JOINING THE CIRCLE

GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS
COPA is a Francophone not-for-profit organization, offering services in both French and English. Founded in 1995, we are a recognized centre of excellence in the field of violence and bullying prevention by advocating for 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.

COPA works with provincial and local 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 change.

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

To learn more about COPA, visit our website at infocopa.com and explore our related educational sites:

- safeatschool.ca (COPA/OTF site for educators)
- copahabitat.ca (COPA site for caregivers and families)
- changeourworld.ca (COPA site for youth)
The Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) is the professional organization representing teachers in Ontario, comprised of four affiliated groups: l’Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association, and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation.

OTF’s responsibilities include promoting and advancing the cause of public education, raising the status of the teaching profession and promoting and advancing the interests of teachers. OTF also represents teachers and all other members of the Teachers’ Pension Plan in the administration of the Plan and management of the pension fund, and acts as the link between teachers and the Ontario Ministry of Education. OTF’s affiliates are responsible for negotiating teachers’ salaries and benefits, protecting teachers’ working rights and ensuring that all demands on teachers are made fairly.

Visit otffeo.on.ca to learn more.
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Perhaps the most prominent symbol of the Métis Nation is the brightly coloured, woven sash. During the Fur Trade, Métis voyageurs paddled 16-18 hours a day and carried 180-pound packs at a trot across long, rugged portages. This back-breaking work created a risk of strangulated hernias, the leading cause of death during the Fur Trade. The sash offered important protection as a pressure dressing for hernias, and provided some back support. In the days of the voyageur, the sash was also a colourful and festive belt, a rope when needed, a key holder, first aid kit, washcloth, towel, emergency bridle or saddle blanket. Its fringed ends could become a sewing kit. The sash has acquired new significance symbolizing pride and identification for Métis peoples.
ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is one part of our collective effort on the journey of reconciliation. This is a journey that involves what COPA terms the cycle of positive change that features learning, reflecting, growing and changing. Joining the Circle is designed to help ensure Indigenous students and their families feel that they belong and are able to realize their greatest potential.

This resource is designed…

• for all educators regardless of grade level or student ability, whether in the classroom, at school, at the board or in the community;

• to increase confidence and sensitivity in education practices in order to facilitate the flourishing of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students;

• to embed the histories, languages, cultures and perspectives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit into all aspects of school and community life regardless of whether there are Indigenous students present or not. Reconciliation involves us all;

• to support our individual capacity and help create systemic change for safe, strong and free school communities with and for Indigenous students and families.

Joining the Circle is not in any way intended to be a textbook or an exhaustive list of histories and information about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. It has been created as one of many rich resources developed for the above purposes. COPA’s goal is to share ideas, inspiration, knowledge, strategies and guidance for enhancing educational practices.

This project emerged out of COPA’s A Circle of Caring project for First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents, families, caregivers and schools. Joining the Circle is a partnership with the Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) and is intended for all education staff in schools, boards and communities. Joining the Circle and A Circle of Caring are both funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.
WISDOM AND GUIDANCE

Joining the Circle was designed by COPA in keeping with the Ministry’s commitment to supporting equity and inclusive education. COPA’s goal is to share our particular vision, while being sensitive and respectful of the different people who have an interest in sharing it. With this vision in mind, the wisdom and guidance of people and groups from Indigenous communities all over Ontario are at the heart of this project.

Many people generously shared their time, knowledge and thoughts. COPA met with hundreds of educators, family and community members, leaders and Elders, Senators and Knowledge Holders. Together we have created a resource to help all of us nurture classrooms, schools and boards where Indigenous students and their families will be safe, strong and free.

COPA was also closely advised by members of our working groups (Anglophone and Francophone), as well as the Ontario Teachers’ Federation. COPA sought and received excellent feedback with regard to planning, creating and disseminating this new resource.

Anglophone Working Group
Deb St. Amant // Wanda Botsford // Chantal Côté // Jeanne Hebert // Christine Lund // Zipporah Nochasak // Shirley Ida Williams // COPA

Francophone Working Group
Deb St. Amant // Chantal Côté // COPA

Creating Joining the Circle allowed COPA and partners the precious opportunity to listen and explore common and distinct experiences. We hope that these are shared here in a way that is truly meaningful, respectful and practical, too.

Gchi Miigwech, Yaw^ko, Nya:weh, Kinanâskomitinâwâw, Marsi, Qujannamiik and Nakumek to everyone who shaped, guided and shared their thoughts, ideas, caring and wisdom to bring this resource to life.
THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established in 2008 by the federal government. It’s mandate was to promote a national reconciliation and foster healing between First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. Its primary focus has been to record and expose the truth to all Canadians about residential schools and related policies that negatively affected Indigenous peoples.

The TRC spent over six years travelling around the country listening to impact statements from residential school Survivors who courageously shared their stories, often for the first time. Based on their findings and under the guidance of Justice Murray Sinclair, they published a report, Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future, along with 94 Calls to Action. Visit trc.ca to read the report and learn more about reconciliation.

Each one of us plays a part in our national reconciliation process, as articulated by the Commission. The Calls to Action that relate to education can serve as a useful guide for educators striving to provide inclusive environments where each and every student and their families, feel valued, appreciated, respected and safe.

THE INDIGENOUS EDUCATION STRATEGY

The Indigenous Education Strategy was launched with the release of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework in 2007. The Framework is the foundation for delivering quality education to all First Nation, Métis and Inuit students in Ontario’s publicly funded school system.

The Framework provides the strategic policy context within which the Ministry of Education, school boards, and schools are working together to improve the academic achievement of Indigenous students. Joining the Circle is consistent with the Ministry’s vision and policy framework.¹

Educators wishing to include more Indigenous perspectives can make use of the Teachers’ Toolkit, a collection of professionally developed electronic resources with practical teaching strategies including themes, topics, and perspectives for students of all ages.² Visit edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal.
OUR ROLE AS EDUCATORS

All Canadians have an important role to play in the reconciliation process. We can begin by acknowledging the legacy of residential schools and becoming better informed about the various and complicated effects of intergenerational trauma still affecting us all today.

Call to Action #62 of the TRC Final Report focuses on the role of education in the process of reconciliation, urging educators, government and Indigenous peoples, including Survivors, to join together to…

• make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Indigenous peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for K–Grade 12;
• provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers as to how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms;
• provide the necessary funding to Indigenous schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

We can think of this journey as a step toward decolonizing and indigenizing schools. Educators, students and families can be involved by…

• learning about and from the history of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, including the legacies of oppression and their continuing impact;
• understanding how the oppression of Indigenous peoples continues today;
• prioritizing Indigenous ways of knowing, being, concerns and worldviews;
• understanding Indigenous peoples’ activism as one of human rights and Indigenous rights;
• knowing, understanding and experiencing Indigenous-informed teaching and learning practices;
• working collectively to change the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples from one of oppression to one of equity and justice.
First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples share a history of living on the land, based on hunting, fishing, trapping 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 Canada, including First Nations reserves, Métis communities and settlements, regional communities of the Canadian Arctic and Subarctic, rural areas, towns and cities.

There are over 133 First Nations communities in Ontario and there are 13 First Nations languages in this province alone. These First Nations communities are widely varied across Canada, with unique histories, cultures, practices and languages. Their languages emerged out of two groups, the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe.

The Métis are a distinct Indigenous people with a unique history, culture, language and territory that varies across the country. The Métis Nation is comprised of descendants of people born of relations between First Nations women and European men. The Métis historically learned First Nations beliefs and ceremonies from their First Nations ancestors, and Christian beliefs from their European ancestors.

The initial offspring of these unions were of mixed ancestry. The genesis of a new Indigenous people called the Métis resulted from the subsequent intermarriage of these mixed-ancestry individuals. In Ontario, distinct Métis settlements emerged as an outgrowth of the fur trade, along freighting waterways and watersheds. The language of the Métis is Michif and much like First Nations and Inuit languages, there are different dialects.

Inuit literally means “the people” and their language is Inuktitut. Inuit language, culture and history vary from region to region and from within. The Inuit have historically lived in four regions in the Far North of Canada, none of these in Ontario. Different dialects of Inuktitut are spoken in each region. Over 3,000 Inuit live in Ottawa and this number is growing. Many come from these four regions, speak Inuktitut and still maintain traditional practices.
INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

The Indigenous student population is growing. 2011 Census results show that Ontario’s population of Indigenous school-aged children (aged 5–19) has grown to nearly 79,000 from 69,000 in 2006. This includes over 55,000 First Nations, close to 20,000 Métis, over 1,000 Inuit and close to 3,000 children with multiple or other identities. It is estimated that 82% of these children attend provincially funded elementary and secondary schools.

Statistics Canada revealed in 2011 that of the Canadian population aged 25 to 64, 67% of First Nations, 79% of Métis, and 51% of Inuit had matriculated compared to 88% of non-Indigenous people. Of that same population, 29% of Indigenous people had “no certificate, diploma or degree,” compared to only 12% on non-indigenous people.

In fact, increasing numbers of Indigenous students are thriving at school, and indeed the drop out rate for Indigenous students in Canada has declined significantly since 2007. Nevertheless there are many who are not flourishing or even staying in school, due to the impact of informal and systemic barriers that can be eliminated if we put our minds and hearts to it.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

In this guide, we share information and tools for becoming aware of creative strategies to ensure the full inclusion of Indigenous students. It reflects the wisdom and values of Indigenous peoples who shared with COPA and helped create this new tool. The information and tools provided here are designed to help educators strengthen our understanding and respect for Indigenous histories and cultures.

Indigenous community members and leaders advised COPA to include cultural teachings. Some of these have been chosen to highlight ways of being, learning and sharing, while recognizing that it would be impossible to include all teachings from all Indigenous communities in Ontario.

This guide is designed for use with the Joining the Circle short animated films, created to nurture welcoming schools and communities. Additional resources are included in the kit to support this initiative.
LISTENING AND LEARNING

There are many efforts by Indigenous peoples and their allies to reclaim, revitalize and celebrate oral traditions, writing systems, languages, literatures, arts, values and ways of understanding the world. The heritage of Indigenous peoples in Canada emerges out of the rich and long histories of many civilizations and cultures.

