



Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children,
Youth and Families
Reconciliation in Child Welfare



Contents

- Preface 3**
- Introduction 4**
- Why is Reconciliation in Indigenous Child Welfare Needed? 6**
- History of the Movement..... 8**
- Engaging in a Touchstones of Hope Movement 9**
 - Considerations..... 9**
 - Commitment..... 10**
 - Community Readiness..... 10**
 - Advisory Circle 10**
 - Funding..... 11**
 - Process..... 11**
 - Information Sessions.....11
 - Train the Trainer Sessions11
 - Community Sessions15
 - During and after the session19
 - Action Planning21
- Appendix A - Touchstones of Hope Scorecard Evaluation 23**



Touchstones of Hope **Reconciliation in Child Welfare**

Preface

The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (the Caring Society) is a national non-profit organization ensuring that First Nations¹ children and their families have culturally based, and equitable opportunities to grow up safely at home and in their communities, be healthy, get a good education and be proud of who they are and where they come from.

The Caring Society has been engaged in the Touchstones of Hope for reconciliation in child welfare movement since the beginning of the movement in 2005. We created this document to help guide those wanting to engage in their own Touchstones of Hope movement in child welfare. This document is part of a larger tool kit that contains: supporting research and evidence relating to Indigenous child welfare and the wellbeing of children, templates to help you plan and deliver Touchstones events (i.e. presentations, budgets, etc.), and other documents that may be helpful. To request the entire Reconciliation in Child Welfare Tool Kit or for any questions about going forward with the Touchstones of Hope in your community or organization, contact us at info@fncaringsociety.com.

¹ In Canada, the three main Indigenous groups are First Nations, Métis and Inuit. The Caring Society's work focuses on First Nations peoples, or those who are ordinarily resident on reserve or living in the Yukon. In this guide, we utilize the term Indigenous to refer to First Peoples all over the world as the Touchstones of Hope are applicable to, and can be defined by, different Nations.




Introduction

The Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families is a movement toward reconciliation in child welfare to ensure better outcomes for Indigenous children, youth and families—to ensure they are safe and living in dignity and respect. The movement is about promoting and entrenching the Touchstones of Hope principles and process in grassroots control, preparing community-based facilitators to work with communities and organizations, and developing culturally-driven vision plans and next steps which are meant to inform child welfare practice and policies specific to regions and Nations.

Success of the movement relies on providing opportunities for those working with and for Indigenous children, youth, and families to develop and build on relationships through a non-linear four phase reconciliation process. **Truth telling** is about having respectful and open conversations about mainstream child welfare and how the foundational ideologies of the system, including policies and practices, have negatively impacted Indigenous children, families, and communities. **Acknowledging** invites us to learn from the past and to recognize that mainstream child welfare has not worked for Indigenous children and change is possible if we work together. **Restoring** means doing what we can to redress the harm for Indigenous children, families, and communities to ensure that it does not happen again. **Relating** encourages those working with and for Indigenous children to work together to create a plan for better outcomes for Indigenous children, youth, and families, to implement the next steps, and to evaluate progress on the movement.

The reconciliation process is guided by five Touchstones of Hope principles that are defined and brought to life by those involved in the movement so that they reflect the unique context of Indigenous Nations and communities. These culturally-relevant principles serve as the foundation of the movement toward reconciliation in child welfare and better outcomes for Indigenous children:

- Self-Determination:** Indigenous peoples are in the best position to make decisions for children in their communities and lead the development of child welfare laws, policies, research, and practice for their communities.
- Culture and Language:** Culture and language are foundational to the health of children and families and child welfare policies, practices, services need to be culturally appropriate. This Touchstone is also recognizing that we bring our own culture and worldviews into the work we do with Indigenous children and families.




Holistic Approach: Child welfare approaches are more effective when we consider all aspects of the lives of Indigenous children (beyond the nuclear family) and that children are shaped by their culture (traditions, spirituality, and social customs), environment, social relationships, and specific abilities and traits.

Structural Interventions: The safety and wellbeing of Indigenous children should be first and foremost but we also need to recognize that there are outside factors preventing families and communities from adequately providing for their children (lack of services, poverty, poor housing, etc.). Adequate services must be given to families and communities and adequate resources must be provided to ensure that agencies and communities serving children can develop programs for prevention and address issues like substance misuse.

Non Discrimination: Indigenous children, youth, and families receiving child welfare services should not be given less or be treated negatively because they are Indigenous. Indigenous peoples are entitled to access to child welfare resources that are responsive to their needs, and to the unique cultural context of their experience.

The Touchstones of Hope process varies depending on the needs and wants of the community, agency, or organization. The Caring Society created this how-to guide so that communities, agencies, and organizations can learn about the foundational pieces (the principles and reconciliation process) to help plan and carry out their own Touchstones of Hope movement. These steps and materials have been tried, tested, and revised to ensure they are the most cost-and time-effective strategies to help you in your process.

