

# A CIRCLE OF **CARING**



A Guide for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Families, and Schools





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THE CIRCLE OF  
**CARING**

## **COPA...providing innovative skills, tools, resources, expertise and training**

COPA is a Francophone not-for-profit organization working in both French and English. Founded in 1995, we are a recognized centre of excellence in the field of bullying and violence prevention, and equity and inclusion.

COPA provides schools and communities with unique multimedia educational resources, as well as training, professional development and opportunities for capacity-building and consultation throughout the province.

COPA works with provincial and local groups, organizations and institutions across Ontario, such as parent groups, schools, boards, teachers' unions, women's groups, cultural, health and community centres and settlement agencies.

COPA's unique approach is based on individual and collective empowerment, founded on principles of social justice to bring about positive social change.

COPA cares deeply about human rights, especially those of children and all marginalized groups.

For related educational websites by COPA, visit:

- **[copahabitat.ca](http://copahabitat.ca)** (COPA site for parents, caregivers and families)
- **[changeourworld.ca](http://changeourworld.ca)** (joint COPA/Ontario Teacher's Federation (OTF) site for youth)
- **[safeatschool.ca](http://safeatschool.ca)** (joint COPA/OTF site for educators)

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# OUR JOURNEY





**T**his project grew out of and is part of COPA's WE ALL BELONG initiative for parents and schools. It has been adapted for First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents, families, caregivers and community helpers and leaders who are looking for more ways to help their children to learn and foster their well-being at home and at school. It is also designed to support schools working with Aboriginal children and families. We hope you will share this resource with those around you.

A Circle of Caring was made possible by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

## **Wisdom and Guidance**

A Circle of Caring has been a three-year journey coordinated by COPA. Our goal was to share COPA's particular vision, while being sensitive to and respectful of the people who would have an interest in using it. It is also designed with the ministry's commitment to support equity and inclusive education, and parent engagement.

With this vision in mind, we actively sought the wisdom and guidance of people and groups from different Aboriginal communities all over Ontario. Many people generously shared their time, knowledge and thoughts. We met with hundreds of family and community members, leaders and Elders, creating a resource that would help us nurture homes and schools where Aboriginal young people and families can feel *safe, strong and free*.

A Circle of Caring is the result of this important sharing—allowing us to listen to, think about and share the experiences, wisdom, and guidance of Aboriginal peoples. We hope that we have done so in a way that is truly meaningful and respectful.

*Chi Miigwetch, Yaw^ko, Nya:weh, Kinanâskomitinâwâw, Marcee and Qujannamiik* to everyone who shaped, guided and shared their thoughts, ideas, caring and wisdom to bring this resource to life.

There are more than 125 **First Nations** communities in Ontario, with dozens of distinct nations and language groups. These First Nations communities have unique histories, cultures, practices and languages.

The **Métis** are a distinct Aboriginal people with a unique history, culture, language and territory. The Métis Nation is comprised of descendants of people born of relations between First Nation women and European men. The initial offspring of these unions were of mixed ancestry. The genesis of a new Aboriginal people called the Métis resulted from the subsequent intermarriage of these mixed-ancestry individuals.<sup>1</sup>

The **Inuit** (which means “the people”) speak Inuktitut, a language with many dialects. The Inuit are varied from region to region and community to community in history, culture and practices. They traditionally live in the Canadian Arctic. There is a large community of Inuit peoples in Ottawa.

## Listening and Learning

First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples share a history of living off the land, based on hunting, fishing and gathering food, often in a community setting. These three separate Indigenous peoples have unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. They live in communities all across Ontario and Canada. These include First Nations reserves, Métis settlements, regional locations of the Canadian Arctic and Subarctic, rural areas, towns and cities.

There are many efforts by Aboriginal peoples and allies to help reclaim, revitalize and celebrate oral traditions, writing systems, literatures, values and philosophies. The rich heritage of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is linked to a long history of Indigenous civilizations and culture.

By listening and being open-hearted, those of us who have coordinated this project have had a chance to learn more about this rich heritage and the diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and teachings. We were guided and grounded, and learned a great deal about how to support young people—at home, in schools and out in the bigger world. This learning is at the very heart of A Circle of Caring, this guide and our animated film series.

A wholistic perspective belonging to Aboriginal peoples has been the inspiration for the project, linking our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health, and the precious values of sharing, respect, kindness and kinship bonds.

## About This Guide

In this guide, COPA shares information about being involved in children’s education and school life, and our special way to prevent bullying and violence. This is combined with the wisdom and values of Aboriginal peoples shared with us as we created this new tool. This guide offers ways to think about and take action against bullying and violence that can be put into everyday use at home, school and in our communities.

We were advised by Elders and community members involved in creating this project to include cultural teachings from Aboriginal communities. Some teachings have been chosen to highlight ways of being, learning and sharing, while recognizing that it would be impossible to include all teachings from all Aboriginal communities in Ontario. They are found in highlighted boxes woven throughout the text.

We hope that the information here can help schools strengthen their support of Aboriginal families, to help make sure that we all feel like we are important members of the school community, and that we all belong. This guide is meant to be used with the Circle of Caring short animated films, featuring two Elders and the Capsule Families, created for this project.

## About the Films

We have created 21 short animated films to help jumpstart conversations among families, parent groups, schools and communities. They are meant to feel realistic and to give a light touch to serious topics. Each film has been adapted from COPA’s WE ALL BELONG project for families and schools and is now infused with new content and imagery as guided by the Aboriginal peoples who contributed to this new resource. In addition, an altogether new film was created with a focus on cultural pride as suggested by the many people we heard from around the province.

The series is designed to help us imagine how we can all be a positive part of our children’s learning and growth, and play an important role in creating safe and welcoming schools. It is designed to help strengthen the bonds of kinship and community, between children, adults and Elders.

We hope these films will help children and all people feel more worthy and empowered and supported by those around them. They promote COPA’s vision—a positive cycle that encourages us to reflect, learn, grow and change.

The films are available in a two-DVD set and can also be found on COPA’s parent website at [copahabitat.ca](http://copahabitat.ca). Each one is close captioned and is available in seven Indigenous languages spoken in Ontario. They are introduced by an Elder and feature members of the Capsule families.

## About Words We Use in This Guide

The following words are used in our guide to help us share our ideas:

- The word “colonization” is used here to describe the act of colonizing, the state of being colonized, or the formation of a colony or colonies.
- The word “discrimination” is used here to describe the unjust treatment of people, seeing their differences as something negative.
- The word “empowerment” is used here to describe the belief that we all need to have choices and control over our lives, and be able to take charge and share power.
- The word “equity” is used here to describe a condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.
- The word “inclusion” is used here to describe the act of including all people in society, even those who are sometimes left out because they lack some advantages or power.
- The word “Indigenous” is used here to describe First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples who are also called Aboriginal peoples—those who have lived in North America since long before European people arrived. Indigenous peoples have a close relationship to the land and their ancestors.
- The term “intergenerational trauma” is used here to describe painful feelings that have been passed on to future generations through the injustice experienced by families and ancestors.
- The term “parent engagement” is used here to describe having parents and family members involved and active in their children’s school life.
- The word “racism” is used here to describe beliefs, actions and laws based on the belief that the dominant racial group is superior to all others. These have resulted in discrimination and injustice for Aboriginal peoples in Canada.
- The word “sexism” is used here to describe beliefs, actions and laws that perceive women to be inferior to men.
- The term “social injustice” is used here to describe the fact that some groups are treated unequally in society due to factors such as money, work, education, ability, class, sex, gender identification/expression, race, spirituality, religion, origins, status and other factors.
- The term “Two-spirited” refers to an Aboriginal person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit.



Many people with different ideas and stories have helped create this resource. When we use the word “we” in this guide, we refer to all of these people, members of Aboriginal communities in Ontario, and all those who have contributed here.

In our communities, families come in all shapes and sizes and those who care for children can play different roles. We have tried to include everyone who helps care for our children. Usually, we have used the words “family”, or “family member” to make sure this guide is about everyone who cares for our children.

Whenever we use the word “parents”, we also mean family members, caregivers and all guardians.

And finally, any time we use the word “children”, this means children of all ages.

# CARING AND SHARING TOGETHER



**A** Circle of Caring presents a positive vision of homes and schools in which the teachings and values of Aboriginal cultures are all-important, especially kindness and respect. In this vision, bullying and all forms of abuse, cruelty and discrimination have no place. It is a world where children, their families and all people feel safe, accepted and included, where children can learn freely and become who they choose to be. It is a vision of a world in which people of all ages can be *safe, strong and free*—a place in which everyone has a role to play and precious gifts to share and receive.

Because Aboriginal children and their families experience so much injustice, it can be difficult to imagine that this vision can become a reality. And yet, the contributors to A Circle of Caring believe that we can make positive change and that we can all be a part of bringing this goal to life. We can walk arm-in-arm with those who believe in change, rather than hang back with those who refuse to.

Working together requires trust, and this can be hard when we or someone in our family has experienced racism or injustice. The Cree Tipi Teachings are sacred values that sustain the Cree spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally. One of the 15 teachings is about strength and reminds us that we can draw on spirit to help us do things that are difficult. Spirit gives us strength.

## **Family Involvement**

Family and community are at the very heart of Aboriginal ways of being and learning. These traditions help us support our children's education. Family involvement, both at home and at school, is important to their well-being. As family members, we can also bring positive change to our children's school culture.

When families are involved in their children's education, young people are usually more successful in school and stay in school longer.<sup>2</sup> We also help them manage difficulties in their lives and prevent bullying and other forms of cruelty and injustice. In these ways, they learn that we are there for them and believe in their potential to be healthy and successful.

By joining Aboriginal peoples' ways of being and learning with non-Aboriginal ways of learning, we can support children's education at all stages of their development.

## Beyond the Classroom

As family members, there are simple and pleasurable ways for us to help our children learn beyond the classroom. While many parents already know this, some Aboriginal parents may feel differently due to their difficult history with the education system.

Later in this guide we will talk about the idea of ‘internalized racism’ and how it affects Aboriginal peoples. It can have a negative effect on feelings of self-worth and self-confidence, making it hard to feel good about yourself. We might feel like we have nothing of value to offer or not even know how to help. Getting involved in our children’s education can sometimes be too much to even think about.

And yet, nothing could be further from the truth! Every family member has strengths, talents and teachings to share with each other and their children, and a chance to be positive role models too. We know our children well and we care for them more than anyone else.

When we combine these thoughts and take their education and well-being seriously, we can offer a great deal. Even the simple acts of encouraging our children, allowing them to dream, and believing in their success, make for rich and precious offerings.

Many of us are already doing so much to help our children with different aspects of their school life—perhaps without realizing it. We can begin to appreciate our own efforts and help support others’ too. We can also get more ideas from A Circle of Caring.

We can start by sharing our own knowledge and wisdom, and using our own everyday skills and tools. For example, storytelling is an important part of our cultures. Telling stories or reading to our children can build their interest in learning and helps them begin their school life on a solid footing. It also helps with their reading skills. When stories and books show the strength and beauty of Aboriginal cultures and heritage, this helps children feel better about themselves and proud of their origins.<sup>3</sup> They can be stronger and braver, make healthy decisions and stand up to bullying and injustice.

Finding safe ways to support children’s learning and growth by exploring possibilities at home and reaching out to connect our homes with their school life can have a very positive impact on all of us, and most especially on our beloved children.

Nurturing a *safe, strong and free* school culture at home and at school and in our communities can be imagined as many strands of string braided together to make one strong rope.



One of the Cree teachings of the Medicine Wheel is about responsibility and relationships between the stages of life. This teaching comes from the teaching of the drum—the circle. When we criss-cross the directions of the ties of the drum, it shows the connections between children, parents and Elders. Our lives and our journeys are like the Medicine Wheel.

## Showing We Care

The way we think and how we act is also important in helping our children's success at school. Having a respectful, caring presence in our children's lives means that there is a greater possibility that they will turn to us in times of difficulty. It also creates a strong foundation for reflecting and learning and taking positive action.<sup>4</sup>

We can be present and show we care in very simple ways, for example, by:

- showing interest in our children's school day and in their concerns and successes;
- encouraging them to study and complete their homework;
- encouraging other family members to do so, too;
- creating a quiet space for studying;
- getting to know and staying in touch with their teachers and other school staff;
- seeking help from people at school or in the community;
- encouraging our children when they are having difficulty; and,
- believing in our children's abilities and celebrating their accomplishments.

Our children are more likely to do well, to make healthy choices and develop a feeling of self-worth when we get involved in their learning. These are real ways of building strong and loving relationships that form the basis of lifelong success.

Each of the six nations of Haudenosaunee (hoe-dee-no-show-nee) is composed of extended family groups called clans. A clan mother heads each clan. In the past, a clan mother was usually the oldest woman of the clan. Today, clan mothers are chosen for their cultural wisdom and dedication to the Haudenosaunee peoples.

The Métis use fiddling and jigging to bring people together. The fiddle is an important part of Métis culture. It is the primary instrument for accompanying the Métis jig. It plays a prominent role in celebrations as a symbol of our early beginnings and the joyful spirit in which we live and grow. The Red River Jig, the unique dance developed by the Métis peoples, combines the intricate footwork of First Nations dancing with the instruments and form of European music. Traditionally, dancing started early in the evening and would last until dawn. Métis peoples continue this tradition today.

## Supporting Our Children’s Learning at School

When family members are present at their children’s school, it builds a bridge to their home life. Children see that learning is important to their family and that school is a safe place where their families’ wisdom and knowledge is valued and respected. Working hand-in-hand with the school will help our children thrive.

Schools can learn from the knowledge and input provided by Aboriginal family members. When school staff are open and ready to listen, there is much wisdom we can contribute.

Unfortunately, the history of residential schools and ongoing experiences with discrimination may colour our view of schools altogether and reduce our interest in participating in school activities. For some, it can be difficult and even painful to have any contact with the school system.

We might choose to increase our contact slowly as we build trust. For example, we could start by:

- attending a fun school event for all family members (a play, a concert or a bake sale);
- reaching out to someone (another parent, a staff person) when we need to visit the school, to help prepare and perhaps go along with us;
- reaching out to someone while we are there and starting a conversation; and,
- introducing ourselves to our children’s teacher(s).