By listening carefully and being open-hearted, those who have coordinated this project have had precious opportunities to learn more about this rich heritage, and the diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and teachings. They were guided and grounded, and learned a great deal about how to support young people—in schools and out in the bigger world. This learning is at the very heart of this guide and the other parts of this resource.

A wholistic perspective central to Indigenous peoples has been the inspiration for this project, linking physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health, and the precious values of sharing, respect, kindness and kinship bonds—the basis of forming healthy, equal relationships.
The following words and terms are used in our guide to help us share our ideas:

- The word “colonization” is used here to describe a form of invasion and oppression of a people, their land and their culture.
- The word “decolonization” is used here to describe efforts to restore justice and equity for Indigenous peoples.
- The word “discrimination” is used here to describe the unjust treatment of people, perceiving their differences as something negative.
- The word “educator” is used here to describe all adults who work directly or indirectly to support student education and wellbeing.
- The word “Elder” is used here to describe respected members of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, determined not by age, but by wisdom and cultural and spiritual knowledge. Different nations and communities use different words for Elders (including Senators and Knowledge Keepers). In order to be most respectful, educators may ask how people prefer to be introduced or referred to.
- The word “empowerment” is used here to describe the process of gaining control over our own lives, taking charge and sharing power.
- The word “equity” is used here to describe a condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people.
- The word “inclusion” is used here to describe efforts to ensure meaningful participation of all people in society, specifically those who are left out because they lack social status and power.
- The word “Indigenous” is used here to describe the first peoples of Canada—First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, also often called Aboriginal people. They have lived in North America since long before Canada became a country. Terms to describe First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have evolved over time. Preferences may vary and it’s important to take direction from individuals or communities as to how they identify themselves. The word “Indigenous” is used in Canada and around the world.
• The term “intergenerational trauma” is used here to describe pain and suffering that has been passed on to successive generations stemming from the injustice experienced by their ancestors.9

• The word “racism” is used here to describe beliefs, actions and laws based on the idea that the dominant racial group is superior to all others. These have resulted in discrimination and injustice for Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world.

• The word “reconciliation” is used here to describe the act of repairing relations between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Canada.

• The word “sexism” is used here to describe beliefs, actions and laws that perceive women as inferior to men.

• The term “teachings” refers to the transfer of cultural knowledge, shared orally and not written down. To receive teachings, we must learn from traditional knowledge holders, which is why building a relationship with these respected people is essential. Teachings are often individual in nature and can vary from person to person and nation to nation.

• The term “two-spirited” is used to refer to an Indigenous person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit.

The words “we” and “us” are used here to include educators.

The words “family” or “family member” are used here to include everyone who cares for our children, as it is not unusual for Indigenous students to either be raised by grandparents or other relatives or be in foster care. Whenever the word “caregivers” is used here, it includes parents and all guardians.

And finally, any time we use the word “student” or “students” this means students of all ages.
Wampum belts symbolize partnership and ways of living side by side. The Two-Row Wampum belt symbolized the agreement and conditions concerning the Haudenosaunee’s relationship with the Dutch whom they welcomed to the land. The two-coloured beaded rows of the belt symbolize two paths or two vessels (First Nations and European) travelling down the same white bead river together, side by side, but each in their own boat, neither trying to steer the other. It 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.
First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada often encounter many challenges with their health and social wellbeing, and Indigenous students may thus face many barriers to succeeding at school. 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 work hand-in-hand and unfortunately are still part of our world—sometimes taking the form of bullying and abuse. Abuse has a negative effect on our young people, at home, at school and in the community.

Discrimination and abuse make participating in school life hard or even impossible. It may also trigger difficult and painful memories.

In recent years, many efforts by Indigenous community and government leaders have been undertaken to help change attitudes and practices, such as ensuring Indigenous students’ right to an education and a learning environment free from discrimination—allowing each child to reach their full potential. As educators we 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 Indigenous students, we will explore the many ways that schools can support them. COPA believes that together we can create cultures 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, heard and welcomed. COPA hopes that this guide will be helpful in overcoming barriers and nurturing a cycle of positive change for ourselves, for our students, and for generations to come.

A positive step is to discover whose traditional territory our school community is physically located on and learn more about that community(ies) with our students.
**CULTURE AND IDENTITY**

Culture is passed down from one generation to the next and is what distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is also linked to land and to time and to a way of life. It encompasses attitudes, beliefs, languages, art forms, rituals, ceremonies, stories, histories, foods, customs, institutions, clothing, ways of knowing, and much more. Cultural identity can be an immense source of pride, for example when participating in ceremonies, drumming, singing, hunting or dancing. Cultural identity can also be a source of confusion and shame, when an individual faces bullying, discrimination, or feelings of invisibility in relation to it.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have their own unique cultures. Even within a distinct group such as the Métis, culture is linked to land and where people live. For example, Métis from the West have different ways of being and therefore a different culture than Métis from Ontario. It is important as educators to be aware of the cultural diversity within and between First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and to avoid categorizing all Indigenous people as homogeneous or “Pan-Indigenous”.

Still, it is not possible to overstate the centrality of the land to all First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, since ways of being and knowing are fundamentally tied to it and all aspects of the Universe. For example, First Nations peoples see the land as a gift from creation, sustaining all of life, and requiring that those who benefit from it take great care of it. Within their world views it is inconceivable to “own” or exploit the land. It is not only seen as the Earth’s surface, but as a whole ecosystem of living/non-living beings and the elements of earth, fire, air and water. There is an emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual relationship with the land.

It is important that we get to know who is in our classrooms and schools. Are there students who self-identify as Indigenous, and if so, what is their heritage? The self-identification forms that caregivers may be given as they enroll their children are often left incomplete, as some caregivers have had negative experiences with schools and therefore mistrust the motives in asking about heritage. As a result, our records do not always paint an accurate picture of the Indigenous make-up of the school community. When students see that their cultures and heritages are valued and that they are reflected in the curriculum and in school life, they may be more likely to self-identify.
We should not assume self-identifying Indigenous students will want to speak openly about their heritage in order to educate others. Some students may know that they have Indigenous roots, but may not know much about their history as there is often a legacy of shame, secrecy and trauma. They may simply feel uncomfortable sharing their knowledge and perspectives, while others might not wish to be viewed as “experts” in all things Indigenous.

We can avoid further stigmatizing and shaming by not asking students to “prove” their Indigenous heritage or judging students by whether we think they “look” Indigenous enough.

We can respect what students reveal about their identity and how they do so by following their lead as to how much and what it is that they want to share. Also, keep in mind that they may identify differently than others in their family.

**LANGUAGE**

The 2011 census reports that over 60 Indigenous languages are spoken across Canada. It is impossible to overstate the importance of language, since culture is fundamentally tied to it. The process of colonization ensured the systematic destruction of Indigenous languages. This has resulted in not only the loss of entire languages, but also the prioritizing of the written word over various Indigenous methods of knowledge sharing, including oral teachings, traditions, and other Indigenous methods of recording information.

Today, there is an active movement to reclaim and revitalize Indigenous languages across the country. There are specific Calls to Action in the TRC’s Final Report designed to support these efforts.12

Share the online Language Tool to help students become aware of common languages spoken throughout Ontario. By learning some simple words, we communicate the existence and the value of these living languages. Use the short animated films in Cree, Inuktitut, Michif, Mohawk, Ojibwe and Oji-Cree to further expose students. Inviting Indigenous community members from your area to speak about this issue and model the value of this heritage can be a practical strategy for nurturing greater awareness.
In Canada and especially outside of Quebec, Francophone identity, culture and language are hard fought rights that continue to be advocated for in a dominantly Anglophone world.

Language rights have been an especially important part of this struggle and the history of oppression of Francophones can create a greater sensitivity to the efforts of other minority and lost language speakers, and to Michif speakers in particular.

Michif is the traditional language of the Métis people in Ontario. There are many different dialects of Michif depending on the different First Nations and European languages spoken in a given area. Ontario Michif is very different from Western Michif. Due to colonization and the oppression of Indigenous languages, peoples and cultures, Michif and other Indigenous languages were lost to many Métis. Speaking Michif can cause deep shame for speakers, especially students in Francophone schools, where they are understood to be speaking “bad French”.

We can work together to change this by acknowledging and affirming that Michif is a distinct language and celebrating Métis culture and contributions in our schools.

**SPIRITUALITY**

Prior to contact with Europeans, spirituality was a way of life and source of strength and unity for Indigenous communities. Enduring today, spiritual beliefs and practices are based on a relationship with nature, where physical and spiritual worlds are interconnected and sacred—where everything has a spirit. A spiritual connection supports physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health, caring for self, family and community. As a result of colonization and racist policies, many cultural and spiritual practices were outlawed with devastating effects.

There are various traditional and religious practices among First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Many are seeking to learn about these original ways of life in order to create balance, nurture wellness and pride, and reclaim their culture and identity.
CONTRIBUTIONS TO CANADA

Significant contributions have been made and continue to be made by Indigenous peoples in areas such as medicine, science, ecology, wholistic practices, arts, culture and language. Recognizing these contributions can form a strong basis for learning from each other and relationship building.

Many things taken for granted today were first introduced by Indigenous peoples. For example, they invented different means of transportation commonly used today, such as the kayak, canoe, dog sled, toboggan and snowshoes. They helped settlers survive harsh Canadian winter conditions by sharing ways to heal sickness with medicinal plants and how to collect and preserve food. They introduced settlers to foods we consume often, such as corn, popcorn, maple syrup and wild rice.

Indigenous clothing that we are familiar with includes parkas, moccasins and goggles. Games with Indigenous origins such as shinny and lacrosse are still popular today and played in many countries. Lacrosse is the national summer sport of Canada. Other contributions include the igloo, bunk beds, sleeping bags and ice fishing.

