

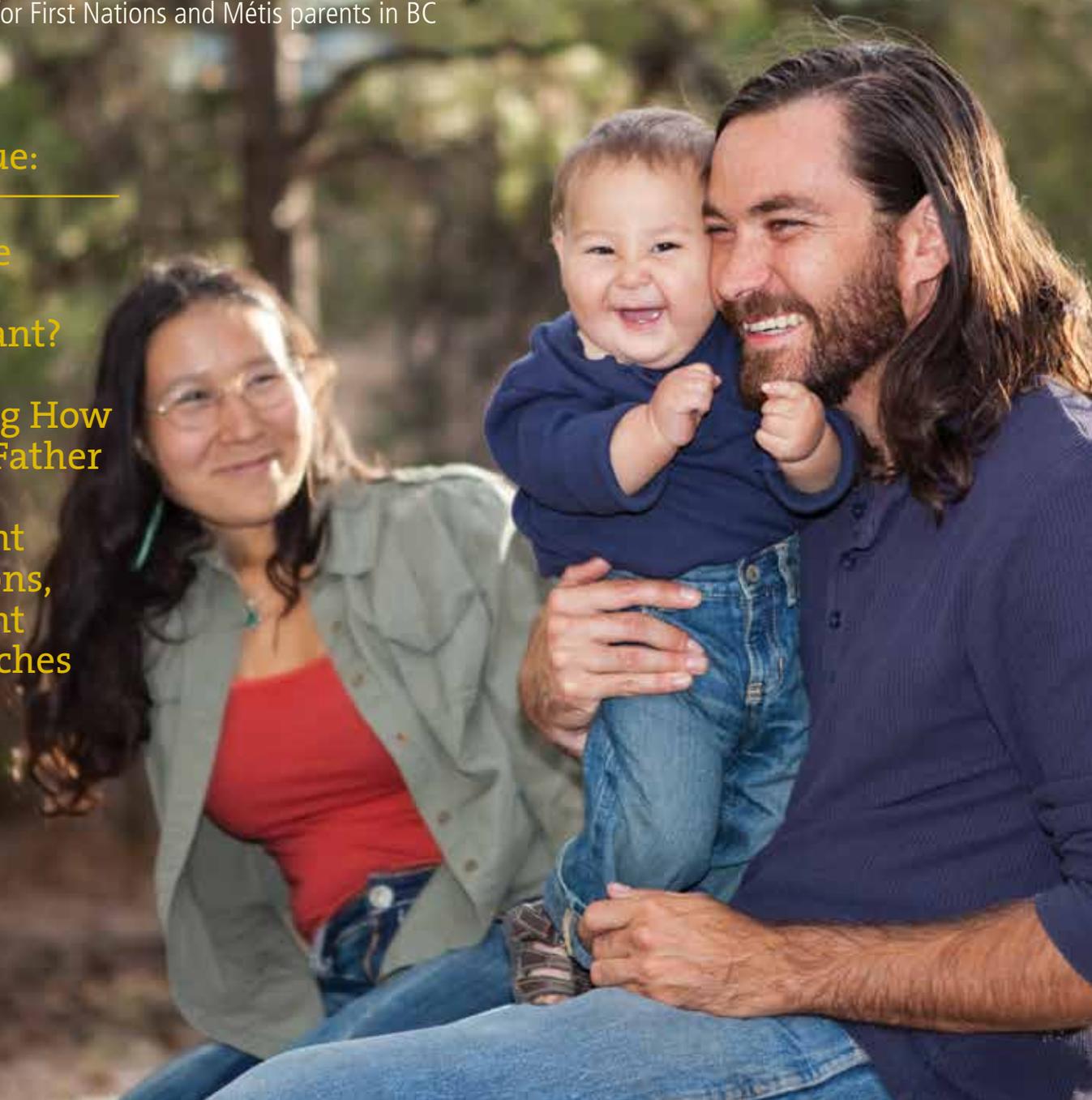


Fatherhood is Forever

A resource booklet about fathering
for First Nations and Métis parents in BC

In this issue:

- » **Why are Fathers Important?**
- » **Learning How to Be a Father**
- » **Different Situations, Different Approaches**



How Was This Resource Developed?