These ideas can help us move forward step-by-step so that we feel more comfortable at school. Next steps might include attending parent-teacher meetings, volunteering for school outings or joining the School Council.



It is valuable for our children to see that we have a positive connection with the school, however small. As we begin to get to know and trust other parents and the school staff, we might feel more at ease and become more involved.

The creators of this project believe that Aboriginal families have a great deal to offer their own children, and to schools and communities, when it comes to learning and living. Aboriginal families have much that can help schools become more safe and welcoming—places where every child’s well-being is important, and everyone’s rights are respected.

# FACING BARRIERS



**A** boriginal peoples in Canada face many challenges with their health and social well-being.<sup>5</sup> Their children may face many barriers to learning. This situation can be linked to the history of discriminatory policies and negative ways they have been treated by those representing the religious and government bodies assigned to work and live among them.

Racism, sexism and other forms of injustice often happen hand-in-hand and are still part of our world to this day—sometimes taking the form of bullying. Abuse harms our children and all of us; it can have a negative effect at home, at school and in the community.<sup>6</sup>

Such an environment makes learning hard or even impossible. It may also trigger difficult and painful memories. It can be hard for us to know how to help our children learn and be safe.

Many efforts by Aboriginal community and government leaders have been undertaken to help change attitudes and practices, such as ensuring Aboriginal children's right to an education and a learning environment free from discrimination—allowing each child to reach their full potential. We believe that schools have an important role to play in this and a responsibility to create a safe, healthy and welcoming atmosphere that makes room for all of us.

As we think about the problem of bullying and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal children, we will explore the many ways that family members can support them. We believe that together we can create cultures in homes and in schools where bullying and discrimination become a thing of the past: where everyone has a chance to work together and to be the best they can be, individually and as a whole, where each and every person's rights are respected, and all people are seen and heard and welcomed. We hope that this guide will be helpful in overcoming barriers and nurturing a cycle of positive change for ourselves, our children and future generations.

Working together is a way that Haudenosaunee welcomed Dutch people to North America. Wampum belts were used to symbolize partnership and ways of living side by side. The Two-Row Wampum belt symbolized the agreement and conditions in the relationship with the Dutch. The two-coloured bead rows symbolize two paths or two vessels (First Nations and European) travelling down the same river together, side by side, but in their own boat, neither trying to steer the other's vessel. The Two-Row Wampum belt portrays what it means to coexist with nature and with each other. These wampum agreements are as valid today as they were all those years ago.

## **Racism and Discrimination in Children's Lives**

We know that many individuals and groups of people in Aboriginal and non-Indigenous communities lack power in the world. They are seen as "different", and therefore somehow less deserving. This leads to various forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and ableism. Within Aboriginal communities, children's experiences of injustice are often a blending of these forms.<sup>7</sup>

Racism against Aboriginal peoples is related to the history of colonization and is part of a system of ideas, attitudes, practices and policies that discriminate against Indigenous peoples. Sometimes this is easy to see, and other times it can be hidden in everyday activities and ways of being. Exploring how racism shows up in our lives can help us to name such injustice and put a stop to it.

Residential schools are a major example of colonization from Canadian history, one that affected Aboriginal ancestors and continues to affect families and communities to this day.

Even now, Aboriginal peoples' histories, cultures and languages can be ignored, made invisible or thought of as unimportant by school systems and other institutions. This is considered another form of injustice. Students may not feel welcome in classrooms and parents may not feel welcome in schools. It may feel like no one understands us or wants us to participate.

Non-Aboriginal people are beginning to understand this injustice experienced by Aboriginal peoples and are taking steps to address it. When school staff think about it from the point of view of Aboriginal families, a real change can take place. Reaching out for guidance, wisdom and help from Elders and Aboriginal children and families helps everyone feel welcome and feel like an important part of the school community.

## **Violence Among Us // Lateral Violence**

People who have experienced violence and abuse may swallow their feelings of anger, shame and rage. They may in turn abuse those around them who have even less power. This may feel like a safer way to deal with these bad feelings.

This is known as lateral violence and is part of a cycle of abuse that started with colonization and continues today with intergenerational trauma, sexism, racism and injustice.

It can include attempts to control, exclude and hurt others with words and/or actions. It can feel similar to the experience of being bullied, which involves the abuse of power. This kind of abuse is usually directed against people in your own community, such as family members, friends, neighbours and people at work. In schools, lateral violence may show up as bullying.<sup>8</sup>

Lateral violence is not okay; all people have the right to be safe from abuse in all parts of their lives. No one deserves to be the target of someone else's negative feelings—no matter what the reason.

## **Racism from Outside Turned In // Internalized Racism**

Stories of racism and injustice against Indigenous peoples are all around us. Sadly, they are so common that many Aboriginal peoples have come to hold negative beliefs about themselves, their cultures and their origins.

This is known as internalized racism and can lead to self-hatred and harmful life choices.<sup>9</sup> For young people, this can include using drugs and alcohol, dropping out of school, being violent (to themselves and to others), prostitution or even trying to take their own life.

For Aboriginal parents, this can affect their self-confidence, and supporting their children's education can be that much harder. Even having a little bit of contact with their children's school may make them feel anxious and afraid, making it difficult to speak up for their children's needs. Because of this, many families don't want to have anything to do with their children's school, even though they might know how important this would be.

Family is the foundation of Inuit culture and the family is surrounded by a larger social network that includes the rest of the community, even the region. Inuit families are large and interconnected as intricate bonds are formed through childbirth, marriage and adoption.

## Residential Schools

The history of residential schools is a shocking and shameful part of Canada's past. Aboriginal children, families and communities continue to live with the terrible consequences today. From the 1830s to the 1990s, 150,000 Aboriginal children were forced to live in government-funded, church-run residential schools.

Children in these schools were forbidden from speaking their Native languages and learning their traditions and values, which were denigrated and suppressed. They were made to live in poor conditions with highly regimented lives and harsh discipline. They also experienced institutionalized physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Many children tried to run away or died of cruelty, neglect and disease—others took their own lives.

In establishing residential schools, the Canadian government essentially declared Aboriginal people to be unfit parents and considered them to be indifferent to the future of their children. This is contradicted by the fact that families felt brutally separated, causing loss, heartbreak and intergenerational trauma. Many families hid their children to keep them away from these institutions where siblings were kept apart and the government and churches even arranged marriages for children after they finished their education.

Isolated from their families and communities, parents were no longer in charge of their children's care and education. Children were forced to assimilate and become more like their colonizers whose goal was to "kill the Indian in the child".<sup>10</sup>

Although Indigenous peoples and cultures have been deeply damaged, they have refused to surrender their identity. The Survivors of Canada's residential schools placed the residential school issue on the public agenda and made it a national issue. Their efforts led to the negotiation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement that mandated the establishment of a residential school Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Survivors have acted with immense courage and determination to ensure that we know this history and continue to be aware and sensitive to the ongoing trauma caused by residential schools.<sup>11</sup>



## Aboriginal Children in Care

Compared to other Canadian children, Aboriginal children are over-represented in government care as a result of continued racism and intergenerational trauma.

They are more likely to be in foster care, a group home or be a Society or Crown ward—where the provincial government is the child’s permanent guardian. In 2010, there were about 27,500 Aboriginal children in foster care in Canada.<sup>12</sup> At that time, Aboriginal children made up only 7% of the child population in Ontario and yet almost half of those in foster care were Aboriginal. One quarter were Crown wards. These numbers have increased as residential schools were closed down.<sup>13</sup>

Even today, reports show that when child abuse or neglect of Aboriginal children is reported, the situation is five times more likely to be investigated and the child is 12 times more likely to be placed in foster care than a non-Aboriginal child. And, once in care, Aboriginal children stay there longer and are more likely to become Crown wards.

In response, many Aboriginal groups have taken a more active role in managing child welfare, working with the Ontario government to improve practices and policies. The standards for child welfare agencies are being changed to take into account the importance of Aboriginal history, heritage and cultural ties.<sup>14</sup>

Children in care are more vulnerable than others as their families are less involved in their education. As we know, this has a real impact on their life and their chances of success at school. In the last decade, there has been an increase of Crown wards completing high school and attending a post-secondary institution. Still, only 46% are doing so, compared with 83% of other children.<sup>15</sup>

As school staff, we can offer extra moral and academic support to these children, and work alongside community helpers and caregivers. Together, we can help strengthen these children’s abilities, self-confidence and success while learning.

We can also take time to be more supportive of those who are working hard to resist negative ideas about their ability to parent and create loving homes. Believing in their capacity is all-important for them and their children.

## Studying Away from Home

Many children have to leave home to attend school if there is no school in their community. It can be difficult for them to be far from their loved ones while adjusting to a new life removed from all that they know. Many children from the Far North experience culture shock, often never having lived in a town or city.

This is a big challenge for many children, and feeling lonely and afraid can make it even harder. Experiencing discrimination because they are newcomers puts them at greater risk. They might also experience racism and bullying that can leave them feeling more isolated. Because of this, they may make harmful life decisions and some decide not to continue their education.

These children have unique needs. They and their families require more support from all of us. Being there, listening, supporting and providing nurturing environments for them is all-important—whether we are a parent back home, a host family, a teacher or a community helper. Making sure that students who are away at school are tended to goes a long way. Reaching out to their parents far away can also make a positive difference.

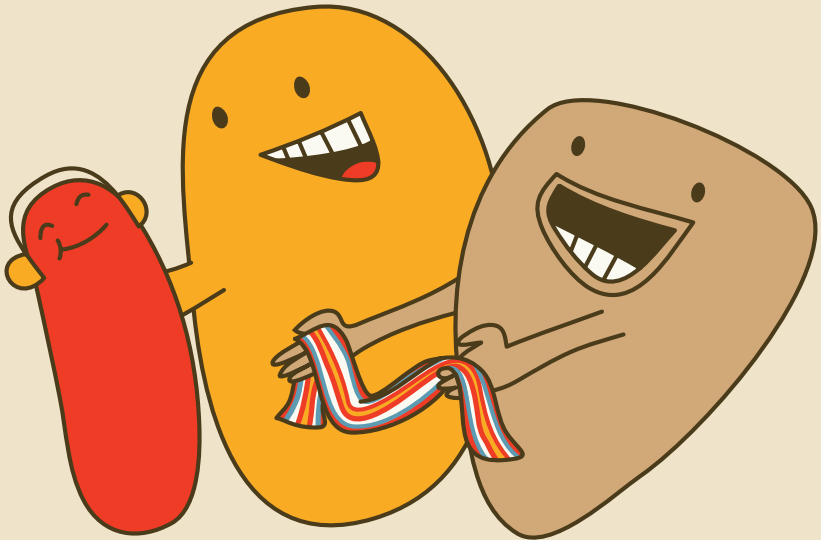
## Parents in Prison

For reasons discussed earlier, many residential school survivors have come into conflict with the law and spend much of their life in and out of prison. Some of these prisons have been built directly on the old sites of residential schools.

In fact, Aboriginal youth and adults are greatly over-represented in Canadian prisons and the rates are growing. Indigenous peoples represent just over 4% of the whole Canadian population and yet, a 2012 study showed that 21% of prisoners in Canadian prisons have Aboriginal origins. Aboriginal women make up 33% of all female prisoners and their rate of being sent to prison has increased by 80% in the past decade.<sup>16</sup>

There is more information now than ever before about the negative effect on children whose parents are in prison. They live with stress at home and at school, feeling ashamed, secretive and disconnected from others. Carol Shedd calls them the “invisible children”.<sup>17</sup>

We know, too, that internalized racism and lateral violence have a real impact on those in prison and their families. It affects how adults act as parents, believing less in their ability to support and educate their children. It can also affect a family’s ability to ask the school for help. They may fear being judged and excluded. Sensitivity to the needs of these families is all-important.



Perhaps the most prominent symbol of the Métis Nation is the brightly coloured, woven sash. In the days of the voyageur, the sash was both a colourful and festive belt, and an important tool doubling as a rope when needed. The sash itself served as a key holder, first aid kit, washcloth, towel, and as an emergency bridle and saddle blanket. Its fringed ends could become a sewing kit. The sash has acquired new significance symbolizing pride and identification for Métis peoples.

# UNDERSTANDING BULLYING



**P**eople who bully others do so to feel more powerful. They find individuals or groups of people that they believe they can dominate and control. It is a form of abuse, and is meant to hurt the person or people being targeted.<sup>18</sup> Those who are bullied are never responsible for being bullied. It is important that we see that and always make it clear to others.

Ontario's Education Act contains provisions focusing on preventing bullying, requiring school leaders to do all they can to create safe schools for all students.<sup>19</sup>

## **What Is Bullying?**

Bullying can take many forms. It can involve words, actions and threats. People who bully others use different methods, such as rejection, cruel comments, sexual harassment or physical aggression.

Bullying is sometimes easy to see and sometimes not. It is often planned and well-organized. It may occur over a short period of time or could go on and on, even just as the threat of further harm.

The following six parts must be present for it to be called bullying:

- a real (or what looks real) imbalance of power between those involved;
- the intent to cause harm;
- negative effects on those being bullied;
- the enjoyment of these effects by those doing the bullying;
- most often (though not always) the bullying is repeated and gets worse as time goes on; and
- the existence of a threat—indirect or outright—of more bullying.

Bullying among children can take place in hallways, classrooms, schoolyards, libraries, gyms, during assemblies and school outings, on school buses (to and from school) and out in the community.

Recently, children found new ways to bully, using cell phones and the internet. This is called “cyberbullying”.

Bravery is one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. To face life with courage and personal strength is to know bravery.

## **Bullying or Conflict?**

We might think that conflict is bullying or, the other way around, that bullying is just an argument between two people. Understanding that they are truly different is important if we are going to understand and put a stop to bullying.

Conflict is a disagreement or a difference of opinion between two or more people who are pretty much equal. With conflict, there are two sides to the story. Conflict is an expected part of everyday life.

Bullying, on the other hand, should never be considered a natural part of life. We will always try to prevent it. Unlike conflict, we hope that we can stop it entirely. In a bullying situation, there are not two sides to the story: someone is always trying to hurt someone else.

