



Considerations for Mentoring Indigenous Children and Youth



Acknowledgements

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kinanaskomatinan¹ (We thank all of you).

Elders:

Pearl Calahasen, Lorraine Cardinal Roy, Isabelle Kootenay, Don Tourangeau, Francis Whiskeyjack

The following organizations were consulted in the creation of this document:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association▪ Ben Calf Robe Society▪ Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society▪ BBBS Wood Buffalo's Full Circle Mentoring Program▪ Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton and Area▪ BBBS of Red Deer and District▪ Boys and Girls' Club of Edson and District▪ City of Edmonton▪ Classroom Connections Consulting Service▪ Edmonton Public Schools, FNMI Education▪ Edmonton Catholic Schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta▪ Government of Alberta▪ InMotion Network▪ Kairos Canada▪ Karma Business Communication▪ Kohkom Kisewatisiwin Society▪ Native Friendship Centre in Hinton▪ Native Friendship Centre in Grand Prairie▪ Northlands School Division▪ Peer Mediation and Skills Training▪ University of Alberta▪ Young Diverse Proud Youth Development Programs |
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¹ This is in Plains Cree, but we also acknowledge the many ways of saying thank you in different Indigenous languages throughout Alberta.



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Considerations for Mentoring Indigenous Children and Youth

AMP offers two primary resources to support the establishment of new mentoring programs. For community groups or organizations, the [“Create a Community-based Mentoring Program” Toolkit](#) or for schools, the [“Framework for Mentoring in Schools.”](#)

The following [Considerations for Mentoring within Indigenous Communities](#) are a supplementary resource to support primarily non-Indigenous organizations that desire to develop and deliver quality mentoring programs for and with children, youth, and families of Indigenous descent. They are based on research and the combined expertise of those who are already engaged in this important work.

These considerations complement the existing mentoring resources available on the [AMP website](#) by providing specific suggestions to strengthen your mentoring work with Indigenous communities in service of young people. These ten Considerations are intended to help you support the development and implementation of quality mentoring programs that build on the strengths of the community, children, and youth.

We also encourage you to use this resource in conjunction with other community-based resources from the Alberta Government and the Alberta Mentoring Partnership such as the [Handbook for Aboriginal Mentoring](#) and [Mentoring Programs for Aboriginal Youth](#).

What is important in a mentor?

- “Someone you can look to when you are having tough days.”
- “A leader in the community.”
- “Reliable and respected person.”
- “Someone I can talk to.”
- “Someone who respects me.”
- “Listener.”
- “Kind and caring person who wants to help and show me new things.”

-Youth mentees, grades 7-9

Guiding our Understanding of Mentoring with Indigenous Communities

Kids love to play. If you have the ability to laugh with the children and youth and do the things you all enjoy together - you will truly love your job. I feed off their energy and they feed off my energy.

-teachings from Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

Woven throughout this resource are the gentle teachings and personal communications with Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers. We also share the voices and experiences of children, youth, mentors, educators, and many other partners who inform this important work.

Reconciliation Through Mentorship

We encourage all who aim to create and facilitate a successful mentoring program for and with Indigenous children and youth to listen closely to what they have to say and start from a place of teaching that “moves us from our heads to our hearts” (TRC, 2015a, p. 270). From these places, we may truly begin to honour and move toward the spirit and intent of reconciliation, alongside Indigenous communities in partnerships for youth.

As the [Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners of Canada](#) remind us, “The concept of reconciliation means different things to different people, communities, institutions, and organizations” (p. 16). At its heart, reconciliation may be described as an “ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada” (TRC, 2015a, p. 18).

As we strive to foster reconciliation through mentoring programs with Indigenous communities as partners, it is important to keep in mind these teachings from the TRC:

Children and youth must have a strong voice in developing reconciliation policy, programs, and practices into the future. It is therefore vital to develop appropriate public education strategies to support the ongoing involvement of children and youth in age-appropriate reconciliation initiatives and projects at community, regional, and national levels.” (2015a, p.243)

The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) reminds us, it is important to create mentoring programs which honour the experiences and many gifts of diverse Elders, Knowledge Keepers, children, youth, and families in Indigenous communities. In the words of the United Nations (2008),

Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories, and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information. (Article 15)

These considerations are also aligned with the Government of Alberta’s vision and goal towards taking positive steps forward to preserve and learn about the history, legacies, and vibrant cultures of Indigenous communities. In the words of Education Minister David Eggen, “We can’t know where we are going until we know where we have been.”

Indeed, “It will take many heads, hands, and hearts, working together” (TRC, 2015a, p. 8) as we collectively work to take steps forward toward reconciliation by fostering positive and more culturally responsive mentoring programs for and with Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.

“It will take many heads, hands, and hearts, working together” (TRC, 2015a, p. 8)

Intergenerational Teachings as Mentorship

I think mentorship is the transferring of knowledge through a shared experience. I believe that in Indigenous cultures in North America it was simply the foundation of how we were taught and how we lived. It didn’t have a name and the concept never needed to be defined.

- Derek Rope, Educator & Youth Program Designer.

Mentorship is a concept that may not be commonly referred to within Indigenous communities. However, as many community partners have shared with us, there are numerous examples of intergenerational teaching and sharing throughout Indigenous communities that could be considered forms of mentorship. Historically, mentoring in Indigenous communities has been embedded in cultural practice in which the entire community has contributed to raising and teaching children and youth.

Honouring and providing safe spaces for the process of mentoring youth is an important part of being responsive to the dynamic needs of children and youth as they grow up in an ever-changing society. To support the development of a mentoring program with Indigenous children, youth, and their families, it is vitally important to be open to doing things differently in relation to the community. Being open in this case means honouring the particular community you hope to work with—by listening, learning, and responding alongside the community.

In the early times, young warriors were chiselled and fashioned for leadership. All eyes were focused on the young individual. But that was when Indigenous people lived in totality off the land, and lived in harmony with nature because the early Indigenous peoples understood nature’s language. If we see a small child try his hand in a cultural activity, as an older person, we take the opportunity to encourage his effort. We may continue to seize the opportunity as it presents itself. Mentoring is somewhat like that, we live in a complex time...

-teachings from Elder Isabelle Kootenay

Consideration 1: Building a Mentoring Program with Indigenous Communities

There are many things to think about as you begin to develop a mentoring program and a process for mentoring. Taking initial time to carefully build relationships, moving with intention to understand the community, and exploring promising practices and existing successes will help lay the foundation that addresses specific needs and strengths within the community. Below are a number of concepts you will want to consider as you begin to build a mentoring program with Indigenous communities.

Consideration 2: Assessing Strengths and Needs – Questions to Consider

Before you move ahead to design and implement a program using the tools and resources provided on the AMP website, it is important to clearly identify -the who, the what, and the where. Use the questions attached (in Tool 2), to connect with individuals within the community and other agencies to learn about collective strengths to help you foster and facilitate a culturally responsive and community engaged mentoring program and process.

Consideration 3: Creating an Inclusive Advisory Group

The size of your team will depend on the size and scope of your program and availability of resources. It is suggested you have a program co-ordinator; larger programs may need more than one co-ordinator. Some programs have one paid staff person and designate other program responsibilities to a team of committed volunteers, advisory committee members, or in the case of school-based or supported programs, a teacher, guidance counsellor, or liaison worker. Whenever possible, hire a program co-ordinator who has the skills required and is from an Indigenous community. When this is not possible, hire a co-ordinator who has experience working with Indigenous communities or who is well respected and connected to the community.

