

Traditional Childcare Practices

Raising our children the Anishinaabe Way.

Prepared by: Weechi it te win Family Services
and The Fort Frances Governance Team



Respect is the key word in the relationship between Anishinaabe children and their parents or caregivers. It lies at the center of a person's relationship to nature and to the Creator, respect for the Elders, respect for the child, respect for all living creatures. The management and growth of a child comes not from fear of his/her parent, but out of respect for adults and tribal teachings.

It is the community's shared responsibility in raising the children.

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Acknowledgment

On April 6th, and 7th, 2000, a group of Grandmother's were called together and asked for their help in developing a manual that will be used to teach parents, care givers and communities how to raise our children. This gathering was held at the Manitou Mounds Round House both days.

The Staff of Weechi it te win Family Services would like to say chi meegwich to the Grandmother's that came and shared their knowledge. Meegwich for allowing us to record the teachings you shared with us in hopes that we may better serve the families in our communities.

The Grandmother's that were with us for the two days are as follows:

Lillian Boshkaykin - Seine River	Joyce Johnson - Seine River
Gladys DeBungie - Big Island	Rosie Spencer - Seine River
Marian Medicine - Big Island	Nancy Jones - Nicickousemenecaning
Louisa Shebagegit - Sabaskong	Mary Kelly - Onigaming
Catherine Kelly - Sabaskong	Bessie Tom - Big Grassy River
Helen Morrison - Nicickousemenecaning	Helen Jordan - Lac La Croix
Rose Marie Allen - Nicickousemenecaning	Helen Geyschick - Lac La Croix
Rosie Cyr - Naicatchewenin	Edna Morrison - Stanjikoming
Mary Smith - Naicatchewenin	Betty Johnson - Stanjikoming
Roseanna Councillor - Naicatchewenin	Margaret Yerxa - Big Island
Florence Yerxa - Couchiching	Annie Wayash - Stanjikoming
Bessie Mainville - Couchiching	Ann Wilson - Manitou
Helen Hunter - Fort Frances	Genevieve Mc Ginnis - Manitou
Elizabeth Brown - Manitou	Marie Ottetail - Lac La Croix
Dorothy Medicine - Manitou	Ida Mainville - Couchiching
Josephine Andy - Big Grassy	Corrine Kelly - Onegaming
Evelyn Copenace - Onegaming	Florence Foy - Couchiching
Joan Mainville - Couchiching	Gladys Andy - Big Grassy

There were three male helpers during the two day gathering. We also need to say chi-meegwich to them for their guidance and assistance during these two days. They are: Elder Joseph Big George of Big Island, Elder Jim Boshkaykin of Seine River and helper Doug Sinclair.

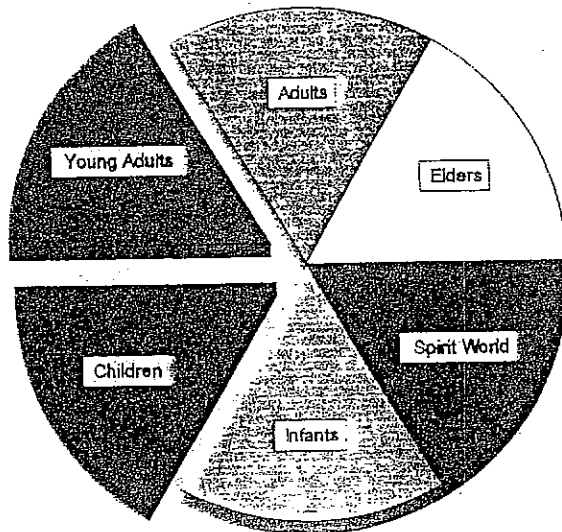
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Introduction:

When our people were a strong nation, we raised our children the way the Creator intended them to be raised. They were taught to live a good life and to respect every thing on Mother Earth. We had our own way of educating our children with the tools they needed to live a good life. It was a community responsibility to raise the children and teach them.

With the changes that have occurred over time, it is now critical that we start to record some of these teachings to ensure a future for our children. We have watched our children being taken away from us for the past 60 years. That is a life time. First it was the residential schools, then it was the Children's Aid Societies of the 60's that took a lot of our children. After so many years we have a nation of people that need to relearn the way of life they were intended to live. We need to prove to the Government that currently controls our people, that we can take control and that we have been given a way to properly raise our children. We have to guarantee a future for our children.