Unfortunately, because we often confuse these two, we can make mistakes in handling bullying. We might even make it worse for the child who is being bullied. Imagine how frightening it might be to be told to “sit down and work things out” with the very person who has been going out of their way to hurt you.

Also, being told that there are two sides to the story ignores how bullying really works. It sends a message to the person who is being bullied that they are actually part of the problem—maybe even the cause of it. This confusion can lead to even more trauma. When it is clear that someone is being bullied, treating it as conflict is not recommended.

## Who Is Involved in Bullying?

Many different types of people are bullied. Many different types of people bully others. A good number of children who bully others have been bullied before or are being bullied now.

People who bully others may do so alone or with the help of others. They may target one person, or two, or even several people. They may get other students to help them out, cheer them on, or at least to watch. Bullying can have a serious effect, in the short and long-term, on all children involved.

**Children who are bullied** may react in different ways. They may keep their problems to themselves because they feel ashamed and guilty about being bullied. They may suffer even more because of this—feeling lonely and isolated as they struggle on their own. They may also express their feelings through aggression—lashing out suddenly or even trying to take revenge. Often they are then blamed, punished and held responsible for the entire problem.

**Most children are witnesses**—they are not bullied and do not bully others. Many of them see it happen though, and we know that they can suffer too. It may bring up feelings of anger, sadness, fear and helplessness. It may also bring on their own memories of being bullied and discriminated against. It may make a child feel badly about themselves for not being braver and they may find it hard to learn, study and think clearly. These feelings can continue later in life.

It is important to know, and to let others know, that when children try to stop the bullying, it can really work. We know that when another child stepped in, 57% of the time the bullying stopped within as little as ten seconds.

**Children who bully** are making a decision to harm others and yet, this urge is usually a sign of problems elsewhere in their lives.

Children who both bully others and are themselves bullied are more likely to feel loneliness, depression and the urge to hurt themselves. Also, studies show that girls are more likely to self-mutilate (intentionally cut themselves) or consider suicide. Those who bully others are likely to have more difficulty managing their adult lives.

Given the high numbers of Aboriginal children who have experienced bullying and injustice, we need to pay special attention when we know that an Aboriginal child is bullying others. It is common to discover that these children are themselves being bullied. And, because many of us have experienced injustice ourselves, we can understand it as part of the cycle of violence.

## How Big Is the Problem?

Unfortunately, bullying does happen in our schools. Studies show that 25% of all students report bullying other students and 29% of students report being bullied. In a 2011 Kids Help Phone survey on cyberbullying, 65% reported having been targeted at least once.

Importantly, Aboriginal peoples are 4% of the Canadian population, but Aboriginal youth represented 10% of the calls to Kids Help Phone.

## Bullying and Racism

Bullying and racism are different, but they can overlap. Anyone can be bullied, but only groups that are targets of discrimination live with this particular form of bullying. Racism can be an extra source of power for those who are bullying others.

When someone is bullied because they belong to a marginalized group, it can be even more difficult to handle, as these discriminatory messages may be further underlined by racism in the larger community.

Aboriginal gay youth are especially vulnerable to bullying, as homophobia and racism are combined in these cases. Aboriginal children that are living away from their families because they are in care or attending school are also more vulnerable.

For many Aboriginal children, this combination of abuse can make the world feel unsafe and lead them to believe that cruelty is a normal part of life.

As Aboriginal family members and school staff serving them, we need to be aware of the ways prejudice and bullying can feed off each other. Keeping this in mind is important when dealing with it. We need to pay greater attention to their safety and well-being. We can only do this if we work together and listen to their stories, concerns and wisdom.

The Métis infinity symbol represents the joining of First Nations and European cultures, and the immortality of the Métis nation. The Métis flag is carried today as a symbol of continuity and pride.



Historically, Two-spirited people were highly respected in many Indigenous cultures and looked up to as leaders, visionaries and healers. Because of this, they were given important spiritual responsibilities. Gender roles and the masculine and feminine were believed to flow together before European people arrived. Words to describe up to six different gender roles (beyond that of just male and female) have been found in 155 Indigenous languages in North America.

## **Bullying and Suicide**

Perhaps it is no surprise to learn that suicide rates among Aboriginal youth are five to six times higher than among other young people in Canada.<sup>15</sup> Many efforts have been taken to understand and address this growing problem. Documentaries such as the Eskasoni First Nations' *The Art of Resilience* and Alanis Obomsawin's *Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Métis Child* explore how suicide is affecting Aboriginal communities. A state of emergency has been declared by a number of Aboriginal leaders over the high rate of suicides.

We now know more about the direct connection between bullying and suicide. Children who are bullied can feel alone and ashamed, afraid to reach out. Hopelessness can drive them to extremes—such as thinking about or even trying to take their own life.

This is one more reason to take bullying seriously and create safe places for all children—whether they are the ones who are being bullied, encouraging it, witnessing it or leading it.

Knowing about the high risk of suicide among Aboriginal youth, as well as actions being taken by Aboriginal communities, can be a great motivator for all of us. Children who feel connected, surrounded and supported are less at risk to harm themselves in this way.

## The Code of Silence

Those who bully often try to force those around them to keep it secret. This is usually done by using threats that are spoken out loud or hinted at. This is all part of what we call the “code of silence”. This allows the bullying to continue and even worsen.

A number of studies have found that a lot of the bullying in schools is never talked about or reported to adults—up to 80%. And yet, we know that breaking this code of secrecy, getting help and stopping the cycle of violence as early as possible is incredibly important.

Children may not talk about it to the adults in their lives because they are nervous or feel hopeless. They may think that no one will believe their story or help them out. Or, they may feel that nothing can be done, even if they were to reach out. They might fear losing even more control of the situation. Children who are cyberbullied often don’t want to report it because they are worried that they will be stopped from using the internet or their cellphones.

Children may decide to share their problems with a friend and insist that they keep it hidden too. The problem then becomes a painful secret for them as well; these children find themselves worrying for their friend(s) and feeling helpless alongside them. It has become more common for these friends to bravely speak out, breaking the shared silence that hangs over so many.

## How Do I Know If My Child Is Being Bullied?

The following are some of the signs that might tell us that there is a problem:

- trying to avoid school, asking to change to a new one, or dropping out;
- changes in the way they are acting—for example, a typically happy child is suddenly quiet and withdrawn;
- stealing money or valuable items (sometimes because the person who is bullying them is forcing them to).

None of these signs mean that bullying is happening absolutely, but they can tell us that there is a problem somewhere that needs our attention.



# PREVENTING BULLYING



**B**abies are not born wanting to hurt others. Bullying and discrimination is learned from someone, somewhere. When children are abused or see others causing harm, they might begin to believe that this is normal behaviour and learn to repeat it. This is what we call the cycle of violence.

We know, too, that people of all ages can change the way they act. In fact, they often do. Our belief in our children's capacity to think about their behaviour and change it is one of the most important ways that we can help prevent bullying. We can unlearn bullying, just as we learned it to begin with.

## **Recognizing Victim-Blaming**

Blaming the victim can keep us attached to the cycle of violence. It is a common response, and those who are being bullied are often seen as somehow responsible for being bullied, and in need of changing *their* behaviour. When they try to ignore it, hoping it will go away, they may be blamed for being too scared and too weak. Or, when children lash out to defend themselves, they may be accused of being the problem. In much the same way, Aboriginal peoples have often been blamed for the injustice they experience.

It is important to keep in mind that bullying is abuse, and meant to cause harm. The person who is targeted is never at fault and should not be seen as in any way responsible. Those who bully others and those who witness it are the ones whose behaviour needs to change. All people—young and old—have the right to live free of discrimination and abuse at all times.

## **Rejecting Shame and Blame**

When we are abused we often take in negative ideas about ourselves, turning our anger inward and holding ourselves responsible. This can result in self-hatred and self-harm. If children are blamed by those they turn to, they too may begin to doubt their own worth and in turn blame themselves. They may shut down and hide their problems from us.

Instead, bullying can be an opportunity for our children and our communities to learn and grow. Rather than judging, blaming or punishing, we can offer our support. We can help those who participated in the bullying change their behaviour, help the children who want to stop the bullying find safe ways to do so, and help those who were bullied to be safe and feel better about themselves.

We want all children to feel more confident. Those who feel better about themselves are more likely to respect each other's rights, including their own. Helping develop feelings of self-worth and self-confidence breaks the cycle of violence and allows children to get into the positive cycle of change—the ability to reflect, learn, grow and change. Healthy communication, choices and relationships are the likely outcomes, and in turn, help prevent bullying.

We can do this by listening carefully, respecting their concerns, believing their stories, and believing in them and in their ability to change.

## **Avoiding Using the Words “Bully” and “Victim”**

We strongly suggest we all stop using the words “bully” and “victim”. These words label children a certain way and make it more likely that they see themselves and each other in a negative light. It is also more likely that they will act like the label.

While it might be easy for us to forget, and it takes longer to say, we suggest using these phrases instead: “the child who is bullying” and “the child who is being bullied.” Using these terms instead of labels shows that we believe in our children, and will be there for them, as they struggle to unlearn negative behaviour and choose to make positive decisions in their lives.

Seeing bullying as something we can learn and unlearn, lets us imagine children as capable of making real change. Children (and all of us) are more likely to do so when we use words that open the door to this possibility.

The family and community are very important to Indigenous peoples. For example, the Inuit cherish their youth, Elders and the generation between them. Elders are given the utmost respect in any community because of their knowledge and wisdom, which they in turn teach to younger generations. Their continual contributions have kept the Inuit traditions alive.

## **Breaking the Code of Silence**

Adults can work together to make sure children are encouraged to get help and support. It is important to let young people know that bullying is not alright, and that it is not accepted behaviour. We need them to know that they can talk about their problems safely with us—their parents, teachers, caregivers or other adults in their lives.

When children do approach us, it helps to understand that they are taking a very big risk. Appreciating their trust in us can go a long way. It is important to let them know that we are thankful to them for seeking our help and honour them for sharing, by respecting their need for control and privacy as much as is possible.

When adults listen carefully to children and are there for them, their trust in us will grow.<sup>20</sup> We can learn a lot from them as we try to help in respectful ways. Allowing them to take charge can create a safe place for telling. Children will be more likely to break the code of silence and choose to get into the cycle of change.

If your child has a problem, you may need to talk to someone to get support and advice, even if your children doesn't want you to. There are positive ways of doing this, by letting them have as much say in dealing with the situation as possible, even when others are involved. Whenever possible, we can:

- let our children know beforehand, when we need to reach out and get help.
- allow our children to choose who they would like to tell or speak to.
- involve our child in the timing of telling others.
- offer to be there with our children when they are getting help.

## Standing Up for Others

Seeing bullying or injustice take place can be a scary and painful experience for children, and for adults too. We know that many people are unhappy when they see others being treated unkindly. They want to do something about it, but are often afraid to.

Even those who help the person with the bullying may do so because they feel forced to. They may be worried that they will be tormented or bullied too. Many children participate or stand by because they want to protect themselves.

Really, it takes a great deal of bravery for anyone—young or old—to break the code of silence and stand up against cruelty, discrimination and racism. When we model this and help our children learn the skills to help others, they will feel braver and be glad to put them into practice. When they do so, they will likely feel better about themselves too.

This is how we become allies (people who support others and help break the code of silence and the cycle of violence).

Helping our children learn how to use their power in a positive way to find the courage needed to become allies (and encouraging them to do so) is all-important—not just to help prevent bullying, but for life in general.

People of all ages can play an important role by standing up to bullying, racism and all forms of injustice. This includes Aboriginal children and adults, and everyone in our different communities.

As allies we can help to prevent bullying by:

- sharing a different message with the person who is being bullied. For example, *“I like your sweater!”* or *“Actually, your lunch looks delicious.”* (This could even be said in private.)
- deciding not to stand by and watch, or choosing to not laugh along with others when bullying takes place.
- asking for help from friends and adults.

We don't need to pressure children to confront the bullying as it is happening. They may be afraid to do so. They might need to get help first or do some thinking and planning. We often expect children to react in the moment, and are disappointed in them when they don't—even though as adults we often find ourselves stuck or afraid to respond.



The positive presence of parents and family members plays a very important role in helping children stand up to others and build healthy, equal relationships. Children learn to socialize by observing our behaviour. When we take a clear stand against bullying and injustice, while taking their fears and safety concerns seriously, we act as positive role models. Children who witness adults being courageous can imagine themselves doing so and are more likely to turn to adults for support.

Through everyday acts of bravery and kindness, young people and adults who choose to be allies help shape the world they live in. Caring and positive role modelling, being involved and offering support and safe spaces for children are all-important as we create *safe, strong and free* homes, schools and community spaces.

The Cree Tipi Teachings are sacred values that sustain the Cree spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally. The teachings serve as a guide for happy and healthy living. One of the 15 teachings is about good child rearing—the guidance and protection of the sacred gift of children. Listening and believing our children is an important part of supporting them and a good child rearing practice.

## **Empowerment**

Bullying, like any form of assault or injustice is all about using power to hurt and control others. The cycle of violence continues as long as a power imbalance remains.

When all of our voices count and we all feel seen and heard, we can feel positive about ourselves and help break that cycle. By creating homes, schools and communities in which all people's rights are equally important, we reduce children's (and all people's) chances of being bullied.

This involves being open to, listening to and talking with children about all kinds of issues and problems. Children who are abused often feel powerless and in need of opportunities to have a say in things and take charge of their own life. When they can take the lead in telling us about a problem and find their own solutions, we help even out the power imbalance.

We can support them by sharing practical information and skills that help them face difficulties, think things through and become better at making decisions. This will help prevent the abuse of power, turning it into a positive force. At COPA we call this "empowerment". To learn more about COPA's empowerment approach to problem-solving, see our booklet, *Problem-Solving Together*.

## Empowerment and Aboriginal Families

For all human beings, how we feel about ourselves is connected to our place in our family and community. Helping our children feel good about themselves and their culture is an important way of preventing the abuse of power. Aboriginal family members have an important role to play in helping our children feel proud of their culture and origins.

Our children are watching us and taking in the attitudes and values we express every day. Children need to experience and observe positive and respectful relationships, and the supportive use of adult power. This can help them be more thoughtful, take responsibility for their actions and make important changes to their behaviour.