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

Many people contributed to the development of this resource. They generously took time to share their stories, teachings, ideas and photos. They shared their knowledge and experience, provided advice, developed text and reviewed layout. The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAHA) and the First Nations Health Authority would like to thank the following people for their role in developing this resource:

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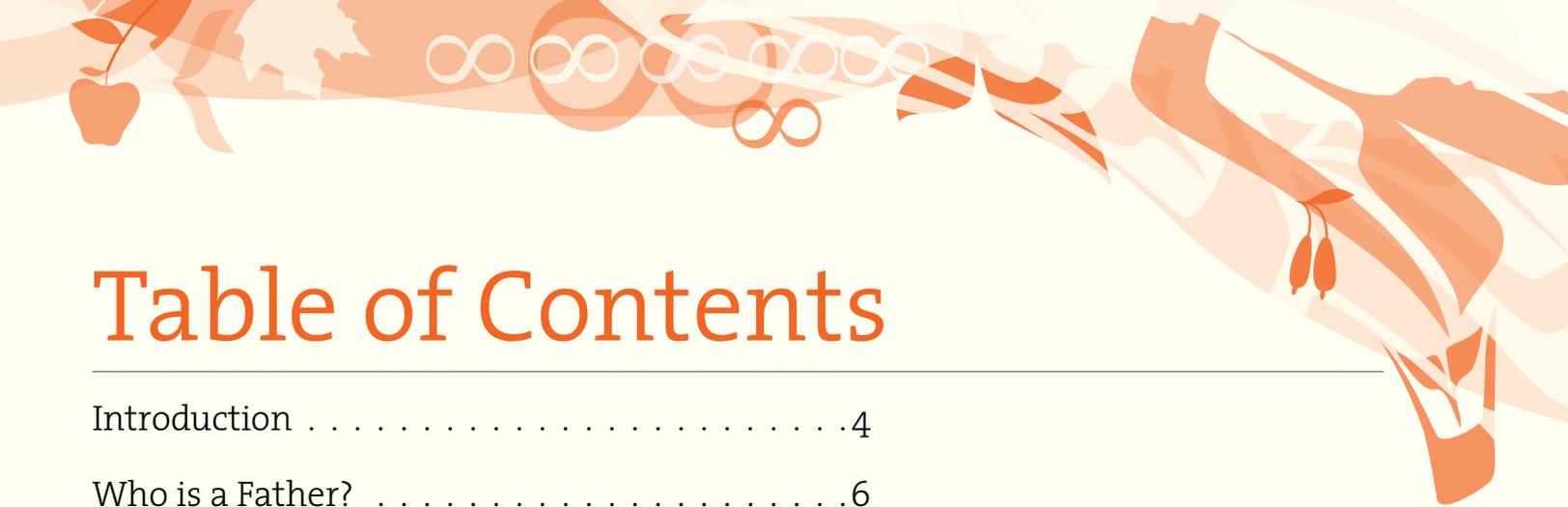


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pépe7
means dad
in Secwepemc

Introduction

Welcome to the most important and challenging journey of your life – fatherhood. As a father, you make a big difference in the life of your child. Many fathers want to be more involved with their children. This booklet will help you be a confident and effective father. It talks about why fathers are important, includes ideas of how to be involved at different stages of your child's life, and shares information about traditional fathering roles. At the end of this booklet you will find resources and services for your family.



*Teach your children
the way to live.*





In-it Annie

“One story, that I recall my Dad telling, is the ‘In-it Annie’ story. This story is about a brother and a sister who would arrive at our doorstep, always in time for dinner. Dad would say that Annie’s brother talked non-stop. Dad’s one complaint (always said with a twinkle in his eyes) was that, ‘He never let me get a word in edge-wise!’ Then, Dad would laugh mischievously, and continue the story. Every time the brother would tell something, he would turn to his sister and ask... ‘In-it Annie?’ Dad would shake his head, repeating, ‘In-it Annie, In-it Annie.’ He added, pointing a finger for emphasis, ‘Those two, they always took the biggest piece of meat... the best!’

Your mother, she would put her canned fruit on the table – and what did he say? ‘Plum-shla moot!’ (Plums again!) He would gaze out the window, as if remembering, and then smile. Then, Dad would pause for a bit... then quietly finish the story, firmly adding, ‘I liked them.’

Through this story, my Dad taught me about being a good guest, being a good host and having good manners.”

– Judy Lemke, Lil’wat/Stl’atl’imx First Nation

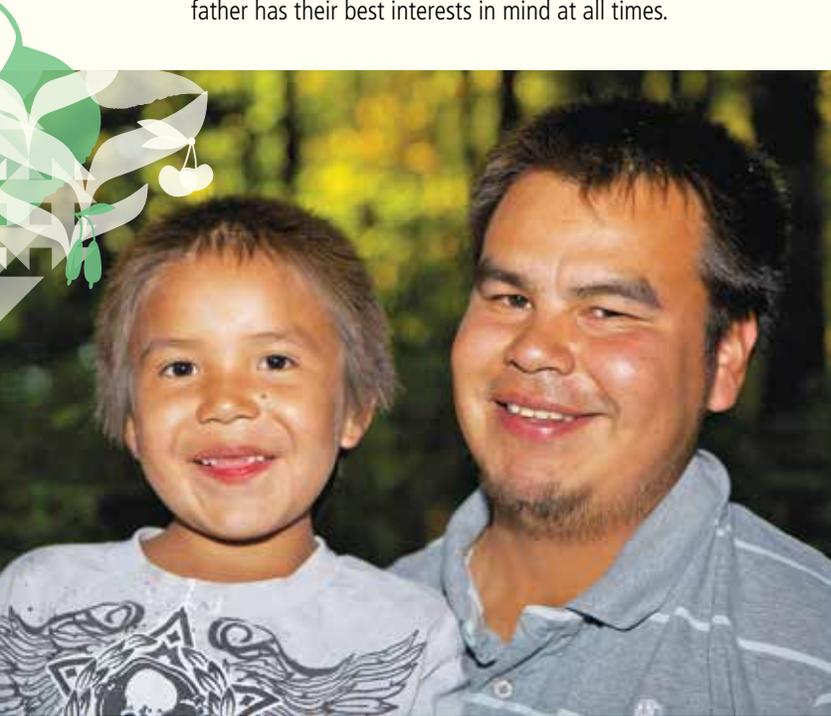
Who is a Father?