For those with little to no experience with the Touchstones of Hope, in-depth information and learning helps to inform whether the Touchstones is the right approach and to see what is involved in the movement. This can take the form of an information session, discussed later in this document. If the community decides to proceed, a train the trainer session is recommended. Since the foundation of the movement is about providing space for open and truthful discussions about child welfare, training is highly recommended to ensure there are people prepared to guide the important discussions.



Once trainers are in place, community sessions are the next step. Community sessions invite Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to define the Touchstones of Hope principles according to their cultural context, engage in honest discussion about child welfare, and create solutions to ensure Indigenous children are safe and living in dignity and respect. The solutions arising from the community sessions are divided into next steps with concrete pieces – who or what can help, how do we make the change sustainable, and what are the timelines for each action. Every Touchstones of Hope movement will look differently on the ground as Indigenous nations and communities have unique circumstances, cultures and languages, and histories.

Why is Reconciliation in Indigenous Child Welfare Needed?

Reconciliation is needed when:²

- There is some form of structural injustice, historical or present (e.g. racism);
- One group has experienced oppression as a result of another group (e.g. Indigenous-Settler relations);
- There is a long history of conflict;
- Those in conflict live in close proximity to each other or work closely;
- There has been direct violence.


“For thousands of years, Indigenous communities successfully used traditional systems of care to ensure the safety and well-being of their children.”³

Imposing Western models of caring for children on Indigenous communities is a key aspect of colonialism. These models and systems have not been successful since they do not take into account the historical disadvantage imposed on Indigenous communities nor do they allow for culturally relevant practices and policies to emerge.

As a result, there continues to be a disproportionate rate of Indigenous children in the care of child welfare and alternate care provided by these systems has often not had positive results. In Canada,

² Lederach in de la Rey, C. (2001). Reconciliation in Divided Societies. In D. J. Christie, Wagner, R., V., & Winter DuNann, D. (Ed.), *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century* (pp. 251–261): Prentice Hill, p. 251. As cited in *Touchstones for Leadership: Reconciliation in Indigenous Child Welfare - Module 1: Primer*. (2008). First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and the National Indian Child Welfare Association (USA). p.30.

³ Blackstock, C., Cross, T., George, J., Brown, I., & Formsma, J. (2006). *Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families*. Ottawa, Canada: First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada/Portland, USA: National Indian Child Welfare Association, p.6.



“Aboriginal children accounted for 7.7% of all children aged 0 to 4, and about one-half of all foster children in this age group.”⁴ According to the Canadian Incidence Study (CIS),⁵ the primary reason for First Nations children being removed is neglect, which is often a result of poverty, poor housing, and caregiver substance misuse.

The safety of children is imperative and removals from parents may be warranted if children are in danger; however, traditional Indigenous models of caring for children include kinship care, where children are cared for by extended family or community members until the parents are once again able to care for their children. The Western system traditionally does not recognize kinship care as the go-to model for caring for children. As such, Western child welfare may not recognize extended family as they would a foster family so the extended family is less likely to receive adequate supports (e.g. funding) to care for children. Children should never be removed from their homes for reasons outside of the control of parents and culturally relevant solutions must be created or utilized (e.g. kinship care), and sufficiently funded in order to address the challenges of a Western model of caring for children.

“These historic and contemporary realities have resulted in many Indigenous communities viewing child welfare as an agent of colonialism rather than a support to the safety and well-being of Indigenous children and youth.”⁶

Many Indigenous communities have fear of those working in mainstream child protection and stigmas against the system itself. Child welfare seen as an agent of colonialism where Indigenous children are removed from their homes and communities and placed into alternate places of care that are often poor options. It is no surprise given the intergenerational impacts of residential schools and the 60s Scoop as well as mainstream child welfare’s involvement in both. Blackstock⁷ and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)⁸ point to the fact that mainstream child welfare bodies, the Canadian Welfare Council and the Canadian Association of Social Workers, had explicit roles in contributing to the placement of Indigenous children into residential schools and removals that contributed to what is known as the 60s Scoop, especially once provinces and territories took control over child welfare services on reserves.


⁴ Statistics Canada. (2017). Diverse family characteristics of Aboriginal children aged 0-4. 2016 Census. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016020/98-200-x2016020-eng.cfm>

⁵ Sinha, V., Trocme, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Fast, E., Prokop, S., et al. (2011). *Kiskisik Awasisak: Remember the Children. Understanding the Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in the Child Welfare System*. Assembly of First Nations: Ontario.

⁶ Blackstock, C., et al. (2006). *Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families*. p.6.