Start with the conventional [mentor program co-ordinator job description](#), and modify it to include the unique requirements of your program.

You may want to create some sort of advisory committee (formal or informal) to help you engage with the Indigenous community and offer guidance as you proceed. This is an important step in the beginning of the process, not in the middle or after programming has already commenced. This committee should include appropriate representation from the Indigenous community and at least one Elder or Traditional Knowledge Keeper if possible. In Consideration 3, we provide some tips to create an inclusive advisory committee. To be successful, an inclusive advisory committee must do more than just bringing diverse people around the table. The committee must have a willingness to listen and collaborate respectfully and responsively in the best interests of children, youth, and their families.

Consideration 4: The Importance of Fostering Safe Belonging Spaces

Mentorship wasn't a hand to guide and show me solutions for hardships. Mentorship was knowing that if I failed, I would still be cared for and supported to try again.

-Youth Mentee, age 18

I had a good mentor myself and a lot of what I learned is from him. I am passing that on. I live by some simple teachings. One of the strongest statements I was taught was if you are weak you will not survive. If you are strong you will survive - this means strength of body, mind, spirit.

It's hard to concentrate if a youth doesn't have food or they don't get enough rest. A lot of times when youth are hurting, they don't know where to turn. When a youth is emotional or hurting one way or the other - whether it be anger, sadness, it is important that they have a safe place where they feel like they belong, a place to share, and be able to reach out to their different support systems like family, an Elder, mentor, or whoever they trust.

-teachings from Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

Indigenous youth and their families contribute to the rich diversity in Canada, yet there is limited understanding of their experiences of belonging and identity making and how this might influence and shape prospective programming initiatives.

According to projections released by Statistics Canada (Morency et al., 2015), “The population who reported an Aboriginal identity [will] continue to grow faster than the non-Aboriginal population from 2011 to 2036” (p. 13). Additionally, research findings project that the Aboriginal population in Canada, estimated at 1,502,000 in 2011, could increase to between 1,965,000 and 2,633,000 by 2036 under the projection scenarios developed for this report. The average annual growth rate of the Aboriginal population is significantly higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population.

In Consideration 4, we present research related to the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Bockern, 1992, 2005; Brokenleg, 1998) and the importance of attending to the diverse and complex lives of children, youth, and their families (Chung, 2016; Lessard, Clandinin & Caine, 2015). In any program, it is critical to foster safe spaces where Indigenous youth, children, and families know they belong (Chung, 2016).

Consideration 5: Acknowledging Identity and Land – Key Understandings and Terminology

Individuals and communities are diverse and may identify themselves in different ways. For example, an Indigenous person may identify themselves (who they are) in terms of where they are from (location), their history, cultural background, and/or language. In Tool 5, we present key understandings and historical factors which have shaped and continue to shape, the different definitions and terminology related to how Indigenous people might identify themselves as. We also recognize that the definitions and terminology cannot truly capture the diversity, the complexity and the contested history that has largely shaped and continues to shape Indigenous communities. These terms are meant to build understanding and open more inclusive and respectful dialogue with Indigenous partners and communities. As well, we share the importance of acknowledging not only the First Peoples of Canada, but also, the land/territory in which we work, live, and connect with.

Consideration 6: Tips for Recruitment and Retention of Mentors

These suggestions in the toolkit are meant to build on conventional strategies to recruit and retain mentors, particularly those of Indigenous descent. The tips for recruitment include unique considerations in efforts to attract and sustain Indigenous volunteers within programs.

Please click on the links below for sample mentee application and parent consent forms for youth participants:

- [AMP online application form](#)
- [Screening guidelines](#)
- [Sample mentee referral form](#)
- [Sample parent consent form](#)

Consideration 7: Tips for Training and Screening Potential Mentors

It is important that appropriate training and rigorous safety precautions are in place for all mentoring programs. Refer to AMP's [screening guidelines](#) for both mentors and mentees as the basis for your screening processes. In Consideration 7, we include practical resources as well as suggestions on how you might modify mainstream processes so the training and screening processes are tailored and appropriate for the mentors and mentees in your program and community.

Consideration 8: Closing a Child/Youth/Family Relationship with the Mentor or Program

There is growing research emphasizing the importance of providing appropriate and sensitive closure to the early ending of relationships between a mentee and mentor. It is important to also pay attention to the expectations mentees and mentors have from each other and bring to the mentoring relationship. In Consideration 8, we discuss the importance of creating a plan and process with your advisory group for closing matches, along with the importance of providing ongoing support for both mentees and mentors.

Consideration 9: Mentoring Scenarios and Examples of Other Programs that Serve Indigenous Communities

Mentoring can look very different depending on several factors such as whether you are an individual, a school, or a larger organization, and where you are located. For example, you may be an individual interested in mentoring a child or youth, or working with a family in an after-school program; a small rural community school aiming to have Indigenous youth mentor other youth; or a larger organization with more resources that can implement a larger-scale mentoring program within the community.

In Consideration 9, we provide real examples of mentoring programs currently serving Indigenous communities across Alberta. We created this document through our many partnerships and conversations with individuals who are also passionate about this work. These mentoring partners provide testimonials of children, youth, educators, and mentoring co-ordinators, as well as detailed descriptions of their programs.

Consideration 10: Protocols for Working with Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers

Honouring and providing the time and space for intergenerational teachings is essential in any mentoring program specifically with and for Indigenous children and youth. Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers play a critical role, and should be welcomed and included throughout the planning process. Whenever possible, seek their guidance and involve them in the program planning and activities, not just at events or year-end celebrations.

Each community will have specific protocols for interacting with Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers. The guidelines that are attached are relatively generic and should be supported by specific information from the community you are working with, as the community is the strongest guide. In Consideration 10, we include additional ideas and resources for engaging Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers within your program.

References & Resources

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Consideration 1

CONSIDERATION 1: BUILDING A MENTORING PROGRAM WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

This resource is invaluable for designing and implementing programs for any diverse groups. The most important part is to LISTEN first and find out what [the community] has, what they see as the issues and how they are handling them, and then ask how we can help. Any program which is part of a community effort will be that much more successful, regardless of ethnic background.

—Peer Mediation and Skills Training, Brenda Christie

This resource was developed with the feedback, support, and guidance of many provincial and regional Indigenous and non-Indigenous community partners including government agencies, educators, Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, children, youth, and families. Thank you for your willingness to share your insights and experience to inform this work.

Early Considerations

Ensure there is adequate Indigenous representation in the planning process.

This means connecting with formal and informal leaders in the community and inviting them to be part of the needs assessment, scoping, and design work. Critical to creating a vision and planning of a program is including and engaging Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, children, youth, and families in this process. Some organizations suggest reaching out to the community you seek to work with and ask children, youth, Elders, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers what their needs and interests are in a program. Learning from the diverse voices within communities takes time and involves building relationships and trust. For any program to thrive and succeed, it is important to listen to what the community you wish to engage with is saying to you.

Create a program specific to the community's expressed needs. Build on existing programs and partnerships whenever possible.

Explore partnerships and connect with groups already working with the community. These may be local schools, youth centres,

or Native Friendship Centres. Find out what they are already doing and seek advice as you build your own program. It is important that the mentoring program is seen as part of a larger community commitment to children and youth. It is also essential that the program has support from local leadership and the community.

Take the time to build relationships and trust among community partners.

There may be different working styles and priorities as you begin to build a program together. Take the time to get to know each other, to identify shared goals, and to build trust. Positive relationships and identifying a shared vision are essential to longer-term collaboration. This may mean that the first few meetings are informal so people can share ideas and perspectives before moving into any kind of formal planning. Eventually the formal planning must happen but the relationships and the building of trust need to come first.

