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Empowerment

# NEWSLETTER

## FALL 2024



FAMILY  
DAY



# THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION ISSUE

## *An update from the front lines*

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was created through a legal settlement between Residential Schools Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives and the parties responsible for creation and operation of the schools: the federal government and the church bodies.

With a mandate to inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools, the TRC documented the truth of Survivors, their families, communities and anyone personally affected by the residential school experience. This included First Nations, Inuit and Métis former residential school students, their families, communities, the churches,

former school employees, government officials and other Canadians.

The TRC concluded its mandate in 2015 and transferred its records to the safekeeping of National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR).

Significant progress has been achieved towards fulfilling the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. One of the key developments was the enactment of the National Council for Reconciliation Act (Bill C-29), which became law in April 2024. This Act establishes the National Council for Reconciliation, an Indigenous-led, independent body tasked with monitoring and reporting on the progress of reconciliation efforts across Canada.

The Council will address Calls to Action 53 (establishing the National Council for Reconciliation), 54 (providing multi-year funding for the Council), 55 (monitoring and reporting on reconciliation progress) and 56 (requiring the Prime Minister to respond to the Council's annual report).

This legislation is a significant step forward, ensuring that reconciliation efforts are continuously evaluated and that the voices of Indigenous Peoples are central to the process.

In terms of public education, it will be important to ensure all Canadians have the educational resources and practical tools required to advance reconciliation.



## TALKING TO OUR CHILDREN ABOUT *Truth and Reconciliation*

Part of the path to reconciliation is learning about and acknowledging the harms that were committed against Indigenous peoples in Canada. Parents and caregivers of young children may wonder how to honestly share this information in an age-appropriate way.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock, OC FRSC (a Canadian Gitksan activist for child welfare, Executive Director of First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and professor for the School of Social Work at McGill University), offers some advice:

### *What is an appropriate age to start introducing reconciliation to children?*

Children can be trusted with the truth, so share reliable age-appropriate information. The First Nations Caring Society has lots of free resources at <https://fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear>, including a child-friendly version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. Also, check out the Project of Heart which won the Governor General's Award for teaching about reconciliation.

### *How can adults begin the conversation about reconciliation?*

Learning together by reading a book (Spirit Bear has four of them, and there are others listed below), watch Indigenous media (APTN and CBC Indigenous), or a documentary by Indigenous filmmakers like Alanis Obomsawin, or participate in local Indigenous activities that welcome the public.

### *What is appropriate language to use when describing Canada's colonial history?*

### *What language is not appropriate?*

Colonialism still exists, so avoid talking in the past tense. Learn how colonialism has shape- shifted over time and now takes the form of not acting on solutions to address ongoing inequalities. Learn the name of the First Nation, Metis, or Inuit Nation in your territory; avoid

using the possessive tense when describing relationships between non-Indigenous peoples/governments and Indigenous peoples. For example, use 'First Nations in Canada', not 'Canada's First Nations'.

### *Are there key details or moments that should be shared?*

It is important that all children learn about the rich diversity and their past and present contributions of Indigenous peoples to Canada. Learning about treaties, Metis scrip, the Indian Act and Indian Residential Schools is essential.

### *What are some recommended resources for talking to young people about reconciliation?*

Every adult should read the Executive Summary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and historian John Milloy's book A National Crime. Watch films like 'We Were Children'; tune into APTN National News to learn more about what is happening right now.

### *What if adults don't know how to answer a child's questions?*

Make it a joint project to find answers. There are lots of free online resources produced by Indigenous peoples to guide you.





## **Anything else to consider when it comes to explaining and talking about Truth and Reconciliation with children?**

Educating is a start but not enough.

Embrace the rich diversity of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples in Canada. Learn about the territory that you live on and learn how you can most meaningfully support them.

With preparation, we can have meaningful discussions that will move us toward reconciliation. It's essential to check our own knowledge of the history and impact of Indian Residential Schools. Only then can we effectively (and empathetically), educate children and youth.

There is a very real chance that many people will not know some or all of the history, which is why it's important to ask yourself what you do know.

"I went to school down the street from a former Indian Residential School and had no idea."

Without a grasp of what happened and its impact, it makes it difficult or near impossible to teach a child about it. But making a commitment to learning now will help build a foundation for change.

