



What you Need to Know about the Inclusion of Elders

in Early Childhood Development Settings

Why should Elders be included in early childhood programs?

Elders have special status in First Nations and other Aboriginal communities. The esteem shown to Elders is a core cultural value and source of strength. Elders in Indigenous communities have always shared their knowledge of language and cultural traditions with children. Today, Elder participation in early childhood programs yields benefits for the children, for the Elders

themselves, and for the community as a whole. The children learn from the Elders, the educators model the protocols of respectful interactions with Elders, and overall community wellbeing is enhanced. Elders who become involved in early childhood programs experience the satisfactions

that come with enriching the lives of children. Elder involvement is essential to addressing the culture and language component of Aboriginal Head Start and BC First Nations Head Start and it is an indicator of quality in all Aboriginal early childhood programs.



This resource sheet was developed by the British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) in response to findings of the 2013 research project ***Licensing First Nations' Early Childhood Programs***. That study found many programs were encountering barriers to the inclusion of Elders. The information that follows clarifies ways in which early childhood programs can support Elder participation and remain in compliance with the ***Child Care Licensing Regulation (CCLR)***. It outlines steps programs can take to involve Elders as visitors, volunteers, or employees. It highlights the special roles Elders play in supporting cultural programming and the importance of removing barriers to their inclusion. ©2014

How should children be prepared for the presence of Elders?

Each community has its own protocols for interacting with Elders. Educators should become familiar with the protocols and follow them. Young children should be taught how to respectfully interact with Elders, including:

- Greetings
- Behaviour expectations
- Showing appreciation
- Farewells

Urban programs typically serve diverse groups of families. Elders living in urban areas might not be from the territories in which the programs are located. Program managers might not be familiar with local protocols. Educators can respectfully ask the Elders themselves for guidance on protocols and then teach their staff, parents, and children how to follow them.

Benefits of Elder participation:

- Traditional intergenerational relationships are re-established
- Children learn language, culture, and Elder protocols
- Children learn the community value of respecting Elders
- Family and community wellbeing are enhanced
- Cultural continuity is supported
- Elders feel valued and their contributions are recognized
- Head Start programs satisfy the requirement of their funders that children be taught culture and language
- Program quality is enhanced
- In urban contexts, families living away from their home territories particularly appreciate connections with and the support of Elders

How might Elders participate in early childhood programs?

There are various ways for Elders to participate in early childhood programs. In all cases, Elders should be shown the highest level of respect and protocols should be followed. Elders come into early childhood programs in order to share their cultural knowledge and wisdom. They should not be expected to provide the supervision and care that are the responsibilities of educators and assistants.

The **CCLR** impacts the participation of Elders if they are “ordinarily present” in early childhood programs. Anyone who is “ordinarily present” is required to have a criminal record check. “Ordinarily present” is not clearly defined in the **CCLR** and it has been interpreted differently in different regions of the province. It is recommended that programs discuss with their licensing officers whether Elders’ planned participation schedules and roles would be interpreted as “ordinarily present.”

Elders might participate:

As occasional visitors:

Visits from Elders enrich early childhood programs. Some Elders prefer to teach language and culture during occasional visits. Visitors who are not “ordinarily present” are not required to have criminal record checks. Visitors share their cultural knowledge and skills with the children in the company of educators and assistants.

Although the **CCLR** does not require occasional visitors to have criminal record checks, some early childhood programs have made it their policy to require all visitors to have criminal record checks.

As volunteer cultural consultants:

Elders and other interested community members enjoy volunteering in early childhood programs. Some Elders choose to volunteer as cultural consultants. It is recommended that programs discuss with their licensing officers Elders’ planned participation schedules and roles.

As hired cultural consultants:

Elders who do not have formal academic qualifications in early childhood education can be hired as cultural consultants to teach language and culture. As the knowledge-keepers of their communities, Elders are uniquely qualified to share essential cultural knowledge with young children.

Elders working in these positions cannot be included to meet the staffing ratios specified in Schedule E of the **CCLR**. For

example, a child care program with 17 to 25 children is required to have at least one educator and two assistants. The program can hire an Elder to work as a cultural consultant as long as the Elder is in addition to, not instead of, the required trained staff.

All employees working in licensed facilities, including Elders, are required to meet the requirements of Section 19 of the **CCLR**. These include:

- criminal record checks;
- character references;
- records of their work history;
- copies of any diplomas;
- letters from medical practitioners indicating they are capable of working with children; and
- evidence that they have complied with provincial immunization and tuberculosis control programs.