Family Circle.



When you remove parts of this circle, it is no longer complete. We need to put our circle back together.

The funding source that is currently used to maintain the services that Weechi it te win Family Services offers to our communities is controlled by the provincial government. They are forced to follow

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that we do have our own way of raising our children that is much different from the social work practices that are presently being taught and used by our social workers. They were all offered tobacco by the staff to attend this gathering. It was with the understanding that some kind of manual would be developed from this workshop. Gina Keast and Darlene Curci worked on putting this gathering together and did a lot to prepare for it. Cathy Jack and Joanne Bruyere were asked to work together as chair person's for this gathering. Elder Joe Big George was asked to be there to assist with the drum. Elder Ann Wilson was asked to assist with the opening ceremonies for the gathering.

Once the opening was complete, Cathy welcomed the Grandmother's to the gathering. She explained the purpose of this gathering using the Ojibway language. Joanne welcomed and expressed what was hoped to be achieved from this gathering. She explained that everyone would be broken up into groups and asked to discuss each stage of a child's life. There were four groups that were formed. The first group talked on the time of conception to 4 years of age, the second group worked on the 5 to 8 years of age, the third group worked on the 9 to 12 years of age and the last group worked on the 13 to 18 years of age. In order to make sure not all the women from one community would end up in one group, they were numbered off from one to four and given an area to work in. The group discussions took place most of the first day. At the end of the day, the grandmother's were asked to think of two things over night. They were asked how we can get more native homes open to children needing a place to live and how we can develop this information into a workable manual.

Before the grandmother's were let go for the day, there was a healing song that had to be done. One of the grandmother's spoke of trouble she still faces in her life today and had to ask for healing. The healing song was done to correct this. The first day ended.

The morning of the second day was a very good learning experience for those of us that are working with the grass roots people. We are young and still learning and have a long way to go. We realized that we may have made some mistakes and hoped that we would be corrected on them and shown the proper way of doing things.

Once the opening was completed, some of the grandmother's spoke to the large group. There was a blessing of the water that was done by one of the grandmother's. One of the Grandmother's was celebrating her birthday and that was acknowledged. There were also some of the grandmother's that got up and expressed their support for this type of gathering and suggested we hold them on a regular basis.

Cathy Jack addressed the Grandmother's and told them of the importance for us to learn these teachings the Grandmother's were talking about. We do not know all these teachings and need to be taught them. Even though we are getting older age wise, most of us are still in our childhood culture wise. We still have a lot of leaning to do. One of the elder's took offence to this and there had to be a

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Parenting

When the Creator placed the Anishinaabe on Mother Earth, the roles and responsibilities of each were clearly defined. The women were given the major responsibility of raising the children. They were made to be the givers of life. The woman has a special connection to the water. When a man and woman decide to conceive a child, they are asking for a special gift from the Creator. Life starts when a child is conceived.

In our culture, when a woman is with child, this is a very sacred and special time for a woman. There is a ceremony that was done by the Grandparents to celebrate the newly expected life that is to come.

There are some requirements a woman must do when the baby is growing inside her. She is required to get lots of exercise because the baby grows on the woman's placenta. She is not to say anything negative about being pregnant as there are consequences. You could end up losing the gift that is developing inside you. The woman is not to brag about the gift growing inside her.