If a child asks, "Why do we have to wear orange shirts at school?" we believe that adults should be able to

not only explain the reason (as we have shared before, Phyllis Webstad had her clothing taken away, along with a new orange shirt her grandmother had bought for her), but we should also be able to connect that story to identity, assimilation and colonialism.

For many Canadians, the history of Indian Residential Schools was never taught in school.

However, in 2024, that's not a satisfactory excuse anymore. There are more resources available than ever before that make it easier to stay informed. Once we inform ourselves, we can inform others.

Here are some helpful suggestions:

### **HELPFUL SUGGESTION #1**

***When talking to a young person (whether it's your child or a student), use language they can understand.***

For example, you wouldn't tell a kindergartner that Indigenous children were abused. Instead, you could say, "At many of the Indian Residential Schools, the staff could be mean to the kids." A five-year-old doesn't need to be introduced to the reality of abuse, but they do understand what 'being mean' is, and it's not too much for them to hear it.

By the same token, if a young person has been educated about Indian Residential Schools since elementary school, by the time they're in secondary school, it's the right time to have those harder conversations.

Keeping age-appropriateness in mind, acknowledge that what happened to Indigenous people was genocide, and explain what that means. Acknowledge that it wasn't a "horrible mistake". It's important not to shy away from the truth.

Indian Residential Schools are a huge part of Canadian history that affects everybody. You might even say that Indian Residential Schools are not even a thing of the past, when so many Indigenous people, families and communities are still dealing with the trauma they caused.



## HELPFUL SUGGESTION #2

### Read books with young people.

Read books with young people. Create opportunities for conversations to break down and discuss the content. Any or all of these books about Indian Residential Schools are a good place to start:



**Today is Orange Shirt Day**  
by Phyllis Webstad and Natassia Davies  
(Ages 0-3)

**Phyllis' Orange Shirt**  
by Phyllis Webstad  
(Ages 4-6)

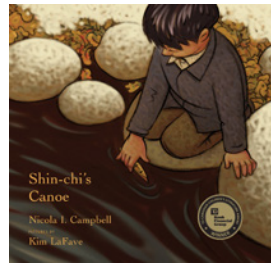
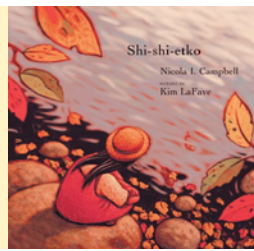


**The Orange Shirt Story**  
by Phyllis Webstad  
(Age 12+)

**My Name is Seepeetza**  
by Shirley Sterling

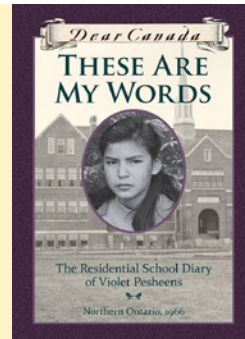


**The Story of Shi-shi-etko**  
by Nicola I. Campbell



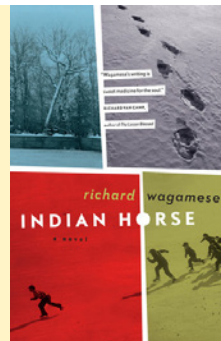
**Shin-chi's Canoe**  
by Nicola I. Campbell

**Dear Canada, These Are My Words: The Residential School Diary of Violet Pesheens**  
by Ruby Slipperjack



**In Search of April Raintree**  
by Beatrice Mosionier

**Indian Horse**  
by Richard Wagamese

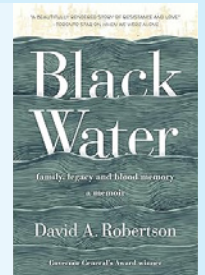


**David A. Robertson**, a prominent Canadian Indigenous author, is known for his extensive work in children's and young adult literature. He is a member of the Norway House Cree Nation and has published more than 30 books, including graphic novels, picture books and memoirs. Some of notable works include:



**When We Were Alone**  
a Governor General's Literary Award-winning picture book

**Black Water: Family, Legacy and Blood Memory, a memoir**



**"We all have a part to play. The world won't be changed all at once—reconciliation is a long-term process—but each step means something."**

—DAVID A. ROBERTSON

#### SOURCES:

fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear  
cbc.ca  
darobertson.ca



**FAMILY DAY**

#### Family Day Care Services

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