One of the most significant contributions Indigenous peoples have made are the names of the places around us—including the name Canada which is from the Saint-Lawrence Iroquoian word kanata (or canada) for “settlement”, “village”, or “land”. We can discover the names of places in our communities and their histories with our students.

As educators we can study the Indigenous names for local sites and landmarks and their history and meanings, and share these with our students. For example, the Eastern Cree name for Hudson Bay and James Bay is Wînipekw (southern dialect) or Wînipâkw (northern dialect), meaning muddy or brackish water. Petawawa is from the Algonquin language and means “where one hears the noise of the waters”. Or, Penetanguishene, which is an Algonquin name meaning “place of the white rolling sands.”
LAND, TREATIES AND RELOCATION

Canada’s many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities have unique histories and distinct characteristics, with complex and developed systems of governance, and profound connections with the land. These connections were—and still are—of vital importance, intertwined with livelihood, culture, language, diet, customs, spiritual teachings, and all aspects of life. Forming a colony entailed the active disruption of these structures and connections so as to promote European settlement.

Many formal treaties were signed between the British government and First Nations and they are still valid today. Many First Nations who signed the treaties did not read English and were not informed of the implications of the agreements.¹⁴ No treaties exist between the government and the Inuit, and the Métis were subjected to the Scrip system, as described below.

Many of these treaties, which are still valid to this day, have been ignored or broken and long-standing court cases are ongoing. Indigenous peoples in Canada have never ceded their right to autonomy and are still seeking self-determination and nationhood as promised in original proclamations and treaties.¹⁵

Becoming informed about treaties is central to reconciliation efforts in Canada. We are all treaty people as treaties affect all Canadians and we are legally and morally required to respect them. Together with our students, we can learn about and explore the treaties and land claims that affect the people of the area where our school is located. We can find out which treaty and First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities are local to us by visiting ontario.ca/page/treaties or by asking local Indigenous groups and leaders.

The Scrip System was in effect from 1870–1921 and its purpose was to extinguish Métis Indigenous title to land before settlement could occur on the prairies. A “Scrip” was a government-sponsored certificate that entitled the Métis head of household to either money or land. Originally a Scrip was worth either $160 or 160 acres. The Métis who wanted land for their Scrip were often offered land far from their family, community, waterways, and forest and not where they had built their home, or had been living and farming and working.
Most Métis were illiterate and did not understand the Scrip System. The majority were duped out of land altogether by speculators. The Scrip System meant a massive loss of land for the Métis.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{TIP} \textit{The history of Indigenous peoples is often told from a European point of view. Seeking knowledge from Indigenous peoples to learn about history means we will have more accurate perspectives. Additionally, it is important to ensure that Inuit share information about Inuit history and culture, and the Métis do so for Métis culture. Given the distinctions and complexity, it is important that we not lump all Indigenous peoples together, and assume one person can speak for all peoples.}

\textbf{THE INDIAN ACT}

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 established a nation-to-nation relationship between First Nations peoples and Europeans. However, the British North America Act of 1867 and the Indian Act of 1876 profoundly altered and codified the new Canadian government’s relationship to First Nations peoples, turning them into wards of the Crown. They were considered dependents and not citizens, and even denied the vote. (Quebec was the last province to award the vote to Indigenous peoples, in 1969.) The Indian Act is understood to be highly discriminatory, and gave the Canadian government the latitude to enforce policy aimed at ensuring European settlement on the land and waterways that Indigenous people lived on. It allowed government agents to interpret legislation and even decide who was a “real Indian”.

Creating laws to legitimize these actions, the British Crown and the Canadian government strategically forced entire First Nations communities to relinquish their hunting, trapping and fishing grounds, along with the waterways at the core of the Métis people’s existence. Treaties were ignored and sustainability was undermined.\textsuperscript{17}

Many people were relocated to “reserves”—designated tracks of land often lacking adequate water sources or fertile ground. Homes were lost and traditional ways of life were forcibly and dramatically altered. Dependence on government-provided dry goods and foodstuffs became imperative, and had a deleterious effect on the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional health of people ruptured from their homes and the means of self-sufficiency.\textsuperscript{18}
Some students, quite often from northern communities and reserves, have to move to another community to attend school. This can mean real culture shock for these students, possibly their first time away from home and their community. Many of these young people feel alone and adrift, without adult care and support. As educators, we can keep the communication flowing and be a voice of caring for these students. Weekly check-ins with the student as well as weekly or bi-monthly progress calls to caregivers can be the emotional boost students and caregivers need.

Entire Inuit communities were forcibly relocated to more southerly regions or to the High Arctic, thousands of kilometres from their homes, in order to assert Canada’s sovereignty there.

When Indigenous people became politically active in the 1920s, and attempts to enforce treaties and make land claims grew, Section 141 was added to the Act, outlawing them from hiring legal counsel and eventually barring them from forming public gatherings.¹⁹ (This was repealed in 1951.) Gender discrimination was an integral part of the Act; according to the law, a woman’s status was entirely dependent on that of her husband.²⁰ For example, an Indigenous woman who married a non-Indigenous man lost her status, while a non-Indigenous woman who married an Indigenous man, gained status even though she had no Indigenous bloodline.

These Acts did not formally apply to Métis and Inuit peoples, although they have often been subjected to the discrimination inherent in these laws, and denied benefits. Today however, as a result of what is called the Daniels Decision, the British North America Act and Royal Proclamation now apply to Métis and non-status Indigenous people.²¹

The Indian Act has been revised and amended over the centuries, and is currently under review by the federal government.
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The history of residential schools is a shocking and shameful part of Canada’s past. From the 1830s to the 1990s, 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and sent to live in government-funded, church-run residential schools. In establishing them, the government essentially declared Indigenous culture to be harmful and Indigenous people to be unfit parents and role models. Indigenous families continue to live with the terrible consequences today.

Children in these schools experienced wide-ranging and institutionalized physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse. They were made to live in extremely poor conditions and subjected to harsh discipline. They were forbidden from speaking their mother tongue and learning their traditions and values, which were denigrated and suppressed. Children were trained for menial jobs and not academic or vocational success. Children died of cruelty, neglect and disease. Many tried to run away and others took their own lives in desperation.22

Parents were no longer allowed to be in charge of their children’s care and education. Cut off from their families and communities, children were denied the experience of a loving home. They were forced to reject their heritage and language and to assimilate. The goal of these schools was to “kill the Indian in the child”.23
The church and government dominated their private adult lives as well, even arranging marriages for students after they completed their “education”. Predictably, Indigenous families experienced grief and loss, causing multigenerational trauma. Many families were so desperate that they lived in hiding to protect their children from these institutions.

Although Indigenous peoples and cultures have been deeply damaged, there is a refusal to surrender their pride and identity. The Survivors of Canada’s residential schools have acted with tremendous courage and determination to ensure that Canadians are aware of this damaging legacy and that reconciliation be front and centre on the national agenda. Their efforts led to the negotiation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in 2006 that mandated compensation for the harm caused to children and families and led to the formation of the TRC.24

In 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada issued a public apology to over 150,000 Indigenous people who were students of the residential school system, acknowledging the disastrous and lasting impact on children, families and communities. Mr. Harper stated that the legacy of this policy “has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today”. The forcible removal of children from their families and the subsequent failure to protect them from the abuse and neglect that they were subjected to at school was further compounded by the profound undermining of parents’ ability to provide appropriate care to their own, while utterly transforming the landscape of community life for generations to come. The apology acknowledged the “extraordinary courage” of thousands of Survivors that have come forward to speak about their experiences. The Prime Minister stated that the government and all Canadians are part of the recovery process—“and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey”.25

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Intergenerational trauma occurs when there is trauma due to the loss of family, culture and language, which with continuing oppression and lack of intervention, gets transferred from generation to generation. It is understood to affect individuals, families, and whole communities and manifests in personal and cultural shame and hopelessness. Substance abuse, abuse and violence, self-harm and suicide are some of the more common coping mechanisms.
Among Indigenous peoples this persistent trauma has caused high rates of internalized racism and lateral violence. In Canada, this trauma has affected many generations of Indigenous communities, impacting the health and well-being of their descendants.

An important consequence of intergenerational trauma is that multiple generations of families have been afraid of the school system. As educators, we can be aware that this trauma, continued racism and social marginalization mean that Indigenous student graduation rates are lower than that of other students, despite inroads made. We can disrupt this trend by believing in Indigenous students and their families, understanding this legacy and working closely with all involved to make positive social and individual change.

**RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION IN STUDENTS’ LIVES**

We know that many individuals and groups of people in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities lack power. They are seen as outsiders and therefore less deserving. This leads to various forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and ableism. Within Indigenous communities, student experiences of injustice are often a blending of all of these.26

Racism against Indigenous 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 more subtle—hidden in everyday activities and ways of thinking and being. Exploring how racism shows up in our daily lives can help us to name such injustice and strive to put an end to it. Residential schools are a striking example of colonization—one that continues to affect families and communities to this day.

Even now, Indigenous peoples’ histories, cultures and languages can be ignored, made invisible or thought of as unimportant by school systems and other institutions. This is another form of injustice. Students may not feel welcome in classrooms and their caregivers may not feel welcome in schools. It may feel like no one understands them or wants them to participate. Non-Indigenous people are beginning to better understand the injustice experienced by Indigenous peoples and are taking different steps to address it.
A real change can take place when educators think about experiences of racism and inequity from the point of view of Indigenous families. We can reach out for guidance, wisdom and help from Indigenous students, families, Elders and community leaders, to promote the belief that all students are an important part of the school and the wider community.

BULLYING AND RACISM

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

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 in society at large.

Indigenous gay youth are especially vulnerable to bullying, as homophobia and racism can combine in a toxic mix. Indigenous students who are living away from their families because they are in care or attending school are also particularly vulnerable.