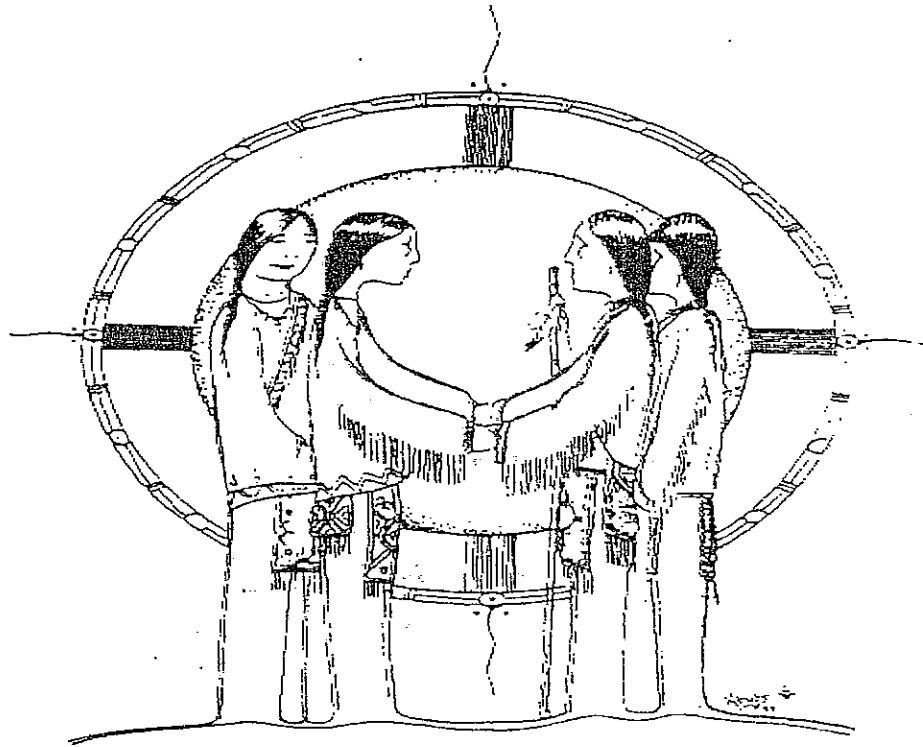
She has to take care of herself and make sure she stay healthy. The woman is encouraged eat well but there are certain things that she needs to avoid during the pregnancy. She is to eat a lot of fish soup to nurture the child while in the womb. She is to refrain from drugs and alcohol during this time. She is told to be very careful not to fall down. She is asked to get up early in the morning and retire early. She is to plan your day with the sun. When the sun comes up, so does she, when the sun goes down, so does she. She is not to fool around or run around. There is traditional medicine for morning sickness if the woman needs it. There was also a form of birth control, but this was not talked about. The elder's were always very secretive about this.

Funerals are not to be attended by women that are pregnant. She is not to view the body of the person that has passed on. If she does, something could happen to the baby (unborn). It could end up being still born or be deformed in appearance, especially around the eyes. The baby could be born cross eyed.

The woman is to teach good morals and values of life. She should listen to the advice the Elder's give to her. They really do know what they are talking about. The women are being prepared all through their life to take on the added responsibility that comes with raising a child.

Long ago, when the child was ready to enter the world, the birth took place where ever the family was. The Grandmother, mother, mother in law or another family member would deliver the baby. Today the birth takes place in the hospitals.

HUMILITY



DIBASENDIZOWIN / NOOKAADIZIWIN

HUMILITY is to know yourself as a sacred part of the Creation.

- to be modest in our actions especially in the context of helping.
- to have sensitivity toward others.
- to be respectful of others' preferred ways of doing things.
- to develop self-awareness on personal strengths and limitations.
- to know that I have the capacity for growth and change.
- to take initiative in self-development and self-evaluation.
- to use self-disclosure appropriately.
- to develop listening and observation skills.
- to allow people self-determination; mutually document needs.