⁷ Blackstock, C. (2009). The Occasional Evil of Angels: Learning from the Experiences of Aboriginal Peoples and Social Work. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 4(1), p.29-30. Retrieved from <http://journals.sfu.ca/fpcf/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/74/4>

⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (2015). *Canada’s Residential Schools: The Legacy. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 5*. McGill-Queen’s University Press: Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago. p.14. Retrieved from http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Volume_5_Legacy_English_Web.pdf



First Nations agencies, funded by the federal government and operated under provincial legislation, started to operate in Canada in the 80s to respond to the need for culturally relevant child welfare services.⁹ Now there are over 100 First Nations child and family service agencies¹⁰ as well as urban organizations specifically for Métis children and families. Many of these agencies continue to work with mainstream child welfare organizations to deliver child welfare services. As a result of differing worldviews, working toward the best outcomes for Indigenous children can often be challenging.

Given these historical and contemporary issues, reconciliation in child welfare is needed to move forward on a new path for Indigenous children. Reconciliation – truth telling, acknowledging, restoring and relating - can lead to building trust, respecting one another’s worldviews, being heard in meaningful ways and having your views inform policy and practice (Indigenous peoples), working as an ally and contributing to meaningful outcomes (non-Indigenous peoples), and most importantly, remembering that the work is about children, youth, and families.

History of the Movement


In 2005, 200 individuals from Canada and the United States working in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous child welfare assembled at a conference in Niagara Falls in response to the growing crisis in child welfare—the disproportionate number of Indigenous children and youth being taken into care and the poor outcomes experienced by Indigenous families. The discussions during the two-day gathering explored the history of child welfare, the reasons behind the growing number of Indigenous children and youth entering the child welfare system, and the values and beliefs needed to reshape the child welfare system to better serve Indigenous children, youth, and families. The document *Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families*¹¹ was created to capture the discussions and what was needed to move forward.

In 2008, the Caring Society and the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) published a curriculum called *Touchstones for Leadership: Reconciliation in Indigenous Child Welfare* written by Dr. Margaret Kovach. The 5-module curriculum was intended to help communities put the principles, defined in their own cultures and context, into practice and engage in reconciliation with those working with their children, youth, and families. Although the information in the curriculum is dated, the Caring Society can provide the curriculum as reference guides to those interested.

⁹ Blackstock, C. (2009). *The Occasional Evil of Angels*. p.30

¹⁰ See <https://fncaringsociety.com/agencies> for the list of First Nations child and family service agencies.

¹¹ You can download document here: www.fncaringsociety.com/reconciliation-child-welfare



Since 2008, the Caring Society has supported numerous Touchstones initiatives to engage Indigenous peoples in the Touchstones reconciliation movement. The largest initiative was the Northern British Columbia Touchstones of Hope movement from 2008 to 2012. Five First Nations child and family service agencies opted to participate in community sessions with the communities they serve and the Ministry of Child and Family Development (provincial child welfare authority) to speak openly about child welfare and to create next steps to move forward together. They trained a network of Touchstones trainers, participated in community sessions, and implemented or started to implement their next steps.

“Moving forward, we know that more can be done with the Touchstones. This document was written ten years ago, but the process guided by the principles contained in the document, are just as relevant today as they were in 2006.”¹²

In 2015, ten years after the gathering in Niagara Falls, the TRC released its final reports on Indian Residential Schools and Calls to Action to everyone in the country. Child welfare was listed as the #1 Call to Action. The TRC also pointed to Touchstones of Hope as a promising practice in child welfare.¹³

As reconciliation has come to the forefront in Canada since the release of the TRC’s final reports and Calls to Action, it is an opportune time to explore the Touchstones of Hope and the movement toward reconciliation in Indigenous child welfare.

Engaging in a Touchstones of Hope Movement

Considerations

The Touchstones of Hope process will be different in every community and organization. Where an organization, agency, or community starts depends on readiness and willingness to try a different approach. Here are key considerations before starting a reconciliation movement in child welfare.

¹² Cross, T., Blackstock, C., Formsma, J., George, J., & Brown, I. (2015). Editorial: Touchstones of Hope: Still the best guide for Indigenous child welfare. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 10(2), p. 6-11.

¹³ TRC. (2015). Canada’s Residential Schools: The Legacy. *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 5*. McGill-Queen’s University Press: Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago. p.56-57.



Commitment

The Touchstones of Hope is a sustainable change movement. The approach uplifts Indigenous peoples to create the best approaches for their children, with non-Indigenous peoples supporting those visions as allies of the movement. Engaging people in creating visions and next steps for Indigenous children requires preparation and time. Those embarking in the movement need to be committed to carrying forth the next steps and action plans that are created through this process. A Touchstones of Hope gathering is not a conference or symposium; it is not the usual two-day gathering where best intentions are put forward, everyone gets excited and then momentum is gone when everyone goes home. All of the gatherings within the movement are meant to be stepping stones toward better outcomes for Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.