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

As school staff working with Indigenous students and family members, we need to be aware of the ways prejudice and bullying can feed off of each other. We need to pay greater attention to their safety and wellbeing and we can only do this if we work together, listen to their stories, concerns and wisdom and model authentic positive attitudes and behavior. Given the high numbers of Indigenous students who have experienced bullying and injustice, all educators are encouraged to pay special attention to Indigenous students who are bullying others. These students are often themselves being bullied and we can understand it as part of a cycle of violence.
BULLYING AND SUICIDE

We now know more about the direct connection between bullying and suicide. Students who are bullied can feel alone, helpless and ashamed, afraid to reach out or draw attention to themselves. Hopelessness can drive them to extreme behaviour, such as thinking about or even attempting to take their own life.

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

Perhaps it is no surprise that suicide rates among Indigenous youth are five to six times higher than among other young people in Canada. Importantly, Indigenous peoples are 4% of the Canadian population, but Indigenous youth represented 10% of the calls to Kids Help Phone.\textsuperscript{27}

Multiple suicide attempts of young people in the remote Attawapiskat community of northern Ontario awoke many to what is now called the suicide pandemic among Indigenous youth in Canada. A state of emergency has been declared by a number of Indigenous leaders.\textsuperscript{28}

Many efforts have been taken to understand and address this growing problem. Documentaries such as the Eskasoni First Nation’s The Art of Resilience and Alanis Obomsawin’s Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Métis Child explore how suicide is affecting Indigenous communities.

Knowing about the high risk of suicide among Indigenous youth, as well as actions being taken by Indigenous communities, can be a great motivator for all of us. We can strengthen our efforts to ensure students feel connected, surrounded and supported so that they are less at risk to harm themselves in any way.

Becoming fully aware of the dynamics of bullying and learning positive techniques for intervention can be a lifesaving endeavor. Explore COPA’s comprehensive and wholistic approach to understanding and preventing bullying in our resource for Indigenous caregivers: A Circle of Caring (copahabitat.ca) and Safe@School (safeatschool.ca).
LATERAL VIOLENCE

People who have experienced violence and abuse commonly repress their feelings of anger, shame and rage. They may in turn abuse those around them who have even less power than they, feeling that this is a safer way to deal with these painful memories and feelings.

This is part of a cycle of abuse and is called lateral violence. For Indigenous peoples, it started with colonization and continues to this day. It can include attempts to control, exclude and hurt others with words and/or actions. This kind of abuse is usually directed against people within their own circle, such as family members, friends, neighbours and people at work. In schools, lateral violence may show up as bullying.29

While lateral violence is understandable, it goes without saying that it is nevertheless unacceptable; no one deserves to be the target of someone else’s negative feelings—no matter the reason. Each one of us has the right to be safe, strong and free.

INTERNALIZED RACISM

Stories of racism and injustice against Indigenous peoples are all around us. Sadly, they are so common that some Indigenous peoples have come to perceive them as normal and hold negative beliefs about themselves, their origins and their heritage.

This is known as internalized racism and can lead to self-hatred and harmful, even disastrous life choices. For young people, this can include substance abuse, leaving school, being violent (to themselves and to others), prostitution or suicidal thoughts and attempts.30

For Indigenous caregivers, this can affect their self-confidence and limit their ability to support their children’s education. Even having a little bit of contact with their children’s school can create feelings of anxiety, 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 valuable it would be.
Internalized racism can deeply affect the willingness of Indigenous students and families to self-identify. We can ensure that we neither push students to do so, nor question their identity nor single them out to speak about their heritage unless they or their family choose to do so. At the same time, we can learn about First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, contributions and cultures in our schools so as to create a welcoming environment on the journey to reconciliation.

MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN

The number of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada is disproportionately high. Native Women’s Association of Canada research indicates that between 2000 and 2008, these deaths represented approximately 10% of all female homicides in Canada, even though they make up only 3% of the female population. More shockingly, 17% of those were girls age 18 or younger. Following strong public pressure from Canadians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, the Canadian government has formally established a national inquiry into this national tragedy. Five Indigenous leaders have been appointed as commissioners to lead this independent inquiry.

The complicated mix of violence against girls and women and anti-Indigenous discrimination is causing alarming rates of trauma, which affects all of us. As educators, we can be aware of, sensitive to and work towards addressing sexism, racism, colonialism and violence and its many tragic consequences.

We can ensure that sexist, racist and classist perceptions of Indigenous women are examined, disrupted and challenged at every turn.

MARGINALIZATION

The legacy of oppression for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples has created social marginalization. The consequences may include fractured families, displacement, disproportionate rates of physical and mental illness, violence, addiction and poverty, along with other social barriers.
Not all Indigenous students and families live with these experiences; they are as just as varied as non-Indigenous families and there is much that is positive to report too. For example, increasing numbers of Indigenous youth are training as professionals. We can be sensitive to the various facets of marginalization and inequity students and families live with so as to challenge these barriers. We can also understand that these are not the result of individual failures, but the result of hundreds of years of social, political and economic oppression that can affect whole communities.

**INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE**

The federal and provincial governments of Canada have a historically fraught relationship with Indigenous peoples, creating and implementing public policy and laws that have effectively disrupted healthy family and community life. Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop, as it is now called, are poignant examples of this.

The Sixties Scoop was a dark era in our history; from the 1960’s to the 1980’s government agencies forcibly removed Indigenous children from their homes and offered them up for adoption without the consent of their parents. It is estimated that approximately 20,000 Indigenous children were adopted out during this period. A campaign to seek redress from the Canadian government for this injustice is underway as COPA completes this guide.

Even today, Indigenous children are more likely to be placed in foster care or a group home and become a Society or Crown ward—wherein the government takes permanent guardianship. In 2005, there were about 27,500 Indigenous children in foster care across Canada. At that time, Indigenous children made up only 7% of the child population in Canada and yet almost half of those in foster care were Indigenous. One quarter were Crown wards. Historically, the number of children in care increased as residential schools were closed.

**TIP** As educators, we can offer additional wellbeing and academic support to these students, and work alongside community helpers and caregivers. Together, we can help address barriers and strengthen these students’ abilities, self-confidence and success while at school.
Children in care are more vulnerable than others, as their families are less involved in their education and wellbeing. As we know, this has a real impact on their chances of success at school and later in life. 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 Ontario students.\textsuperscript{36}

Reports continue to show that when child abuse in Indigenous families is reported, the situation is 2.5 times more likely to be investigated and the child is 9 times more likely to be placed in foster care, than a non-Indigenous child. Furthermore, once in care, Indigenous children stay there longer and are more likely to become Society or Crown wards.\textsuperscript{37}

In response, many Indigenous groups have taken a more active role in managing child welfare, working with government to improve policies and practices. The standards for child welfare agencies are being changed to take into account the importance of Indigenous history, heritage and cultural ties.\textsuperscript{38} In January 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered the government to cease discriminatory practices and to take measures to right this wrong and prevent further discrimination.\textsuperscript{39}
STUDYING AWAY FROM HOME

Many Indigenous students have to leave home if there is no school in their community. This is a particularly prevalent occurrence during the years of secondary schooling. It can be difficult for students to be far from their loved ones while adjusting to a new life removed from all that they know. Many experience culture shock, often never having lived in a town or a city.

This presents an extra challenge for many students, and feeling lonely and afraid can make it even harder. Experiencing discrimination because they are newcomers puts them at even 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, lashing out or harming themselves. Many drop out and decide not to continue their education.

Students living and studying away from home 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 educators, host families or community helpers. Making sure that students who are away at school are tended to goes a long way. Reaching out to their caregivers who may be far away, as well as host families, more frequently than usual, can also make a positive difference.

WORKING IN RESERVE COMMUNITIES

Some educators may choose to teach in on-reserve communities and that can pose challenges. It is important to be open and learn as much as we can about the community from a wide variety of people living there. We can learn about the cultures, traditions, strengths and role models in the community as well as being open to ways of being and doing things that are different from our known ways.

We can examine and reflect on any bias or preconceived ideas we may have going into the community. We can also learn about the various socio-economic realities, different types of families, and cultural shifts affecting our students. We may need to understand lateral violence much more deeply in small communities since so many more people will be interconnected.
For reasons discussed earlier, many residential school Survivors and those living with intergenerational trauma have come into conflict with the law and spend much of their life in and out of prison. Ironically, some of these prisons have been built directly on the old sites of residential schools.

In fact, Indigenous youth and adults are greatly over-represented in Canadian prisons and their rate of incarceration is 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 Indigenous origins. Indigenous women make up 33% of all female prisoners and their rate of incarceration has increased by 80% in the past decade.40

There is more information now than ever before about the negative effect on young people whose parents or caregivers are in prison. Researcher Carol Shedd calls them the “invisible children”.41 They live with stress at home and at school, feeling ashamed, secretive and disconnected from others, compounded by the absence of their caregiver.

They also can experience secondary prisonation—trauma induced by both their parent’s arrest and then their repeated exposure to the harsh environment of prison if they visit. Children with caregivers in prison are also more likely to be put in care and separated from their loved ones.

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 caregivers, 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 students is all-important.
Family is the foundation of Inuit culture. The family is surrounded by a larger social network that includes the rest of the community extending across the region. Inuit families are large and interconnected, with intricate bonds that are formed through childbirth, marriage and adoption.
Joining the Circle presents a positive vision of schools where the teachings and values of Indigenous cultures are all-important, especially kindness and respect. Discrimination, bullying and all forms of abuse and cruelty have no place here. It is a world where students, their families, educators and all people feel safe, accepted and included, where students can learn freely and become who they choose to be. It is a world in which everyone has a role to play and precious gifts to share and receive. It is a world in which people of all ages are safe, strong and free.

Because Indigenous students and their families experience so much injustice, it can be difficult for them to imagine that this vision can become a reality. And yet, the contributors to Joining the Circle believe that we can make positive change and that we can all be a part of bringing this goal to life. In so doing, we become part of reconciliation efforts in Canada.

**NURTURING WELCOMING CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS**

Striving to ensure a welcoming and inclusive classroom and school community will have a positive effect on Indigenous students, and on all children. Young people will note these efforts. Even the simplest act of encouraging Indigenous students and believing in them can have a tremendously positive impact on their success and wellbeing.

