

Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families

The over-representation of First Nations children and youth in child welfare care has been a long-standing problem in Saskatchewan and across our country.

In 2005, Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders came together to develop principles to guide the re-visioning of child welfare services for Aboriginal children in Canada and the United States.

The Touchstone of Hope principles (shown on back) are meant to be interpreted within distinct cultures and contexts of Aboriginal communities according to a four stage reconciliation process:

Relating

Working respectfully together to design, implement and monitor the new child welfare system.

Restoring

Doing what we can to redress the harm and making changes to ensure it does not happen again.

Truth Telling

Telling the story of child welfare as it has affected Indigenous children, youth and families.

Acknowledging

Learning from the past, seeing one another with new understanding, and recognizing the need to move forward on a new path.

Reconciliation cannot be classified as a single event. Rather, reconciliation is a movement carried forth through events, moments between individuals, and most importantly, through relationship building.

The Touchstones of Hope are intended to be infused throughout the child welfare system from research to practice, and the movement encourages building and sustaining relationships with others devoted to ensuring that Aboriginal children are healthy and living in dignity and respect.

To that end, the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth has adopted the Touchstones as part of our guiding principles when promoting child welfare system change and working with Aboriginal children, youth and families.



Content adapted from:

<http://www.fncaringociety.ca>

Resources:

*Reconciliation in Child Welfare:
Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous
Children, Youth, and Families*

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TOUCHSTONES OF HOPE

Principles to Guide Reconciliation in Child Welfare

Self-Determination

- Indigenous peoples are in the best position to make decisions that affect Indigenous children, youth, families and communities.
- Indigenous Peoples are in the best position to lead the development of child welfare laws, policies, research and practice that affects their communities.
- Non-Indigenous child welfare workers need the capacity and understanding to work effectively with Indigenous communities, experts, children, youth and families.
- Only adequate and sustained resources will enable Indigenous communities to implement self-determination in child welfare.
- The role of children and young people in making decisions that affect them must be recognized.

Culture and Language

- Culture is ingrained in all child welfare theory, research, policy and practice. There is no culturally neutral practice or practitioner.
- Child welfare policy and practice are most effective when they reflect and reinforce the intrinsic and distinct aspects of Indigenous cultures.
- Guidelines and evaluation processes for culturally appropriate child welfare are strongest when established by Indigenous communities, reflecting local culture and context.
- Language is the essence of culture, and child welfare knowledge, policy and practice are most relevant when expressed in the language of the community served.

Holistic Approach

- Child welfare approaches that reflect the reality of the whole child preserve the continuity of relationships and recognize the child is shaped by her/his culture (including traditions, spirituality and social customs), environment, social relationships and specific abilities and traits.
- Effective child welfare services take a lifelong approach to making decisions, and give due consideration to both short- and long-term impacts of interventions.
- Relevant child welfare interventions acknowledge that non-Indigenous and Indigenous children and youth are citizens of the world. This means that the child welfare system must ensure all children and youth in their care have opportunities to understand, interact with, and respect peoples of different cultures.

Structural Interventions

- Protecting the safety of children and youth must include resolving risk at the level of the child, family and community. Without redress of structural risks, there is little chance that the number of Indigenous children and youth in care will be reduced.
- Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, child welfare providers should not remove children or youth from their homes due to poverty. Impoverished families must be provided with the economic and social supports necessary to safely care for their children and youth.
- Social workers must learn to differentiate between structural (also known as distal) risks and family risks to a child or youth, and develop meaningful responses to both.

- Substance misuse is a major problem, and child welfare must develop programs to redress neglect arising from parental substance abuse—preferably in tandem with culturally based addictions experts and services—within the context of the economic poverty of many communities.

Non Discrimination

- Indigenous children and youth receiving child welfare services should not receive inferior services because they are Indigenous.
- Indigenous peoples are entitled to equal access to child welfare resources that are responsive to their needs, and the unique cultural context of their experience.
- Indigenous peoples are entitled to equal access to ancillary resources related to child welfare, such as services supported by the voluntary sector, corporate sector, and all levels of government.
- Indigenous ways of knowledge must be given full credence when child welfare work is carried out with Indigenous children, youth and their families, and Indigenous interventions used as a first priority.



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