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BRAVERY

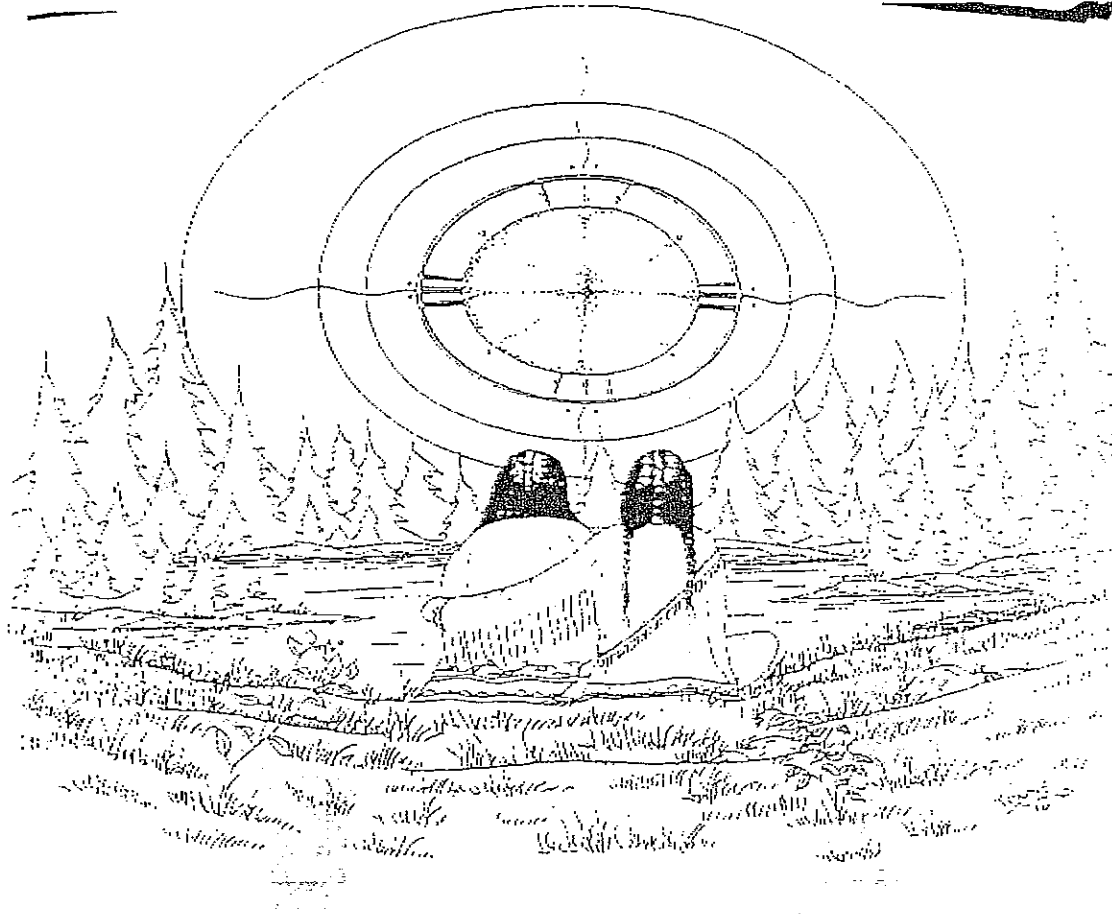


ZOONGIDE'EWIN

BRAVERY is to face the foe with integrity.

- to have courage and face difficult situations.
- to acknowledge the ability to go deeper into self-awareness.
- to be strong and achieve completeness in our personal development.
- to maintain strength of character.
- to have self-assurance.
- to identify personal and professional development needs and undertake to meet them.
- to demonstrate awareness and understanding of own attitudes and values in the helping process
- to fulfill obligations and responsibilities with integrity.

LOVE



ZAAGI'IDIWIN - ZHAAWENIDIWIN

To know LOVE is to know peace.

- to know how to get along with others and work with people.
- to have the capacity for caring.
- to recognize the value of sharing.
- to have things in a state of order and harmony.
- to show kindness and cooperation.
- to know and understand your program's mandate, goals, and objectives.
- to apply and practice values of acceptance and empowerment.
- to demonstrate the capacity to offer hope and effective support.
- to work towards harmony and well-being in interpersonal relations.

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A woman is not to brag about the size of her breasts. These are considered the sacred mountains and are intended for nurturing and feeding the baby. Breast feeding is the most important component of the bonding process that takes place between the mother and child. Long ago, if a mother was not able to feed her baby, there was always another mother who would have enough milk in her breasts to help out feeding the baby.

In our culture, all children remained with the family. If they were not kept by the biological parents then the extended family took them. There was no such thing as abortions. If a woman has a miscarriage, she is to bring home the fetus and the placenta and ask an elder to conduct the appropriate ceremony for her.

It is the parent's responsibility to make sure the child is taught according to the seasons. There are certain times of the year that things have to be taught, and it is up to the parents to make sure the child receives the teachings. The parent's have to encourage the child to strive for the best. To be as creative as possible. Don't be afraid to show the child love and affection. Teach them to respect every one and everything. Teach them their connection to Mother Earth. Teach them that it is ok to be sad, comfort them, don't be afraid to show them your affection.

Raising a child is a community responsibility as well. The parent's, grandparent's, extended family and community all play a very important role in raising the child. We need to learn to rely on one another again. If the parents need to have someone else care for their child, they should always remain the main part of that child's life. You have nine months to prepare for the arrival of your special gift. Never lose sight of how special giving life to someone is.