A father is a man who takes responsibility for the children in his life. Many men grow up without a positive, healthy role model of fatherhood. It is often when men are holding their baby for the first time that they take a good hard look at what it means to raise a child.

It is important to be as involved as possible, right from the time you find out you are going to be a father. In fact the earlier you get involved, the more connected you will be with your children as they grow. This can start before pregnancy. By doing the following things you show your children an important lesson – *they are important to you.*

Provide the necessities of life

Most fathers want to provide for their children. This includes things like a home, food and education. It also includes things like love, security and attention. Think of it as providing a safe place to grow. When their needs are met, children learn to trust that their father has their best interests in mind at all times.



Watching your children at the playground is not the same as playing with your children.

Spend time with your child

Children watch how you spend your time. They learn about the things that matter most to you. When you spend time with your children, they see they are worthy of your time. This shows them they are important to you. It is not only the *amount* of time you spend with them, it is also the *quality* of the time spent. When spending time with your children, focus on your children. Listen to your children. Do things that interest them. Involve them in things you like to do. Go outside whenever possible. Get away from the television and the computer and put away your cell phone. Learn more about their life outside of the home. Be aware of your children's friends. Know how your children are doing in school and encourage success. Your children look to you for approval and help. Get to know what your children need to learn and how your children learn. Make sure your children get what they need to be successful.

Show affection

Children need to know they are loved by their father. Your children need to hear you say, "I love you." Hug them regularly. You need to initiate affection with your children. This is difficult for some fathers because they did not grow up in a caring home with family and community to support them. Some fathers are not comfortable with emotions. Showing affection will help your children learn they are important to you.

Respect and honour the mother of your children

It is important that parents are on the same page when it comes to setting limits, discipline and roles in the family. Children do well when they see their parents working together, whether they are living together or not. Think about how you talk about and relate to the mother of your children.



Talk with your children, even when they are babies and cannot use words to respond.

Be a role model to build trust and security

Your children learn more from what they see you do than from what they hear you say. They are watching how you spend your free time, what your attitude is towards hard work, how you talk about others, and how you handle your emotions (especially anger). As they see you do these things, they are learning about how to get along with other people, the value of working hard, and how much of a priority they are to you. You want your children to bond with you. Children bond with people they trust and respect. For more information see the booklet *Family Connections*.

Remember that being a father is a life-long commitment

Your role as a father starts before pregnancy and continues throughout your child's entire life. As your child grows, your relationship will grow and change. Children need to know that you will always be there and will always love them.

Teach your child

Children look to their father to teach them about life. A great way to do this is to learn about your own heritage and culture. Learn about your past and where you came from. Pass this along to your children. This means talking with your children about their grandparents and extended family. It means sharing skills like fishing, drumming, jigging or playing a sport. Being involved in their school life is important too. Sharing life together helps fathers and children learn about each other. It gives children amazing stories to share with their own children when they become parents. It also helps them get to know you.



Share your traditions and your community

Your children will feel more connected if they know about their community and their traditions. These will be a source of comfort and support when times are difficult. It will help them know who they are, and to take pride. It will link them to you, to their extended family, and to their community. There are many ways to do this:

- Tell your children about their ancestors.
- Take your children to cultural events such as feasts.
- Take your children out on the land.
- Share teachings that you know.

Why are Fathers Important?

Children want to look up to a man they can trust. They want to have a father who guides them. Careful guidance builds a close, respectful relationship. It also teaches children how to be good parents, strengthening the generations that follow. Here are some ways you can guide your child.

Give clear guidance

Children need guidance from adults who care about them. Being consistent helps your child feel safe and secure. Your child knows what to expect, feels safe making mistakes, and isn't afraid to ask questions. Praise your child when he/she does well. Set limits for your child. Follow through when limits are crossed. Be calm and firm. Use a calm, understanding and positive approach when you teach or discipline your child. To learn more about discipline see the booklet *Parents as First Teachers*.