Learn about the culture(s) of the group(s) you hope to work with.

Take the time to understand some of their history, their contributions to the community, their challenges. Build your program around this understanding. For example, in many communities, group mentoring may be a better fit for Indigenous children and youth because it is more reflective of community values about how to raise children. It also enables you to reach more young people, to overcome other challenges such as recruitment and retention of mentors, and to access community resources (Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, community leaders) who can make important contributions to the group programming content and activities.

Do your homework and seek guidance.

Research best or promising practices for working with the specific community and integrate these into your program design process. This information may not be in the form of academic research; rather, it may be in conversations with others who have worked with the community or are respected by the community. Be open to this important information and use it to help guide the programming design.

Most important, engage children and youth from the community in the design and planning process at the beginning stages. Figure out what their needs and interests are and use this as the foundation for sustained programming initiatives.

Engage Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers whenever possible.

Work with partners to decide when and how to engage community Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers in the process. Learn about protocols and processes for working with these community members. We have included different resources within the tools to offer suggestions that will help inform your processes in engaging with Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers.

Take the time to engage with the broader community.

In addition to speaking with Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, children, youth, and families, connect with formal and informal leaders, attend community events, and visit schools that serve the community. Also talk with Indigenous liaison workers at schools and in community agencies and organizations. Use all of this information to help with program design and build on these relationships to garner support for the program as it begins to roll out. Some families and communities may be hesitant because of previous experiences and history; therefore, moving slowly to build meaningful and strong relationships is essential.

As one passionate mentoring coordinator shared with us:

When reflecting on my experiences, I would say it takes time to start up a program serving Indigenous youth just like any other pilot project. You will need to get to know your community and its Elders, get your local Band offices to support you in whatever way they can. Encourage the schools and school boards to provide support. Attend other community events to show your support outside of the program. Build relationships, and these relationships will turn into future contacts that you may later call on for assistance and they are happy to help. Take time getting to know the program participants and adapt your program to what they need.

- Vanessa Stanley, co-ordinator, BBBS Wood Buffalo's Full Circle Mentoring Program

Community Engagement

Ongoing engagement with families and the community will be essential for the program's long-term success. Help families and community members feel welcomed; they are assets and valuable resources. Below are some suggestions to support your efforts to

engage families (including parents, guardians, grandparents, and kinship care) as well as the broader community.

- Meet with families in person, in a welcoming setting. Work with your advisory committee to make connections and identify an appropriate person to be a family/community liaison for the program.
- Seek the guidance of an Elder or Traditional Knowledge Keeper for suggestions on connecting with families.
- Host an open house and invite Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, family, and community members to come and take part.
- Create an inviting environment by providing food or snacks at these gatherings, and in your mentoring program for both the mentees (children and youth) and the mentors.
- Welcome families to come to the program as participants or observers (whichever they feel comfortable with), whenever they are able. Ask whether they wish to share a special skill, a story, or their interest with the children and youth.
- Organize gatherings or events where families can come with their other children.
- If possible, organize a gathering during your program (such as sharing a meal or hosting a feast midway through the program or at the end of the program). Include families, Elders, community members, and school staff if appropriate.

Remember that building relationships with families and the broader community is essential to program success. Make this an explicit part of your program planning and ensure that someone is responsible for this important work.

Be flexible and innovative in the way that you build the program.

Understand that you may need to be unconventional in your approach as you work to tailor a program to meet the specific needs of the children, youth, and families in your community. Be prepared to learn and continually adapt and modify your program with your community's feedback and input. Use the strengths of all the partners in your community and strive to celebrate and honour these different experiences and gifts within your program.



Consideration 2

CONSIDERATION 2: ASSESSING STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

Our philosophy at our Native Friendship Centre is, we are a grassroots kind of agency. Programming comes from the ground up. Ground up, meaning- we listen to the youth, families, Elders, and community and see what is important to them; it is then that we start building the program together around their collective needs.

Hinton's Native Friendship Centre- Yvonne Oshanyk (Executive Director)

Strengths and Needs Assessment: Does Your Community Need this Program?

Many of our mentoring partners have stressed the importance of connecting with Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, children, youth, families, and other agencies, to understand your community's collective strengths and needs in a mentoring program.

Many communities would benefit from a mentoring program, but it is important to be clear about the nature and extent of their needs. In larger communities, a strengths and needs assessment may be required. Otherwise, consider bringing community partners together or having one-on-one conversations to explore the following assessment questions. The answers to these questions will help you begin to design your program:

- What formal and informal mentoring resources does the community have now?
- How would the community benefit from a mentoring program?
- Is there really a need for this program? To what extent? How do we know?
- Who are the targeted mentees (children, youth, families)? How many are there? How old are they?
- What are the expressed needs and interests of the children, youth, and families? What do Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers in the community say?
- Who do we need to work with to recruit and sustain these potential mentees within the proposed programming?
- Who else is working with these youth? What resources and agencies are available to guide us? How can we collaborate with others to meet the needs of the greater community?



Consideration 3

CONSIDERATION 3: CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ADVISORY GROUP

An advisory group can help you with many aspects of managing and creating a program for and with Indigenous children and youth. When selecting members for this group, you may want to include representatives from the following:

The Community

Invite Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and leaders in the community who are passionate about supporting Indigenous children and youth. It may also be very helpful to include someone who has experience working with Indigenous communities even though they are not connected formally to any of the partners. This could be a community leader or a consultant—someone who can be a neutral third party to help guide the process and mediate different ideas and opinions.

Local Schools

Invite teachers, counsellors, principals, and Indigenous liaison workers who may be familiar with the children and youth in your program and their families.

Indigenous Organizations or Associations

Having representation from people who already work with this community can help strengthen your partnerships and further collaboration to build the strengths and meet the needs of these young people.

Families and Caregivers

Involve families (parents, guardians, grandparents, kinship care, or caregivers of the children or youth) in the program. Developing closer relationships and listening to their perspectives will enrich the program for and with children, youth, and families.

Indigenous Children and Youth

ALWAYS invite children or youth who are taking part in the program to be part of the advisory committee. Honouring and providing a space for their voices, stories, and perspectives in helping to create a vision and plan for the program will not only strengthen the program, but will also build the confidence and leadership skills of the children and youth involved.

Mentors

Invite Indigenous mentors to be a part of the advisory committee. As with involving children and youth, having their perspective will strengthen the program and will help you to recruit and retain other passionate mentors.



Consideration 4

CONSIDERATION 4: THE IMPORTANCE OF FOSTERING SAFE BELONGING SPACES

You belonged as a relative if you acted like you belonged. Treating others as kin forged powerful human bonds that drew everyone into a network of relationships based on mutual respect.

—Brokenleg, 1998, p.131

In our traditional way, we adopt one another in a sense. People that you get close to, become your extended family. We are already connected by the Creator in the circle of life. In a circle, we are all equal. We are all connected as human beings.

-teachings from Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

We understand that to be in relation with others—particularly children, youth, and families of Indigenous heritage—means to see and treat them as though they were family. As well, being in relation or a relation, in any “program” it is imperative to create safe spaces not only for Indigenous children, youth, and their families, but with them, alongside them.

Building on the four quadrants and teachings of the sacred medicine wheel and the connectedness of circles, Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990, 2002) used a metaphor of a “circle of courage” to describe four foundations for positive youth development: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity.