Aboriginal values and Indigenous teachings are key to making this happen. Each day presents many opportunities to show and send positive messages to our children, about them and about their culture and heritage. These messages can go far in supporting empowerment.

## Building Self-Worth through Empowerment

We can help our children feel good about themselves and build their sense of worth and personal power by:

- listening carefully when children talk to us, taking their feelings, worries and challenges seriously, and making sure they feel seen and heard.
- admitting that bullying, violence and injustice do exist and that none of it is acceptable.
- focusing on what our children can do, rather than on what they can't do (or should do or shouldn't do).
- recognizing and nurturing our children's talents, skills and abilities.
- encouraging our children's ability to be courageous, and help their friends and classmates.
- nurturing kindness and empathy in our homes.
- discussing our responsibility to respect our own rights and the rights of others.
- providing children with practical and important opportunities to reflect, learn, grow and change—to think things through, to make decisions, to take positive action and to share responsibility.
- encouraging ways to talk to each other and deal with conflict in a healthy way.

“To know love is to know peace” is one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. By reminding everyone to love each other, we also show that we can be kind and caring even when we have different views and ideas.

## **Cultural Pride through Empowerment**

We can help our children feel proud of their culture and heritage by:

- being aware that we are role models for our children and thinking about other positive messages we can teach and show.
- speaking proudly of Aboriginal values, culture and teachings and sharing them with our children.
- creating and nurturing positive relations with other caring adults in our communities, especially with respected Elders.
- exploring movies, music, books and other forms of culture with our children. Think about who is missing from these images and stories, who is visible and how they are seen.
- naming bullying, racism and discrimination wherever we find it (social interactions, television, movies, on the internet, etc.).
- helping our children understand how racism, bullying and other forms of injustice are connected.
- speaking out against acts of unkindness and cruelty, including racism and discrimination whenever we can.
- being an ally to those around us who experience bullying and injustice—even in small, quiet ways.
- using a wholistic approach by making links and partnerships whenever possible within our community, such as with teachers, principals and other school staff, community leaders and groups, and people working to nurture healthy schools and communities.

We can talk with strength and respect, keeping our own power without taking away that of others. We can respect our own rights, and those of others too. We can work hard to even out power imbalances whenever possible.

The Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen or Thanksgiving Address is said by the Haudenosaunee to open and close gatherings. It shares how one is to conduct oneself in harmony with the natural world, and is about mutual respect, conservation, love, generosity and the responsibility to understand that what is done to one part of the Web of Life, we do to ourselves.

## **Nurturing Inclusive Schools through Empowerment**

In schools, empowerment means being there for young people. It means helping ensure student safety while creating meaningful opportunities for them to be seen and heard as they strive to reach their potential.

When school staff and community leaders help young people get information and develop skills needed to act for themselves and on behalf of others, they nurture their empowerment and well-being.

When working to create safety, inclusion and belonging at school for Aboriginal students and families, it is important to be mindful of history. Remembering and recognizing the historical abuse and exclusion of entire Aboriginal cultures in society can create a basis for understanding and change.

We can review and reflect on our school practices and policies. By studying our materials, activities, and the images we see around us (in our classrooms and hallways, on our websites, and in our bulletins and letters home), we can find out more about who is missing, who is visible, and what students are learning about themselves and others.

Non-Aboriginal school leaders can act as allies for Aboriginal students and families by striving to create empowering conditions in our schools. We can look at our own beliefs and identify negative views or misinformation that we have absorbed from society.

We can learn more about Aboriginal cultures and history, strive to engage Aboriginal parents, families and caregivers, and find opportunities to welcome them. This can help ensure that schools become inclusive—reflecting Aboriginal histories, realities, needs, strengths and wisdom. We all have the right to be *safe, strong and free*. We all belong.

## Healthy Ways of Talking and Sharing

We can do something about bullying and injustice by thinking and talking about it in healthy ways that show respect for our own and all people’s rights, dignity and self-worth. Encouraging this throughout the whole school community moves us closer to helping prevent bullying and injustice.

## Responding to Children Who Are Being Bullied

Children who are being bullied need to be helped in a respectful way. We need to help them feel safe and listened to.

Speaking out takes a lot of courage and we can tell them this. We can tell them that no one deserves to be bullied, that it is never okay to bully anyone, and it is not their fault that it happened. We can tell them that we believe in them and that their feelings are okay.

We can also send out the message that things can change, that there is hope and that they are not powerless. We can let them know that we are there for them and that the community is there for them too. We can continue to remind them of that as we support them, now and in the future.

### Additional Ideas:

- Encourage your child to describe the problem from their own point of view. Avoid asking if she or he did anything to cause the problem.
- Call the behaviour what it is—bullying. Try to use language that names and describes what happened. (“*You were bullied*” or “*Your rights were taken away.*”) Avoid using the label “victim”.
- Find out what is hoped for from you. Are you being asked to do something at this time or to simply listen?
- Help your child get the information and learn the skills they need, to protect their rights in a positive way, to heal and to begin to feel better about themselves. This might mean learning assertiveness techniques, making new friends, building strengths, talents and abilities or getting help from the school’s social worker or other helpers at your school, school board and community.
- Respect their need for privacy as much as possible. You may need to tell others, such as the school, community organizations or the police. It is important to make sure that the young person is part of the planning, knows what is happening and is involved in decision making as much as possible.
- Check in regularly to make sure that the bullying has stopped.

## Choosing a Response

When faced with a bullying situation, children who are bullied and those who see it happen tend to act in one of several ways. Let's look at these responses to understand them so that we can make choices that work and that we are proud of:

**Passive //** This is the most common response and unfortunately it rarely works. Children who respond passively are trying their best to avoid or ignore the situation. Those who are bullying will still feel in control. Being passive can send a message that those who are being bullied don't have power or rights.

**Aggressive //** This is usually an attempt to frighten or overpower those who bully others. It may make the problem worse, as those who are bullying become more aggressive to maintain their position of power. Being aggressive also sends a message that other people's rights are not important and that aggression is acceptable behaviour.

**Assertive //** COPA believes that being assertive is a positive and useful way to deal with bullying and injustice of all kinds. It sends a message that bullying is not right and that everyone's rights matter. It can change the energies between those who are involved, shifting the balance of power. Children can learn assertive ways of dealing with their problems and at the same time make sure that everyone is feeling safe and accepted.

A few components of acting assertive:

- Body language that shows confidence, such as eye contact and an upright posture;
- Using a speaking voice that is clear and can be heard;
- Using words that communicate everyone's right to be safe and accepted.

**Tip //** Take time to practice together. Practicing really helps.

An assertive response does not always mean that you have to speak directly to the person who is bullying. There are many different kinds of assertive ways to take action. The person who is being bullied—or is seeing it happen—knows the situation best and is able to think about and choose the best response.

We believe that all people can be creative, brave and kind. It is always important to encourage children to see how brave they are when they try to put a stop to injustice—even if it is hard to do or doesn't work. This encouragement will help them make positive choices in difficult situations.

For many Indigenous peoples, sharing information about how to act or live in a good way is done by sharing stories or teachings. These stories include messages about values, morals or how to act. For example, the well-known Inuit legend of Sedna talks about the challenges and tensions in a culture, how important family and children are to Inuit, and how they are sometimes forced to make difficult decisions. The overpowering role of nature is always evident in these situations, as is the presence of sometimes malevolent forces.

## **Responding to Children Who Are Witnessing Bullying**

When we find out that our children have witnessed bullying, it is important to see what part they played in it. For example, they may have tried to stop it, they may have joined in or they may have just watched. These are very different situations and knowing this can help us to decide what steps we might take and how best to approach the problem.

For children who have been trying to help their friends, we can thank them for doing so. We can also thank them for coming to us with their problem. Let them know that their ideas and feelings matter, and that you know it takes courage to do all of this. If they feel that they had tried and failed, remind them that they were brave to have done what they could and that there will be other chances to take action.

For children who have joined in with the bullying, we might explore why they are doing so. Sometimes it is because they have been forced to or are frightened that they will be targeted next. We can take these feelings seriously and then help them take responsibility for how they are hurting others. With children who are actively involved, we may need to challenge their excuses, such as *“we were just joking around”*.

In both cases, it is very important to focus on learning and not on shaming and blaming. It is necessary for them to problem-solve with us as to how they might stop the bullying. They will feel more ready to carry out the plan if they are involved in creating it. We can help them think things through and take positive action with empowerment in mind. We can help our children reflect, learn, grow and change.

It is always important to respond by listening carefully and respectfully, and to believe in our children’s ability to change and become an ally. We need to follow up and be supportive as time goes on.

## Responding to Children Who Are Bullying Others

When our child has been bullying other children, we may feel angry and disappointed. It is more useful to let them know their behaviour is wrong without insulting or rejecting them. In this way we may keep the door open for talking about their situation and acting differently. Avoid calling them a “bully” and discuss their ability to reflect, learn, grow and change. We can help them understand and take responsibility for their behaviour, as well as the fear and hurt of the child they bullied. There are many stories of children who, with encouragement and support from those around them, have chosen to stop bullying others and have become positive leaders and allies.

We can do this by naming the behaviour as bullying and telling them that bullying is never okay. They may have excuses and yet there are never two sides to the story when it comes to bullying.

We want to help children who hurt others take steps to put things right and accept the consequences of their actions. By regularly checking in we can make sure that the bullying has stopped or we can help them find new ways to deal with it. Eventually, we can help our children learn about acceptance, respect, compassion, equity, belonging and healthy relationships.

We need to keep in mind that those who are hurting others may be doing so because they are being hurt, too. This is another reason why keeping the door open for sharing matters. Punishing them is not the goal; what is important is learning and changing.

Children who are bullying or joining in can learn that:

- bullying hurts others. It is unacceptable, as is any form of abuse and cruelty.
- we can change our behaviour and get into the cycle of positive change.
- we can respect our own rights and the rights of others.

These four simple steps can be our guide as we move forward:

- help your child understand how bullying is harmful.
- help your child think of ideas to stop it and repair the situation.
- help your child sort through these ideas and put them into action.
- follow up with your child as time goes on.

Let’s work together so that our children can become allies in schools and communities where everyone feels *safe, strong and free*.



Haudenosaunee means “people who build a house.” The name refers to an alliance among six nations—the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora. Haudenosaunee people refer to themselves as Ongweh’onweh (ongk-way-hon-way), which means “human being”. Although many cultural similarities and family connections unite the six nations, each is unique and distinct.

## **Approaching the School**

Helping children when they are involved in bullying can be very hard. Sometimes we need to get help or talk to other people.

We know that bullying is more likely to stop when the school knows about it and is involved in preventing it. And yet, we may worry that teachers or the school will not take care of the problem and we may even feel afraid when we think about talking to them. This can be even harder for Aboriginal peoples who still live with the effects of residential schools and injustice.

It might be difficult to know if, when or how to ask our child’s teachers or principal for help. We can review the section describing bullying on page 29 and ask ourselves if the six parts are present. This can help us understand the situation and decide if we need to go further. Part of the plan your child and you have created might include going to the school to talk to a teacher, principal or Aboriginal support worker. Asking for a meeting is often the first part of an action plan. It is ideal for your child to know about and be part of the meeting.

As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, by law all school boards must take bullying in schools very seriously. They must take steps to prevent bullying by making a plan and guidelines to be shared with their schools. Schools also have what is called a Code of Conduct that helps guide acceptable behaviour. These all should be made public to all parents, caregivers and community members.

To deal with problems such as bullying, schools and boards must use “progressive discipline”. This allows schools to deal with negative student behaviour with what they see as appropriate consequences and get help. Principals must take action when a bullying incident occurs and get in touch with the family of the students that are directly involved.

Humility is one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings: knowing that we are not above or below others in the circle of life.

## Approaching Another Family

Many parents have told us that they might choose to approach the school in order to help them resolve a bullying problem with another family. We may wish to approach another family directly. This can be a difficult step to take as parents for we feel protective of our own children, and may not be receptive to being approached by others. This can be especially hard for those who have met with racism and discrimination, and are worried that this will play a part.

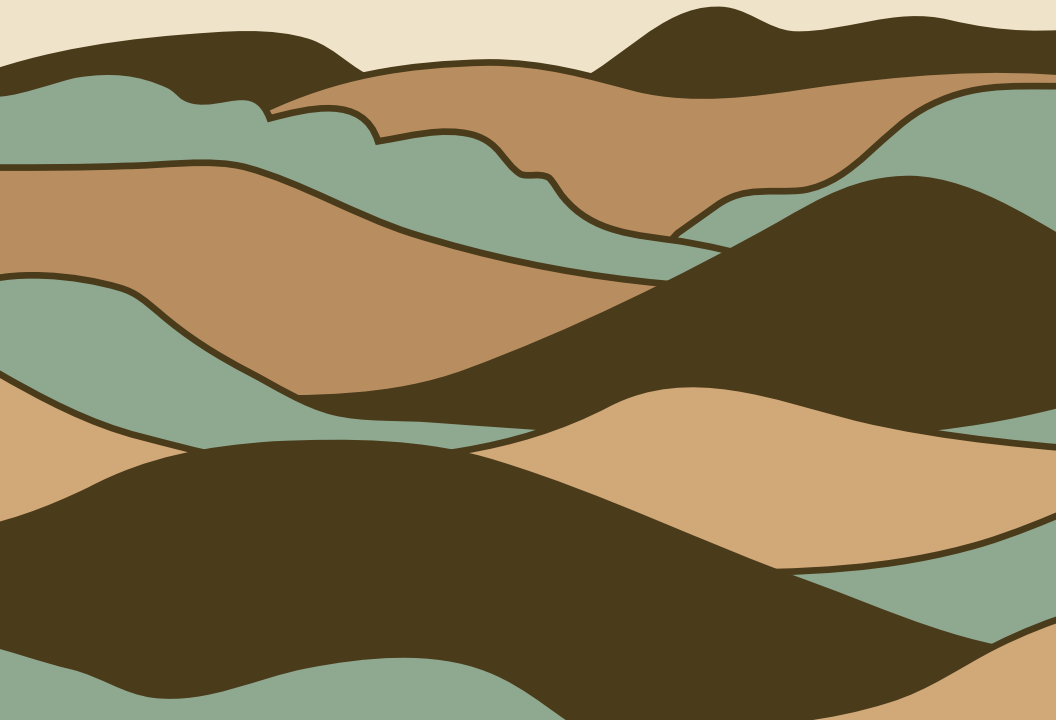
Once again, it is important to ask ourselves a few questions:

- Are the core elements of bullying present in this situation? (It might be conflict and not bullying—see page 27.)
- Is my child involved in the process of deciding how to move forward? Have I used empowerment listening and problem-solving guidelines (see the *Problem-Solving Together* booklet) to ensure that my child has as much say in the action plan as possible?
- Should my child be part of my discussion(s) with the other family?