Set the standard

Giving good guidance starts with taking good care of yourself. Children learn by watching how you act. When you eat well, exercise and express your emotions in a healthy way, your child will follow your lead. For more information see the booklet *Growing Up Healthy*. When your child sees you work hard and have a positive attitude, your child is more likely to succeed at school and in jobs. When you make a mistake, let your child know it was a mistake. This teaches your child that adults are learning too. You set the standard for your child's behaviour.



In the past, many generations lived together with everyone helping out. Children were everyone's responsibility.





Have reasonable expectations

Teach your child to be responsible. You can do this is by expecting your child to help out, care for other people or a pet, or finish their homework. Praise your child when the job is done. Having responsibilities helps your child learn how to solve problems. It also builds confidence. Make sure your child is able to complete the task with minimal help. Expecting too much can put stress on children, for example, expecting a 3 year old to get breakfast ready. If your expectations are too low, your children may not learn to be responsible or to push themselves when things are hard. To learn more about parenting and how children develop, see this website:

- Best Chance
www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca



Abba
*means father in
Nadleh Whut'en*

Give children experiences

Experience is often the best teacher. Children need fathers who introduce them to the world and the people in it. Sadly, many children learn more about the world through television and the internet than they do from real-life experiences. Provide positive experiences for your child. Think of ways they can meet new people, try new things and test their abilities. New experiences help your baby's brain develop, and encourage your children to trust themselves and be more willing to try new things.

Be supportive

All children need a safe place when they are hurt or feel frightened. It may be a bad dream, being treated unfairly at school, or falling off their bicycle. You can be this safe place by listening to your child and by doing whatever you can to make things better. Try to hear what your child is NOT telling you in words. This means paying attention to your child's body language and emotions – listening with your eyes. Do you remember when you were young and afraid, or had your feelings hurt? Think about how it felt. Offer your child comfort and security.

Learning How to Be a Father

The best thing about life is that it takes place in the moment. Every moment, you can choose a path of healing. Every step that you take in your own healing is a step towards becoming a better father.

These days most fathers want to be more involved, in more ways, than ever before. They want to be there for their children, and take part in raising their children. They change diapers, feed and play with their children. Involved fathers make a big difference in the lives of their children. Some fathers find they have a lot to learn, especially if they are isolated or did not have a role model to learn from.



*No man is born with
all the skills necessary
to raise a child.*

Our past affects fathers

Many First Nations and Métis children grew up without an involved father, due to the residential school system or the child welfare system. Many men were raised in a residential school or have parents who were in residential schools. They were raised by adults who lacked love, care and concern for them. These adults did not connect the children to family, community and traditional beliefs. Some fathers were neglected and abused as a child. These things can make it difficult to relate with other people, especially partners and children. Fathers may treat their families the way they were raised as a child. Fathers may need to heal and may need to learn new ways of parenting. Get the help you need.

*“If one doesn’t ask for help when
help is needed, then one is not
friendly, one is not kind.”*

– Richard Atleo in his book

Tsawalk: A Nuu-Chah-Nulth Worldview

After the residential schools, the community, extended family and fathers may have lost their place in a child’s life. Now, families often live alone, far from extended family. Sometimes fathers feel isolated. They may have little or no support as a parent. They may not know about programs in their community that help parents.

Moving forward

Men can learn about fathering through their fathers, and by watching other men with their children. Aunts, uncles, grandparents and others in your community may also be wonderful supports for your family. Fathers can also learn by asking questions and reading books. They can use the parent support programs and parenting classes in their community. These programs connect fathers and help fathers feel supported in their role. To learn more about being a father, ask for help and look at the services listed at the end of this booklet.



*Being a father takes practice
and time. The more time
you spend caring for your
children, the more confident
you will feel as a father.*

Fathers get more comfortable with children by caring for children. It is helpful to be involved as early as possible. This can start before pregnancy as you can talk together about your health, your lives, and the changes that children will bring. Once your partner is pregnant your involvement continues. During pregnancy, fathers can talk to their unborn baby, attend prenatal classes and medical appointments, get the things their baby will need, and care for their partner. Once your baby is born, you can change diapers, play with your baby, take your baby for walks, get up in the night when he/she wakes, and help with toilet-training. Spend as much time as possible with your child.

Your attitude can make a huge difference. You can make a choice to learn all you can about your role and about what you can offer. You can stay positive and hopeful about your children.