We believe the philosophy embodied in this circle is not only a cultural belonging of Native peoples, but a cultural birthright for all the world’s children.

—Brendtro, Brokenleg, Bockern, 2002, p. 45

Even as these four critical values were established, Brendtro, Jackson, and Bockern (2014) later noted, “Belonging trumps them all” (p.12). There is a wide consensus among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and educators that experiences of belonging are critical for physical and emotional well-being as well as for mental health and stability; having a sense of belonging is critical for a successful life and contributes most to making life meaningful (Brendtro et al., 2014; Chung, 2016; Brokenleg, 1998; Pym, Goodman, and Patsika, 2011). Research shows that having a sense of belonging to someone, to place, to a community, is a significant factor in shaping children and youth’s identity (Chung, 2016; Lessard, 2014).

“The presence of a strong sense of belonging make young people more receptive to guidance from other community members.”

—Brendtro, Brokenleg, Bockern, 2002, p. 47

According to Brendtro et al. (1990), one of the most important aspects in the circle of courage is “the spirit of belonging,” in which “the universal longing for human bonds is cultivated by relationships of trust so that the child can say, ‘I am loved’” (Reclaiming Youth Network, 2007).

Children and youth need belonging. They need to feel belonging somewhere, where they feel accepted at their level. They are just trying to establish a family. Someone who will protect them, will look after them, where people will care about them.

-teaching from Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

With this understanding of belonging as a way of being with others in this world, we recognize the importance of attending to the diverse lived experiences that each child, youth, and their families hold and bring to the community and to the program.

One way you might celebrate and honour Indigenous youth and their families’ experiences and foster a sense of belonging¹ is by paying attention to the stories they may choose, over time, to share with you, including:

- stories of place, both geographically and in their hearts (where they come from, where they feel connected, etc.)
- stories of family (who they see as their family, who makes them feel like family, what is family)
- intergenerational relationships, such as with their grandparents (or kokums and moosums in Plains Cree)

As you strive to build relationships and get to know children, youth, and their families in more authentic and meaningful ways, it is important to move slowly and remember to take good care of the stories you are entrusted with. Moving slowly means listening to the children, youth, and family and allowing them to share and bring you into their stories, when and where they choose to.

When you are working with an Aboriginal youth and their family, be yourself and slowly work your way into getting to know them. Think about when you smudge and how the smudge rises slowly. In the same way, take your time to get to know that family and feel their spirit.

Bring yourself to the child's eye level and teach from there. Remember that every kid is a teacher. When they say something, take it in and listen, because whatever they say, it is true to them.

-teachings from Elder Don Tourangeau

We may begin to honour others by listening carefully and attending to the stories that each child, youth, and family carry. It is important to pay attention to their lives and experiences as we strive to build more inclusive communities in relation with Indigenous children, youth, and families (Chung, 2016; Lessard, Caine, and Clandinin, 2015). Feedback from community schools suggests that children who participate in a mentoring program feel a stronger sense of belonging.

They have a deeper sense of belonging and an increased level of confidence in themselves.

-principal, elementary school

I believe that the children grow to become more knowledgeable, understanding, and develop strong relationships with each other. As well they become more accepting of others in the group.

-assistant principal, elementary school

1 These understandings of belonging are largely informed by Chung’s (2016) doctoral work where she engaged in relational research with Indigenous youth and their families. <https://era.library.ualberta.ca/files/ck0698778p#.WFBVfRZCiu4>

References and Additional Resources

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- *We would like to thank Bent Arrow Healing Society and their Coyote Pride Mentoring Program, for providing the testimonies from educators in this tool



A photograph of two Indigenous children, likely of Cree or Ojibwe descent, wearing traditional regalia. They are smiling and looking towards each other. The child on the left is wearing a white shirt with a colorful, patterned vest. The child on the right is wearing a white shirt with a red and yellow patterned vest. The background is a bright blue sky with white clouds.

Consideration 5

CONSIDERATION 5: ACKNOWLEDGING IDENTITY AND LAND – KEY UNDERSTANDINGS AND TERMINOLOGY

Key Understandings and Terminology

The richness and diversity of Indigenous Peoples cannot be captured with terms or labels. Here we present different terms with an understanding that they do not reflect the degree of diversity among the individuals and communities they are used to represent or how an Indigenous person may identify themselves. We also recognize that the definitions of terms are contextual, and may differ in urban and community settings. Most often, communities refer to themselves as who they are in terms of location, history, culture, and language (for example, Cree, Stoney, Métis, or from Enoch Cree Nation, Alexis First Nation, etc.).

An important consideration in relation to mentoring is that these terms and definitions regarding territory and specific geographic location to identify with are often only partially understood histories for many youth and their families—particularly those who live in urban settings. This does not discount how important it is to acknowledge identities and the personal journey each child, youth, and family is on in reclaiming their Indigenous identities. We cannot make assumptions in this work.

The terms we include are meant to provide context on the historical factors that have shaped and continue to shape Indigenous communities. We hope you may also find them useful in opening conversations that are more culturally inclusive as you engage with Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.


Indigenous: There is a growing shift toward using the term “Indigenous peoples” to reflect a more inclusive awareness of Aboriginal or First Peoples in Canada as well as in other countries to refer to those who are indigenous to the land (Government of Canada, 1996). This term acknowledges the Original or First Peoples of Canada, who are people of indigenous descent, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. As Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada reminds us, Indigenous peoples or First Peoples of Canada (including Inuit, Métis and First Nations people) are “separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs” (n.d., para. 2).

“Indigenous peoples’ rights have been recognized at the international level in various ways but most importantly in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007” (Kairos, n.d.)¹

Aboriginal: Some synonyms for Aboriginal peoples may include Indigenous peoples, First Peoples, and Original Peoples. The term “Aboriginal” was used in Canada’s Constitution and therefore has specific importance within a Canadian legal context. Canada’s 1982 Constitution Act recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

First Nations: According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (n.d.), “First Nations people [historically referred to as North American Indians] in Canada are descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada who lived here for many thousands of years before explorers arrived from Europe” (para. 1). Many communities may use the term “First Nation” to identify themselves by the nation to which they belong. For example, Mohawk, Cree, Ojibwe, Haida, Dene, Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Blood, Secwepemc, Oneida, etc. Each nation has its own culture, traditions,

¹ These definitions have been largely been informed by Kairos Canada and their Kairos Blanket Exercise Education Resource (Edu-kit) Glossary of Terms.



and history. Currently, there are 617 First Nation communities, which represent more than 50 nations or cultural groups and 50 Aboriginal languages” (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, n.d., para. 1).

Métis: Métis people “are the mixed-blood descendants of French and Scottish fur traders and other early settlers, and Cree, Ojibwe, Saulteaux, and Assiniboiné women. They have their own culture and history. As is the case with many Aboriginal languages, the Métis language, Michif, is endangered. Métis society and culture were established before European settlement was entrenched. This term is sometimes used more generally for someone who is of mixed ancestry, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal” (Kairos, n.d.).

Inuit: The Inuit “are the Indigenous circumpolar people of Canada and other northern countries. They were formerly called Eskimo, which the Inuit consider a derogatory term. In Canada, the Inuit live in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, northern Quebec, Labrador and, in recent years, southern Canadian cities as well” (Kairos, n.d.).