It is important to maintain the approach described in this guide. Positive role-modeling of healthy communication has a very positive impact on our children who are observing us and hoping for our constructive and consistent support.



# CONCLUSION



**I**n this guide, we have shared a vision of schools where Aboriginal families and all people feel safe, accepted and welcomed. This means children having all that they need to learn and be the best that they can be as we build *safe, strong and free* homes, schools and communities. Such a vision can only come to be when we are able to think and talk to others about the painful, hurtful consequences of discrimination such as racism, sexism and homophobia, and how they continue to affect our communities.

We all know there is no simple recipe for change. These problems are linked to unequal power among people and are woven into our society. They can spill out into our daily interactions with each other, into our homes and our schools.

Yet, there is much reason for hope. Cultural change—within our society and its institutions, including schools—is truly possible. Parents’ involvement in our children’s schools is a first step, a big step, leading to a change of heart. We can help prevent bullying and racism by nurturing safe and inclusive places to learn and grow. By being present in our children’s lives, at home and at school, we can show that we believe in them and that we truly care. We can be important, positive role models for healthy, loving relationships. Aboriginal teachings value the importance of education and offer us all guidance in supporting our children’s learning.

We can get out of the cycle of shame, blame and violence and into a new cycle—with concrete ways to reflect, learn, grow and change. Conversations about power, ways to help even it out and ways to respect our own and others’ rights are important parts of this cycle.

Empowerment, with a focus on changing attitudes and learning skills, helps nurture healthy and equal relationships. This approach offers family members and all of us positive ways to support our children when they are having problems and are involved in bullying or other forms of abuse.

We are all able to make positive change happen. When Aboriginal families feel seen, heard and valued in our children’s school we can share our wisdom and teachings. We can contribute fully to building a school culture based on compassion and kindness where everyone feels a part of the whole.

A Circle of Caring is intended to support Aboriginal families. We hope, too, that school and community leaders have found guidance and inspiration here, enabling all of us to breathe more life into building welcoming spaces for Aboriginal family members. Everyone has the right to be *safe, strong and free*. We all belong.

*Chi Miigwetch, Yaw^ko, Nya:weh, Kinanâskomitinâwâw, Marcee and Qujannamiik* to each person that took the time to contribute to these ideas.

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We hope you'll enjoy meeting the different characters that appear in our short animated films. They are carefully crafted to reduce stereotyping such as male and female roles, cultural and racial beliefs, and physical ability.



## The Elders



**Wisdom** is an Elder with a great love of learning and a passion for the stories of her ancestors. She has always enjoyed learning about her culture and listened closely to the Elders' stories. She enjoys sharing her knowledge, especially with the young. Her favourite thing to do is to sit by the fire and tell stories.

**Anik** loves the outdoors and has great respect for nature. As a young child, Anik was always excited to go fishing, hunting and canoeing. He learned to respect Mother Earth, the animals, all people and living things, from both his family and the Elders. Anik remembers that as a young child he thought the Elders were like the trees: tall, strong and full of knowledge.



## The Polkadot Family



**Dot** is an adult who cares for the family. Down-to-earth and hard-working, Dot's favourite hobby is beading. Whether it's gloves, moccasins or leather bracelets, Dot loves to spend countless hours creating beautiful beadwork.

**Spotty** is 13 and a bright, cheerful character who loves colour and music. Spotty loves meeting new people and is always making new friends.





## The Capsule Family



**Knack** is an adult who cares for the family. Knack always wears a friendly smile and takes great pride in tackling jobs, working hard and getting family members involved.

**Fixit** is an adult who cares for the family. Fixit loves to repair things and always has a project going on. Fixit's projects don't always work out as planned, but the family is thankful for all that energy.



**Sage** is an adored grandparent and helps care for the family. Sage loves to be in the company of young children. Sage loves taking chances and discovering new things.



**Keenly** is a happy-go-lucky young adult who is excited about life. Keenly is always involved in different hobbies and talks to others about them. Keenly always carries a bag full of useful items, including tools for different hobbies.



**Fones** is a quiet and thoughtful teenager who is always listening to music and plugged into headphones.



**Specs** is a 12-year-old who loves to read and lend a helping hand to others.



**Toof** is a curious seven-year-old who likes to look around the world, taking Bouncy on all sorts of adventures.



**Bouncy** is five and the youngest member of the family. Bouncy loves to play and is full of energy.

# Cultural Pride

Fones goes on a journey of remembering the rich traditions of Aboriginal cultures. Fones meets all the members of the Capsules Families and together they share and celebrate their unique cultures.

**Narrated Message //** *Our heritage is important, we can always be proud of our culture and of who we are. Life is full of challenges, sometimes we can encounter bullying and even racism along the way. This can make us feel bad about ourselves. But we should always remember that we are not alone. We have our families to talk to and to help us. We have our Elders in our communities who can offer us guidance and teach us about our culture. We even have teachers and other adults at school who can offer us support. When we help and support one another, we grow safer. When we help each other learn, we grow stronger together. We have a proud culture; beautiful and unique. Our traditions help us learn about ourselves and enhance our education at home, school and in our community.*

## IDEAS

- Reminding our children that they are not alone, that there are others at home, at school and in our communities whom they can turn to for support. We can help them understand that asking for help and sharing problems makes us stronger.
- There are many adults at home, at school and in the community that we can turn to, to help our children stay safe. With our Elders and others in our communities, we can teach our children about our rich heritage and traditions, and help them develop pride in them. We can remind them that they too can turn to Elders for guidance and support.
- Knowing who we are and understanding our traditions can help us face bullying and racism. Teaching our children about our rich heritage and our traditions can strengthen our ability to face difficult moments.
- Learning at school and learning about our traditions and cultures to make our school experience a better one. We can make connections between learning about our traditions and learning at school. Building a sense of pride that children can depend on as a source of strength when they face bullying and racism.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. How do our children feel when they do not know about their culture and teachings? Why is it useful for our children to be proud of their heritage?
3. How can you help children find adults in their lives—at home or at school—who they can turn to for support?
4. What day-to-day situations could be opportunities to share information about our culture and traditions?
5. How can we bring our culture and heritage into their learning and school life?
6. How can our children's teachers and the school support us in these aims?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What examples of Aboriginal teachings and traditions are part of your students' education (for example, the curriculum, the school's physical environment, etc.)?
3. What more could be done to make Aboriginal teachings more present in your students' education? What benefits could this have?
4. What opportunities are there in your day-to-day work life to incorporate information about Aboriginal cultures and traditions? How can you learn more about these?
5. How might you support Aboriginal families' efforts to strengthen their children's pride in their culture and history?

## Equity and Diversity // Schools and Communities

People are gathered in a big harvest celebration outside the school, illustrating the value and beauty of diversity and feeling included in the school community.

**Narrated Message //** *Diversity, equity and human rights are fundamental values we can all cherish and believe in. Our knowledge, wisdom, experience and traditions can combine to create welcoming, safe, strong and free school communities. When all of us respect each other and work together, we help create learning opportunities that enrich our children's lives, broaden their horizons and enhance their achievements and well-being. Together we can realize the promise of diversity and shape a bright future for all of us. This holds true to the teachings of our ancestors that guide us to respect people from every race, the animals, the land and each other.*

### IDEAS

- Knowing that welcoming everyone in the classroom, at school and in the community is important.
- Sharing information about the difference between 'equality' and 'equity', the value of diversity, the importance of equity and inclusion for student success on all fronts. Knowing how important it is for all students and their families to feel like they belong. Learning how to support diversity, equity and human rights.
- Making sure that everyone feels welcome all the time—in classrooms, schools and communities.
- Creating and taking part in activities that see everyone as important and belonging.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why is it important to respect people of all cultures and origins?
3. How could you learn more about equity and inclusion in your children's classroom or school? How could your children share some ideas about how this might happen?
4. Do you feel that your community's culture and beliefs are included and honoured at your children's school? If not, what are some of the barriers to this happening?
5. What could the school do to further promote and honour equity and inclusion? How can we make sure that all children and their families feel like they belong?
6. What suggestions or personal stories do you have to share around equity and diversity?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What is happening in your classroom and at your school to foster equity and inclusion?
2. How can we help make sure Aboriginal parents feel like they belong? How can we help parents understand the value of equity and inclusive education?
3. How can you encourage parent participation that better reflects the diversity of your school?
4. What strategies do you have that might help strengthen the visibility and belonging of Aboriginal children and families?
5. Who are the key people at your school or board who might help with this issue?

## Safe, Inclusive and Accepting Schools

Bouncy is nervous about starting school and a friendly teacher reaches out, offering a warm greeting. Later, Bouncy makes a new friend. Another teacher chats with Specs, while Toof meets up with old friends. Knack and Fixit look on with satisfaction as all the different members of the school community are welcomed and start their new school year.

**Narrated Message** // *Schools are important places of learning where everyone deserves to be welcomed, feel safe and be included. First Nations, Métis and Inuit children can encounter many cultural challenges when attending public school. This can be difficult for them and for us, their parents and families. Schools can work hard to ensure that they create welcoming, safe and inclusive environments for everyone. We can help them in their efforts by sharing our culture and ensuring they understand our traditional ways. There are school board, school council and community supports that can help us share the ways in which our children learn. A welcoming school is a place where students can learn, grow and reach their full potential. Everyone can play an important role in nurturing a positive school environment where all children, their families and all the people that work there feel like they belong.*

### IDEAS

- Making sure that students and all members of the community feel safe, welcomed and accepted. Actively welcoming all students and their families and making sure they feel like they belong.
- Acknowledging differences, similarities and shared values. Creating a place that shows the beauty and value of diversity.
- Seeing how a welcoming school helps children feel good about themselves and their culture. Honouring and celebrating the many different Indigenous cultures found in Ontario schools.
- Making sure we name and do something to stop bullying in our schools. Knowing the difference between bullying and conflict. Building skills and taking steps toward working together.
- Making sure that positive ways of behaving with each other are in place for all members, young and old, in the school community. Helping others to act in a kind and respectful way, and to help others change. Modelling respectful and open-minded behaviour.

- Looking for family member help and encouraging everyone to get involved at school, in any way they can.

## **QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

### **Family Members**

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What does a safe, welcoming and accepting school look like, sound like and feel like to you?
3. What suggestions do you have for creating a more welcoming and inclusive school?
4. What can the school do to help welcome Aboriginal families and make sure that they feel like they belong?
5. How can you be part of these activities? In what ways could you help?
6. What personal stories do you have to share?

### **School Staff and Community Leaders**

1. What does a safe, inclusive and accepting school look like to you?
2. How can you facilitate a welcoming school community for Aboriginal families? And how can your colleagues, the administration or board help you with this?
3. What ways do you have for honouring cultural differences in your classroom or at large in the school community?
4. What actions have you taken to welcome and include students and families from diverse backgrounds that have worked for you?
5. What ideas do you or your school have for involving Aboriginal families? What ideas do you have to further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and their families?
6. How can you and your school partner with families to nurture safe, welcoming and accepting schools?

# Nurturing Kindness and Empathy

Knack and Toof are looking through a photo album together. We see current and older pictures of the Capsule family in many settings. The photos portray a family who accept each other and treat each other with respect and kindness.

**Narrated Message //** *We are role models for our children, who are reflections of our most important values and culture. Our teachings are based on honesty and truth. We cherish harmony and peace. We have respect for each other, for the land and for the animals and plant life that surrounds us. A great way to encourage kindness is to model these behaviours in our own actions. Our children watch us carefully and observe our relationship with others, how we listen to each other and how we treat each other. When we are kind and caring, and encourage our children to be the same, we instill in them a sense of empathy and help create safe, inclusive and accepting schools.*

## IDEAS

- Realizing that our children are watching our interactions with them and others. Being aware of everyday interactions we have and how they affect our children, for better or for worse. Being positive role models by treating others with care and respect might mean showing how we can apologize and fix the problem when we've made mistakes.
- Accepting that we can be part of the cycle of change, and that we all make mistakes and can fix any harm done.
- Treating each other kindly when we have different views can be hard. Listening carefully and talking respectfully with others even when we disagree can go a long way. Working together we can build caring and accepting homes, schools and communities by fixing problems early and honestly, and with respect.



## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What are some actions that teach children about respect for others?
3. Who are some positive role models in your family, school or wider community? What makes them good role models?
4. Why is it hard to talk with someone you disagree with?
5. Why do you think saying sorry is important? What makes an apology meaningful?
6. Does your school community celebrate kindness and respect for everyone? As an Aboriginal family member do you feel seen or heard in your school community? In what ways?
7. How would you describe a home or school that is safe, caring and inclusive? What characteristics would it have?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. In what ways do you model kindness and empathy in your classroom?
2. What are some of the components of careful listening and healthy communication?
3. How would you describe your school community's conflict resolution practices?
4. Why do you think saying sorry is important? What makes an apology meaningful?
5. How can your school staff contribute to respecting and celebrating diversity? What policies and practices could be implemented to ensure that Aboriginal students and families feel welcome and respected? How could your board support you in these efforts?
6. How would you describe a community that is safe, caring and inclusive? What characteristics would it have?
7. What additional ideas do you have that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

# Positive Role Modelling

Knack and Fixit are looking at a family collage of moments together, of learning, facing challenges and loving times.