Community Readiness

In deciding whether or not your community or organization is ready to start this process, it is important to consider whether you are able to ensure that people feel uplifted in the reconciliation process. It is important that when the opportunity arises for open and respectful discussions around children, people feel safe to express their views. It can be challenging to have truthful conversations about children in our communities, the history and role of child welfare, and whether our work is truly helping those we are meant to serve—so safety and respect have to be priorities.

If you decide to go forward and your community has experienced trauma or there are tarnished relationships between agencies/organizations working with children, more support must be dedicated to ensure the process is respectful.

Reconciliation, especially in child welfare, is not meant to be easy but it can be transformative. If you are unsure about it, it may be as simple as asking yourself whether you want to continue to “move deck chairs on the Titanic” or whether you want to try something new that has potential to make substantial change for the children, youth, and families in the communities you are working with and for.

Advisory Circle

An Advisory Circle’s role is to support the movement, plan events, get information out to communities and those in the organization or agency, help implement next steps, and ensure the work continues. If an organization or community opts to have an Advisory Circle, it is recommended to have a minimum of 60% Indigenous representation and a maximum of 40% non-Indigenous representation. An Advisory Circle can be created at any time during the movement.



Funding

The budget for Touchstones of Hope activities 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 travel, meals, accommodation, Elder, facilitator, and speaker honoraria, space rental, and other costs associated with event planning. Reconciliation is a long-term journey 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.).

Process

There are many starting points to the Touchstones of Hope movement. For example, some may choose to start the process with a general information session and others, who already have a base of information on the Touchstones of Hope, may want to seek training for individuals to facilitate community sessions or may want to go right in to the community sessions.

Information Sessions

The starting point for those with little to no information about the Touchstones of Hope and who want to learn more to see if the approach could be the right fit is usually an Information Session. The community, organization, and/or agency may wish to have someone from the Caring Society present an information session on the Touchstones of Hope in person or by webinar. An Information session involves a presentation on the Touchstones of Hope and questions from the audience. The goal is to educate about the movement and provide ways in which communities or organizations can get started in the process. [Contact us!](#)

There is a section dedicated to providing information about the Touchstones of Hope on the [Caring Society's website](#) and we also have a [short video on the Touchstones of Hope](#). The Caring Society is happy to answer questions by telephone or email about the movement and process.

Train the Trainer Sessions

A two-day Train the trainer session is ideal for communities or organizations that want to undertake a Touchstones of Hope movement but need individuals trained in the Touchstones of Hope principles and process to help plan and/or facilitate discussions in the community sessions. The training provides trainees with background information on the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation movement and Indigenous child welfare in Canada, gives them an opportunity to explore the meaning of each Touchstone in child welfare as well as in their own context, and provides them with facilitation techniques and tools to help carry out a community session.



Timeline


Based on experience, the Caring Society recommends this approximate timeline for planning a train the trainer session. Note: tasks and timelines may differ based on unique needs of communities, agencies and organizations.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 2-3 months ahead: | Determine dates and plan the budget;
Identify and invite trainees, an Elder and a facilitator(s); |
| 2 months ahead: | Book venue, catering, and audio-visual rental; |
| 1 month ahead: | Confirm catering and audio-visual requirements;
Order supplies; |
| 1 week ahead: | Print materials and create participant packages. |

When deciding on dates, keep in mind that trainees may need to travel. Also keep in mind times of year that may not be the most ideal - i.e. during times that might interfere with Indigenous cultural events, end of the fiscal year when final reports are due, etc.

Costs and needs for the session may include but are not limited to:

- Materials - flip chart paper, markers, pens and paper for participants, printed materials like participant certificates and participant packages;
- Facilitator fees - fee for service or honorarium, accommodation and travel;
- Elder honorarium and gift (i.e. tobacco is appropriate in some regions);
- Trainee travel and accommodation;
- Laptop, projector;
- Room rental;
- Catering - lunch, coffee and snacks.



The hosting agency or organization (or Advisory Committee) is in the best position to determine who to invite to be trainers in their Touchstones of Hope movement. Ideally, individuals have some experience in facilitation, however the training should provide information on facilitation as well the opportunity for participants to put their skills into practice. Another thing to take into consideration is whether or not your future Touchstones facilitators have a flexible enough schedule to facilitate a 2-day community session. An Elder from the region where you will be hosting the event is also likely an important person to invite to the training in order to open and close the session and to carry out other cultural protocol.

Since this is a small event, invites and follow-up can be made to trainees either by email or telephone. As for facilitators, the Caring Society recommends 1-2 people; they can be individuals from the hosting agency, organization, and/or Advisory Committee who are well versed in the Touchstones of Hope principles and process, or you can contact the Caring Society to inquire about the possibility of the having one of our Touchstones facilitators assist you with this training.


