learning and Literacy supports adult focused literacy programs in Manitoba.

Phone: 204-945-8247
Toll Free: 1-800-282-8069 ext. 8247
www.gov.mb.ca/mal/all

Attachment Network of Manitoba offers a variety of online parenting supports and downloadable resources for enhancing secure attachment across the lifespan.

www.attachmentnetwork.ca

Autism Society of Manitoba is dedicated to advancing the quality of life for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families.

Phone: 204-783-9563
www.autismmanitoba.com

Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program provides support to improve the health and well being of pregnant women, new mothers and babies facing challenging life circumstances.

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/prog-ini/cpnp-pcnp/

Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment has many online resources to help protect children's health from environmental contaminants.

www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca

Child and Family All Nations Coordinated Response Network provides information about programs and services to help families keep their children safe from abuse and neglect.

Phone: 204-944-4200
Toll Free: 1-888-945-2627
www.ancr.ca

Children's disABILITY Services offers a variety of resources to help parents with caring for children with developmental or physical disabilities at home, in their own communities.

Phone: 204-945-5898
www.gov.mb.ca/fs/cds

Children's Therapy Initiative provides coordinated, regionally based services to help children and youth with disabilities and additional needs to reach their full potential.

Phone: 204-452-4311
www.sscy.ca/caregivers-families/childrens-therapy-initiative

Community Action Program for Children promotes the healthy development of young children (0-6 years) who are living in conditions of risk.

www.capc.pace.phac.aspc.gc.ca

CONTACT Community Information is an online database of programs and services for parents, children and families in Manitoba.

Phone: 204-287-8827
Toll Free: 1-866-266-4636
www.contactmb.org

Dial-a-Dietitian of Manitoba connects callers to a registered dietitian who will listen and offer tips and suggestions about food, nutrition and healthy eating.

Phone: 204-788-8248
Toll Free: 1-877-830-2892
www.wrha.mb.ca/prog/nutrition/dietitian.php

Early Learning and Child Care supports quality, licensed, play based early learning and child care programs for children in Manitoba aged 12 weeks to 12 years.

Phone: 204-945-0776
Toll Free: 1-888-213-4754
www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare

How You Can Learn More (Cont'd...)

Families First is a community based, intensive home visiting program offering information and support to families, prenatally and with children (0-6 years).

Phone: 204-945-2266

Toll Free: 1-888-848-0140

www.manitoba.ca/healthychild/familiesfirst

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada works to improve First Nations and Inuit health outcomes through a range of quality health services and supports.

Phone: 204-983-4199

Toll Free: 1-866-225-0709

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/index-eng.php

First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba offers programs and services to support the health and social well being of First Nations families and communities in Manitoba.

Phone: 204-942-9400

www.fnhssm.com

Healthlinks Manitoba is a province wide telephone health information service that individuals and families can call – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – to talk about their health related concerns.

Phone: 204-788-8200

Toll Free: 1-888-315-9257

www.sites.google.com/site/healthlinksmanitoba

Healthy Baby Community Support Programs connect pregnant women and new parents with other parents, families and health professionals for information, support and resources on prenatal and postnatal nutrition and health, breastfeeding, parenting tips and lifestyle choices.

Phone: 204-945-1301

Toll Free: 1-888-848-0140

www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/healthybaby/csp

Healthy Baby, Healthy Brain is a parent website to support healthy early brain development.

www.healthybabyhealthybrain.ca

Healthy Child Manitoba offers a continuum of programs, services and resources to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, families and communities in Manitoba.

Phone: 204-945-2266

Toll Free: 1-888-848-0140

www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild

Indigenous Languages of Manitoba Inc. provides a wide range of services and supports to promote the retention of Manitoba Indigenous languages.

Phone: 204-989-6392

Toll Free: 1-866-429-0606

www.indigenousslanguagesofmb.com

Manitoba Aboriginal Head Start – Urban & Northern Communities supports early childhood development, school readiness and family health and wellness for children aged birth to six years.

www.mbaboriginalheadstart.ca

Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres provides information about the programs and services that are offered at local friendship centres for pregnant women, children and their families.

Phone: 204-942-6299

www.friendshipcentres.ca

Manitoba Communicable Disease Control works to identify, manage and prevent the spread of communicable diseases in Manitoba. Routine Immunization Schedules are available online.