Of Being Your Father

*I can only say that the true beauty of being your father is this
I find as much comfort in your arms
As you do in mine
In the times that I truly need a place free of judgment
It is usually with you
I have found more celebration in your achievements as my child
Than in mine as your father
I am more at peace as I hold you sleeping in my arms
Than at any other time in my life
Walking with your hand in mine is pretty close
My arm around your shoulders
There is no wrong in our relationship, only discovery
I rejoice in our mutual imperfection
I revel in our path of discovery and exploration
And as I protect and nurture you, my sacred heart
I am lifted in the knowing that the very best me I can ever be
Is the me that I am
When I am with you
Daddy's got you baby, sshh, I gotcha...*

*– Duane Jackson, Tauhx Gadx – A Journey To Be Whole,
Regional Coordinator, Children First*

Different Situations, Different Approaches

Fathers are not the same

Fathers raise children in many different situations. Children learn from other male role models as well, such as extended family, community members, family friends, teachers, instructors, etc. There are single fathers who are raising their children on their own. There are separated and divorced fathers who are working hard to stay involved with their children. There are fathers who are unable to see their children because of distance, work, court or child welfare decisions. There are gay fathers, young fathers, step fathers and foster fathers. Extended family (uncles, grandfathers, brothers, etc.) may take on the role of father. Sometimes children have special needs or medical issues that will affect their relationship with their father.

No matter what situation you are parenting in, it is important to put forth your best efforts as a father. If parenting is shared with a partner, think about how to provide the best, healthiest, emotionally safe environments and relationships for your children. Children benefit by feeling love from their parents, no matter what the parenting situation. They also learn about relationships from their parents.



Fatherhood is forever.

Staying connected

Whatever your situation, you can do many things to stay connected with your children. If you are not living with your children, try your best to arrange to have regular visits with your children. Spend as much time as possible with your children. This may take some flexibility in work schedules and family times. When you have a visit planned, do everything possible to be there on time, and to have something to do, such as going to a playground, park, picnic site, beach, or Friendship Centre for some quality time together. If you have to miss your planned visit, be sure to call and let your children know. Explain that they are very important to you, and that you look forward to the next chance to visit.

If you can't be there, you can connect by:

- Writing emails or sending notes by mail.
- Sending pictures or a video.
- Talking on the phone or through a computer.

It's tough when you can't see your children. Let your children know that you love and accept them. Leave out any feelings of guilt or blame. Tell them that even though you can't be with them right now, you want them to know how much you love them, and that you think about them every day. If you can, add funny or happy stories about your family or about being with your children.



What kind of father have you always wanted to be?

Think about what is keeping you from being this kind of father. Your first step is to parent yourself. Get the help you need. Read books that help and inspire you. Seek out helping and healthy people. Work towards being the father you always wanted to be.

Play a role in the regular routines, such as meals, bath time and bed time. Talk about how you will share the schedule for your child, such as visits to the doctor and dentist, meetings with the teacher, and taking your child to regular activities such as clubs or sports.