**Narrated Message //** *Our children are the key to our future and we are their most important educators and role models. Our teachings are founded on values of honesty and truth. We are inspired by the values and traditions of our ancestors. We have respect for each other, for the land, and for the animal and plant life that surrounds us. We cherish harmony and peace and are proud of our heritage. Guided by our spiritual values, we aspire to attain our highest potential. When we share our traditional knowledge with our children's school we help enhance their personal and academic development.*

## IDEAS

- Taking time to reflect on our interactions with children and each other, while understanding the challenges of being a consistent, positive role model. Sharing information about the impact of parents' behaviour on children's academic success.
- Holding positive thoughts in our imaginations for our children's future (parents and schools working in partnership so that the home and the school can share in these expectations and support learning). Sharing information about the importance of partnering with the school, and how to do it so we work toward that positive future.
- Watching our children be with others to gain insight into their strengths and challenges, and how to offer support.
- Connecting with our children's teachers and the school whenever possible. Getting involved (for example, volunteering for field trips or school activities, joining the School Council, helping with homework and offering encouragement).
- Celebrating successes—even small ones!

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why is it important for us to contribute to our children's education? What is a parent's role in their children's home and school life?
3. How are you a positive role model in your children's life right now? Who else could be a positive role model in your children's life?
4. How can we, as parents, increase our children's chances of success at school?
5. Why might parents not know that they have a role to play?
6. What skills, information and support do parents need to feel confident and motivated in the school environment?
7. What suggestions or personal stories do you have to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. Why might Aboriginal parents have difficulty seeing themselves as possible role models?
2. What information do parents need to increase their motivation and confidence?
3. Are there families at your school that might need extra support and encouragement? How could you reach out to them?
4. How can school staff encourage parents to see themselves as important contributors to their children's education?
5. What additional responses might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?
6. Who are the key people at your school or board who might help with this issue?

## Believing in our Children's Success

Fones is nervous about canoeing alone for the first time. Knack, Fixit and Keenly, along with other family members, provide encouragement, support and ways to take action, rooting for Fones along the way. As a result, Fones approaches the experience with a good attitude and feels able to take on challenges and do well in school and life.

**Narrated Message** // *Life is full of challenges and sometimes those challenges can be intimidating if we face them alone. What we can remember is that we have our families and our community to help us along the way. Our culture helps us to know ourselves—our family and our community help us grow. When each individual feels strong and knows their role, the community grows strong as a whole. We know that when we recognize and believe in our children's abilities and strengths, we provide the building blocks of a lifetime's worth of self-confidence and self-esteem, the foundation of academic and social success.*

### IDEAS

- Trying to find time to help children with homework and projects can be challenging, along with juggling everything we need to do and worry about. Thinking about building this help into everyday life can make it all easier.
- It may be hard to help our children with their school work. Maybe we don't feel sure of ourselves in reading, writing, math or other subjects. Thinking about different skills and talents our family members have to help our children at school can be a way through. Checking in with our children's teachers and getting tips for helping with homework is something else we can try.
- Our help and encouragement can make children feel good about themselves and their efforts to do well at school. Telling them that you see that they are trying and working hard can go a long way.
- Supporting our children by encouraging them to speak openly about their fears and worries, and their hopes and dreams for the future.
- Continuing to believe that our children can learn and do well, even when they are having a hard time.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What ideas do you have for helping your children when they are having difficulty with their school work?
3. Would you like to have more time to talk to your children's teachers or other school staff to work on this?
4. Do you feel you know enough about your children's learning strengths and weaknesses and interests in order to help with school work? What would help you learn more?
5. What could the school do to help you with this?
6. What additional suggestions or personal stories do you have to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What factors reduce parents' ability to help and support their children with their school work?
2. How can your school enhance parents' support for their children?
3. What other strategies might help parents offer support to enhance their children's success at school?
4. Are there families at your school that require additional encouragement or ways to take action to enhance their capacity to support their children? Are there any additional responses that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?
5. Who are the key people at your school or board who might help with this issue?

## A Telephone Call from School

Knack receives a telephone call from Specs' school and panics, thinking that the school is calling with news that the worst has happened. Knack is relieved to hear that Specs is fine; the school is just calling to let parents know about an upcoming field trip.

**Narrated Message** // *Phone calls from school can be a bit intimidating for us parents. We worry about our children when they are away at school and language barriers can sometimes be an issue. For the well-being of our children, there may be many reasons why our children's teacher might contact us. When they called Knack they just wanted to confirm the drop-off time for an upcoming school trip. Active communication with our children's school allows us to support and enhance their academic and social progress.*

### IDEAS

- We might feel nervous or anxious when the school contacts us. Many of us can feel concern about contacting or returning phone calls to the school.
- We might need information about different ways to talk to each other and more skill in building positive home and school relationships.
- It can help to learn about how the school system works and understand who is there to do what and help in different ways.
- Opportunities to connect with the school can be useful: for example, giving the school your email address and telephone number, taking part in parent-teacher meetings, or using the school website to find out about news and activities.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why is it difficult to get calls like these? What are parents concerned about?
3. Why would the school need to contact parents or family members?
4. What are other ways that the school may try to contact adults in the family? Who are the people from the school who might contact you?
5. What could the school do to make these calls easier for parents?
6. What additional suggestions or personal stories do you have to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. Why does good communication with parents improve their likelihood of building positive relationships with the school?
2. Why does good communication with parents improve students' chances of doing well at school?
3. How do Aboriginal families' experiences (such as residential schools) have an impact on our communication with them?
4. How can schools be more aware and think about these issues further to help make families more comfortable?
5. How can teachers and school staff help make parents more comfortable about the calls, letters or emails that the school might send out?
6. What additional responses or strategies might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal families in this regard?
7. Who are the key people at your school or board who could help with this issue? For example, does your school have someone who specifically helps Aboriginal families?

# Storytelling and Reading with Our Children

Bouncy tries to convince Knack to read a story. Bouncy is disappointed because Knack is busy. But later, Knack finds time to read to Bouncy, whose imagination is active. The film ends with a snapshot of the family reading together happily.

**Narrated Message** // *Our oral history is important. Through storytelling we share our values, teach our children and pass down our knowledge to the next generation. There are other ways too that can help us gain knowledge, such as reading. Life is busy and sometimes we forget to take the time to tell stories or read with our children. When we sit together to tell stories we share our culture and valuable teachings with our children. When we read together with them we help them with their education, we enrich their vocabulary and sharpen their minds. Storytelling helps inspire our children with the values, teachings and traditions of our ancestors. Reading with our children stimulates their creativity and broadens their horizons.*

## IDEAS

- It can be challenging juggling the tasks of daily life and also finding time for storytelling and reading. We can encourage storytelling and reading among all family members.
- Understanding that it is important to read and to read with our children in any language. We can read printed materials found at home or other places (signs, labels, directions or recipes); suggest that they read aloud to others; make books (draw pictures or write stories together).
- We may find it hard to read or not be comfortable with English or another language that is not our own. Reading with our children in our mother tongue is also useful. We can find out about services in the community that can help us with reading, such as literacy centres.
- Additional ideas may be to get reading materials (feeling comfortable with libraries); spending time to get to know what libraries offer (books, magazines and other tools such as toys and music); finding out about and taking part in reading activities at libraries (contests, presentations or Story Hour); encouraging children to borrow materials from libraries or even school; allowing children to choose their own books.



## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why is storytelling and reading (particularly when it is done at home) so important for our children's learning?
3. Would you like to spend more time sharing stories and reading with your child? If so, what could help you to do this?
4. Where might you or your children get ahold of reading material to take home?
5. What would help you as parents get ahold of these materials?
6. What additional suggestions or personal stories do you have to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. Why is storytelling and reading (particularly when it is done at home) so important for students' academic success?
2. How might storytelling resonate more with Aboriginal families? Why might reading be challenging?
3. What are the factors that may prevent families from sharing stories or reading with their children on a regular basis?
4. How can the school encourage parents and children to read and share stories more often and together in ways that are practical and appealing?
5. Who are the key people at your school or board who might be available to support reading time at home?
6. Are there families in your class or school that require particular support with regard to this issue? What positive strategies could you or your school develop and implement to help offer more support?
7. What additional responses or strategies might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

# Everyday Success at Home

Toof is learning to build a fire without too much success. Sage offers to pitch in, and contributes some talents and skills. Great results and happy moments come out of the two working together.

**Narrated Message //** *We Elders and adults are important role models to our children and youth. Every day, life offers many natural opportunities for learning. As role models, we can share our knowledge and experience with our children. Working together with our families, our community and our Elders, we can help our children learn, improving their chances of success and well-being, both at home and at school.*

## IDEAS

- Offering to help children with school work is all-important. We might be worried about our ability to help or not having the time to do it. We can think about how we as family members with all of our skills and talents can help our children to do well at school. Asking other members of the family to help out can be positive for home and school life.
- Planning activities that are fun and part of daily life can make a difference. Doing fun activities together helps parents and their children to feel close. Taking advantage of everyday moments for talking and learning is also worthwhile.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why is helping with children's homework and projects important for our children to do well at school?
3. Would you like to have more opportunities to talk to your children's teachers or other school staff about how you might do this?
4. Which skills, talents and experiences do you have that could be useful in helping your children with school work?
5. Are there ways the school can help parents get hold of more information or help?
6. Do you have any suggestions or personal stories to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. Why is it important for family members to help students with homework and projects? How do you imagine this happening?
2. How can teachers and school staff encourage parents to understand the positive impact of getting involved? How can we encourage them to do so?
3. Do you think some families might be reluctant to do so? If so, why?
4. Are there families in your class or school that require particular support with this?
5. What are the positive ways to take action that you or your school might develop and implement to help offer this support? What additional responses and strategies might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members in this regard?
6. Who are the key people at your school or board who might be available to help out?

# Creating a Space for Study

Specs needs a place to do homework and so a workspace is created just for this. Still, Specs can't concentrate with all the distractions. Fixit tries to help create a more tranquil space so that Specs can concentrate and work without difficulty.

**Narrated Message** // *Having a place where we can concentrate to do our work without distractions is nice. At home, we can help our children improve at school by providing them with a suitable space to study. Not all of us have a lot of space in our homes though, so finding a place to concentrate can sometimes be difficult. But if we all work together, are respectful and share, we can create a comfortable setting with minimal distraction. As parents we cannot become too distracting ourselves. Let's remember to always allow them access to our help and support. Listening to our children's input when we help them to create space and time for school work, culture, family and fun, can increase their interest in applying themselves to their studies and help them achieve balance.*

## IDEAS

- Finding physical space to work with. There may be many needs for space in the family. Thinking about community centres and libraries for learning space (and showing children other learning environments).
- Being aware of the importance of having appropriate study space for children. Helping children organize their time and create their learning space.
- Asking children to help organize their own space, and if possible, allowing them to have some control over where it is.
- Asking other members of the family to respect their learning space. Organizing set times when family members will try to not interrupt and keep the noise down.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why is it important to create a workspace at home?
3. How could this workspace be organized in your home? How have you managed so far? What success have you had?
4. Are there things that the school could do to help with this?
5. What other public spaces exist in the community where your children could do school work?
6. Do you have any suggestions or personal stories to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What are ways to take action that can help students access study space?
2. What are the factors that might affect this?
3. Are there Aboriginal families at your school that might need support in this regard? Have you contacted them to discuss this?
4. How could a teacher or the school help communicate the importance of appropriate study space for students to parents?
5. Are there study spaces at school or in the community that students and parents could be made aware of?
6. Who are the key people at your school or board who might help with this issue?
7. What additional responses and strategies might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

## Working Together, Learning from Each Other

Toof is struggling with an arithmetic problem. Knack wants to help but is also having trouble with it. Knack meets with the teacher and makes a connection between traditional knowledge and the textbook, and is now able to help Toof, to everyone's satisfaction.

**Narrated Message** // *There are many ways of learning. We learn through our culture, the land, our stories and by working together. We can also work with teachers to improve our children's education at school. If we share our ways of learning with our children's teachers we can help them understand our culture better and the ways in which our children learn from us. In turn, we can learn ourselves how to best help support our children's academic success. A partnership between home and school can improve our children's well-being, in school and in general. Working together we can create a healthy learning and living environment.*

### IDEAS

- Sharing the importance of helping children with school work.
- Asking teachers and school staff for help and feeling comfortable doing it. Checking in with teachers about the best ways to help children with their homework. Knowing more about expectations, learning goals, teaching ways to take action and the curriculum (what is being taught).
- Considering different skills and talents family members have that might help to make a child successful at school.
- Exploring online tools and community resources to help children with their homework.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What are other ways that parents and teachers might work together to help students when they are struggling with school work?
3. Would you like to have more time to work with teachers or other school staff to work on this?
4. How could you know more about your children's school work and school life?
5. Are there things that the school might do to help you get more information or support?
6. Do you have any suggestions or personal stories to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. Why might parents and family members need to get help with their children's school work?
2. How can we help parents to feel more comfortable reaching out to us?
3. What are other mechanisms that might support parent and teacher collaboration and enhance student success?
4. Are there Aboriginal families at your school that require particular encouragement or ways to take action for supporting their children?
5. How can the teacher or the school help enhance parents' confidence and motivation to help their children with school work?
6. What additional responses and strategies might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

# Parent-Teacher Meeting

Fixit and Knack are anxious about the upcoming parent-teacher meeting at school. They have never gone to one and they are not sure what will happen. By watching an old-fashioned educational film they learn more.

**Narrated Message //** *Parents have a lot of valuable information to share with the school about their children. Sometimes meeting with school staff can make parents and families nervous because of bad memories of residential schools, worrying about discrimination or about not being understood because of language. It takes a whole village to raise a child. Our children's education is an important process that is shared between home, school and the community. Sometimes it can be hard to make sure that our children's needs and interests are looked after. There are programs and community supports for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples that can help us to meet those needs. Meetings with our children's teachers have a real impact on our children's lives—they can help improve their chances of success on all fronts.*

## IDEAS

- Practical problems may make it difficult to go to the school (for example, work, transportation, child care). Nervousness about going to the school and talking to teachers and other school staff may also play a part.
- Children may not want their parents to be involved at school. Talking to children about school meetings in a positive way to make changes that are good for them can help.
- Schools can share information about parent-teacher meetings—what they are for, how they work. Families can learn about the importance of these meetings on children's success at school.
- Schools and parents can discuss shared, realistic high expectations for children.
- Finding ways to get involved: trying to go to as many school activities as possible, visiting the school's website often, using the school agenda to learn more about activities and your children's school life.
- Feeling free to ask for another time to talk to teachers or other school staff as needed—in person or on the phone.



## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. How can attending parent-teacher meetings be important for student success? What additional questions do you have about these meetings?
3. Would you like to have more time to talk to your children's teachers or other school staff?
4. Who at the school might have more information about your child? How would you get this information?
5. Do you have any suggestions or personal stories to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. Why is it important for parents to attend parent-teacher meetings?
2. Which factors reduce attendance at parent-teacher meetings?
3. How can the school encourage parents to attend parent-teacher meetings?
4. What might support parent and teacher communication to enhance student success?
5. Are there Aboriginal families at your school that may require particular encouragement or information? What are positive practices that could be developed and put in place?
6. What additional responses and strategies might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

## Joining School Council

Fixit has been invited to join the School Council. Fixit has no idea what this will involve or if Fixit has the right skills and know-how to become a member. During the film, Fixit learns about the role of the Council and how Fixit might take part.

**Narrated Message** // *Councils are very important in our culture, they help us organize and govern our communities. Schools also have councils that parents can join. School Councils can give everyone a chance to improve the school community by sharing our wealth of knowledge, talent and experience. By joining a School Council we help support a flourishing school community and our children reach their highest potential.*

### IDEAS

- Parents face challenges juggling the responsibilities of daily life. We can get involved in different ways to support the Council, if we don't have much time.
- Barriers (for example, comfort with reading and writing, or speaking language) among adults can make it hard to join School Council.
- We can learn information about how to join School Council and why it is important for our children.
- We may attend one meeting as an observer, just to see what a School Council meeting is like.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why is it important for parents to join School Council?
3. What factors might prevent them from doing so?
4. What skills, information and support do parents need to be more likely to join the Council? What can we do as parents to help other parents to provide these things?
5. Are you a member of School Council, or have you ever been? What made you decide to join?
6. What did you get from the experience?
7. Do you have any suggestions or personal stories to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What information do parents need about how and why to join School Council?
2. What are the factors that might encourage or prevent their participation? How can a teacher or the school help encourage parents to join the Council?
3. Are there Aboriginal families at your school that might need encouragement to join? Have you reached out to them to discuss this possibility?
4. Who are key people at your school or board who might have a positive influence in this regard?
5. What role can students play in encouraging parents to join?

## Supporting, Not Blaming

When Fones and a friend see Specs approaching, they throw a banana peel on the floor. Specs slips on it and goes flying. Specs looks embarrassed. Later, Keenly sees that Specs is upset and asks about it. When Specs shares the story, Keenly listens and helps Specs come up with ideas for dealing with it. The next day when the same thing happens, Specs responds assertively.

**Narrated Message** // *Teasing and bullying are two very different things. In our cultures we may tease each other sometimes as a way of acknowledging and accepting one another in our communities. But this kind of teasing is done with love. Bullying is very different. Sometimes we try to find a logical reason for bullying behaviour. Sometimes we may even wonder if the person being bullied is to blame. Bullying can happen to anyone for any reason. Let's remind our children that it's never their fault. Being proud of who we are and celebrating our differences will boost our children's self-confidence and have a lasting impact. Nobody deserves to be bullied—ever.*

### IDEAS

- Children who are being bullied may think that they are somehow at fault. Feeling blamed for being hurt makes the bad feelings worse. We can let children know that no one ever deserves to be bullied.
- Providing safe places for those who are bullied to get help is all-important.
- Coming to a better understanding of why some people bully others is important. Children who bully others target a person's difference, which they see as a weakness.
- Fear and shame can prevent those who are bullied from asking for help. Family members' roles can include providing support and helping children feel better about themselves. Understanding the emotional and/or physical harm that can come from being bullied is important.
- Feeling proud of our cultures and our differences is necessary for kids to feel better about themselves and heal from bullying. Finding ways to help children believe in our cultures and our differences is part of feeling better about themselves.
- Creating communities where bullying, racism and all forms of abuse and injustice are not allowed, and if it occurs, working together to deal with it in a positive way.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What are some of the reasons a child from our Aboriginal communities might think they are to blame when someone bullies them or is racist towards them?
3. How would you describe how bullying and racism make children feel?
4. Why do you think children might target children who appear to be weak? How might you prevent others from bullying or being racist?
5. How would you help and encourage healing if your child has been bullied or experienced racism? How might teachers and the school help you with this?
6. Can you think of some ways that you and the school could share the message that nobody deserves to be bullied or targeted by racism (or any form of social injustice)?
7. Do you have any suggestions or personal stories to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. Have you observed the impact of being bullied on some of your students? How would you describe this? How is this different or similar to when an Aboriginal student is bullied?
2. How might you improve the self-esteem of a bullied Aboriginal student in your classroom? Are there ways you could partner with Aboriginal family members in this effort?
3. Why do you think people that bully often prey on what they perceive to be others' weaknesses or vulnerabilities? As an educator, how might you help prevent this?
4. How does your school provide safe ways for students who have been bullied to get help and support? What additional ways to take action are needed to reach out to and support Aboriginal students?
5. Does your school clearly and consistently communicate the message that nobody deserves to be bullied? In what way? How do these ways of taking action specifically help to prevent racist bullying (or bullying based on other forms of social injustice)? How could the board help with this?
6. Are there any additional responses that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

# Listening Carefully

Knack is on the couch and notices Specs under a rainy, black cloud looking very upset. Knack shows interest in hearing how Specs is doing. Specs slowly opens up and tells Knack about the problem. Knack shows concern and support by being attentive, and listening carefully. Specs seems to feel better after talking with Knack and coming up with ideas about how to handle things.

**Narrated Message** // *Our councils, talking and sharing circles, and meeting with our Elders are places where we come together to talk, discuss, tell stories and listen to one another. Listening is important in our culture. One of the most important things we can do is to listen to our children. We can change things for the better not by taking charge but by listening carefully and nurturing caring relationships with children who feel vulnerable.*

## IDEAS

- There are many ways we can communicate clearly with our children, and let them know that we are there for them. Finding time in our busy lives to check in with our children and find out how they are is an important kind of support.
- It is important to give children time and space to move at their own pace, share their stories and help them come up with ways to deal with their problems. We can help children develop problem-solving skills, rather than rushing to do the thinking for them.
- We can take time to notice when our children seem worried or sad.
- Finding a quiet, private space to talk.
- We can listen carefully when children speak and tell us their problems.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. How would you know that your child is struggling with a problem?
3. Why is it important to listen to children talk about what has happened to them?
4. How would you describe “listening carefully”? How is this different from other kinds of listening? How would you describe it?
5. Is it difficult to listen this way? If so, in what way?
6. What kinds of questions encourage children to come up with ways to think about and handle a difficult situation? What questions help them learn and grow?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What might encourage Aboriginal students to share concerns they have? What are the barriers that might make it difficult?
2. How would you describe listening carefully? What are the challenges to putting it into practice as an educator?
3. What can we offer Aboriginal families in our school that would help them when talking with their children? What kinds of supports might staff need in order to support Aboriginal family members?
4. Are there any additional responses that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

# Problem-Solving Together

Bouncy is hiding in the dirt, unhappy and out of sorts. Keenly reaches out to Bouncy, and the two of them approach Sage who listens tenderly, helping Bouncy recover.

**Narrated Message** // *Life has many challenges. Sometimes children can feel troubled and find it difficult to talk to us. Getting support from our friends, family, Elders and community is an important first step toward finding solutions. Our Elders are there to listen, offer guidance and help problem-solve. It is important that we be approachable, and recognize how much courage it takes for children to share their problems.*

## IDEAS

- Sometimes it is not easy to talk to others about problems; we can feel helpless and alone. When we are able to talk about our problems with others, it can help us heal.
- It can be difficult but it is important to stay calm and listen deeply to our children. This gives them the message that their feelings and ideas are important, that they still have a say and that you are there for them. Breaking down barriers by caring, listening and offering support is a way for peers and adults to help.
- Getting upset or rushing to fix a problem can result in children feeling more powerless. Listening carefully and with compassion helps children to talk freely. Allowing children to tell the story at their own pace and in their own way can go a long way. Encouraging children to develop their own ideas, and to learn how to problem-solve builds their strengths.



## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. How can we support our children when they come to us with a problem?
3. How could a teacher or the school help you to help your child feel better about themselves and learn how to problem-solve?
4. What kinds of questions would help children learn to reflect and problem-solve?
5. What are some characteristics of a positive role model? Who are the positive role models in your family or in your community?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What can you do to help improve students' self-esteem and their problem-solving skills?
2. What are important ways to take action when working with Aboriginal students?
3. What kinds of questions would be useful to ask in helping students develop their problem-solving skills?
4. How can you and your school work in partnership with Aboriginal children and their families to support them in building their self-worth and confidence?
5. How can we model positive problem-solving skills in our classrooms?
6. Are there any additional responses that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

## Bullying Hurts

Fones is waiting for the school bus with a group of students, including Toof. Spotty arrives with a hand drum and is happily playing it. Fones and another student begin to bully Spotty. They grab and throw the drum away, and record a video of Spotty crying, which they post online. Many of the students watch it and laugh, while others look on uncomfortably. Spotty clearly feels hurt and lonely.

**Narrated Message //** *Having self worth is important for each of us. When our children venture into the world they can often find cultural discrimination and bullying. This can undermine their sense of self worth. Discrimination and bullying of any kind is serious. The intention to hurt someone is an act of aggression. Discrimination and bullying cause pain and can leave a lasting effect for everyone involved.*

### IDEAS

- Understanding that being bullied can cause physical and emotional pain. Those who are bullied can feel lonely, alone and afraid.
- When bullying means attacks on who we are as Indigenous peoples, it can be especially difficult and painful.
- People who see the bullying happening are involved in many ways, and are sometimes part of the bullying; oftentimes when they don't really want to be.
- Those who are bullied, as well as those who see the bullying happen, may be afraid to say something to the people who are doing the bullying or to get help. They can feel very upset and nervous.
- Bullying via phone and the internet is common and is known as cyberbullying. It is not acceptable under Ontario's Education Act.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Who are the different people involved in the bullying?
3. What do the different people seem to be feeling?
4. Some of the students seem worried but don't seem to be doing anything. What is happening?
5. How might this bullying harm the people involved?
6. How is cyber-bullying different from other forms of bullying?
7. How is racist bullying different from other forms of bullying?
8. Do you have any stories you would like to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What do we see happening in this film? Who are the different people involved?
2. How might this incident harm the people involved? How about the school or classroom climate, especially for Aboriginal students?
3. Do you see much bullying in your classroom or at school? Are you aware of such incidents?
4. Do students approach you about bullying incidents? How do you handle these situations?
5. What could you do to help students feel comfortable getting help?
6. Have you addressed cyber-bullying specifically at your school? What are some of the unique challenges with cyber-bullying?
7. What are some of the unique consequences and challenges with racist bullying? Have you addressed racism and other forms of social injustice specifically at your school?
8. Are there any additional responses that might further support Aboriginal children and their needs?

## Support for a Child Who Is Being Bullied

At home, Dot notices that Spotty is upset. Spotty shows the video with the bullying incident. Dot is very angry, and then manages to calm down and be there for Spotty, listening carefully. Spotty feels better as the problem is shared and a plan is created together.

**Narrated Message //** *It takes a lot of courage for children to speak about bullying. A child who is being bullied needs caring and tenderness, along with reassurance that it is not their fault. It's important to give them space, listen carefully, reassure them, and be their guide. Let's invite children to tell us in their own words what happened and how they feel. When they are able to express themselves and find their own solutions, they take an important step toward rebuilding their feelings of self worth.*

### IDEAS

- Bullying is a real problem for children. Opening up and talking about being bullied can be scary and hard.
- Staying calm when we learn that our child has been bullied can be hard, too. It is important to know that we are acting as role models and guides, rather than rushing in to solve our children's problems.
- Being there when our children have a problem is all-important. We can try to stay calm and focus on the needs of our children, and listen carefully, rather than reacting, when children speak to us about bullying.
- Leaving space and time for children to tell their story, in their own words, in their own time, can really help. Encouraging them to come up with their own ideas may mean the results are more positive.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why do you think it can be hard for children to talk about being bullied?
3. What could we do to encourage children to feel comfortable about sharing their problems?
4. How do you think a child might act if we react strongly when they come to us with a problem? How might they feel?
5. Where and how could you get help for your own feelings about your child being bullied? What kind of help would you need the most?
6. How can teachers and others at the school and in the community help if your child is being bullied?
7. What are the questions you could ask to help children come up with ways to deal with their problem? What are the benefits of having your child come up with positive ways to deal with it?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What kind of listening behaviours would encourage a student to tell their full story about bullying?
2. Why do you think it can be hard for Aboriginal students to open up about being bullied?
3. How could you and your school offer assistance to Aboriginal family members who learn that their children have been involved in a bullying incident?
4. Do you or your school have a process in place if family members come forward about bullying? What kinds of responses might be helpful?
5. Are there any additional responses that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal family members?

## Support for a Child Who Has Witnessed Bullying

Toof goes to eat breakfast, looking troubled about having seen Fones bullying another student. When Knack asks what's wrong, Toof opens up and talks about it, discussing ideas for stepping in. Later, when Fones is bullying again, Toof steps in assertively and reaches out to include everyone in a game.