Parents today do not know the teachings and are not living up to their responsibilities. Our children are not being cared for. They are not being fed properly. They are left alone to raise themselves. Our mother's today are having their children without being prepared to raise them. We have young mother's that are into drugs and alcohol and prefer to do that over raising their children. We have young mother's that are now trying to raise the children on their own and are getting stressed out over it. We have father's that do not live up to their responsibilities to raising the child. We have too many children that are lost and searching for their identity. It is the parent's responsibility now to help the child find themselves. The parent's that are no longer using alcohol or drugs are still not raising the children properly. They are spending the time they once did in the bars in casino's now. We need to rebuild the family circle.

Parents have to stop being reckless and start caring for their children. Remember they will some day be taking care of you. Do not fight your child's battles. Be careful what you do because it will come back on you 3 X as hard. When the child does wrong, they have to suffer the

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Legends are different from stories. These can only be told during the winter months. When a legend is being told, sometimes it would take two or three days for it to be completed. The legend teller would decide how much the children were told each night. The children were told not to fall asleep during the legend telling time. This was showing disrespect for the person telling the legend and the teaching you are receiving. Because of the teachings of honesty and respect, what the grandparents say is the truth and should not be questioned.

Grandparents are not living up to their responsibilities today, they are practicing the non native way of living. When the parents of a child are not able to take care of it, the grandparents should take over, however, some of them are too old to be taking care of little ones, but still can play an active role in their upbringing. It is their responsibility to teach the child. The Grandmother's are always willing to take the grandchildren, but they do expect certain things from their children in return. It is hard to tell your grown child they have to sober up and take care of their children. We have to bring back these teachings. Start now it is never too late to learn. The Grandmother is the one that is to make the dancing regalia for the children. She starts them at a young age. She teaches them to dance and sing. Elder's have a natural process of teaching without actually telling you what is happening. **We must emphasize the teachings.**

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Conception - 4 Years of Age.

The birth of your child has happened and now the life teachings start. It is important that baby feel the mother's nipples soon after birth to start the bonding process. The breast of a woman are considered the sacred mountains. When a child is breast fed, they are immune to sicknesses. This is the cleanest way to feed your baby. It is very important that the child be breast fed. When your baby bits while being breast fed, they are telling the mother that there is something wrong with the child like having a stomach ache. There is a ceremony that is done to welcome the baby into the world, known as the welcoming ceremony. This ceremony should take place 3 or 4 days after the baby arrives, but must happen before the baby is able to walk.

Tikinagan, Moccasin, and Moss Teachings:

The teachings that were shared are referred to as the **Mother Earth Teachings**. The most important teaching is the tikinagan that the baby is to be kept in. This is where the physical leaning for a child starts. The tikinagan is made of 4 different types of wood, cedar, highland spruce, black ash, and bass wood. There was a lot of consideration given by the parents in preparing the tikinagan for the child. The bead work, and fancy needle work that so beautifully covers the tikanagan is a good example of that. There is a dream catcher that is hung from the protector brace of the tikanagan to catch the dreams of the child.

We all look for love, it starts with the tikinagan. If you don't keep your baby in a tikinagan, they are lost culturally. The tikinagan is the babies home, it is their sacred lodge. This is where dreams come from. The child traveled everywhere with the mother. The child learns from observing and listening to what is going on around him/her.

The cedar that is used represents love. It is used to help exercise the muscles of the baby. When the baby wiggles around inside the tikinagan it learns strength, endurance, and good posture. The decorations that hang on the board of the tikinagan represented what the child will be good at such as becoming good hunters.

The back of the tikinagan displayed the clan that the child belongs to. The child takes on the clan of the father. The baby was kept in what is referred to as a **moss bag**. This is the traditional pamper for babies. The babies never suffered from diaper rash like they do today when they were kept in the moss bags. The mattress that the baby lied on was made of leather, moss and rabbit fur to keep the child warm. The baby is fitted with a pair of **moccasins** to keep the feet warm. There is a hole that is put in the bottom of the moccasin to respect the spirits. Today, you do not see people using tikanagan's, that is where the teachings start in the physical life, namely respect.

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to get the name. It is important for the parents to remember the story that goes with the name in order to pass it on to the child when they are old enough to understand. At the time of the naming ceremony, there is also a token or a gift that is handed down to the child. If you don't take care of the gift or token that was given to you, you could get sick. It is important that the child have an Anishinaabe name in order for them to be helped spiritually. It is said the Creator only recognizes you by your Anishinaabe name. It is the parent's or extended families responsibility to make sure the child is given a name. This can happen anytime in life....it is never too late. The gifts that are given to you in this ceremony,(name and feather) should be feasted every year. When you say you are going to ask for a name for your child. You have to carry through with it or the child could get sick. When the child cries, you can hear the child asking for you to follow through with what you said you were going to do for them. If the child continues to be sick after the naming ceremony, the child is still looking for something. You may have to go seek another elder for another name or look for a traditional healing ceremony.