Having a respectful, caring presence in our students’ lives means that there is a greater possibility they will feel tended to and be able to manage barriers that might otherwise impede their success. It can build important life skills and a strong foundation for reflecting, learning and taking positive action.

Students will see us as a resource to turn to when they face challenges. This in and of itself offers educators precious opportunities to be supportive and help build problem-solving skills and decision-making capacity.

When educators develop a positive relationship with their students’ caregivers, a crucial bridge is built between home and school. Students are positively affected when they see that learning is important to their family and that their school is a safe place where their families’ wisdom and knowledge is welcomed, valued and respected.
As educators, we can do this in very simple ways. We can show interest in our students—in who they are, in their challenges, their concerns and their successes. We can encourage our students to study and offer resources for homework help. We can believe in our students’ academic abilities and celebrate their accomplishments. We can model positive behavior that we hope students will emulate. We can seek wisdom and support from their caregivers. We can reach out to Indigenous people at school or in the community.

HOW FAMILIES CAN SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING

Family and community are at the very heart of Indigenous ways of being and learning. Family involvement, both at home and at school, has a positive impact on students. When families are involved in their children’s education, young people tend to be more successful at school and stay in school longer.

When we have positive relationships with our students and their families, we can contribute to addressing difficulties in their lives, and help prevent bullying and other forms of cruelty and injustice. In these ways, Indigenous students and families develop more trust, as we demonstrate that we are there for them.

By joining Indigenous peoples’ ways of being and learning with those of non-Indigenous people, we can enrich our practice while supporting students’ growth at all stages of development.

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

As educators, there are simple ways for us to encourage family members and community supports to nurture our students’ learning within and beyond the classroom. While many caregivers are already involved in this way, some Indigenous family members may feel less drawn by this as a result of their traumatic history with the education system.
Unfortunately, the history of residential schools and ongoing experiences with discrimination have coloured the view of many families and reduced interest in participating in school activities. Internalized racism, colonization and intergenerational trauma have deeply affected Indigenous peoples and their attitudes toward education and school life. Generations later, family members may feel as though they have little of value to contribute to their children’s education, to the school or simply not know how they might pitch in. For some, it can be difficult and even painful to have any contact with the school system.

And yet we know that every family member has strengths, talents, and teachings to share with each other, with their children and with us. Caregivers know their children well and care for them more than anyone else. Nurturing a safe, strong and free culture in schools, at home, and in our communities can be imagined as braiding many strands of string together to make one strong rope. From a Métis perspective, it is like the strands of wool in the sash: individually they can be easily broken, but together they are united and strong.

It is important that educators build trust, and we can do so in these simple ways:

- by making the first phone call of the year to home positive and perhaps a simple introduction and welcome.
- by encouraging caregivers and family members to join in school activities or feel welcome to ask questions or raise concerns;
- by reaching out in a friendly manner to a family member at a school or community event and by starting a conversation;
- by introducing ourselves to caregivers when we meet them in the community.

Next steps might include encouraging caregivers to attend parent-teacher meetings or sharing something in the classroom, finding ways for them to volunteer for school outings or asking them to join School Council. These ideas can help family members feel more comfortable at school. We should keep in mind that Indigenous caregivers may feel particularly anxious about attending these meetings, and may assume that the meeting is for communicating problems only.
One of the Cree teachings of the Medicine Wheel is about responsibility and relationships between the stages of life. This comes from the teaching of the drum—the circle. When we crisscross the directions of the ties of the drum, it shows the connections between students, caregivers and Elders. Our lives and our journeys are like the Medicine Wheel.
In this guide, COPA and our partners have shared our vision of classrooms and schools where Indigenous students and families, and indeed all people feel safe, accepted and welcomed. This means ensuring students have the information and tools they need to learn and be the best that they can be as we nurture a safe, strong and free world.

We all know there is no simple recipe for real change. And yet, the importance of establishing and strengthening relationships and rebuilding trust with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, families and leaders cannot be overstated. Educators becoming aware and engaged in nurturing safe and inclusive places to learn and grow is a crucial step toward a profound change of heart. By being present in our students’ lives, at home and at school, we will demonstrate that we believe in them and that we do truly care. We can be important, positive role models for our students, valuing and modelling healthy, loving relationships. By aligning ourselves with Indigenous values, teachings and ways of life, we will enhance all of our students’ education and personal development—plus our own.

We all have a role to play in refusing to participate in the cycle of shame, blame and violence, as we embrace a new cycle—with concrete ways to learn, reflect, grow and change. We can all contribute to building a school culture based on compassion and kindness, where everyone feels a part of the whole. When Indigenous families feel seen, heard and valued in our schools they will be more likely to share their wisdom and teachings.

Joining the Circle is intended to support all of us in school communities. We hope that you have found guidance and inspiration here, enabling all of us to breathe more life into welcoming spaces for Indigenous students and family members.

Everyone has the right to be safe, strong and free. We all belong. Gchi Miigwech, Yaw'ko, Nya:weh, Kinanâskomitînâwâw, Marsi, Nakumek and Qujannamiik to each person that took the time to contribute to this project.
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.
Q. **Do Indigenous students speak Indigenous languages?**

A. Yes, many do! And in fact, their first language may not be English, and instead Indigenous. Students may therefore need additional support with their English language skills. This may also explain why some students will be quieter in class or less comfortable with curriculum.

Q. **Does being Métis mean that one has mixed Indigenous and European heritage?**

A. There is often an assumption that if one is of mixed ancestry, with Indigenous heritage, that one is Métis. While that might satisfy the generic definition of Métis, it does not necessarily meet the definition of Métis as a people.

In Canada, the Métis are recognized as a distinct nation. “Métis” means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of Historic Métis Nation ancestry, and is accepted by the Métis Nation.

Q. **What terminology is appropriate to use?**

A. It is always best to allow people to choose their own terms of identification as they vary. For example, many people identify themselves by the nation to which they belong, such as Anishinaabek, Cree, Mohawk, Odawa, Oneida, Métis, Inuit or a combination of identities.

Today, “Indigenous” may be used in speaking about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples collectively, while recognizing that First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and peoples are varied and distinct. The term “Indigenous” is used currently in Canada.

“Indian” was the term used by the Europeans who first made contact with the First Nations peoples in North America. “Indian” and “Eskimo” (to refer to the Inuit) have a long history of negative connotations and are considered offensive. The terms “Native” and “Aboriginal” are still in use by some groups and government bodies. The term Indigenous is often misused to represent First Nations only; while in fact, it includes three distinct groups: First Nations, Métis and Inuit.
Q. **How can I avoid language that stereotypes Indigenous peoples?**

A. Discriminatory stereotypes portray Indigenous peoples as being “savage” or “uncivilized”. They were called “Eskimos”, which means “eaters of raw meat”. Other stereotypes, such as the “noble savage” or the “Indian living in harmony with nature,” may seem less harmful, but still distort identities by promoting unrealistic and dated generalizations of people.

Q. **What is the correct way to speak of the Inuit people in Canada?**

A. 1 person: Inuk (e-nook)

   2 people: Inuit (e-new-e)

   3+ people: Inuit (e-new-eet)

Q. **What are some of the differences of the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe?**

A. There are many differences; for example, at their own ceremonies, the Haudenosaunee go around a circle or pass things within a circle moon-wise (counter-clockwise). The Anishinaabe go around a circle or pass items within the circle sun-wise (clockwise) during their ceremonies.

First Nations languages emerged out of these groups, the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe. The Haudenosaunee’s languages are Iroquois-based and include the Six Nations languages: Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca and Tuscarora. The Anishinaabe’s languages are Algonquian-based and include all other First Nations languages: Algonquin, Cree, Dene, Odawa, Ojibwe and Oji-Cree.

Q. **What is smudging?**

A. First Nations open an event, meeting or gathering with a smudge and a welcome by an Elder. This entails purifying oneself by using sacred medicines (various herbs) and blessings. Smudging is believed to be a time of grounding and preparing for the work, teachings or ceremony that will follow.
Q. **What is the importance of fiddling and jigging for the Métis?**

A. 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. The Red River Jig, a 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. Some Métis peoples continue this tradition today.

Q. **Were there treaties between the Indigenous peoples of Canada before European contact?**

A. Treaty agreements, both formal and informal, were created and respected by the First Nations peoples themselves, with each other, long before European contact, ensuring stability as well as peace and cooperation between the nations.

Q. **When was the last treaty between the government and Indigenous peoples signed?**

A. New treaties are still being developed. The Algonquin land claim is an example of a current treaty negotiation and will result in Ontario’s “first modern-day constitutionally protected treaty”. The Algonquin have unceded rights to parts of both the Ottawa and Mattawa rivers that run through Ontario.

Q. **What is Bannock?**

A. Bannock is a simple bread that could be made from the rations of flour and sugar that were given to replace traditional foods. Bannock can be baked or cooked on a stick over an open fire. It is also called fry bread when it is fried. It is a staple of many First Nations’ diets.

Many Indigenous peoples consider it a traditional food, and it is consumed at many celebrations. In fact, bannock was introduced as a result of colonialism. When people were forcibly relocated and sent to reserves without good hunting or other traditional food sources, Indigenous people were taught to make bannock to help tide their hunger.
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 evident in these situations, as is the presence of sometimes malevolent forces.
This section of the guide is designed to provide information and structure for those who are leading group discussions using the short animated films. COPA encourages you to review the whole guide, however, in order to absorb the many practical ideas and strategies presented throughout.

**ABOUT THE FILMS**

Ten short animated films are available to help jumpstart conversations among educators, schools and communities. They are meant to feel realistic and, at the same time, offer a light touch to serious topics. Each film has been adapted for educators from COPA’s A Circle of Caring project for families and schools, and is now infused with new content and imagery as guided by Indigenous peoples and educators.

The film series is designed to help us imagine how we can all be a positive part of students’ 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 students, adults, educational partners, and Elders. Ideally, the films will support students and all people to feel more worthy and supported by those all around them. The films promote COPA’s vision: the positive cycle that encourages us to learn, reflect, grow and change.

