

# 1

## Children's rights and the image of the child

### Practice Guideline on Child Development

This section's applicable Code and Standards:

RECEs make the well-being, learning and care of children their foremost responsibility. They value the rights of children and create learning environments where all children can experience a sense of belonging and inclusion. RECEs foster children's joy of learning through child-centred and play-based pedagogy.

RECEs respect and nurture children's first language and/or traditional language and culture. They demonstrate a commitment to address the unique rights and needs of Indigenous children and their families. They respect each child's uniqueness, dignity and potential. (Ethic A)

RECEs:

- are knowledgeable about the research and theories related to the impact of caring and responsive relationships on children's development, learning, self-regulation, identity and well-being (Standard I: B.1).
- engage in supportive and respectful interactions with children to ensure they feel a sense of security and belonging (Standard I: C.2).
- support children in developing coping skills, regulating their behaviour and interacting positively with others. They recognize all children's capacity to self-regulate and their right to be supported to develop these skills (Standard I: C.4).
- intentionally create and maintain environments that support children's play and learning as well as contribute to a sense of belonging and overall well-being. They ensure that the environment is safe and accessible for all children and families. They also ensure that the environment reflects the values and diversity of the community (Standard III A).

The World Health Organization (2020) states that every child has a right "to achieve their full developmental potential" (p. viii) and outlines that professionals in a variety of fields have an important role and responsibility to provide 'nurturing care' to children and their families (Lancet, 2017).

[The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989) provides a universal set of standards and obligations designed to protect the unique rights of children. It says that all children have a right to:

- Survival;
- Non-discrimination;
- Develop to the fullest;
- Protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and
- Participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

[Realising the Ambition](#) (2020), an international report from Scotland, points to the following four central principles in their ongoing research about the developing child:

- Rights of the child;
- Relationships;
- Responsive care; and
- Respect.

*How Does Learning Happen?* (2014) emphasizes the standards and principles noted above, specifically highlighting that collaborative relationships among children, families and educators are viewed as vital. These relationships positively influence children's development, promoting a sense of belonging, engagement, well-being and expression.



Figure 1.1 illustrates HDLH's four foundations influencing children's development.

These fundamental principles are also woven into the profession's *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*. The Code and Standards reflects the profession's core set of beliefs and values of care, respect, trust and integrity. It outlines RECEs' obligations to children, families, colleagues and the overall profession. In particular, Ethic A says:

**“RECEs make the well-being, learning and care of children their foremost responsibility.** They value the rights of children and create learning environments where all children can experience a sense of belonging and inclusion. RECEs foster children's joy of learning through child-centred and play-based pedagogy. RECEs respect and nurture children's first language and/or traditional language and culture. They demonstrate a commitment to address the unique rights and needs of Indigenous\* children and their families. **They respect each child's uniqueness, dignity and potential.**”

\*It is important to understand and respect that there are three distinct and constitutionally-recognized Indigenous Peoples in Canada: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. While they have a shared history of colonization in Canada, they differ culturally, linguistically and in their relationship with the Crown. When you see the term 'Indigenous' or 'Indigenous Peoples' in College resources, it refers to individuals who are First Nations, Inuit and Métis, broadly. When you see one or more of those cultures named individually, it's in instances where the research being referenced applies to that specific Indigenous culture.