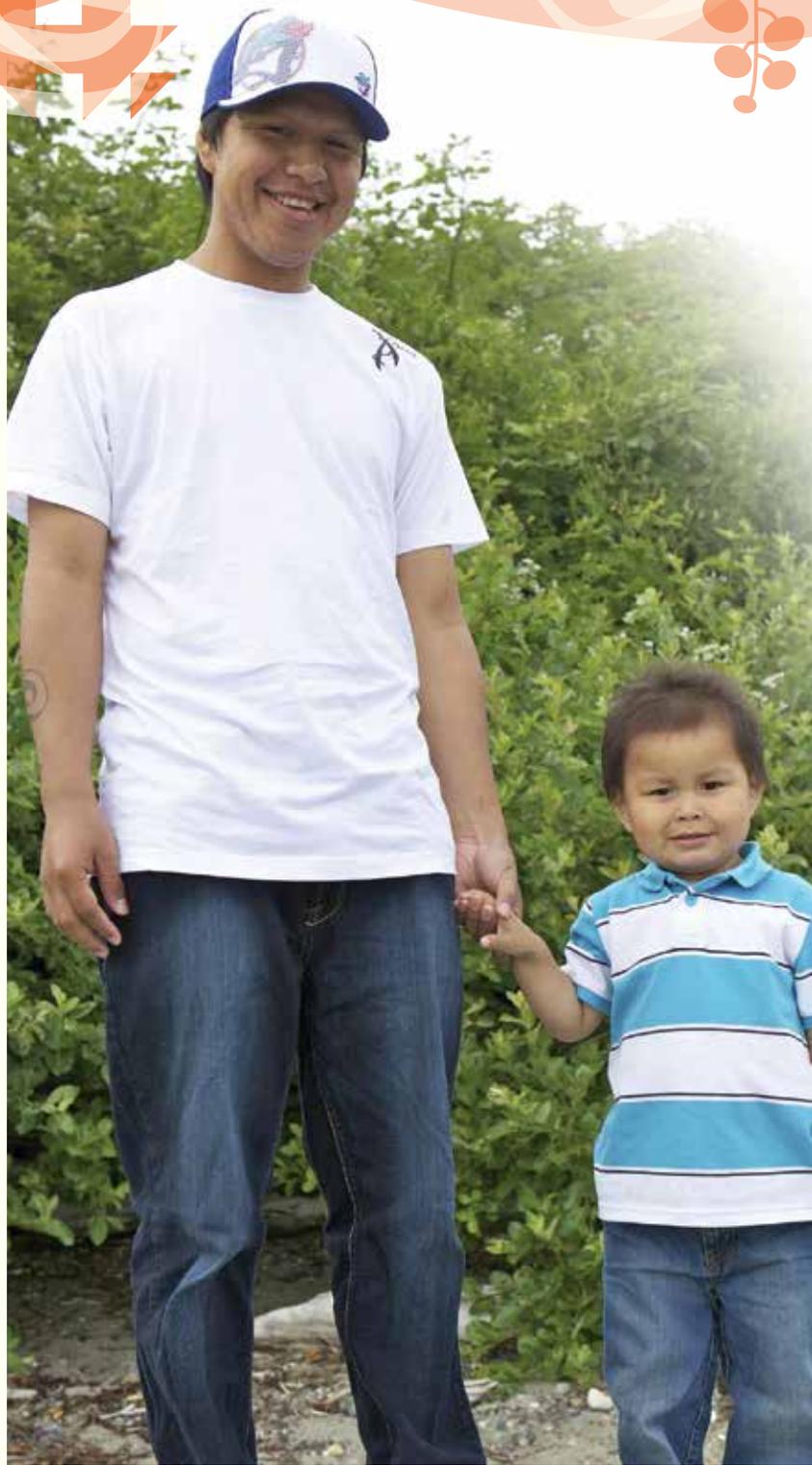


The best thing about life is that it takes place in the moment. Every moment, you can choose a path of healing.

Involve your children

Think about ways that you can involve your children in your community and beliefs. This might be through cultural events, books about your community, traditional crafts or games, music from your community, or learning your First Nations or Métis language, etc.

While this booklet talks about children aged 0-6, fathers also have an important role as their young children grow to be youth and young adults. It is helpful to learn about the challenges that come with each stage of life and what parents can do. See the resources at the end of this booklet for more information.



Bah
*means father
in Wet'suwet'en*

How You Can Be Involved

One of the most important things fathers can do is to work on having a great relationship with their children.

Before pregnancy

- Talk about any concerns that you have about starting a family.
- Talk about how you will raise your children.
- Make healthy choices.
- Talk to others about the changes that a baby will bring, and how to be prepared.

During pregnancy

- Go to medical appointments and ask questions.
- Care for your partner – make her lunches, help her get rest, give her back rubs.
- Learn about pregnancy and birth.
- Attend prenatal classes.
- Play the drum for your unborn baby.
- Talk, read or sing to your unborn baby.
- Talk to your partner about breast feeding.
- Talk about any concerns that you have about starting a family.
- Talk about how you will raise your children.
- Make healthy choices.
- Talk to others about the changes that a baby will bring, and how to be prepared.
- Learn about the signs of postpartum depression.



In some traditional teachings fathers are pregnant too. You may need to take the same care as if you were pregnant. You may be responsible for making sure that your pregnant partner does not hear or see anything violent, scary or sad.

Baby

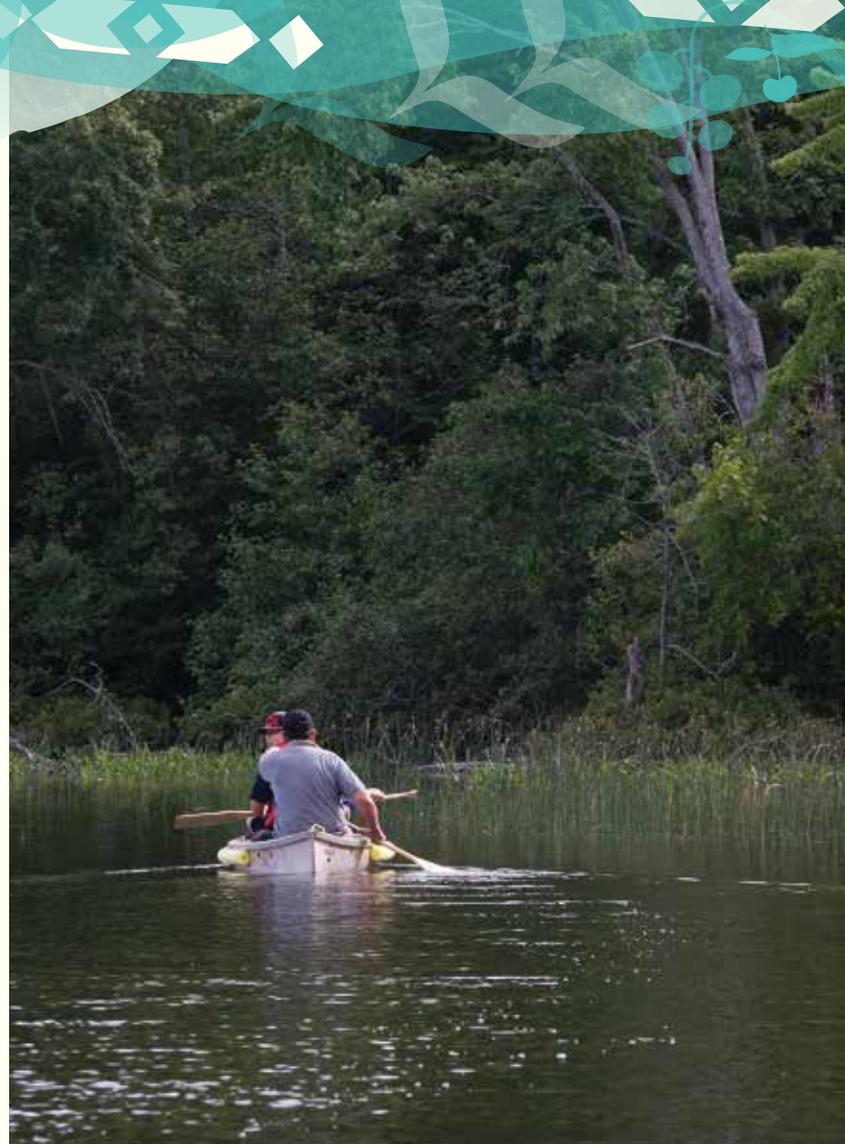
- Learn how to hold, bathe and change your baby.
- See if you can tell how your baby is feeling.
- Respond to your baby's cues.
- Be part of breast feeding by bringing your baby to your partner, being close by and talking with your partner, gently stroking the baby's arm or head while your baby is nursing. Bring water for your partner to drink while she is nursing. Offer to burp the baby.
- Take your turn during the sleepless nights.
- Take your baby for a walk outside and talk about what you see. Use a baby carrier or sling so your baby is close to you and can hear you.
- Read, tell stories and sing to your baby.
- Play peek-a-boo.
- Watch for signs of postpartum depression or other medical issues in your partner. Assist her in getting the help she needs.