Acknowledging the Land of Indigenous Peoples

It is important to respect and acknowledge the land and traditional territories of Indigenous peoples in which we live, work, and visit in relation. One of the ways we can honour the relationship is by acknowledging Indigenous peoples and the land we are on; this is often said at the beginning of meetings, gatherings or presentations. Ask your community if you are uncertain about the territory you are on; as well, there are often guides available to help you. For example, the Canadian Association of University Teachers’ (CAUT) Guide to Acknowledging Traditional Territory provides the territorial acknowledgment appropriate for some local regions. (See References and Resources for the guide, as well as maps and further information.)

As CAUT president James Compton notes, “Acknowledging territory shows recognition of and respect for Aboriginal Peoples, which is key to reconciliation.”

References & Resources:

Canadian Association of University Teachers. (2016). *Guide to Acknowledging Traditional Territory*. Retrieved from: <https://www.caut.ca/docs/default-source/professional-advice/list--territorial-acknowledgement-by-province.pdf?sfvrsn=12>

Kairos Blanket Exercise Education Resource Kit (Edu-kit). (n.d.) *Glossary of Terms*. Retrieved from: <http://kairosblanketexercise.org/edu-kit/edu-kit-resource-glossary-terms>

Muskrat Magazine.com. (2015). *Canadian Cities Rooted in Traditional Indigenous Territories*. Retrieved from: <http://muskratmagazine.com/canadian-cities-rooted-in-traditional-indigenous-territories>



Consideration 6

CONSIDERATION 6: TIPS FOR RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND SCREENING OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS MENTORS

When reflecting back to when we were young, who was that person for you? It may have been a teacher, a grandparent, a family friend, or a mentor from an agency. Whoever this person may have been, they had an impact on your life, they encouraged you to try your very best and saw the potential in you when sometimes you couldn't see it yourself. They were a listening ear, a hug when you needed it, or there to celebrate with you in celebrating your accomplishments.

I believe it's important that we not only provide these relationships in our mentoring program but yet we encourage youth to identify other individuals in their life that may also be a good mentor. I think back in my life and I can identify my mentors and each one of them were special to me in their own way.

—Vanessa Stanley, co-ordinator, BBBS Wood Buffalo's Full Circle Mentoring Program

The first step to our mentoring programs is to develop the trust and mutual respect of participants; only once this is achieved can we all work together to learn and grow. Through this program we want the girls to voice their opinions, and a way for this to occur is for them to select the activities. Initially we bring activities to them, all the while listening to their interests.

Gaining their trust takes time but is well worth the effort. Indigenous girls need a non-judgmental adult to listen and really hear what they are saying. The girls come out of their shells and share their stories, their humour and their dreams. One piece of advice we can share is, patience is key to a successful program.

—Leigh Grant-Sims, program director, Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta

In my experience, it takes a lot of time to establish these mentoring relationships. It is important to show genuine concern for children and youth and to tell them that you care about them. Concentrate on the good that they do. When I am trying to give them advice, I tell them that I am speaking with them with their best interest in mind—not to get on their case. It is important to be truthful, honest, gentle, and non-judgmental.

—teachings from Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

We echo these beliefs and values that a caring mentor has a powerful impact and makes a difference in a child's or youth's life. Building and bridging trusting relationships between mentors and mentees takes time.

Through conversations with Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and other mentoring partners, we present some suggestions on how you might recruit, retain, and screen potential Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors:

- Identify a “connector” to be involved in recruitment—someone who is respected and credible in the community. Support this person to connect with potential mentors in the community.
- Identify Indigenous organizations and associations in your community. Meet in person (if possible) with leaders and explain your program. Do presentations about your program and the mentoring opportunity at staff or board meetings. Develop and provide promotional material that is targeted to their staff.
- Identify Indigenous students’ associations at community colleges or universities. Build a relationship with the volunteers who are part of the association. Meet them in person to explain the program. Develop and provide promotional material that is targeted to their members.
- Demystify mentoring. Explain to potential mentors that it does not require special skills and that most importantly it is about being a role model and caring friend to an Indigenous child or youth in their community.
- Spend time building a relationship with a potential mentor before expecting them to commit to the program. Help them to fully understand the purpose of the program and their role in achieving that purpose. Meet in person rather than on the phone.
- Once a mentor has committed and been trained, provide regular ongoing support.
- Acknowledge, thank often, and reward the mentors. Regularly recognize their importance and contributions to the success of the program.

Consider the following suggestions to further modify mainstream processes so they are more appropriate for your proposed program and the Indigenous volunteers in and for the community you aim to reach:

- Work with your advisory committee to make changes to the applications and interview forms so that they are appropriate to the community you are trying to engage and build relationships with.
- Build relationships with potential Indigenous mentors before you begin a formal interview process.
- Minimize the amount of information required from potential mentors and mentees.
- Gather information that is essential for safety and to develop appropriate program content, but remember not to be intrusive in your questions.
- Remember that questions that are common on mainstream application forms may not be appropriate for Indigenous mentors. Again, rely on your advisory committee to review forms and processes.
- Find out the potential mentor’s interests and strengths. What role would they like to play within this program? Is there anything else

they would like to share?

- When appropriate, work with school Indigenous liaison workers to connect with families and support the recruitment and screening of potential mentees (children, youth, and families).

When developing training for volunteers who want to work with Indigenous children and youth, you may want to begin with a standard mentor training program and then modify it as needed. We suggest including training and information related to working with Indigenous communities generally, and with the children, youth, and families’ specific community.

AMP has developed an online training program for mentors and an online guide to child safety. If possible, we suggest that mentors participate in this training before they are matched with a mentee, child, or before your program begins.

Find out more about [AMP’s no-fee online training](#).

It is important that you provide ongoing support to mentors to access this training and that you follow up with personalized, face-to-face meetings for program-specific training or learning. (For example, it would be helpful to have an Elder advise, share, and guide this process.)

Please refer to AMP’s [AMP’s Standard Resources and Guidelines](#) to support quality supervision and monitoring.



Consideration 7

CONSIDERATION 7: TIPS FOR TRAINING AND SCREENING POTENTIAL MENTORS

The building of a trusting relationship is key. It is important to spending extra curriculum time to find out the youths' interest. Make it fun and playful. Also, build trust by being a role model. It is important to not judge the youth and the mistakes they make. Speak to them at an even level rather than an authoritarian, be a friend. And remember to give them time.

Once you begin to build trust, provide little incentives by acknowledging them every time they do something that is positive. And if they do something that is inappropriate, remember to speak with them in a kind, non-judgmental way.

—teachings from Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

We keep Elder Francis's teachings close as we are reminded of the importance of moving slowly and taking time to build a trusting relationship between mentee and mentor. In this section, we present some ideas for consideration when training and screening both Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentoring volunteers.

Things to Consider When Training Volunteers

- Be sure to recruit volunteers who have expressed a clear interest in or previous experience working with Indigenous communities.
- Include Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, cultural advisers, and community leaders in the training process.
- Support these community members to provide the volunteers with meaningful information about working with Indigenous children and youth, and information specific to the community you are working with.
- Over time, it may be helpful to provide an overview of the history and experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. There are many resources that can also help to provide some background about the colonization process, residential schools, and their impacts.
- During the training process, provide opportunities for volunteers to examine their own cultural identity, values, practices, and assumptions they may have about Indigenous people.
- During training, provide volunteers with an opportunity to explore what they wish to bring to an Indigenous child or youth, and the community at large. Help them to see their strengths.
- With support from Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, or community leaders, provide information on specific cultural practices, values, and protocols that are important for you and your mentors to understand. Work with your advisory committee to determine what these may be.
- With support from Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, or cultural advisers, ensure that non-Indigenous volunteers are aware of appropriate protocols when working with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and families.
- Remind volunteers that, for many of these children and youth, "family" may mean something different to each child and youth. A sense of family may take many forms.