For a train the trainer session, ensure you have a space that is technology friendly (internet, plug-ins and a screen) and has tables for trainees, whether it be a meeting room in a hotel or a board room at an organization. In terms of food, ensure to have ample food and beverage for everyone.

The month leading up to the training, it is important to confirm any catering orders as well as audio-visual needs. The week leading up to the session, ensure to send confirmations or reminders to the trainees. In terms of materials, the Caring Society recommends providing copies of the *Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families* booklet. Other resources could include: information on Indigenous child welfare nationally and locally, Jordan's Principle, a facilitator tips and techniques, such as how to work with challenging behaviour in group settings.

The day of the training, ensure all of your technology is working properly and that any presentations you have are ready to go so that you can start your training on time.

Hosting a Touchstones Train the trainer session

A train the trainer session gives trainees the chance to learn more about the Touchstones of Hope in terms of child welfare. The facilitator provides an overview on the Touchstones of Hope and the background of the movement (direct instruction). Alternatively, the Caring Society has a Touchstones of Hope video that can be used to introduce the Touchstones to trainees. The training should also provide historical information and context to Indigenous child welfare both nationally and locally. Even if some trainees have a background in child welfare, this step is important to ensure that all trainees have a baseline level of knowledge. For the national child welfare context, the training could examine the case on First Nations child welfare at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in Canada,



especially its implications for other Indigenous groups in terms funding and the relationship of the government with Indigenous child welfare. For local context, provincial or territorial and regional statistics and information is helpful for participants. Teaching/learning can be done in many different ways including videos, small group activities, large group activities or discussion, or direct presentations.

The facilitator(s) should allow time for the trainees to learn more about what each of the Touchstones of Hope principles (culture and language, self-determination, structural interventions, non discrimination, and holistic approach) means to them in their own context and within child welfare. Facilitators can structure this learning and discussion any way they see fit.

The training should also discuss what to expect from a Touchstones of Hope community session as well as their future role as facilitators.

The last part of the training provides participants with an opportunity to learn facilitation techniques, types of facilitation, and to practice their facilitation skills, either with a partner or solo, by presenting to the group on one of the Touchstones or phases of reconciliation. On the first day, there is a lot of learning and information, however participants should be given some time to work on their presentation the first day.

Encourage trainees to utilize different facilitation or presentation techniques that they learned. Presentations should be no more than 10 minutes per group minutes with a 2-minute period for providing feedback to the participants.

On the last day of training, ask participants to fill out an evaluation form (should be included in the packages – see Appendix A) and return them to you before they leave the session. The Caring Society would love to hear about your experience and we welcome you to send a copy of the results of your session to us.

After all is done with the training, there is an opportunity to hand out certificates of completion to the participants. The closing can be done in many different ways. One way is to have a closing circle where everyone comments on their experience of the training, what they hope to accomplish from it, or what they have taken from the session. If you have a closing circle, be sure to allow enough time in the schedule for participants to share their experiences.




Community Sessions

A community session brings together Indigenous community members and Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working in agencies or organizations serving Indigenous children, youth, and families. Participants learn about the Touchstones of Hope approach, child welfare in the national and local contexts, Jordan's Principle, and they have the opportunity to share their perspectives in a small group to vision plan and create next steps to ensure all Indigenous children and youth are safe and living in dignity and respect. The hosting organization determines the agenda for their session. The Caring Society recommends alternating between large group plenary presentations and small group discussion sessions, with an activity toward the end that allows participants to come back together as a large group and close the session in a good way. Participants are asked to come to the community session as themselves and not as their job title so all participants feel safe and comfortable to share (when people introduce themselves based on their job titles or positions, group member may feel intimidated and power differentials may be reinforced). The hope is that by creating this different type of space, reconciliation can occur through open and honest truth telling and relationships can start to form or be built upon.

Timeline

Based on experience, the Caring Society recommends this approximate timeline for planning a community session. Note: tasks and timelines may differ based on unique needs of communities, agencies and organizations.

Ongoing:	Planning meetings;
3 months ahead:	Determine dates and plan the budget; Identify and invite participants and Elders and facilitators; Create the agenda to determine if you need to find presenters (presenters can also be facilitators and Elders already attending the session);
2 months ahead:	Book venue, catering, and audio-visual rental; Pre-work with participants (read further below);
1 month ahead:	Confirm catering and audio-visual requirements;
3 weeks ahead:	Order supplies;
1-2 weeks ahead:	Print materials and create participant packages;



Create participant lists for small group discussion.