Toddler

- Keep your toddler safe by child proofing your home.
- Learn about how to teach and discipline your child.
- Go outside and explore some leaves, rocks and bugs.
- Take your toddler to the park.
- Play active games, like kicking a ball, wrestling or banging on some plastic bowls.
- Read a story or make up a funny story.
- Get out some paints, crayons or playdough and create art together.

Preschool

- Do crafts, drawing and colouring with your child.
- Play games that include learning about numbers and letters.
- Take your children grocery shopping and involve them in choosing fruit, vegetables and other food items.
- Get involved in their make-believe play, even if it means dressing up and sipping tea.
- Read to your children, share a traditional story, or a story about when you were young.



School age

- Help out with homework, getting ready for school.
- Participate in school activities.
- Have your child help make dinner, including setting the table and helping to clean up.
- Go for walks or bike rides and teach your children about the community they live in.
- Play board games and card games with your children.
- Get to know their friends.



Family Traditions

Having traditions creates closeness and a sense of belonging. Traditions may be family or community practices. They give children positive memories of their childhood.

Most traditions are practiced around holidays or special times of the year, like fishing or berry seasons. They give children and fathers something to plan, anticipate and do together.

There are traditions that families can create

These become times that other families may not understand, but that are very meaningful for your family. Some ideas are:

- Take a picture on the first day of school each year.
- Call Grandma and Grandpa every Sunday afternoon.
- Play board games every Friday evening.
- Look for flowers on the first day of spring.
- Have a birthday hat that is used on all family birthdays.
- Have breakfast in bed Saturday mornings.
- Make up your own holidays, like Kid's Day or It's Nobody's Birthday Day.

Make your family traditions unique and something that everyone enjoys. You will probably find that the children remember these traditions and talk about them all year.

You can also learn more about traditions in your community

For example there may be ceremonies or practices for pregnancy, or for when a child is born, named, learns to walk, or moves towards adulthood. Celebrate your traditions and proudly participate. Traditional ceremonies and practices vary by community. Take time to learn from Elders, family, other parents and services in your community.



baaba

means dad in Nisga'a



Playtime

Play is a great way for fathers to connect with their children. It gives a chance for fathers and children to have fun together and to learn about each other.

Play is good for children

It develops their imagination. Children learn valuable social skills through play. It helps them develop physical skills. They learn to express their emotions. They get to explore and learn about their environment.

What is the best way to play with children?

Watch what they are doing and join in. Follow their lead (as long as they are safe). When fathers play this way, children learn they can make decisions. It also builds trust, leading to greater cooperation.

There are many different ways to play. You can turn almost any situation into playtime. Here are some ideas:

- **Arts and crafts:** Find some crayons or paint. Getting messy can be part of the fun.
- **Dress-up:** Use some old clothes and let your child's imagination run wild.
- **Music:** Build your own instruments, make noise and sing together.
- **Nature:** Dig in the dirt or collect leaves or rocks. Go fishing or climb a tree.
- **Group games:** Play tag or hide and seek. Invent a game together.
- **Quiet games:** Teach your children card games or board games. Look at nature.