Things to Consider When Training Indigenous Volunteers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take the time to build personal relationships with individuals who have expressed an interest in being a mentor in your program. ▪ Provide an in-person orientation to the program before asking a volunteer to complete AMP's online training. ▪ Supplement AMP's online training with more in-depth, in-person training. ▪ Demystify the idea of being a mentor. Work to make the role as non-threatening as possible. ▪ Be clear with the volunteer that they are being asked to be a mentor—a role model and friend—not a cultural expert or Elder. ▪ Clearly set out roles and responsibilities of each mentor in your program. ▪ Be clear about the level and length of commitment required. Ensure that the volunteer is able to make this commitment. ▪ During the training, include exercises that help the Indigenous volunteer identify what they would like to share with the children and youth in your program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ During the training, provide opportunities for the Indigenous volunteer to share their own cultural identity and practices. ▪ During the training, provide opportunities for the volunteer to examine their assumptions about other cultures and their own culture. ▪ Whenever possible, connect the Indigenous mentor to an Elder or Traditional Knowledge Keeper who is part of the program or the steering committee. ▪ Provide ongoing support to the mentors. Make sure they understand that they will have access to the support they will need to be successful mentors. ▪ Acknowledge, thank, and reward the mentors. Recognize their importance in the success of the program. ▪ If a mentor is not able to continue with the program, follow up to find out why and see whether these barriers or obstacles may be removed. If possible, provide opportunities for the mentor to re-engage with the program when they are able.
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Screening of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Mentoring Volunteers (over age 18).

Why should you consider doing a [criminal record check](#)?

According to the Government of Alberta's Human Services,

To help ensure the safety and security of your family member, you should require potential staff to provide a Criminal Record Check which indicates whether they have ever been involved in criminal matters...

Depending on your situation you can decide how often your staff needs to complete a Criminal Record Check or a Vulnerable Sector Check.

—(2012, para. 1)

If a potential volunteer has already conducted a recent criminal record check, some groups, agencies, and organizations may accept it (if it was done within the previous six months) but may also create their own "offence declaration" form to complement the criminal record check. An offence declaration is a written statement (or boxes they might check) which state the applicant (potential mentor) has conducted and provided a recent criminal record check and has no offences in the previous six months.

You may also contact your local RCMP or police station to see whether they will consider waiving the fee for conducting a criminal record check for a potential volunteer in your program. To have the cost waived, you should provide a written letter of request from your program or organization that the applicant (potential mentor) can bring with them to their local RCMP or police station. Many mentoring partners have told us that the local RCMP or police will usually waive the cost for a criminal record check if it is for a community program.

Some organizations may decide they only need to do a criminal record check to screen potential mentoring volunteers. However, as requested by some community partners, we have also included information on another kind of screening called a [child intervention records check](#), formerly known as a child welfare check.

As an agency, organization, or group, you will have to see which record check best fits your standards and policies.

Please note that these records checks are snapshots of a person's background and history and may not reflect or tell their whole story, situation, or life circumstances. If you are unsure about the information you receive regarding a potential volunteer background or history, we suggest you consult with your trusted advisory group, who will also keep this information confidential.

On a case-by-case basis (depending on the particular situation), you will have to decide whether you need to gather more information to get to know a potential volunteer mentor beyond these formal record checks.

References and Additional Resources:

Alberta Mentoring Partnership (2016). Posters: *Raising Awareness of the program*. Retrieved from: <http://albertamentors.ca/corporate-mentoring/#x-section-5>

**This is a mainstream tool that may be adapted and modified. You can download and edit these posters to raise awareness about a mentoring program, invite employees to attend information sessions, and recruit volunteer mentors.*

Edmonton Catholic Schools. (2001). *Child intervention record check (formerly known as child welfare check)*. Retrieved from <http://hrs.ecsd.net/careers/Volunteer%20Intervention%20Record%20Check.pdf>

Calgary Police Services (n.d.) *Police Information Checks*. Retrieved from: <http://www.calgary.ca/cps/Pages/Public-services/Police-information-checks.aspx>

Government of Alberta. (2012). Criminal record checks. Retrieved from <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/disability-services/pdd-fms-criminal-record-checks.html>

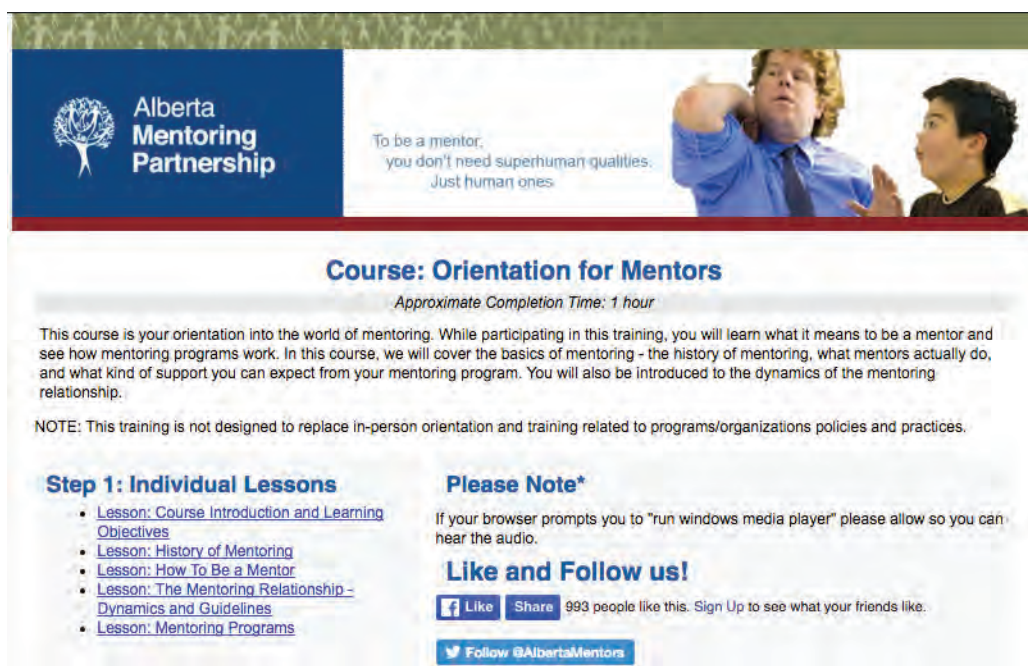
Online Mentor Training

Learn more at albertamentors.ca

The Alberta Mentoring Partnership's Online training for Mentors training provides an overview of some of the core concepts of mentoring and what it means to be a mentor. The Online training consists of one course on mentoring; 5 short modules and then a quick quiz to complete at the end.

Some of the concepts covered include:

- Course Introduction and Learning Objectives
- History of Mentoring
- How To Be a Mentor
- The Mentoring Relationship – Dynamics and Guidelines
- Mentoring Programs



Alberta Mentoring Partnership

To be a mentor, you don't need superhuman qualities. Just human ones.

Course: Orientation for Mentors

Approximate Completion Time: 1 hour

This course is your orientation into the world of mentoring. While participating in this training, you will learn what it means to be a mentor and see how mentoring programs work. In this course, we will cover the basics of mentoring – the history of mentoring, what mentors actually do, and what kind of support you can expect from your mentoring program. You will also be introduced to the dynamics of the mentoring relationship.

NOTE: This training is not designed to replace in-person orientation and training related to programs/organizations policies and practices.