The Caring Society recommends regular planning meetings to discuss roles and responsibilities and to assign tasks and deadlines for everyone involved in planning the community session. It is at these meetings where you will determine the dates, location of the venue, materials that you will need, and who should attend the session. You will need to develop the participant list to determine how many facilitators and Elders should be at the session (1 Elder and 1-2 facilitators per small group; recommended 20 participants per small group). You will also need to create a letter of invitation and figure out how much work needs to be done beforehand with participants. For example, the hosting organization could do some work around the non-discrimination Touchstone, encouraging participants, especially non-Indigenous participants to examine the concept of worldview - everyone has a lens or worldview and it may be a matter of figuring out how that translates into our work with Indigenous Peoples.

Facilitators and Elders may also serve as speakers but you may need to invite additional speakers to present on some of the topics. Planning meetings should be held regularly throughout the planning stages to ensure that tasks are being completed, questions are being asked and answered, and that overall, the session is organized.

When deciding on dates for these sessions, it is important to keep in mind that participants may need to travel and to be aware of times of year that may not be the most ideal - i.e. conflicts with Indigenous cultural events, conflicts with busy times of year like the end of the fiscal year, etc.

Costs for the session may include but are not limited to:

- Materials - flip chart paper, markers, printed materials like participant packages;
- Facilitator fees (fee for service or honorarium and/or gift, accommodation and travel);
- Elder honorarium and gift (i.e. tobacco is appropriate in some regions);
- Presenter honorarium and gift (if applicable);
- Participant travel and accommodation;
- Laptop, projector;
- Room rental – one main space for all participants and break-out rooms based on the number of small groups;
- Digital recorders for the small groups if the session is mainly oral;
- Catering – breakfast, lunch, coffee and snacks.




The hosting community, agency, organization (or Advisory Committee) are in the best position to determine who should attend the community session. Like the Advisory Committee, it is recommended to have 60% representation of Indigenous peoples and 40% representation of non-Indigenous peoples at community sessions. This split helps ensure that Indigenous voices are at the center of small group discussions and resulting action plans. The Touchstones movement is meant to be Indigenous led and Indigenous participants may find it difficult to speak about their experiences with the mainstream if they are one of only a few Indigenous people in the group.

Create your list of invitees and draft the agenda. The two-day agenda should include an introduction to the Touchstones of Hope and activities or presentations on each of principles (culture and language, self-determination, structural interventions, non discrimination, and holistic approach). The Caring Society can provide suggestions on ways to teach and learn about each of the Touchstones and we encourage regions to be creative with the ways in which they present each of the principles.

Participants can be anyone working with and for Indigenous children, youth, and families – including front line workers, community members, managers, policy makers, etc. Elders must be invited to the session to lead participants in culturally appropriate protocol and act as support persons for each of the small groups. If you have done a train the trainer session, you will have a network of facilitators available. If you have not had a train the trainer session, the planning team needs to ensure facilitators have strong knowledge of the Touchstones of Hope principles and process and are prepared to guide the small group sessions. As stated earlier, facilitators can serve a dual role of guiding participants through their small group discussion as well as being presenters.

In order to promote open and honest dialogue at the session, a letter of invite needs to be sent to participants to outline what to expect at the session and to underline the importance of participants leaving their titles at the door to try to ensure that everyone feels comfortable sharing their visions for child safety. To ensure the gathering is a success, this part is essential. Again, the hosting organization may choose to do some work with participants before the session whether it is providing an overview of the Touchstones of Hope and what to expect at the session or perhaps some extra work around the non discrimination Touchstone.

Ensure the space you choose has break out rooms so that you can divide the large group into smaller groups. The plenary space should also be technology friendly (internet, plug-ins and a screen) and have tables for participants. In terms of food, ensure to have ample food and beverage for participants.




The month leading up to the training, it is important to confirm any catering as well as audio-visual needs (if applicable). The hosting organization should also decide on what type of activity they would like to do with the small groups so they can ensure that facilitators are prepared and can also order materials. The purpose of the small group discussions is to allow space for participants to decide what is best for their children and communities and to create visions for improved child welfare systems for Indigenous children, youth, and families in their communities and regions. The tool or activity selected to guide discussions should support this objective. Participants should leave the session with concrete steps for moving toward better outcomes for all children, youth, and families in their communities. The Caring Society often uses a facilitator tool called PATH, Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope, which is available from Inclusion Press.¹⁴

In the weeks leading up to the session, ensure to send confirmations or reminders to participants. In terms of materials, the Caring Society recommends providing copies of the *Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families* booklet. Other recommended resources for participant packages include: information on Indigenous child welfare nationally and locally, Jordan's Principle, and an evaluation (see Appendix A).