Remember that play is meant to be fun

Some competition is helpful in learning new skills. If you are playing competitive games, focus on how much fun you had together.



“It is important that we step away from societal ideals about what it means to be a “man” and embrace traditional ideals about respect, and humility, and what it means to be a parent.”

– Duane Jackson, Tauhx Gadx – A Journey To Be Whole, Regional Coordinator, Children First



Play builds the bond between fathers and children.

Proud Single Father

“Hello - My name is Livingstone Godfrey Stephens but mostly people call me Sonny. I am the proud single father of my six year old son Aslan. I have been a single parent for going on five years and I can tell you it hasn't all been easy. Life has its ups and downs. My son has special needs. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and FAS and requiring me to stretch my support circle. I was very fortunate to find the support in the community with daycare and school and with my family. In our first year together my son and I had to travel to the BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver. We received a referral from our dentist but my poor boy had to wait 9 months, in pain, before his surgery. I tried to hold back tears as my boy went under the anesthetic but once he was in surgery I had to call my mom to calm myself down. The result of the surgery was the pulling of the last of Aslan's baby teeth, 15 in all, but the real outcome was to have my boy no longer in pain. The changes were noticeable in daycare, in his wanting to learn and do new things, and starting to talk more and speak clearer. We were very fortunate to not have to go through this experience alone, having the support of professionals and our family.

Aslan started attending Kindergarten in the morning and preschool in the afternoon to start getting him ready to be in school all day. This was a tough transition for both of us but was made easier with the support of the school and the early childhood educators at the daycare centre. We attended the parent/tot drop-in at the school and through them started attending the Tauhx Gadx Men's Group. The group was great for both of us. Aslan got to spend more time around other people and their children and I got to sit in circle with other men who were facing many of the same challenges I was. We spend time with Elder Charlie Carlick, discussing topics such as respect, courage, wisdom, celebration, and humility. See, life has its ups and downs but there's help out there for single parents. Don't be afraid to ask for it. We don't have to do everything by ourselves – we are not alone. Aslan is now going into grade 1. His adult teeth are coming in, so sometimes I keep him home. Each challenge we face together, our relationship gets stronger. We learn from our off days, and we keep moving forward. My son and I are doing good to this day and we are very thankful to our community, our family, and our friends.”

Thanks for letting me share our story, Sonny Stephens

How You Can Learn More

Aboriginal Head Start Programs support early childhood development, school readiness and family health and wellness for children from birth to six years old.

Phone: 250 858 4543

www.bcfnhs.org for on-reserve programs

www.ahsabc.net for urban programs

Aboriginal Infant Development Programs work together with families to support the growth and development of young children.

Phone: 250 388 5593

www.aidp.bc.ca

BC Aboriginal Friendship Centres often have programs for pregnant women, parents and children.

Phone: 250 388 5522 or

Toll-Free: 1 800 990 2432

www.bcaafc.com

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

www.bccf.ca/families

BC Ministry of Health has an online guide to all the toll-free resources in BC.

www.health.gov.bc.ca/navigation/1-800.html

Beginning the Journey of Fatherhood: A guide for Aboriginal Men is a booklet for Aboriginal fathers.

www.ecdip.org/mediareources

Best Chance is an online resource for parents.

www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca

Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program and **Community Action Program for Children** programs begin during pregnancy and go up to early childhood. Many of the programs have help for breast feeding, nutrition, food preparation, and also offer resources to help families.

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

www.cpnpcnp.phac-aspc.gc.ca

Dad's Toolkit is a manual for fathers.

www.bcbabyfriendly.ca/BabyManualforDads.pdf

First Nations Parents Clubs help support parents to help with educational success.

Phone: 604 925 6087 or

Toll-Free: 1 877 422 3672

www.fnsa.ca/parentsclub

Healthlink BC directory has information about how and where to find health services in BC.

Phone: 8-1-1

Local Libraries may have books about parenting and child development.

www.bclibraries.ca

Métis Community Service Society of BC provides services for parents.

Phone: 250 868 0351

www.mcsbc.org

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

www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/en/publications.aspx?sortcode=2.8.10&searchCat=1

Preschoolers: Building a Sense of Security is a fact sheet by BC Healthlink.

www.healthlinkbc.ca/kb/content/special/ta7012.html

...with Dad: Strengthening the Circle of Care is a narrative report and documentary DVD on strengthening the role of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis fathers in communities, programs, research, and policies in Canada.

www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/286/With_Dad__Strengthening_the_Circle_of_Care.nccah



'op

means father in Haisla

The booklets in this series include:



Fatherhood is Forever

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



Growing Up Healthy

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



Family Connections

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



Parents as First Teachers

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

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

Aussi disponibles en français: www.nccah-ccnsa.ca

For more information:



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