The films feature the Capsule families and other friends and are available on DVD. They can also be found online at copahabitat.ca. Each film is close captioned and available in six Indigenous languages spoken in Ontario: Cree, Inuktitut, Michif, Mohawk, Ojibwe and Oji-Cree. Each film is also available in French and in English and is introduced by an Elder.
CAST OF CHARACTERS

COPA hopes you’ll enjoy meeting the different characters that appear in the 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.
Ehnita is a bright and experienced instructor. Years of learning and teaching have taught Ehnita that great things happen when everybody works alongside each other, sharing with and respecting one another.

Kari is a young instructor with a passion for knowledge and a great sense of wonder at the world. As a new educator, Kari is eager to learn from students and their families.

Dot is a hard-working adult who cares for the family. 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 friends.
Sage is an adored grandparent and helps care for the family. Sage loves to be in the company of young children. Sage enjoys taking chances and discovering new things.

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.

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.
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REFLECTING ON OUR ROLE

An educator takes a journey, learning about the rich cultural traditions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Bringing these ways of knowing and being into our schools can transform learning and teaching for all.

Narrated Message // Sometimes when people think about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, stereotypes and negative images may come to mind. These ideas can stop people from seeing us as who we really are. Indigenous peoples are diverse, strong and proud. Our cultures and traditions are rich, our histories are vast and complex and our contributions to Canada are many. We can change our preconceived ideas by becoming aware of how Indigenous people see and interact with nature and the world and our ways of knowing and being and teaching and learning. Learning about new cultures can be intimidating but don’t be afraid to ask students, families, board staff, and community members—including Elders. We share similar values but we are not all the same; we are First Nations, Métis and Inuit and our many cultures and traditions are each beautiful and unique. Our heritage is very important to us and we strive to make our children proud of their culture and of who they are. Learning about our cultures and making an effort to include our traditional ways of learning and being into the classroom and school, makes the school a kinder and richer place where Indigenous children and their families feel welcome, safe, nurtured and acknowledged.

(Reflecting on our Role cont’d on next page)
QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What practices can we put in place to support an environment in which Indigenous students feel comfortable and proud to share information about their cultures and histories?
3. How can we learn about Indigenous cultures and histories, including the impact of colonization, along with the rich heritage of First Nations, Métis and the Inuit?
4. What steps can we take to establish a relationship between the local Indigenous communities and the school so that we can learn from each other?
5. How can we include Elders, Senators, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and community leaders in teaching students and school staff? How can we learn to share that knowledge in a respectful manner?
6. Who can we reach out to at the school or board level to become more informed about policy?

IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

• As educators, we may be afraid that we don’t know enough about Indigenous histories and cultures. We may not know where to start, what to do or how to do it without offending. We can review our school and board practices and policies so as to be better equipped to implement them. We can reach out for support from the Indigenous Education leads at our board, community resources, Elders and others for knowledge, wisdom and support.

• Our students and their families can be an important source of knowledge. At the same time, we can’t assume they want to play that role. We need to avoid placing an undue burden on Indigenous peoples to inform us about their cultures and histories.
• We can actively seek out ways to embed Indigenous ways of being and learning into our schools, our classrooms and all our education practices. There are many adults at school, at the board, at home and in the community that educators can turn to.

• We can build a positive Indigenous presence by inviting Elders to provide an opening or song at a school event (research the traditional protocol for doing so). We can acknowledge the traditional territory on which the school is located with signs in English and the Indigenous language(s) of that territory. We can ensure the library has a broad range of relevant books and resources and that they reflect the realities and culture of Indigenous students and do not perpetuate stereotypes or freeze peoples as part of “history”.

• We can recognize that family and community events may not coincide with the school calendar and treat these absences as learning opportunities for all students.

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

• Non-Indigenous educators can act as allies 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 explore training options available to educators; for example, the Ontario Teachers’ Federation and Faculties of Education offer online and face-to-face courses in Native Studies and Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.
BUILDING PRIDE AND IDENTITY

An educator learns about the diversity and rich traditions of Indigenous cultures. They discover ways to nurture pride and identity among Indigenous students and their families.

NARRATED MESSAGE // Our rich Indigenous heritage is very important to all of us. Our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students can be proud of their cultures and of who they are. Sometimes students can encounter bullying and even racism because they are Indigenous. This can make them feel badly about themselves and put them at risk. It may affect the way they feel about school. Knowing about Indigenous traditions, recognizing cultural diversity and being aware of our wholistic ways of learning can positively affect Indigenous students and help them succeed and flourish. Organizations and community members and leaders, such as Elders, Senators and Knowledge Keepers can offer guidance. When we help each other learn, we grow stronger together. We have proud First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures; each beautiful and unique.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachings and traditions are part of our students’ education?
3. How might we and our colleagues help support Indigenous families’ efforts to strengthen their children’s pride in their culture and history?
4. How might we build relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit families and community members and leaders so that they may share their knowledge and cultures in schools, fostering pride and identity?
5. What more could be done to make First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachings and cultures more present in all of our students’ education? What opportunities are there in our day-to-day work life to incorporate information about First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures and traditions?
6. How can we learn more about the discrimination that Indigenous students face? What steps can we take to address and prevent it?
While Indigenous peoples share many similarities, First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada have distinct cultural, linguistic, historical, spiritual, geographical and other differences between them and within them. We can avoid lumping all Indigenous peoples into one group and making stereotypical assumptions about them—most notably what we believe Indigenous peoples are supposed to look like.

It is important to remind ourselves that identity can be a source of confusion, shame, fear and guilt, as well as pride, for our students. Indigenous leaders and Elders often identify language as a vital link to this re-connection. Introducing our students to the existence of our many Indigenous languages is a positive step toward establishing that link. (Use the online Language Tool to bring these languages to life for young people.)

It is important that we respect how Indigenous students identify themselves. Cultural pride and identity is both individual and communal and is interpreted differently by each of us. It can change depending on the setting that a person finds themselves in. Some Indigenous students may be proud—exploring and affirming cultural identity, happy to share—while their family members may feel very differently about their heritage.

Indigenous students may experience a cultural divide and feel that they are living two lives—adjusting to non-Indigenous ways of being, while at the same time maintaining their cultural identity at home and in their community. By developing positive relationships and greater cultural awareness, we can begin to understand these complexities and help ensure that all students and families feel that these parts of their lives are better integrated.

We can learn more about bullying, racism and discrimination and name it wherever we find it, while striving to prevent it ourselves. We can also help our students understand how different forms of injustice are interconnected. Being an ally to those around us who experience discrimination matters too—even in those small, quiet ways. 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.
CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

People are gathered together for a harvest celebration outside the school, illustrating the value and beauty of diversity and inclusion.

NARRATED MESSAGE // Diversity, equity and human rights are fundamental values we cherish. It matters that all of our students feel welcome and safe in their school community. When our students see themselves, their cultures and traditions reflected in the school curriculum and school life, it gives them a sense of belonging. Educators can seek Indigenous peoples’ guidance on nurturing positive environments for students. 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 alongside each other, we create spaces that enrich our student’s lives, broaden their horizons and enhance their success and well-being. The teachings of our Indigenous ancestors can guide us all to respect each other, including people from every background, as well as the animals and the land. Together, we can bring our vision of equity and diversity to life and shape a positive future for all young people, and for all of us.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What steps are being taken in our classrooms and at our school to foster equity and inclusion?
3. How can we help make sure Indigenous students and families feel like they belong? How can we help all students and families understand the value of equity and inclusion?
4. How can we encourage caregiver participation that better reflects the diversity of your school?
5. What strategies can we put in place that might strengthen the visibility and belonging of Indigenous students and their families?
6. Who are the key people at our school or board who might help with this?
Knowing how important it is for all students and their families to feel like they belong, we can promote inclusion by taking steps to ensure everyone feels welcome in the classroom and at school. We can reach out to First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and their families and adjust our pedagogical practices to indigenize the learning environment.

We can communicate the value of diversity and inclusion for student success on all fronts.

We can become more aware of the subtle ways language can be harmful. Biased terminology often reinforces our Eurocentric perspective; for example, we might teach our students that well-known non-Indigenous works of art are called “masterpieces” but significant Indigenous cultural and artistic expressions are spoken of as “crafts”.

We can examine stereotypes and not perpetuate them. Discriminatory stereotypes portray Indigenous peoples as being “savage” or “uncivilized”. Other stereotypes, such as the “noble savage” or the “Indian living in harmony with nature,” may seem less discriminatory, but still distort identities by promoting unrealistic and dated generalizations of people.
WELCOMING SCHOOLS

Bouncy is nervous about starting school and a friendly teacher reaches out, offering a warm greeting. All members of the school community are made to feel welcome as they start a new school year.

NARRATED MESSAGE // Everyone deserves to feel welcome, safe and fully included at school. First Nations, Métis and Inuit students can encounter many challenges when attending public school. This can be difficult for them and their families due to the effects of residential schools and racism. One way for educators to work towards creating safe, strong and free schools is by learning and sharing our knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous cultures. Learning about the cultural traditions of our communities from us, being aware of our ways of learning, and making an effort to include them in different aspects of school life can make a world of difference for all. Inviting community members to share traditions and ways of learning and being, develops awareness in non-Indigenous students and strengthens pride in Indigenous students, too. Welcoming classrooms and schools means that students can learn, grow and reach their full potential.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What does a safe, inclusive and accepting school look like and feel like?
3. How can we facilitate a welcoming school community for Indigenous families? How can we work with colleagues, the administration and board to help with this?
4. In what ways can we honour cultural differences in our classrooms and in the larger school community?
5. What actions can we take to welcome and include students and families from diverse backgrounds?
6. What ideas can be developed to ensure that Indigenous families and Elders, Senators and Knowledge Keepers have a meaningful role to play at school and in our students’ lives?
IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

• We can strive to engage Indigenous students’ caregivers and families, and find opportunities to welcome them as important members of the school community.