As employees with early childhood qualifications:

In some communities early childhood programs are able to hire Elders who have early childhood education academic qualifications. The **CCLR** permits Elders with early childhood qualifications to be counted when meeting employee to child ratios.

Programs hiring Elders with academic qualifications need to consider whether they will rely on the Elder’s presence to meet the employee to child ratios required by the **CCLR** or whether they will ensure ratios are met by other employees who provide routine care. At all times, Elders should be respected for their unique and valuable cultural knowledge.

How can early childhood educators reach out to Elders?

Early childhood programs that do not have well-established relationships with Elders may find it helpful to:

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| Actively seek out Elders to participate in your programs | Chat with Elders when you see them in the community | Attend Elder luncheons to meet Elders |
| Let them know they are welcome in your facilities | Let them know they are important to early childhood programs | Take the children on field trips to visit Elder groups in the community |
| Invite them into your programs as special guests | Encourage them to visit for a day to see what is going on in your facilities | Be prepared to begin with limited involvement that will gradually grow |

How can early childhood programs assist Elders through the criminal record check process?

When recruiting Elders to become involved in early childhood programs as employees or volunteers, educators may find it helpful to present criminal record checks in a positive light, emphasizing that they are a means of protecting children and keeping them safe. Some Elders are reluctant to have record checks because of past difficulties. It may be helpful to explain that records are only checked for relevant offences. Individuals with criminal records are not automatically unable to work or volunteer with children. The offences that are considered relevant are listed on the Criminal Records Review Program Website.

The Criminal Records Review Program determines whether individuals are a risk to work with children. Early childhood programs that have Elders and other volunteers “ordinarily present”

can register with the Criminal Records Review Program for free-of-charge record checks for their volunteers. It is possible to register on-line and volunteers can request record checks on-line. The free-of-charge record checks are not available for employees.

The decision to prevent an individual from working or volunteering with children due to a relevant criminal record is not made by early childhood program staff. Criminal Records Review Program personnel evaluate the individual’s record and make the decision.

Early childhood programs should offer to help Elders complete their requests for record checks and cover the costs for Elders they wish to hire.

For information and assistance with the Criminal Records Review Program, call toll-free: 1-855-587-0185 during business hours.

Even with explanations of the rationale for criminal record checks and offers of assistance through the process, some Elders may be uncomfortable having criminal record checks. Some Elders consider it to be an insulting requirement. Early childhood programs may be able to accommodate these Elders as occasional visitors. In this way they are able to participate and contribute to programs without having criminal record checks.



Resources

Child Care Licensing Regulation:

http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/332_2007

See Section 19 – Character and Skill Requirements; Division 2 – Employee Qualifications

BC First Nations early childhood development framework:

<http://www.fnesc.ca/Attachments/ECD/ECD%20Consultation%20Document%20Dec%2017%2009.pdf>

See Appendix B, pages 38-44 “BC Aboriginal Child Care Society Statement on Quality Child Care”

Aboriginal Head Start Urban and Northern Initiative:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/publications/ahsuni-papairun/index-eng.php#a14>

See Part III, Section C: Guidelines - Program Components, 1: Culture and Language

BC First Nations Head Start on-reserve program:

<http://www.bcfhns.org/content/component-1-culture-and-language>

BC Criminal record checks – Children and vulnerable adults:

<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/criminal-records-review/>

BC Criminal Records Review Act amendments:

<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/criminal-records-review/shareddocs/new-volunteers-agencies.pdf>

Relevant offences reviewed for those working with children:

<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/criminal-records-review/offences-reviewed/index.htm>

Honouring Our Elders: A Guide to Elder Participation in Aboriginal Head Start Programs.

Available for purchase from: Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC. Price: \$20.

Contact executivedirector@ahsabc.com

Where can I view/download
the resource sheet?

Visit http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_2/accs-publications.php

Where can I learn more?

Visit <http://portal.acc-society.bc.ca/>



and check out the links in our
resources section



BC **Aboriginal
Child Care** Society

How can early childhood programs build strong relationships with Elders?

Recruiting Elders is an important administrative responsibility for Aboriginal early childhood programs. Program managers should let Elders know how valuable their contributions are to the children, to the programs, and to their communities.

To establish and maintain strong relationships with Elders, it is important to ensure that they receive practical support such as transportation assistance and acknowledgement of their contributions. Elders coming into a facility should be welcomed and provided with an orientation. The roles they will be playing should be respectfully discussed before they begin. They should be made comfortable and their needs should be met. For example, some Elders are diabetic and they may need snacks. Provide comfortable, adult-sized furniture for them. All Elders should be warmly thanked for their participation. Early childhood programs should follow community protocols regarding gifts and honoraria to show recognition and thanks to Elders.