**Narrated Message //** *We all have a responsibility to watch out for each other. Seeing someone being bullied can be frightening and painful. Fear of becoming the next target or not knowing what to do might stop children from reaching out and helping someone else. Listening carefully to our children as they open up to us about their experiences, their fears and concerns can make a real difference. Encouraging our children to be kind and courageous allows them to stand up for others making a positive difference in their lives. When we look out for each other, we all become stronger together.*

### IDEAS

- Children often don't know how to stop the bullying. They can feel upset and nervous after seeing it, and guilty for not being able to stop it.
- Children might not speak up for others for fear of being bullied. They may be scared to tell a parent or teacher about bullying, and afraid of being blamed.
- Providing safe and helpful places for children who have seen bullying to ask for help is all-important. Making sure that there are adults who are trained and available so that children can get help and speak out (at home, at school, in the community) is useful.
- Figuring the situation out together to help children come up with their own ideas to help will more likely make for positive results. Figuring out helpful ways with children to help them feel confident and able to stop bullying is part of this.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What issues do you think might prevent students who have seen bullying from trying to step in to stop the bullying?
3. How can we encourage children to share a problem like this with us?
4. If our children tell us that they have witnessed bullying, how might we respond?
5. What kinds of questions can we ask children to help them think of ways to stand up for others?
6. What are some ways that might be useful for children to help stop the bullying?
7. How could teachers and your school community help support parents put these ideas into place?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What do you think prevents students who witness bullying from coming forward? How can the school address these challenges?
2. What ideas do you have about how you and your school can provide a safe place for children who witness bullying to come forward?
3. What kinds of questions can we ask to help students to reflect and think of ideas for supporting others being bullied?
4. How could you and your school support parents who approach you with concerns about their children witnessing bullying?
5. Are there any additional responses that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

## Support for a Child Who Is Bullying Others

Fixit hears the phone ring and picks it up. Fones enters the room, laughing at a cell phone video. Fixit looks at the image on the phone of Spotty, looking very concerned. Fones suddenly changes expression, and when Fixit sees that Fones is feeling badly, the two talk together about it. Fones deletes the video and the next day apologizes to Spotty.

**Narrated Message //** *It can be hard to discover your child is bullying others. During difficult moments with our children, it is even more important that we, ourselves, become positive role models. As adults, we can take responsibility for our actions and encourage our children to do the same. We can reassure them that they can change. These are important learning opportunities. Helping guide our children toward reflection and making better choices shows them that we believe in their ability to change. Our belief in them can mean everything.*

### IDEAS

- We can make sure that our children understand that their bullying behaviour is wrong and hurts others, while making sure they know we are there for them. We can ask questions to help children think about how the person they bullied might be feeling right now.
- We can try to understand why they are bullying. We can stay calm, taking time to breathe and manage our feelings when learning and thinking about what has happened. Thinking about what to do when we learn that our children have been bullying others, in a thoughtful and reflective way, ensures that we are positive role models.
- We can believe and communicate that our children can change and repair this situation—making use of this important learning opportunity. Helping our children think about and change their behaviour helps them grow as a person. We can remind ourselves that everyone makes mistakes and that making it right is possible.
- Using empowerment listening techniques to better understand the behaviour. Helping our children to change and fix the harm done. Helping children to think of their own ideas for next steps to fix the situation, while being respectful of the child who has been bullied.



## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What are some of the feelings you might have if you learned your child is bullying others? Who could you go to for help?
3. How can you listen in a way that will help you understand why your child is bullying others?
4. How could you let your child know you don't like their bullying, but still care about them and believe in their ability to change?
5. What questions could you ask your child to help them find ways to think about and fix the situation?
6. Do you have any personal stories to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. What are some of the challenges you face when you need to tell a parent that their child has been bullying others?
2. How can you and your school provide support to a parent in this kind of situation?
3. What have you found beneficial in helping a student who has been bullying understand the harmful impact of their behaviour, or ways to repair the situation? How can we help other children involved?
4. What are additional responses that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members in this instance?
5. Does your school have any ongoing anti-bullying programs or processes in place? If yes, what kinds of activities, interventions and support do you offer students who have been bullying others?
6. What steps can we take to avoid shame and blame and then work toward a real change? How can we help students who are bullying learn to reflect, learn, grow and change?

## Approaching the School

Spotty and Dot walk to school together. Spotty is looking worried and is reassured by Dot. At the school they knock on the teacher's door, and are invited in. Dot encourages Spotty to share and the teacher listens carefully, bringing Dot into the conversation as well. The film ends with the three of them deep in discussion, with Spotty leading it.

**Narrated Message //** *It is important that we work together with schools to ensure our children's well-being. Cultural and language barriers, racism and past discrimination can sometimes make it difficult for us to approach schools. But there are programs and support for us as First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples that can help us become more involved. We can collaborate as parents and teachers, acting as positive role models. Approaching a teacher when our child is being bullied, bullying others or watching it happen is difficult. We all have a role to play in preventing bullying. Working together, we can create more caring and positive learning environments for our children.*

### IDEAS

- Children might feel afraid to stop the bullying or ashamed of not having stopped it. They may be afraid to ask for help. It is useful for our children and for us to know who to talk to at the school about bullying
- Available and caring adults, making the time and space to talk about bullying and other problems, can change everything.
- It is important to allow children to take the lead in talking about the bullying that happened to them. Listening carefully will make a difference.
- When we know we are not alone and that the school will help us, we can be more helpful to our children. Adults can work together and act as positive role models to young people.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

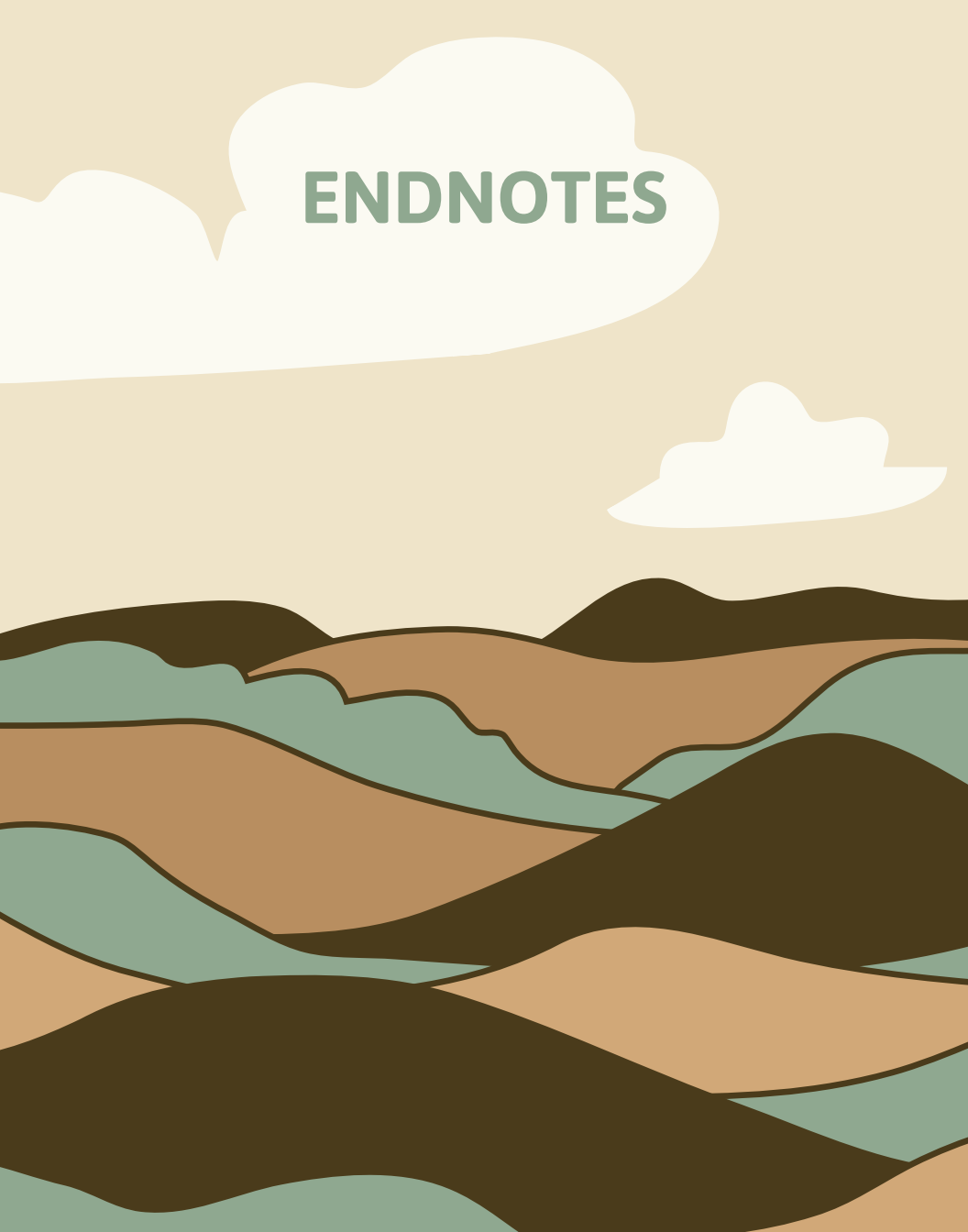
### Family Members

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What might help you to talk about a problem with a teacher or principal?
3. What are ways to make sure that children take the lead in talking and planning when we reach out to others?
4. How can parents and teachers listen carefully and help our children problem-solve?
5. Do you have any personal stories to share?

### School Staff and Community Leaders

1. How did the teacher in this film demonstrate support for the parent and student?
2. Do you have a space and time when parents and their children can come to discuss concerns privately? What are some of the challenges of being accessible in this way?
3. How can your school and the wider school community support you in creating opportunities for dialogue on bullying?
4. Do you know of strategies for building strong positive relationships between school staff and parents?
5. Can you share an experience where you felt you worked well with a parent in helping to support a student involved in a bullying incident? Is there anything you might do differently?
6. Are there any additional responses that might further support and meet the specific needs of Aboriginal children and family members?

# ENDNOTES



1. Provided by the Métis Nation of Ontario.
2. “Children with involved parents have higher academic achievement. Not only do students score higher on tests but they are more prepared to start school and have a greater likelihood of graduating.” (From online article *Parental Involvement and Children’s Academic Success*. Found at [familyfacts.org](http://familyfacts.org).)
3. See online article *Academic Success, What Determines It?* at [tvoparents.tvoparents.org](http://tvoparents.tvoparents.org).
4. For more on the subject, see the Ministry’s handout, *Bullying, We Can All Help To Stop It*. Found at [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/multi/english/BullyingEN.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/multi/english/BullyingEN.pdf) (2013).
5. For more on the subject, see the Ministry’s handout, *An Overview Of Aboriginal Health in Canada*. Found at [nccah-ccnsa.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/101/abororiginal\\_health\\_web.pdf](http://nccah-ccnsa.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/101/abororiginal_health_web.pdf) by the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (2013).
6. “The proportion of Aboriginal adults who report experiencing discrimination while attending school or classes is substantially higher than that of non-Aboriginal adults.” (From *Report on Equality Rights of Aboriginal People*, Canadian Human Rights Commission. Found at [chrc-ccdp.ca/eng/content/report-equality-rights-aboriginal-people](http://chrc-ccdp.ca/eng/content/report-equality-rights-aboriginal-people).)
7. “Regardless of sex, there is a higher proportion of hate crime reported by victimized Aboriginal adults compared to victimized non-Aboriginal adults.” (From *Report on Equality Rights of Aboriginal People*, Canadian Human Rights Commission. Found at [chrc-ccdp.ca/eng/content/report-equality-rights-aboriginal-people](http://chrc-ccdp.ca/eng/content/report-equality-rights-aboriginal-people).)
8. Subsection on lateral violence adapted from brochure by Native Women’s Association of Canada, *Aboriginal Lateral Violence*. Found at [nwac.ca/files/reports/AboriginalLateralViolence%20-%20web%20version.pdf](http://nwac.ca/files/reports/AboriginalLateralViolence%20-%20web%20version.pdf).
9. For more information on internalized racism see *Women’s Experience of Racism: How Race and Gender Interact* at [criaw-icref.ca/sites/criaw/files/WomensExperienceofracism.pdf](http://criaw-icref.ca/sites/criaw/files/WomensExperienceofracism.pdf).
10. See *Where Are the Children?* Found at [wherearethekids.ca](http://wherearethekids.ca), and *1000 Conversations*. Found at [1000conversations.ca](http://1000conversations.ca).

11. This subsection (Residential Schools) based on *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Found at [trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec\\_Summary\\_2015\\_05\\_31\\_web\\_o.pdf](http://trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec_Summary_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf).
12. *Working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Families Who Have Experienced Family Violence: A Practical Guide for Child Welfare Professionals*. Found at [oacas.org/pubs/oacas/fn\\_eng\\_guide.pdf](http://oacas.org/pubs/oacas/fn_eng_guide.pdf).
13. See Statistics Canada's online resume *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit*. Found at [statcan.gc.ca](http://statcan.gc.ca).
14. For more information, see *Aboriginal Child Welfare in Ontario – A Discussion Paper Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare* (2011), p. 50.
15. See Ontario Ministry of Education's Capacity Building Series, *Improving the Educational Outcomes of Children and Youth in Care* (Special Edition #37, August 2014).
16. See 2012 Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview. Found at [publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsracs/pblctns/2012-ccrs/index-eng.aspx#c11](http://publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsracs/pblctns/2012-ccrs/index-eng.aspx#c11).
17. See COPA's article about rights for children with parents in prison. Found at [info-copa.tumblr.com/post/75478900143/the-rights-of-children-with-parents-in-prison](http://info-copa.tumblr.com/post/75478900143/the-rights-of-children-with-parents-in-prison).
18. Information on understanding and preventing bullying in this guide was adapted from COPA's guide on bullying prevention for parents, part of the WE ALL BELONG toolkit. (Order from COPA's eBoutique: [infocopa.com](http://infocopa.com).)
19. For more information, see [edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/SafeAccepSchools.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/SafeAccepSchools.pdf).
20. See online article *Why You Should Work on Your Listening Skills*. Found at [life.familyeducation.com/parenting/communication/45281.html](http://life.familyeducation.com/parenting/communication/45281.html).



# A CIRCLE OF CARING

This guide book is part of COPA's Circle of Caring project designed in collaboration with First Nations, Métis and Inuit families, community leaders and elders. Topics include cultural pride, helping our children succeed, understanding bullying and discrimination, getting involved in school life, and nurturing safe and healthy schools and communities.

Order a toolkit at [infocopa.com](http://infocopa.com) or see materials online at [copahabitat.ca](http://copahabitat.ca), COPA's website for parents and caregivers.

# COPA

COPA is a Francophone non-profit organization founded in 1995. We provide children, families and schools with unique multimedia educational resources, as well as training in the area of abuse prevention, and equity and inclusion.

COPA's unique approach is based on individual and collective empowerment, founded on principles of social justice to bring about positive social change. COPA cares deeply about human rights, especially those of children and other marginalized groups.