Once the participant list is complete, it is highly recommended that organizers create the small groups before the session starts. As previously stated, it is crucial that participants feel comfortable in their small groups. This is especially important for the community sessions since the invitees will have a variety of positions and roles within a community or an organization. The following are some guidelines for creating small groups:

- Size of the groups. The breakout groups should be small enough that everyone has a chance to participate but not so small that lacks a variety of perspectives. Generally, a group should be no larger than 20 so that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the discussions.
- Representation. As with the overall session, the groups should be organized according to a 60/40 split of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants.
- Personalities. The goal of the small group sessions is for meaningful conversations to occur, so if you think there are people who should meet (i.e. to possibly start a new collaboration), then it might be best to put them in the same group. There may also be individuals who are not suited to be in a group together. Create the groups to the best of your knowledge and keep in mind that the Touchstones facilitator will be guiding the process and he or she will have tools of their own if a challenging situation occurs.

¹⁴ Visit <http://www.inclusion.com/path.html> for more information.

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- Perspectives. Everyone has a worldview and will be able to share something different with the group. This is why it is essential to have both Indigenous and non-Indigenous representation in the small groups.

During and after the session


Participants register on the first morning. The Caring Society recommends assigning a colour or other marker (clan, number, etc.) for each small group which is added to participant name tags so they know which small group they are assigned to. Arrive early to ensure all of your technology is working properly and that any presentations you have are ready to go so that you can start the session on time. The break out rooms should be set up in a way that encourages participation from all persons in the session. If there is group work within the small group session, tables work well. Another set up that encourages participants to fully participate is a semi-circle in front of the facilitator with no tables.

Once the session starts, an Elder can open the day in a way that is best suited to the customs and traditions of the region or the Nation. Typically, there are welcoming remarks from the hosting organization, followed by a presentation introducing the Touchstones of Hope. Organizers should also go through housekeeping items including identifying support people (Elders and/or pre-designated support persons) available for participants during the community session if needed.

The format of the large group session, where participants learn more about each Touchstone principle in a local context, is at the discretion of the hosting organization. In terms of order, the Caring Society recommends structuring the day with any presentations that might be more difficult toward the beginning or middle of the day (e.g. Elder presentations on culture and language or non discrimination that touch on Residential Schools). That way, if any information is triggering, there are supports available.

For the small group sessions, it is important to reiterate that participants leave their titles at the door. Below is an innovative example from a past Touchstones session the Caring Society participated in:

On the first day of the session, when participants are registering, ask them to write down their title on a piece of paper. Before they enter the plenary room, they are asked to drop it into a basket. This way, they are literally, leaving their titles at the door and walking into the room as themselves.



The Caring Society often uses an activity called “Coming as Ourselves” to open small group discussions. During an introductory circle, participants are asked to introduce themselves with their name, where they live or where their families are from, and one interesting thing about themselves. Participants are reminded not to mention their job title or place of employment. Even if participants are familiar with other participants and what they do in their jobs, starting with this activity often helps break the ice as they may learn something new about someone.

During the small group session, the facilitator(s) will help participants define the Touchstones principles in their own unique contexts. The small group session is a place for participants to create concrete next steps for better outcomes for all children, youth, and families in their communities. There are many tools that can be used to engage with the Touchstones of Hope principles to inform child welfare policies and practices. It could be as simple as guiding participants through questions relating to each of the Touchstones of Hope, while ensuring they create next steps relating to the Touchstones of Hope. The tool utilized should ensure that the entire small group engages with each other (versus separating the small group into further small groups) since the goal of the community session is also to create space for the Touchstones of Hope reconciliation process.

The Caring Society recommends wrapping by the small group sessions by lunchtime on the second day. At some point on the second day, the hosting organization should remind participants to fill out the evaluation provided in the participant package. It is important to ensure that participants turn in their evaluations at the end of the session to gauge the effectiveness of the session, to see if there are things to improve on, and to inform possible future gatherings.

On the afternoon of the second day of the community session, the Caring Society recommends that all small groups come together in the plenary room to share important pieces of their discussion; it is a great way to bring the groups back together. Time permitting, a closing circle may be a fitting way to close the session but allow enough time to do so. The Caring Society has done the following activity as a small gesture of reconciliation:

Before the closing circle starts, each participant receives a stone. Written on each stone is one of the five Touchstones principles or one of the four phases of reconciliation. The stones serve as a symbol of reconciliation it is hoped that they will inspire participants to continue the movement for reconciliation.

Once the closing circle is complete, one of the Elders typically offers a prayer to close the session in a good way, but of course this is dependent on the customs or traditions of the Nation where the session is being held.

After the session closes, facilitators are encouraged to type up their notes to send to the organizers or if the session was recorded, someone should be designated to transcribe the recordings.