Step 1: Individual Lessons

- [Lesson: Course Introduction and Learning Objectives](#)
- [Lesson: History of Mentoring](#)
- [Lesson: How To Be a Mentor](#)
- [Lesson: The Mentoring Relationship - Dynamics and Guidelines](#)
- [Lesson: Mentoring Programs](#)

Please Note*

If your browser prompts you to "run windows media player" please allow so you can hear the audio.

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Consideration 8

CONSIDERATION 8: CLOSING A CHILD/YOUTH/FAMILY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MENTOR OR PROGRAM

If you do not close a match between a child, youth, and the mentor/program properly, it can have long-term effects. It is important to end the relationship on a positive note

-Vanessa Stanley, co-ordinator, BBBS Wood Buffalo's Full Circle Mentoring Program

How you leave or end a relationship is just as important as how you enter one, if not more. Children, youth, families, and mentors should be continually supported in their efforts to build positive, enduring, and growth-promoting relationships. Before you aim to start any program, it is important to discuss how your organization plans to support children, youth, and families in closing a match and relationship with a mentor or ending their participation in a program.

Establishing **clear guidelines** and **expectations** on how to provide closure to end a match between a mentee and a mentor, or end a child, youth, family, or mentor's participation should be discussed and outlined with your entire team.


There are many reasons and circumstances that may result in an end to a match between a child, youth, family, and mentor or with a program. For example, the program might be coming to a year end or perhaps a permanent end, there may be an unanticipated life circumstance such as a child or youth moving, there may be a change in family arrangements or in caregivers, or it may be that the child, youth, family, or mentor is not finding the program to be meeting their interests or expectations.

Another scenario could be that a child, youth, or family is not connecting with a particular mentor. In this case, it is important to communicate and work with each individual to see whether there are ways to come together and work out the differences. However, if all possibilities have been explored and there is no resolution available, it is important to help facilitate a new match while respectfully celebrating and acknowledging the contributions and strengths of each person.

Mentees and mentors **should know at the start** their options for ending a match so they do not just leave the relationship when they become uncertain about how to handle a difficult situation or decide they no longer want to continue. A process and suggestions for resolving possible conflicts should be discussed and ongoing support should be available for both mentees and mentors.

We suggest that your organization **continually monitor matches** between mentees and their mentors and provide **ongoing training** for mentors. Research shows that these practices are associated with more positive youth outcomes. These practices may also help reduce early endings. Regular contact with matches may give program staff the opportunity to identify difficulties or issues as they arise so they may provide the necessary support and assistance or in some cases, if necessary, a new match.

Ongoing training may give mentors the chance to get assistance with challenging situations and help them continue developing their skills as a mentor. Examining mentoring relationships that end early can provide important lessons in efforts to promote high-quality youth mentoring relationships.



With the guidance of co-ordinators and facilitators who currently engage in programs serving Indigenous communities, we present some possible **suggestions** on **how to support the closure** or end a relationship between a mentee and mentor.

One-on-one or small group meeting: Speak with the child, youth, and sometimes the family (depending on their involvement) and mentor in a one-on-one setting or sitting together (if this seems appropriate for everyone) to acknowledge the contributions, benefits, friendship, and relationship that has been built over time.

Phone calls home: It is always more personal and preferred to have meetings face to face. However, if this is not possible due to circumstances, the program facilitator or staff should call the mentee or mentor themselves to provide closure. The mentor should not be expected to do this.

Group sharing circle: Another setting to provide closure is a group sharing circle. For example, some program co-ordinators may ask the children, youth, mentors, Elders, or others to share what has been the highlight of their experience in the program.

Formal closure letter: Some large agencies suggest sending a formal closure letter home in addition to the above. For example, many organizations create their own closure letter tailored to their community and program. It is suggested to state in this letter that the match is closed and if the mentor and mentee do decide to continue a friendship or relationship, this is outside of the agency or organization and does not reflect the policies and procedures of the agency or organization.

AMP has additional [tips for closing a match](#) between a mentee and mentor.

Whether your program runs only for a year or two or is ongoing, it is important to come together and celebrate the contributions of the children, youth, families, mentors, Elders, and the community.

Some mentoring partners suggest **hosting gatherings or feasts in celebration**. Some groups or organizations may host gatherings where there is food and drinks or feasts once or twice in a calendar year. For example, the BBBS Wood Buffalo's Full Circle Mentoring Program holds a feast near Christmas and on or around Canada's National Aboriginal Day (June 21). These gatherings are another great opportunity to celebrate the many contributions of everyone in the program and from the community.

References & Resources

Centre for the Advancement of Mentoring. (n.d). *Bringing Closure to the Mentoring Relationship: An Overview*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nttac.org/media/trainingCenter/149/TCAM%20Bringing%20Closure%20to%20Mentoring%20Relationships%20Overview%20508%20C.pdf>

Match Closure, Alberta Mentoring Partnership. <https://albertamentors.ca/peer-mentoring/match-closure/>



Consideration 9

CONSIDERATION 9: EXAMPLES OF OTHER MENTORING PROGRAMS THAT SERVE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

When starting up an Indigenous-based mentoring program it will be very different than mainstream mentoring programs. It is an opportunity for mainstream organizations and systems to learn what is required to serve Indigenous youth and their communities in a culturally responsive way.

When I started in my role, I did just as much work on my free time outside of the program as I did at the program. As a non-Indigenous person, I built relationships and attended community events where I earned respect in the Indigenous community in Wood Buffalo.

There are always new struggles I encounter every day, but I see the need for programs like the Full Circle Mentoring Program and I am willing to provide guidance and support to any organization that is wanting to start a program like this in their community.

It is important to note that experiences will be different depending on demographics, age of children and youth you are wanting to serve, and the type of program (community-based versus site-based).

-Vanessa Stanley, co-ordinator, BBBS of Wood Buffalo's Full Circle Mentoring Program

Mentoring can look very different depending on many factors. One such factor is whether the community you are situated in is an urban or rural setting, or perhaps a smaller northern community. It also depends on the size and kind of organization you are (for example, whether you are a school or a small, mid-size, or large organization). The following mentoring scenarios give a small picture into possibilities and potential for mentoring programs. We also want to highlight the hard work of many local and regional community partners who already engage in this important work with Indigenous children, youth, families, and the broader community.

Different Mentoring Scenarios:

School Setting.

You may be a teacher or school staff member interested in creating a mentoring program for children or youth before, during, or after school. For example, some schools have noted success in programs where Indigenous youth mentor other youth as they transition from junior high to high school. Or mentoring volunteers might come to engage with youth before school, at lunch, or in an after-school program alongside a school co-ordinator, liaison worker, or teacher.

Small to mid-size organizations.

You may be a small to mid-size organization with a very small group of staff or volunteers and little or no funding beyond your own fundraising. Some small groups of dedicated individuals have created different mentoring programs where volunteers might offer to share particular skills, interests, or resources to help support children and youth in Indigenous communities.



Large organizations.

You may be a larger organization with a larger staff, more funding, and resources available to run one or several programs serving Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in or across Alberta. You may already be well established and recognized for your unique programming.

Other mentoring scenarios:

We recognize that there are many other mentoring scenarios and that your situation might not fit into any of these descriptions. We present these three very simplified scenarios because we want to emphasize that creating a successful mentoring program can be possible with just a few “head, hands, and hearts” working together, or with the help of many.