• By examining our materials, activities and the images we see around us, we can find out more about who is missing, who is visible, and what students are learning about themselves and others. (See appendix.)

• We can acknowledge differences, similarities and shared values—creating a safe space that highlights the beauty and value of diversity. We can ensure that Indigenous students and families have opportunities to help shape a school community that better reflects their ways of being.

• Explore COPA and OTF materials (safeatschool.ca) that provide both a vision and practical strategies to help facilitate safe, inclusive and accepting schools.
POSITIVE ROLE MODELLING

A collage of memories highlights ways for educators to be positive role models for our students, who learn from each other and from us about growing up and belonging.

NARRATED MESSAGE // We are important role models to our children and youth. Actively and respectfully including Indigenous traditional teachings in schools not only helps our children learn, but also builds pride and understanding. Our traditional 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 animal life. We cherish harmony and peace and are proud of our heritage. Guided by our spiritual values we aspire to attain our highest potential. When educators invite and welcome members of our communities as role models to share our knowledge with the school, we enhance our students’ personal and academic development and success.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. In what ways can we model kindness and empathy with our students?
3. What are the ingredients of healthy communication?
4. Why is apologizing important? What makes for a meaningful apology?
5. What are some of the challenges to being a positive role model for students? What steps can we take to overcome those challenges?
IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

• As we all know, our students observe our behaviour and learn from it. Being aware of our everyday interactions and how they affect everyone around us is a powerful means to transmit positive messages. Students tell us that adults rarely retract or apologize for their behaviour, while expecting them to do so. Being a positive role model entails acknowledging errors and striving to repair the problem.

• Treating each other kindly when we have different views can be difficult. Listening carefully and talking respectfully with others even when we disagree can go a long way. We know that by working together we are more likely to build caring and accepting classrooms and schools.

• We can watch our students interact with others to gain insight into their strengths and challenges, and how to offer support. We can celebrate successes—even small ones!

• Indigenous ways of being and knowing can teach us about positive role modeling, nurturing understanding, empathy, patience and kindness. This is one step toward indigenizing the classroom.

• We can use Indigenous role models from history, contemporary society, science, arts, medicine, entertainment, culture and other facets of life.

• We can show ourselves to be learners alongside our students when we invite Indigenous knowledge keepers and community members to share teachings.

• We can model respect by infusing these teachings into the learning environment while resisting cultural appropriation.
WHOLISTIC LEARNING

Fones is nervous about canoeing alone for the first time. A teacher and family members offer encouragement, rooting for Fones along the way. As a result, Fones feels more able to take on challenges and do well in school.

NARRATED MESSAGE // School can be a challenging place to be for Indigenous students. It is important to believe in each student’s potential even when they are struggling. Being aware of our traditional ways of knowing and learning can help us reach out to students and help them succeed. Our cultures allow us to learn more about ourselves. When we join together we help nurture their whole well-being on intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional levels. When students feel supported and have wholistic learning opportunities, they feel more confident and able. They can grow as individuals and as part of a safe, strong and free community. Recognizing and believing in students’ abilities, strengths and understanding their unique learning needs promotes a lifetime’s worth of self confidence and self-esteem and the foundation of academic and social success.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What different educational practices can we incorporate to ensure the success of Indigenous students?
3. How could we learn more about how students learn best?
4. How can we support caregivers to in turn support their children’s education at school and at home?
5. Are there families at our school that require additional support in order to enhance their children’s learning?
6. Who are the key people at our school, board or local Indigenous community who might help with this?
As educators, we know that everyone learns at a different pace and in different ways. Culturally, many Indigenous students learn best through hands-on activities: by being out in nature, by singing and playing, by observing and practicing. Incorporating bodily/kinesthetic, musical and environmental teaching styles into daily activities will increase chances of student success.

We can encourage students to share their optimal learning styles with us so that we can be more effective and they can have greater agency in their education.

We can help our students realize their potential by evaluating their academic progress outside of the conventional bounds of literacy and numeracy.

We can recognize that body language speaks volumes and transforms relationships, especially when the language of instruction is not the student’s or their caregivers’ mother tongue. Learning by observation is highly prized among Indigenous peoples. For the Inuit, for example, being at eye level, and not standing above the student, is natural and important.

Actively listening is considered respectful. Many Indigenous students and their family members may have fairly long pauses in their speech. These pauses are not for lack of words; they are part of the culture.

Teaching and learning is viewed as a community responsibility. Traditionally, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins, friends, neighbours and many others play a role in helping raise and educate children within the community. Connecting students to peers, family members and community supports can mean greater student success and a sense of achievement within a circle of care.

It is important to understand that communication and learning may be hampered by a history of discrimination, stereotyping and non-acceptance. Relationship building is the key to overcoming these barriers.

We can acknowledge that we also learn from our students. This can be humbling for us and empowering for them.
WORKING TOGETHER

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 caregivers know about an upcoming field trip.

NARRATED MESSAGE // Phone calls from school can be scary for Indigenous families due to their history with residential schools and racism. As educators we can be aware of this anxiety. We can address concerns, call simply to collaborate with caregivers and the community, and to celebrate student successes. Working together and learning from each other allows us to better support and enhance students’ academic progress and well-being. Active communication between the school and our students’ caregivers means students will flourish and realize their potential.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. How can we strengthen our belief that families are a central part of the school community? How do we create school community together?
3. How does the experience of residential schools impact Indigenous families’ participation in school life and how might we modify our interactions with them?
4. What can we learn about education that Indigenous families and communities are doing with their children outside of school? How can we bring that knowledge into our classrooms?
5. How can we help caregivers feel more comfortable reaching out to us?
6. What steps can we take to help ensure caregivers are comfortable with all forms of school communication?
7. What can we do to strengthen a student’s support network if they’re attending school away from home?
IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

• Indigenous caregivers may feel anxious when the school contacts them. They may be reluctant to speak to us or return our calls, due to their tragic history with the school system.

• It can be helpful to share general information with families about the school system. COPA has produced guides that can be a benefit to caregivers. They can be found at settlement.org.

• Opportunities to connect with the school can be useful; for example, giving caregivers ways of reaching out to you, encouraging them to be part of school life, and using the school website to share news and activities. We can build relationships by sharing positive news about their children’s learning, as well as when they are having difficulty.

• We can also make attempts to meet with family members where they are most comfortable, such as public libraries, local coffee shops, community agencies or Friendship Centres.

• If we do not live in the school communities in which we work, we can understand that we are playing the role of a “guest” invited into the “home” in which our students and their families live. We can be aware of the many different types of families and avoid making assumptions about them.

• We should feel free to ask local knowledge keepers about practices, protocols and information if we are unsure; for example, when might Indigenous students be away for annual hunts and how can information about this practice be shared with all students?

• We can recognize that access to one’s culture is not a privilege; it is a fundamental right for all.
PARENT-TEACHER MEETINGS

Fitit and Knack are anxious about the upcoming parent-teacher meeting at school. They have never gone to one and are not sure what’s expected, until they watch a film that explains it all.

NARRATED MESSAGE // Caregivers and families have a lot of valuable information about their children, but school meetings can be intimidating. Many people in Indigenous communities are anxious about schools and worry about discrimination and language barriers. So, how can educators work towards building relationships between school and home? It takes a whole village to raise a child, according to a well-known proverb. Education is an important process that is shared between home, school, and the community. Learning about First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures and about traditional ways of learning from caregivers, guardians and members of the community, can help to better connect with students and establish better communication between home and school. Welcoming caregivers to meet and attend school events along with friendly phone calls are great opportunities to connect. Reaching out to caregivers in the community can have a real impact in students’ lives helping them improve their chances of success on all fronts.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. Why is it important to build relationships with Indigenous families?
3. What factors reduce attendance at parent-teacher meetings?
4. How can the school encourage Indigenous caregivers to connect with the school?
5. What might support caregiver and teacher communication to enhance student success?
6. Are there families at our school that require additional support in order to enhance their children’s learning?
Not everyone is aware of the value of parent-teacher meetings; clarifying their importance to student success is key. Offering flexibility in scheduling and location will go a long way.

It may be difficult for caregivers to participate due to work, transportation or childcare responsibilities. Anxiety about visiting the school and speaking with staff may also play a part.

Students themselves can be effective messengers, encouraging their caregivers to attend. By describing these meetings in a positive way, we can make students and caregivers more likely to want to participate.

It can help to allay concerns by telling caregivers in advance about the goal of the meeting. These will likely be more constructive if caregivers feel prepared and have a say. If taking notes, we can explain what their purpose is. We can use the online Language Tool to learn how to greet families in their mother tongue, should it be one of the included languages.

We should be aware of differences in communication, while modeling respectful interaction. It is helpful to try to avoid adversarial seating arrangements and be mindful of one’s physical size, voice and body language. We can use language everyday people can understand and avoid jargon or acronyms. We can explore COPA and OTF’s Professional Learning Module at safeatschool.ca to learn more about engaging caregivers as meaningful partners in their children’s education.
OUR SCHOOL COUNCIL

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

NARRATED MESSAGE // Councils are very important in our cultures. They help us organize and govern our communities. School councils offer caregivers from Indigenous communities important opportunities to contribute to school life and help support their children. School councils can provide opportunities to positively impact the community and are an important way to include families from Indigenous communities to do so. Having Indigenous voices on school council is an inclusive way to reach out to families and further indigenize our learning environments. When educators share their interest in learning more about Indigenous cultures they nurture positive relationships with Indigenous communities. Caregivers will feel more motivated to take part in school life. Educators can work with families and the community to find as many ways as possible to include Indigenous perspectives at school. By sharing cultures we support a flourishing school community where all students can reach their highest potential.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What information do caregivers and family members need to know about how and why to join School Council?
3. What are the factors that might encourage or prevent their participation? How can the school encourage caregivers to join?
4. Are there Indigenous families at our school that could be encouraged to join?
5. Who are key people at our school, board or local Indigenous community who might have a positive influence in this regard?
6. What role can students play in encouraging their caregivers?
IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

• It is important that we make a concerted effort to reach out to Indigenous caregivers so that they feel welcome at the School Council.

