

# Touchstones of Hope: Reconciliation in child welfare - Background and Description



The Touchstones of Hope Reconciliation in Child Welfare is a movement to re-develop Indigenous child welfare where community-developed visions for healthy children and families, informed by the Touchstones of Hope Principles, serve to lead child welfare policy and practice. The five Touchstones Principles are:

- *Culture & Language*: Culturally relevant child welfare policy and practice established by Indigenous communities.
- *Holistic Approach*: Child welfare approaches that reflect the whole reality of the child.
- *Self-Determination*: Indigenous peoples are in the best position to make decisions that affect Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.
- *Non-Discrimination*: Indigenous children and youth receiving child welfare services should not receive inferior services because they are Indigenous.
- *Structural Interventions*: Solutions to challenges such as poverty, poor housing, and caregiver substance misuse which affect many Indigenous children and families.

The Touchstones principles are defined and interpreted within the unique culture and contexts of Indigenous communities, avoiding a pan-Indigenous approach. They are intended to guide Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through a four phase, non-linear, reconciliation process:

- *Truth Telling* – Telling the story of child welfare as it has affected Indigenous children, youth and families
- *Acknowledging* – Learning from the past, seeing one another with new understanding, and recognizing the need to move forward on a new path
- *Restoring* – Doing what we can to redress the harm and making changes to ensure it does not happen again
- *Relating* – Working respectfully together to design, implement, and monitor the new child welfare system

The Touchstones principles and process were developed by approximately 200 Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders working in Indigenous child welfare. As the child welfare system was not meeting the distinct needs of Indigenous children and families, the leaders knew something had to be done to address the over-representation of Indigenous children in child welfare care. They gathered in 2005 in Niagara Falls, Canada to discuss the crisis. The results of their rich discussions form the basis of the Touchstones of Hope principles and process which are outlined in detail in: *Reconciliation in child welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous children, youth and families* (Blackstock, Cross, George, Brown & Formsma, 2006).



## Touchstones of Hope: Reconciliation in child welfare - Process

The Touchstones movement provides opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples working in Indigenous child welfare to respectfully engage in a reconciliation process and to build relationships with all of those invested in the wellbeing of Indigenous children, youth, and families. Together, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples engage in discussions to define the Touchstones of Hope principles in their unique contexts in order to build on the good work already being done as well as to create new child welfare concepts that reflect the realities and needs of Indigenous children.

There are many opportunities in the Touchstones movement that foster engagement and relationship building including:

- **Information session** – Short presentation about the Touchstones of Hope offered by the Caring Society.
- **Regional session** – 1-2 day session providing individuals and organizations an opportunity to learn about the Touchstones of Hope and go through a simulation of a Touchstones community session. Allows the opportunity to make an informed decision on moving forth with the Touchstones of Hope process
- **Advisory Committee** – Provides a foundation for the keepers of the Touchstones of Hope movement. This Committee (60% Indigenous and 40% non-Indigenous) is created by those leading the movement. Committee members represent the voices of those in communities and organizations of those involved and it is their job to report back.
- **Train-the-trainer sessions** – Supports participants in learning more about the Touchstones of Hope and how to facilitate a Touchstones of Hope community session.
- **Touchstones community session(s)** - Provide space for open discussions to occur and new concepts centered on community based visions for healthy Indigenous children to emerge; participants brainstorm the things needed to sustain a long-term movement for healthy children and create action plans for moving forward.
- **Engagement session** – In-depth, participatory learning session about the Touchstones of Hope offered by the Caring Society. Ideal for organizations that may not necessarily want to engage in an entire movement to-redevelop child welfare but want more information than just an information session and to explore what the Touchstones means to them in their context.

Here are examples of tools and resources that can be used to assist in a Touchstones reconciliation process:

- **Touchstones Tool Kit** – Offers a ‘how-to’ guide on starting and continuing a reconciliation movement. Available from the Caring Society ([info@fncaringsociety.com](mailto:info@fncaringsociety.com)).
- **Newsletters, website** – Creates a way to report on the movement, including upcoming sessions and to engage those in the process through writing about their experiences. Anyone using the Touchstones model is welcome to submit a short article about their Touchstones activities for consideration in the Caring Society newsletter.
- **PATH** – Allows for a forum of open discussion which can be used in a regional or community session to help participants create a vision of healthy children, families, and communities. This tool was created by Inclusion Press ([www.inclusion.com](http://www.inclusion.com)).



# Touchstones of Hope: Reconciliation in child welfare – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

## **How can my community/organization start a Touchstones movement in our community?**

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada created a Tool Kit on how to become engaged in a reconciliation movement. It is divided into four parts and includes:

- Planning guides and information to assist in hosting events and creating an Advisory Committee or website;
- Information on each of the Touchstones principles, including presentations on each of the Touchstones of Hope;
- Samples of budgets, community visions, and action plans;
- Resources relating to the Touchstones principles, reconciliation and child welfare.

The Tool Kit is available on a Mac and PC compatible CD. Tool Kits are provided free of charge but can only be used for communities and organizations wishing to engage in the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation movement and not for those who wish to make a profit on the materials or information.

## **Who can be involved?**

The Touchstones of Hope reconciliation movement is geared toward people working in Indigenous child welfare activities. Since the goal of the movement is healthy children and communities, those guiding a particular movement may also choose to invite individuals in other sectors like education, justice, health, etc.

The Touchstones process also includes learning and engagement opportunities. Organizations working with Indigenous children and youth have invited the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society to host information sessions and engagement workshops about the Touchstones of Hope. An information session is a short presentation about the Touchstones of Hope providing some background context and explaining the stages in the movement. An engagement workshop provides the opportunity for participants to learn more about the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation in child welfare movement, to learn more about the history of Indigenous peoples with a focus on child welfare and to participate in defining the principles in their own context – including personal context and organizational context.

## **How much does Touchstones of Hope movement cost?**

The budget for a Touchstones of Hope movement is set by those planning activities within the movement and varies based on the level of engagement. Here are some things to take into consideration - costs for participant and facilitator's travel, meals, accommodation, Elder honoraria, and other costs associated with event planning. Reconciliation is a long-term initiative that requires time, effort and continual follow-up and engagement. With this in mind, Touchstones sessions can be done on a tight budget with in-kind donations from organizations and communities involved (i.e. donated meeting space, community billets, meals, etc).

## **How can I find out more information?**

See our website at <http://www.fncaingsociety.com/touchstones-hope> or contact us at [info@fncaingsociety.com](mailto:info@fncaingsociety.com) or 613-230-5885.