Action Planning


About 2-4 weeks after the community session, the hosting organization and other interested people or groups (like community members) meet for action planning. Both the evaluations and the facilitator notes are used to inform action planning. The group prioritizes 5-6 next steps from the small group sessions and they create an action plan. For each next step, the following information should be obtained:

- Tasks – Divide each step into smaller tasks if you can. Ensure they are listed in detail so everyone is clear on what needs to be done.
- Resources – List the people, places, or things needed to complete the next step.
- Person in charge – This person can work solo or in a team to complete the task or tasks at hand. If one of the next steps has several tasks associated with it, it might be easier to work in a team since many individuals also have a daily work load.
- Timeline – This is dependent on the task and needs to be respectful of differing and often busy schedules. However, setting a concrete date will help everyone stay on target.
- Goals – With this next step, are there any goals?

Someone from the planning team should conduct follow-up on the action plan to see what tasks have been completed. Follow-up can be done on an individual basis – contacting the “person in charge” of the next step – or during the next action planning meeting. Here are some suggested questions to ask when following up on progress:

- Were you successful in completing the next step or any tasks within that next step?
 - If yes, what made this successful? Were there any outcomes that came out of completing this next step?
 - If no, what challenges did you face? Is there anything that would help in making this next step or task successful?
- Was the timeline sufficient to complete this task? Did you have enough resources?
- Do you have recommendations, suggestions, or comments?

It is important to ask these questions and ensure that the people carrying forth the actions are supported. Even if some of the next steps remain incomplete or take longer to complete, it is okay to move forth and keep the movement going.



This process of going through the next steps, implementing them, and then meeting to discuss continues until all the next steps and tasks are completed. This will take time so it is important to provide the organizations and communities involved with enough support to keep moving forth; this could mean supporting the organizations financially or through creating a position like a Touchstones of Hope coordinator (as was done in Northern British Columbia, funded by the province) who helps to oversee the movement.

The Touchstones of Hope is a movement to promote better outcomes for Indigenous children and families. The movement consists of principles - culture and language, self-determination, holistic approach, non discrimination, and structural interventions - which guide a reconciliation process of truth telling, acknowledging, restoring, and relating. During the Touchstones of Hope community sessions, communities and organizations create plans of what it would take to ensure all Indigenous children and families in their communities are safe and healthy, and living in dignity and respect.

Next steps can be achieved through continual action planning, follow-up, and support in the process. It is important to commit to this process despite challenges along the way. The Caring Society truly believes that change for Indigenous children and families is possible and most effective at a grassroots level.

Should you have any questions or are interested in engaging with the Caring Society in a Touchstones of Hope process, please do not hesitate to [contact us!](#)

Appendix A - Touchstones of Hope Scorecard Evaluation

Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families: Reconciliation in Child Welfare



Please complete the following evaluation form and return to your small group facilitator.

1. I learned something new about the perceptions of the history of child welfare and Indigenous peoples that help me to better understand how I can support Indigenous children and families in my community.

1 (Strongly agree) 2 (Agree) 3 (Do not agree) 4 (Strongly disagree)

2. I have engaged in at least two conversations with other participants during the event (outside of the small group discussions) about the history and the way it shapes current practice with Indigenous children, young people and families.

1 (Strongly agree) 2 (Agree) 3 (Do not agree) 4 (Strongly disagree)


3. Through exploring the worldviews, values and beliefs that underlie the foundation of child welfare in the large presentations and small group discussion helped me to better understand what changes need to be made to better support the values and beliefs of Indigenous children, young people and families in the child welfare system.

1 (Strongly agree) 2 (Agree) 3 (Do not agree) 4 (Strongly disagree)

4. I can describe what reconciliation in child welfare means and why it is important to the safety and well-being of Indigenous children, young people and families the child welfare system serves.

1 (Strongly agree) 2 (Agree) 3 (Do not agree) 4 (Strongly disagree)

5. The Touchstones, if implemented, have the potential to create positive change in child welfare that would result in substantial benefits for Indigenous children in the child welfare system.



1 (Strongly agree) 2 (Agree) 3 (Do not agree) 4 (Strongly disagree)

6. I have built new relationships with other participants or event organizers to a degree where I would be comfortable contacting them after the gathering to continue the conversation about the Touchstones and how to translate them into child welfare research, policy and practice.

1 (Strongly agree) 2 (Agree) 3 (Do not agree) 4 (Strongly disagree)

7. I have identified at least one action that I personally am willing to undertake to advance the movement to reshape child welfare in a way that better supports Indigenous children, young people and families.

1 (Strongly agree) 2 (Agree) 3 (Do not agree) 4 (Strongly disagree)

8. This is a new type of event where the best interest of Indigenous children as well as the values and beliefs of child welfare itself have been the focus instead of research, policy and practice. I can see the process and outcomes of this approach as also being beneficial to non-Indigenous children, young people and families in the child welfare system.

1 (Strongly agree) 2 (Agree) 3 (Do not agree) 4 (Strongly disagree)

9. We would warmly welcome any comments you wish to share about the gathering, your experience, or recommendations for future action.

Thank you for your feedback!