## The image of the child

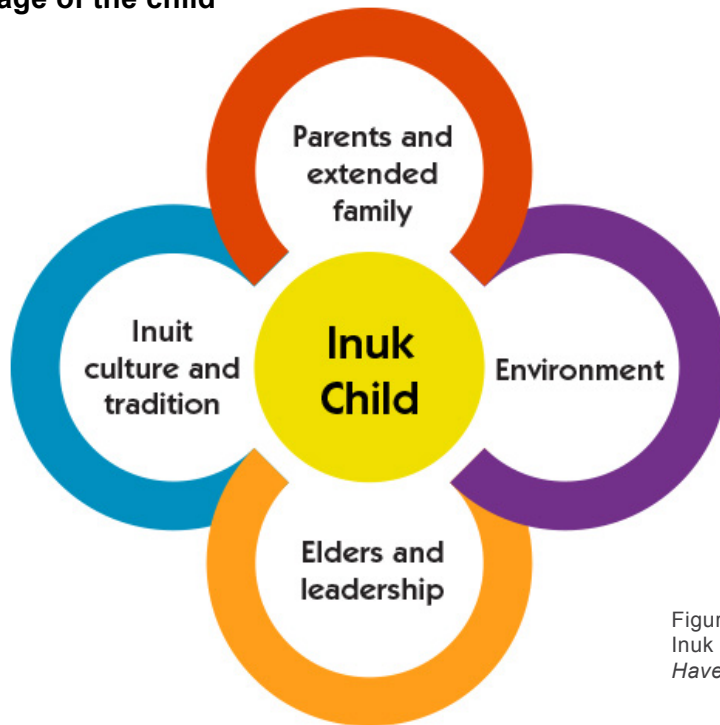


Figure 1.2 illustrates a model of the influences surrounding an Inuk child as outlined in *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangut: What Inuit Have Always Known to be True* (2017).

How does an RECE's image of the child and childhood connect to child development? When RECEs recognize all children as being capable, curious and active citizens who have a right to participate in their social communities, they are more likely to “deliver programs and services that value and build on their strengths and abilities” (HDLH?, 2014, p. 6). And when RECEs understand the ways their own beliefs, experiences and actions influence children's development, risks to overall health and safety are reduced.

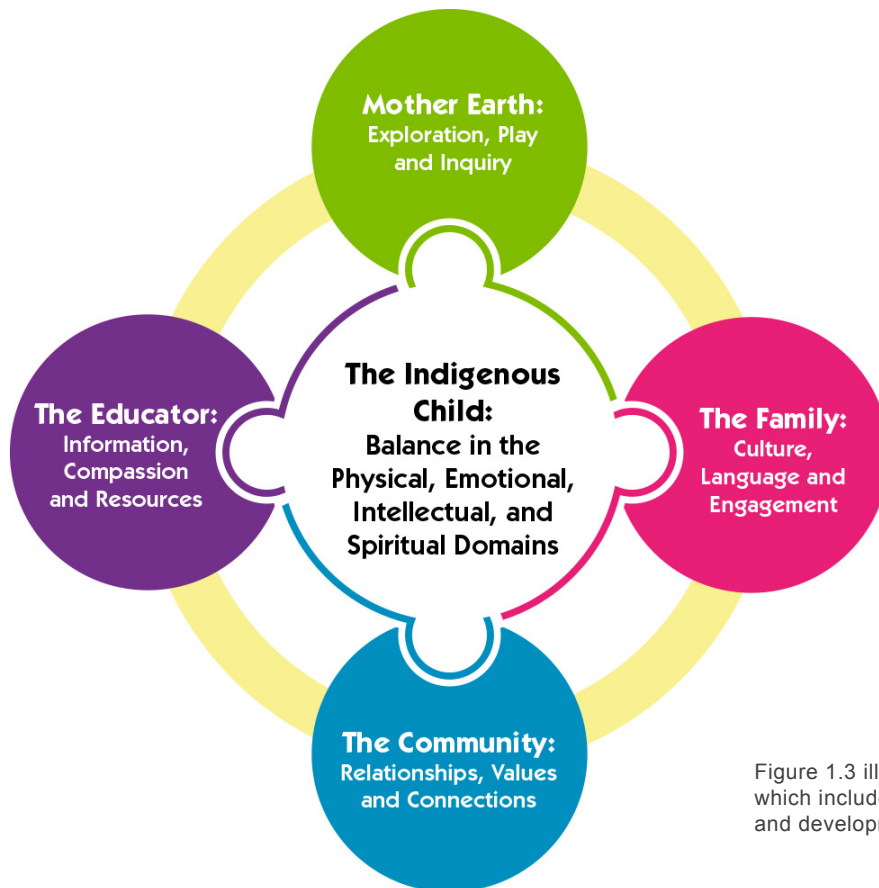


Figure 1.3 illustrates Toulouse's *Holistic Continuum of Learning* which includes key elements and influential factors for learning and development of the Indigenous child.