In our conversations with people in different communities who want to start a mentoring program, they often share their feelings of being uncertain or, at times, even intimidated or overwhelmed if they do not have much funding or resources at their fingertips. What mentoring partners both large and small have told us is that they are more than happy to collaborate and support others in this work; you only need to reach out to them.

Many mentoring partners have provided feedback into this guide and the accompanying tools in friendship and collaboration. They want others who share their passion to contribute to and serve Indigenous communities to succeed as well.

Mentoring partners also shared a few last important **considerations** when you are planning for your mentoring program, particularly when it comes to insurance.

Insurance Coverage:

Many mentoring partners have told us it is important to get appropriate insurance coverage. For example, if you plan to have a mentor or staff member drive mentees for a particular event, they strongly advise getting vehicle insurance for these individuals. They also suggest having insurance coverage for your organization. Call your insurance company to inquire; the cost will vary depending on the size and type of your organization, staff, and other factors.



Consideration 10

CONSIDERATION 10: PROTOCOLS FOR WORKING WITH ELDERS AND TRADITIONAL Knowledge Keepers

It's always nice to laugh with someone.

Laughter is a very strong and healing medicine.

-teachings from Elder Don Tourangeau

Elders bring authentic perspectives and help honour and foster the cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples. An Elder may offer guidance and teachings that strengthen our understanding of traditional practices within a particular community. Elders may also help gently guide the positive development of children and youths' identities and self-esteem, and nurture their sense of belonging.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2005) describes an **Elder** as:

Someone who is considered exceptionally wise in the ways of their culture and the teachings of the Great Spirit. They are recognized for their wisdom, their stability, their humour, and their ability to know what is appropriate in a particular situation. The community looks to them for guidance and sound judgment. They are caring and are known to share the fruits of their labours and experience with others in the community"

— Aboriginal Healing Foundation (p. 4).

An Elder may have learned under the guidance of other spiritual Elders and may have the gifts, wisdom, and knowledge to conduct ceremonies. Some communities may ask an Elder if they would offer prayers or do an opening and closing of a ceremony or event.


There are also other key community members who may be known as "**Traditional Knowledge Keepers or Knowledge Keepers.**" They are respected and recognized for their skills and knowledge through their life experiences. They may have much to offer to a mentoring program but do not conduct spiritual ceremonies.

It is important to acknowledge that Elders and Knowledge Keepers have gifts in different ways that may include language, spirituality, and histories. Being a knowledge keeper does not necessarily mean that the person is considered an Elder within the community. For example, in a specific northern community, the 40-year-old local hunter and trapper who assists the community with knowledge of guiding and trapping and provides food for many in the community is considered a knowledge keeper in this place, but not an Elder within this specific community. This knowledge keeper's gifts are an integral part of the community and the ways they are trying to maintain strong cultural connections to the land and culture.

Many Indigenous communities may also have **cultural advisers**. These are individuals who have extensive knowledge about the community's cultural practices, language, and values. These cultural advisers are able to provide information and teachings about particular communities; however, they often do not conduct spiritual ceremonies.

Your program will need to decide when it is important to engage traditional Elders and when it is appropriate to engage cultural advisers and Traditional Knowledge Keepers. If there is a Council of Elders in your community, ask for their support to identify potential Elders to be connected to your program. Your local Native Friendship Centre is also a valuable resource in helping you connect to Elders within your community.

When making requests to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or cultural advisers, practising and acknowledging cultural protocol is imperative.



The following are suggested protocols to consider specifically for Elders, but may also be appropriate for Knowledge Keepers or cultural advisers.

Approaching an Elder. It is suggested that you introduce yourself and let them know where you obtained their contact information, the reason for your call, and your interest in meeting them to further discuss your request. If you wish to make a request with an Elder, it is advised to meet in person beforehand.

If someone has a request, it's better to meet in person to talk, rather than just over on the phone.

-Elder Don Tourangeau

Don't approach an Elder over the phone to make a request. Go face to face unless you are in a different province.

-Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

Providing transportation: Make sure the Elder has transportation to and from the program (such as a taxi or driver); it would be appropriate for your organization to arrange this and cover the expense.

Building a relationship: Take time to build a relationship with the Elder. If possible, have the Elder be a part of your advisory committee and help guide the vision for the program. Ask the Elder what role they may want to play in the process and program. It would be

appropriate if you also want to share your hopes that the Elder is able to help in those ways.

When you are meeting with an Elder, remember to share a little bit about yourself. It important to share who you are and where you are from so the Elder can get to know you too. And this way, he/she will feel more comfortable with you.

- Elder Don Tourangeau

It doesn't matter if you are an Indigenous person or non-Indigenous- when you are kind, kindness is healing. It leads to friendships and bonding.

-Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

Respecting Differences. Remember that Elders are not all the same. Elders have different perspectives, experiences, languages, histories, and cultural backgrounds. Elders have different skills and areas of expertise. Find out what your Elder is most comfortable teaching and provide them with opportunities to teach to that knowledge.

Traditional Practices and Gifts¹

Traditionally, back in the old days when an Elder was approached, some were given Buffalo Robe, a teepee, horse, blanket, and so. Nowadays, we will still accept any of these things, especially a horse (says jokingly and laughs out loud).

-Elder Don Tourangeau

¹ See links within this Toolkit as well as the reference section at the end for additional resources on Elder Protocol.

In this conversation with Elder Don, he was joking as he does not actually mean for anyone to go and buy him a horse. The lesson here is that it is important to value and honour traditional practices, but to also have a sense of humor and remember to laugh and enjoy your time with Elders.

When you are seeking the help and guidance of an Elder, there are different traditional practices depending on the specific community and cultural background of the Elder you seek. For example, tobacco may be an appropriate offering to Elders in many communities, but not all. It is good to ask the Elder first, because different communities have distinct protocols. You may also ask people in your community if you are uncertain. For Elders who value a particular protocol, if you offer a traditional gift and they accept it, this usually means they are available or open to listening to your request.

It is okay to ask most Elders what is appropriate protocol. So then once you make an arrangement to meet in person, you can bring a specific protocol.

A question that you might ask is: What is the protocol I should follow to approach you for a specific request?

—Elder Francis Whiskeyjack

Create a Welcoming Environment. When you meet with an Elder, offering food and drinks is a nice gesture. Make sure the Elder is comfortable before they begin to teach.

It's always nice to share a cup of tea or a snack when you meet with someone. It's important to feel welcomed and comfortable.

—Elder Don Tourangeau



Honour teachings: Listen carefully to what the Elder is saying. Accept that there are many ways of understanding something and no one right way. Encourage children, youth, and adults in the room to listen carefully when an Elder is speaking. If you wish to take notes or photographs, always ask the Elder for permission first.

Provide honorariums and gifts: Monetary honorariums or gifts are important as they acknowledge and show appreciation and reciprocity (giving back) to the Elder who has taken personal time to share their wisdom and knowledge with you. For additional ideas, please see links and resources listed.

Encourage acknowledgments from the children and youth: In addition to giving an honorarium or gift for the Elder's time and guidance from the program, support the children and youth to also appropriately thank the Elder for their time and teachings. For example, some youth have told us they like to show thanks to an Elder for spending time with them by singing a song, creating a painting, writing a card, or making a homemade gift for them at the end of the year.

See you later.

"Rather than saying goodbye to an Elder, it's nice to say 'see you later' or as we say in my language (Plains Cree), 'Moweh tas' which means, later. This means you will want to come back and see that Elder again."

—Elder Don Tourangeau

Or, as Elder Francis says,

"Kitom Mina" (pronunciation key-tom me-na) which means, "Until Next Time."



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