Childhood 5 - 8 Years of Age.

There have always been development stages for children to go through. Some of them overlap each other and will be talked about in more than one age grouping. It is very important to teach the child the values of life. The Seven Teachings become very important to the child. At 5 years of age, the child becomes very curious about things. They need to be taught life skills. They were taught to demonstrate what their skills are.

The children learned to listen to their parents and to the elder's. They were taught not to interrupt the elder's when they were speaking. They were taught to respect themselves and everything around them. They were taught to get up early in the morning and be ready for what ever the day had to offer them. If you don't respect life it was said that the Grandfathers could make you go to sleep for ever. This was a teaching to the children to be grateful for the life they were given

Children at this age should be taught to offer tobacco for everything that is taken from Mother Earth and to seek an elder to tell them legends. Elder's long ago were very blunt and straight forward. They are taught not to fall asleep while the legends are being told, there is a lesson that is being taught during the telling of legends. This is to develop the mind of a child. They were also taught that when older people were talking, not to sit around and listen. That is how a child learns to gossip.

Teaching the child to be safe is very important. There are good spirits and there are bad spirits. The good ones are out in the day. There are bad spirits that come out at night and you could run into something that is bad for you. That is why it is better to sleep at night. You won't get sick if you do this. When you go to bed early and get a good sleep, you will have good spiritual dreams. These

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The children were taught never to make fun of animals or people. They were taught to sit still at pow wow's and not to run around inside the dancing area. Children learn by observing. At this age, it is not recommended that a child attend a funeral. During this time, the family has to put black ash on their foreheads and birch bark was placed in the doorways and windows of the home for 4 days. (from the time of death to the funeral day) A child is not to sleep with the head pointing west (for some areas, this could be south.) Your bed is not suppose to lay the same direction that the dead are buried. The same holds true when you go camping during ricing and berry picking time. You head can not be facing the water.

When a child starts to lose their teeth, the tooth is to be put with a piece of charcoal and thrown to the east. It has to be given back to Mother Earth. Encourage the child to be creative. Allow them time to develop their creativity and encourage them to try anything. Build their self esteem and give them a sense of accomplishment. Allow them to be themselves and make their own mistakes. When a child dances at a pow wow for the first time, there is a ceremony that has to take place for this. In each community, the teachings may vary a bit.

Adolescents. Ages 9 - 12 Years Old.

This is a very important time in a child's life. They are moving from the childhood stage to the adult stage of life. The teachings for both boys and girls are more defined. This is when the children are going through their puberty stage. The girls start their menstrual cycle and the boys voice changes.

For the girls, this is when the Grandmother moon is watching over her. The menstrual cycle is referred to as the ladies moon time. Women have to be very cautious about what they do during this time. As long as a woman respects herself, she will not be sick. It is important to show respect and honor your self.

When a young girl has her first moon time, the parents seek an elder to assist the girl with the teachings during this time in her life. She is to be alone for 10 days while this is happening. She is not to be around the male members of her family or any males for that fact. She is not to go swimming during the first summer, can not pick up or carry a baby, can not go berry picking, can not hunt, skin animals, or walk over anything. She can pick her own berries, but first they have to apply cedar ashes on their hands and wear a cedar bonnet. Girls are to use red cedar to help give them energy. Someone else has to prepare the berries for her, then she can eat them. She is to have her own utensils to eat with. She is not to use the same utensils as the male members of her family. The utensils she uses will become the first part of her bundle. She is to live separately from the family. Long ago they would be put in their own teepee/lodge and had to do all their own cooking and cleaning. They

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to understand and respect their sexuality and life itself. Teachings on respect for yourself and others sexuality will stop promiscuity. Because our youth are not learning these teachings, they are not learning to respect themselves or the value of life.

The Rights of an Adolescents.

