



**BC Aboriginal
Child Care Society**

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ELEMENTS OF QUALITY CHILD CARE FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Preamble

For Aboriginal parents, extended families, and communities, caring for children is a sacred responsibility. The Creator has given Aboriginal peoples the right and responsibility to initiate, design, and control programs and services for our children. We accept these rights and responsibilities to care for and educate our children according to the Laws of the Creator.

The elements of quality child care described below rest on these beliefs:

*We, the Original Peoples of this land, know the Creator put us here. The Creator gave us laws that govern our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind. The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities. The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provided us with all our needs. We have maintained our Freedom, our Languages, and our Traditions from time immemorial. We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed. The Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination. The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation.**

Our child care programs reflect the Laws of the Creator, our traditions, beliefs, and values. From those foundations, we have derived these elements of quality:

1. Aboriginal world view

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs reflect a shared world view and child care personnel pass our values on to our children.

Discussion:

British Columbia's Aboriginal peoples share, in varying degrees, a distinctive world view that is reflected in our ways of caring for and educating our children. Elements of our shared world view include: appreciation for the sacredness of life; awareness of the continuity of life and our connections to past and future generations; love for our families; respect for nature; a commitment to positive relationships and equality; and the pursuit of spiritual well-being.

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2. Relationship with the environment

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs teach children how to respectfully use and care for the earth's gifts.

Discussion:

At the heart of Aboriginal cultures is a close, respectful relationship with the earth and its inhabitants. Caring for the land, air, and water, respect for nature, and knowledge of the environment are essential characteristics of our cultures.

3. Cooperative relationships

Principles:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs teach children a non-competitive approach to life. Child care personnel model cooperation, respect, consideration for others, and sharing.

Discussion:

Aboriginal cultures are based on relationships of mutual support. Community members cooperate and help one another. Individuals support one another for the benefit of the community as a whole. Teamwork, mutual assistance, and sharing are valued.

4. Elder involvement

Principles:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs teach children to respect our Elders. Quality Aboriginal child care programs ask for guidance from Elders. The views of Elders are invited and heard and valued and acted upon. Elders are an essential part of the curriculum.

Discussion:

A defining feature of Aboriginal cultures is the special respect given to Elders. We look to our Elders for guidance and we include them in important decision-making. We ask our Elders to help us learn the traditional teachings of our cultures. Elders play valuable roles in our communities and we turn to them for their knowledge and wisdom.

5. Holistic view of development

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs support the development of culturally appropriate, holistically-based curricula and assessment instruments.

Discussion:

The Aboriginal perspective on children's growth and development is holistic and it includes the spiritual domain. Children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual health and well-being overlap and are intertwined. Each child's growth and development reflects his or her uniqueness. Patterns of development are inseparable from the cultures in which children are raised.

6. Aboriginal languages**Principles:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs endeavour to ensure that children's rights to enjoy and become literate in their languages are honoured to the extent possible.

Where it is possible, Aboriginal languages are used for everyday communication in child care programs. Where that is not possible, children are taught Aboriginal languages to the extent possible. Child care programs serving Aboriginal children from different cultures teach respect for all languages and cultures.

Discussion:

Aboriginal languages are key elements of our identities and heritage. The continuation and revival of Aboriginal languages are urgent priorities. Child care programs have a critical role to play in preventing further loss of Aboriginal languages.

7. Relationships with families**Principles:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs build positive, respectful relationships with children's families and work in partnership with them. Quality Aboriginal child care programs help families care for their children.

Discussion:

Children's families are their primary care providers and educators. Family members are welcomed and involved in child care programs as volunteers, visitors, and on governance bodies. Families are well-informed regarding their children's progress. Opportunities are provided for family members to learn more about children and ways of supporting their health and well-being. The form of the education reflects community priorities and preferences. It may involve home visits, outreach programs, parenting workshops or courses, discussion groups, mentoring programs, or other options selected by local families.

8. Preparation for future responsibilities**Principles:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs prepare children to eventually assume a wide range of responsibilities as members of thriving self-governing communities. Quality Aboriginal child care programs build children's confidence and self-esteem and communicate the expectation that they will make positive contributions to community life.