Phone: 204-788-6737

www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc

www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/schedules.html

Manitoba FASD Strategy offers a range of specific programs and services for women with addictions and parents of children born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Phone: 204-945-2266

Toll Free: 1-888-848-0140

www.manitoba.ca/healthychild/fasd

Manitoba in Motion helps Manitoba families make physical activity part of their daily lives, for health and enjoyment. Resources offered include physical activity guidelines for children.

Phone: 204-945-3648

Toll Free: 1-866-788-3648

www.manitobainmotion.ca



Manitoba Parent Child Coalitions offer a variety of local early childhood development and positive parenting programs, resources and supports for families with children aged prenatal to six years.

Phone: 204-945-2266
Toll Free: 1-800-848-0140
www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/parentchild
www.mbparentchild.com

Manitoba Parent Line connects callers with parent education counselors who provide confidential assistance, information, service referrals, and support for child development issues and common parenting concerns.

Toll Free: 1-877-945-4777

Manitoba ParentZone is an online resource for dependable, current parenting and child development information, programs and support for parents.

www.manitobaparentzone.ca

Manitoba Poison Centre provides immediate help to parents and families who think their child has been exposed to chemical, biological, pharmaceutical or environmental poison.

Toll Free: 1-855-776-4766
www.hsc.mb.ca/emergencyPoison.html

Manitoba Prenatal Benefit is a monthly cheque to help pregnant women buy healthy foods during pregnancy. The benefit is available to all women, regardless of where they live in Manitoba.

Phone: 204-945-1301
Toll Free: 1-888-848-0140
www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/healthybaby/mpb

Manitoba Public Library System is an online directory of all public libraries throughout Manitoba. Local libraries may have books about parenting and healthy child development.
https://mb.countingopinions.com/memberlist_details.php

Metis Child, Family and Community Services works to strengthen the capacity of families to care for children through culturally appropriate, community based programs and parenting supports.

Phone: 204-927-6960
Toll Free: 1-800-821-8793
www.metiscfs.mb.ca

Metis Community Liaison Department at the Manitoba Metis Federation offers support services, resources, advocacy and referrals to Metis individuals, families, Elders and communities.

Phone: 204-586-8474
www.mmf.mb.ca

National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health is a source for a wide range of reliable, current and culturally appropriate information on First Nations, Inuit and Métis child, youth and family health.

www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/34/Publications.nccah

Public Health Agency of Canada provides a range of quality health services to support emergency preparedness and the prevention and control of infectious and chronic diseases.

Toll Free: 1-844-280-5020
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php

Specialized Services for Children and Youth provides services for Manitoba children and youth with disabilities and special needs.

Phone: 204-452-4311
www.sscy.ca

Strengthening Families Maternal Child Health Program is a community based, intensive home visiting program for families with children (0-6 years), living in First Nations communities.

Phone: 204-946-9724
www.fnhssm.com/index.php/policy_areas/maternal-child-health

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The booklets in this series include:



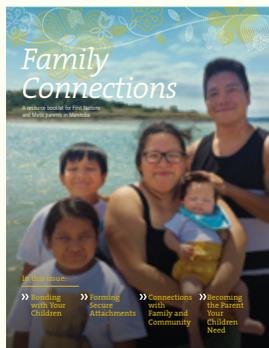
Fatherhood is Forever

This booklet about fathering is for First Nations and Metis parents in Manitoba.



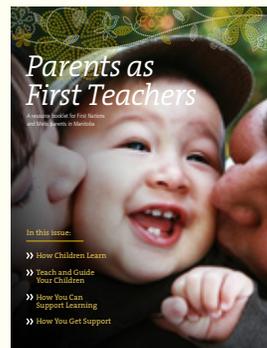
Growing Up Healthy

This booklet about healthy children is for First Nations and Metis parents in Manitoba.



Family Connections

This booklet about bonding with your child is for First Nations and Metis parents in Manitoba.



Parents as First Teachers

This booklet about how children learn is for First Nations and Metis parents in Manitoba.

Available in alternate formats, on request. You can view all of the English booklets online at www.nccah.ccsa.ca or at www.fnha.ca

Aussi disponibles en français: www.nccah.ccsa.ca

For more information:



3rd floor
332 Bannatyne Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3A 0E2
204 945 2266
Toll Free: 1 888 848 0140
healthychild@gov.mb.ca



NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE
FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

3333 University Way
Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
250 960 5250
nccah@unbc.ca
www.nccah-ccsa.ca



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

501-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2
604 913 2080
info@fnha.ca
www.fnha.ca