- ⊗ you have a right to privacy.
- ⊗ you have a right to receive good care.
- ⊗ you have a right to healthy meals.
- ⊗ you have a right to education that suits your abilities.
- ⊗ you have a right to regular medical and dental care.
- ⊗ you have a right to age appropriate clothing.
- ⊗ you have a right to participate in after school activities such as sports, drama clubs, etc.
- ⊗ you have a right to practice your religion and to receive religious instructions.
- ⊗ you have a right to participate in activities that are important to your culture or heritage.
- ⊗ you have a right to respect for your individuality, including gender identification and sexual orientation.
- ⊗ you have a right to participate in planning your care and to be heard when important decisions are made about you.
- ⊗ you have a right to see information in your care file.
- ⊗ you have a right to be notified of and to attend court hearings that may affect your life.
- ⊗ you have a right to request a placement review if you become unhappy where you are living.
- ⊗ you have a right to ask for extended care services once you reach 18 years of age.
- ⊗ you have a right to be informed of your rights.
- ⊗ you have a right to freedom from physical, sexual or verbal abuse.
- ⊗ you have a right to appropriate discipline.

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Education

The schooling in the old days was done by the parents while on the trap lines or where ever the family may have settled. We learn through the years what we are to pass on to our people to help them survive. We have learn by experience. We learn by observing what our parents are doing. This starts right from when a child is small and kept in the tikinagan. Learning is an ongoing process. We are still learning even when we are old.

In order to teach, you have to first get permission from the elders. What you talk about should also include the warning that come with the teachings. You can only speak of the teaching, you do not show how to do them. There was a warning that was shared with us. On ji ne aa - be careful what you say, it could come back on you 10 fold. It may not happen today or tomorrow or even next week, but someone in your family will be effected and get sick at some point and time.

The government made a big mistake when it changed the child care laws in Canada. Government policies are destroying our children. They took the responsibility of raising children away from the parents. Children are told right from the first day they start attending school that if they are spanked or talked rough to by their parents to tell their teacher and something will be done about it. We are teaching our children to be disrespectful this way.

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other children. Our people fear the application process because it asks for a police check. We need to help our people believe they are good enough to be foster parents. In the old days, parent's were tricked into signing document that gave the government the right to take their children. They were told the documents were suppose to go to INAC. We can't let that happen again.

When our children are places in white foster homes, they become even more lost. They are taught to believe the ways of the white man and that the ways of the Anishinaabe are bad. It is ok to place them in non native homes, but the foster parents must understand the importance of the culture and ensure that the child is receiving the appropriate teachings. There was a young lady who was tossed around from foster home to foster home until she ended up in a non native foster home. When this girl was older, she was given a jingle dress by someone and she was afraid of it because she was told those ways were bad. She wanted to go as far as burning it. The elder's had to work with her and teach her about the culture so she would understand. The parents should have a say in where their child is being placed. It is important that the biological parents remain a major part of the child's life. The foster parents have to be willing to work with the biological families on this. The grandparents as well should be given access to the child. The hardest part of being a foster parent is the letting go of the child. There should be grief counseling set up for the foster parents once the child is removed from the home. The elders need to hold healing circles with the family, foster family, child and who ever else needs to be involved.

Family members right now feel like they don't have a say in the matters of their children. This has to change. The entire family has to be involved. Long ago, there was no need for children's aid. With the introduction of liquor, you started seeing children's aid workers in the communities. Elder's don't have the opportunity to teach the children the language. The Elders need to be more involved in the case conferences, in the planning of care for a child, and in the planning of the healing practices both for the parents and for the child. It is so very important that the elder's be involved in every area of the service organization possible. The responsibility for raising a child has to be given back to the parents. They have to be taught that it is ok to be strict with their children. They are learning the values of life when you are. Identity is very important to a child in order for him/her to know life.

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taking the children. They have more control then before. They think our ways are bad for our children and their ways are superior to ours. They don't want our children to have Anishinaabe names.

- If we don't help our children fill that large void in their lives, we are going to once again lose our children to such things as residential schools. We have to start the teachings and break that cycle.
- Advertise at the pow wow's for families to take in foster children. Have the applications on hand and make them so that they are easy to fill out and not seen as a threat to the potential foster parents.
- There should be more elder involvement at the board level.
- Money should be invested in the communities teaching parenting skills to all the parents.
- Elder's should start providing grief counseling, and hold support groups for the foster parents.
- The Grandmother's would like to be brought back together for one day when all the information has been collaborated to validate the manual. They want this to be as accurate as possible to the teachings they have shared and allowed us to record.

***“Sometimes we have to be told something
10 times before it actually sinks in.....”***