Discussion:

Aboriginal communities in British Columbia are becoming increasingly self-governing. As the children in our child care programs today grow up, they will fill important roles in governance, administration, service delivery, and business enterprises in their communities. Young children must be prepared for academic success and encouraged to set goals and achieve their ambitions.

9. Inclusion

Principles:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs are inclusive. Children with exceptional talents and abilities are encouraged to develop their gifts. Children who need extra support, modified environments, and individualized programs have their requirements met.

Discussion:

Each child is a treasured gift from the Creator. Each child has his or her own individual temperament, talents, learning style, intelligence, interests, challenges, abilities, and prior experiences. Each child's growth and development and learning path is unique. All children have a right to individually appropriate care that meets their needs, develops their gifts, and helps them reach their full potential.

10. Multi-age grouping

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs recognize the advantages of multi-age grouping.

Discussion:

The segregation of children on the basis of age is contrary to Aboriginal cultural values and traditions. Multi-age groups more closely resemble life in an extended family. Multi-age child care allows strong attachments between educators and young children to continue from infancy through to school-age. In multi-age programs, younger children are helped by and learn from older children. Exceptional children can be more easily included in multi-age groups since the learning environments are designed for children with a wide range of abilities. With appropriate staff preparation and adult-child ratios, multi-age grouping is a safe delivery option.

11. Respect and recognition for child care personnel

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs are exemplary employers, providing all personnel and volunteers with training, support, respect, and recognition for the important work they do.

Discussion:

Aboriginal communities have always valued the work done by people who care for and educate children. All personnel in child care facilities, including managers, early childhood educators, child care assistants, cultural and language personnel, support staff, and volunteers require training in order to do their jobs well. Employers show employees and volunteers their work is respected and valued by providing appropriate wages, good working conditions, opportunities for career advancement, access to professional development, and comfortable work spaces and off-duty areas.

12. Research

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs conduct and participate in research to answer their own questions and increase their understanding of issues that are important to them and to their communities.

Discussion:

Research is a means of building knowledge. Early childhood educators act as research practitioners and contribute to the development of a constantly growing body of knowledge focusing on Aboriginal child care. This body of research is used to support the ongoing pursuit of excellence. Aboriginal led research, based on Aboriginal cultural values, contributes to policy development and informs practice. It builds on existing indigenous knowledge and is relevant to the community. Aboriginal research is conducted according to the highest ethical standards.

13. Delivery models

Principle:

The descriptions of quality Aboriginal child care are applicable in all settings in which children receive care and education.

Discussion:

Aboriginal children receive high quality care and education in a variety of settings including child care centres, part-time preschools, adult and tot drop-in programs, Head Start programs, family day care homes, programs based in community centres and parks, before-school and after-school programs for school-aged children, respite facilities that provide overnight and longer-term child care, and child-minding programs.

14. Collaboration and network building

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs provide their personnel with opportunities to establish and maintain connections with other Aboriginal child care providers.

Discussion:

Child care personnel benefit from belonging to networks of mutual support with other members of their profession. Aboriginal child care providers want to help one another, share their knowledge, and work together to enhance Aboriginal child care services. Personnel require release time and support to attend meetings and conferences and participate in initiatives that build links between programs. Technologies can be used to enable geographically separated child care personnel to collaborate and stay connected with one another.

15. Accountability

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care services are governed by and accountable to Aboriginal parents and communities.

Discussion:

Aboriginal peoples have the cultural knowledge, commitment to their children's well-being, and awareness of local priorities that is essential to insure good governance of child care programs.

16. Local authority

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs comply with the regulations developed by Aboriginal child care administrative bodies.

Discussion:

Regulations for the operation of Aboriginal child care facilities are the responsibility of Aboriginal administrative bodies. High standards are set to insure children's health and safety. Group sizes and adult to child ratios meet or exceed those recommended by the CCCF. Standards for the licensing of facilities and the credentialing of child care personnel are developed and administered by Aboriginal peoples.