How can critical reflection support children’s development? By engaging in self-reflection, you’re working on gaining a deeper awareness and understanding of your own experiences that may have contributed to your beliefs about children, families, cultures, languages and communities. RECEs’ beliefs shape the learning environment and, in turn, children’s experiences. Read more about how those beliefs can impact your practice in the [Practice Note on Beliefs and Biases](#) (2022).

Children live and grow among families with a range of complex histories and within differing social, cultural and linguistic perspectives. To best support the unique children in your care, it’s important to realize that children and their experiences are not universal. This emphasizes the underlying reason for engaging in self-reflection and ongoing learning related to the multiple contexts that children, families and educators come from. It’s to support self-reflection on your beliefs and biases related to the image you have of children, families, communities and yourself as an educator. When you identify areas that require growth and change, you can create and commit to goals and actions that will support you in adapting your practice.

“There are hundreds of different images of the child. Each one of you has inside yourself an image of the child that directs you as you begin to relate to a child. This theory within you pushes you to behave in certain ways; it orients you as you talk to the child, listen to the child, observe the child” (1994, p.1).

– Loris Malaguzzi, one of the Reggio Emilia approach founders

Viewing all children as capable citizens is one way RECEs can support children’s overall well-being and development. The idea that all “children are competent, capable of complex thinking, curious and rich in potential” (HDLH?, 2014, p. 6) is reflected in [Dene knowledges and views](#) about raising and teaching children (Angela James, a Métis educator, researcher and the author of *Becoming a capable child in the Early Years Study 4*, 2020).

Dr. Pamela Rose Toulouse from Sagamok First Nation writes that many aspects of HDLH? (2014) “align with Indigenous worldviews, pedagogies and approaches to child development” (Toulouse, 2018).

As illustrated in figure 1.2, “in an Inuit cultural setting, children are the centre of family life. Influences on the child are shown in the surrounding circles” (*Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to be True* by Joe Karetak, Frank Tester & Shirley Tagalik, 2017, p. 7).

Toulouse also presents a *Holistic Continuum of Learning* (figure 1.3), which “builds upon the foundations for learning and development in HDLH? (2014) and highlights key elements of quality for Indigenous children.” Toulouse says the influential factors are expanded to include children’s “experiences with the communities and the natural world (*Mother Earth*)” (pp. 2-3).

The learning frameworks presented place children, families and educators in what Rachel Langford (2010) calls a “democratic pedagogical [center]” – a centre that values dialogue, deliberation and negotiation among all members. Supporting child development begins with a genuine interest in, and respect for, the unique children and families you work with. Valuing children and their families and treating them with dignity supports their overall sense of security and self, both of which are essential to optimal child development and learning. It can be viewed as what matters the most.

With colleagues, consider children's rights in the following practice situations. Frame your reflections around the idea that children, families and educators come from diverse historical, social, cultural and political structures. Review the [Practice Note on Ethical Decision Making \(2019\)](#) to help guide your reflections and discussions.

With a collaborative approach in mind, what steps might you take to respond to the following practical examples:

- A group of children discuss the idea of arranging the learning environment to reflect the construction zone they are building. They bring their ideas to the RECEs and their peers during community circle.
- A child tells you they do not want to eat the snack on the menu.
- Most children in your group want to stay outside when "outdoor" time is over, but a few children want to go inside.
- A child wants you to call them Chris when they are at child care, despite their parent's requests to use their given name.
- A parent asks you to have their child do homework in the after-school club. The child communicates they want to play with their friends, instead.
- A child comes to you after your colleague decides the child needs to be separated from their friends because of 'inappropriate behaviour.' The child tells you they don't want to stop playing the game.

You can add your thoughts and reflections in the space below.

Download the Pause and Reflect on children as capable and active citizens ([Word](#) | [PDF](#)).