• Indigenous adults may be reluctant to join due to a lack of self-confidence; they may feel that they are not equipped to contribute at this level or face challenges juggling the responsibilities of daily life. We can address these barriers by looking for a spectrum of ways for people with diverse skills to contribute.

• Not everyone knows the importance of a school council for student success. We can provide information about its value and the ways caregivers can play a role. We can encourage them to attend a meeting as an observer—just to see what a School Council meeting is like.

• Should they attend, we can take extra care to actively welcome and include them. Planning ahead for this is a good strategy to ensure full participation; for example, designing activities that everyone can contribute to in a meaningful fashion.

• We can try to expand the nature of school activities so that there is the possibility of a broader range of contributions. Often, we limit ourselves to what was done in the past; imagining new goals and projects and inviting community members to take part can ensure a greater diversity of membership.
LISTENING CAREFULLY

Spotty is feeling upset and comes to talk to an educator. Spotty slowly opens up and tells them about the problem. The educator shows concern and support by being attentive and listening carefully. Spotty feels better after talking and coming up with ideas for how to handle things.

NARRATED MESSAGE // In our Indigenous communities people of all ages come together to talk, discuss, tell stories and listen to one another. Listening is very important in our cultures. Sometimes, our children may encounter difficulties at school like problems with their studies, bullying and even racism and discrimination. Educators can listen carefully to their students and watch for signs of problems. Approaching an educator in a time of difficulty might be hard for students. It can make all the difference if we are approachable, and listen carefully. Educators play an essential role in nurturing caring environments for all students. By being there, we help build nurturing, caring relationships with students that can help them make positive change and flourish.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the messages in this film?
2. What might encourage Indigenous students to share their concerns? What are the barriers that might make it difficult?
3. How do we describe listening carefully? What are the challenges to putting it into practice as an educator?
4. What can we offer Indigenous families in our school that would help them when talking with their children? What support do we need to make this happen?
There are many ways we can communicate clearly with our students and let them know that we are there for them. Finding time in our busy lives to check in is an important form of support.

We can reach out when our students seem worried or sad, although they may not always want to share their concerns with us. By listening carefully and allowing them to tell their story, they are more likely to do so.

We can provide students with the time and space to move at their own pace. Listening to their ideas means that we can help them develop their problem-solving skills, rather than rushing to do the thinking for them.

We can allow wait time. When an Indigenous student is speaking, we should not rush to fill in the words if there is a lull in the conversation. The student likely knows what to say next. We can enjoy the quiet (wait time) and allow the student to continue at their own pace.

We can use Problem Solving Together: COPA’s Tool for Empowerment to develop this skill.
Working together requires trust and this can be hard when we or someone we know 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.
EVALUATING RESOURCES

What to include—does the resource...

• correctly locate and identify First Nations, Métis or Inuit peoples?
• acknowledge the cultural, physical, and linguistic diversity between and among Indigenous peoples?
• present information about Indigenous peoples respectfully and accurately?
• acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty and promote a better understanding of the unique relationship between Indigenous peoples and the federal government?
• recognize and honor the intrinsic value of Indigenous cultures as well as the importance of continued cultural and linguistic survival?
• acknowledge Indigenous contributions to Canadian society, history, politics, and culture?
• include Indigenous perspectives and experiences in a respectful manner?
• address controversial or complex subjects by giving equal voice to all sides, including Indigenous peoples?
• depict the cultural, spiritual, political, and economic diversity among present-day Indigenous peoples?
• recognize and honor contemporary and/or historical Indigenous peoples who are heroes or heroines within their own communities?
• portray indigenous peoples as intelligent, capable, trustworthy, and caring human beings?
• nurture cultural and personal pride in Indigenous students?
• provide positive Indigenous role models for all students?
• encourage all students to respect Indigenous peoples, histories, and cultures?
• inspire all students to learn more about Indigenous peoples, histories, and cultures?
We can also prioritize resources that centralize Indigenous ways of knowing and being such as oral teachings from Elders, experiential learning, music and dance in addition to the written word.

What to watch out for—does the resource...

• mix and match cultural attributes or characteristics from different First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities?
• feature generic “Indians” or a vague pan-Indigenous identity?
• imply all Indigenous peoples from North America have the same language, culture, history, spiritual traditions, or way of life?
• promote stereotypes or caricatures of indigenous peoples, groups or cultures?
• imply Indigenous peoples or cultures are inferior or bad?
• use biased language to create prejudiced impressions of Indigenous people or cultures?
• perpetuate blatant inaccuracies about Indigenous peoples, histories or cultures?
• omit, avoid, or minimize Indigenous histories, peoples, or experiences?
• imply that all Indigenous peoples or cultures are identical or extinct?
• present only a non-Indigenous point-of-view of history or events?
• mention only Indigenous peoples who were useful to Europeans?
• avoid controversial or complex issues or gloss over harm inflicted by the policies or people in the government of Canada or other institutions?
• deny or seek to undermine Indigenous sovereignty, cultural self-worth, or linguistic value?
• contain any material that would shame or embarrass an Indigenous student?
• contain any material that would cause any student to think Indigenous peoples are inferior, bad, or unimportant?
QUESTIONS

Self-Reflection

1. What are some of the things I have learned about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples?
2. Where do I remember learning those ideas (media, books, family, school, etc.)?
3. What have I done, or what could I do, to unlearn any negative ideas?
4. What manifestations of racism have I seen (or experienced) in my school?
5. What are some small steps I could take in my own life (e.g., personal and professional interactions) to share more evenly my power and privilege?
6. What kinds of strategies can I identify (or have I implemented in my school) that can facilitate the development of young people’s ethnocultural identity?
7. What differences can I see among students?
8. What differences do I know about, even though I cannot see them?
9. What differences might there be, even though I cannot see them and do not know about them?
10. What do I know about identities that are important to individual students in class? What assumptions, if any, have I already made about students’ identities?
MYTHS VS FACTS

MYTH // Indigenous peoples are all the same.

FACT // The term Indigenous (or Aboriginal) is used in Canada to describe three distinct groups who each have their own unique histories, cultures, languages, perspective, spiritual beliefs between them and among them. Indigenous peoples do not all look the same either—they may have brown eyes and black hair or be blond and blue-eyed or multi-racial. Indigenous peoples are as diverse in appearance and cultures as any other community.

MYTH // First Nations, Métis and Inuit people get everything for free.

FACT // Reservations and lands were not “given” to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Indigenous peoples receive the same benefits as all Canadians including Child Tax Benefit, Health Insurance and Employment Insurance. Where treaty rights exist, they are still subject to regulation and/or funding such as hunting, fishing, housing, education and health. Government legislation such as Bill C31 and C3 (addressing sexist discrimination against Indigenous women and their children) continue to impact and limit rights-based eligibility and access to services.

MYTH // Indigenous people get free housing and post-secondary education.

FACT // Under the Indian Act, the federal government provides a level of housing and post-secondary assistance to First Nations and Inuit peoples to achieve the same standard of living as other Canadians. Funding is capped and has only increased 2-3% in the last 25 years. These subsidies are provided in a manner similar to those offered to all Canadians.

MYTH // Indigenous people are tax-exempt.

FACT // Income earned by a First Nations person having Status and working on reserves is exempt from income tax. Generally, First Nations people must pay income tax when working off-reserve and all other taxes. Depending on the province, some Status people do not pay provincial sales tax but this right is unevenly applied. Although on-reserve members don’t pay taxes, they pay fees for services, such as water and garbage pickup. Foreign diplomats are also tax-exempt.
PROTOCOL FOR INVOLVING ELDERS

First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples all have traditional knowledge keepers. In various communities they may be referred to differently—Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Community Elders and names in Indigenous languages. These titles are earned and given within the community to members who carry the traditional teachings, cultural practices, history, ceremonies, and often the language of the community. The titles are not based on the person’s age; therefore, some Elders can be relatively young as long as the community recognizes them as a knowledge keeper.

Cultural differences among Indigenous peoples come into play with Elder protocol. For example, when asking an Anishinaabe or Cree Elder to give a traditional teaching or to open a ceremony, it is the custom to offer tobacco. For Haudenosaunee Knowledge Keepers, Inuit Community Elders and Métis Senators, it is usually not necessary to offer tobacco first. Ask in your local community or the Elder what the protocol is. It is best practice to offer an honorarium and a small gift. Travel expenses can also be covered if the Elder has to travel.

On the day of the event, greet the Elder ahead of time and make sure they have some coffee, tea, or water to drink. Ask how they would like to be introduced. Have them speak first, avoid interrupting and allow time for opinions and thoughts to be shared. In a social event with food, Elders are generally served first. It is disrespectful to interrupt, openly argue or disagree with an Elder. Again, it is important to acknowledge and follow the protocol and practices of the specific Indigenous communities in your geographic region.
Humility is one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings: knowing that we are not above or below others in the circle of life.


3. Provided by the Métis Nation of Ontario.


JOINING THE CIRCLE

This guidebook is part of COPA’s Joining the Circle project designed in collaboration with First Nations, Métis and Inuit families, community leaders and Elders and a wide range of educators. Topics include pride and identity, helping students succeed, understanding challenges Indigenous young people face, and nurturing safe and healthy schools and communities. Order a free toolkit at infocopa.com or see materials online at copahabitat.ca.

COPA

COPA is a Francophone non-profit organization founded in 1995. We provide students, families and schools with 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 change. COPA cares deeply about human rights, especially those of children and all marginalized groups. We all belong.

OTF

The Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) is the professional organization representing teachers in Ontario. OTF’s responsibilities include promoting and advancing the cause of public education, raising the status of the teaching profession and promoting and advancing the interests of teachers. OTF also represents teachers and all other members of the Teachers’ Pension Plan in the administration of the Plan and management of the pension fund, and acts as the link between teachers and the Ontario Ministry of Education.

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