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[Welcome to Parenting after Separation for Indigenous families.](#)

This course is for parents and other family members who are dealing with family issues including guardianship, parenting arrangements, contact, child support and spousal support.

If this is your first time visiting the site, please click the "Register" button at the top of the page and follow the instructions to register for this course.

Once your registration is completed, you can click the "Log in" button and get started.

The course registration is only open from Monday to Friday but once you've registered, you can complete the course at any time that works for you.

In some locations, you might be required to take this course to receive a certificate that you can file in court.

If you want more information about this, click on the "about" tab at the top of the page.

When you are ready to begin, click on the "Course Content" button, also found at the top of the page.

Here you'll find a list of the Lessons. Click on Lesson 1 to begin.

On each lesson page, you'll find the learning objectives and topics for that lesson. Click on the first topic to get started.

Every topic page is laid out in the same way with a brief introduction to the video that you need to watch.

If you're unable to load the video, there is an audio version. Or, if you can't access either the video or audio versions, a transcript is available.

You only have to choose one of the formats because the content is identical in all 3 formats.

Once you've gone through the lesson, click the "Mark Complete" button to return to the Lesson Page. This will let the course track your progress.

Go through each of the topics in the same way.

There are optional activities throughout the course that will help you put what you've learned into practice.

There are Knowledge Checks in some of the lessons. The goal is to get 75% on each quiz in the course. You can repeat the quiz as many times as you need to get the 75%.

At the end of the course, please take a minute to complete the optional survey to provide feedback on the course.

To receive your Certificate, follow the instructions and the certificate will be mailed to you.

If at any time you need help while taking the course, please click 'contact us'.

Lesson 1 Topic 1: Welcome

Sam Bob: Lesson one. Welcome.

Loretta: My name is Loretta Pelletier Adams. A lot of people know me by Lorrie and that's okay. My real name is K'ipK'ax and I'm from the Nisga'a Nation, Northern British Columbia. I would like to welcome you all to parenting after separation for indigenous families.

Loretta: I think it's really important for all people to take this because we've lost a lot of our parenting models, parenting styles, so we need to relearn that, but most importantly we have to make good decisions for our children after separation. And another thing that might happen, is that we might learn that we're not alone in the decision making or separation and that we might learn some ideas from other parents that are going through the same thing.

Loretta: Separation is not an event. The decision to separate is, that's the first part, but all the other things that you're responsible for, you need to pay attention to. It could last for some, only a week, some for a month, and some you're still working on it for a year after, or two years after.

Loretta: It's not an event. It's a whole process. And what you're thinking about through the whole process is about the children. And for them to understand that it had nothing to do with them, because it's almost automatic for children to take on being the cause. "If only I was good enough." "If only I was better behaved." All of the if only's, when it has nothing to do with them, and you're there to support the children and nurture them. It's all about the children.

Loretta: Another really important thing to remember is that not all separations will look alike. So we're all available to help each other through separations and oftentimes we get too much emotion into it. We should look at it as just another challenge in life. That way it'll stay free of all the pain and the hurt that is going between the two partners. We encounter, through separation, that things will be different. You're not able to count on each other in the same way so you need to find other resources that will fill in the places that are missing now and that might take awhile. You might have to rely on friends and relatives to find out about community resources. You first have to find about who are the resources in

your family that can help you? What are the resources in the community that can help you and your children? Or even start sharing with your past partner about what might help.

Loretta: All separations are different because all families are different. The children are all different from each other. Everybody has their personal needs. We have to be gentle with ourselves as well. Remember ourselves and take care of ourselves. The tendency is to isolate yourself and feel shame. You can't feel shame.

Loretta: We're fortunate in that a lot of our ceremonies are still intact and we have a lot of knowledge keepers that are starting to come forward. To me ceremony is very important, and the children need to feel that kind of peace as well.

Loretta: Start focusing on the successes that you've had because there's going to be a lot of challenges. You have to learn how to see your successes as well and that's when you can start teaching the children about what was good about it. Yeah, my partner's not here anymore, but what was good? And what can be good from here on in? How can you make it look as much the same as possible for the kids? Because that's still their dad, I'm still their mom, all their elders are still the same. I was separated years and years ago and my nieces and nephews still refer to my past partners and that is success: when they still feel the freedom to be in relationship with my past relationships.

Sam Bob: Welcome to parenting after separation for indigenous families. My name is Sam Bob, Tulkweemult. I am Coast Salish from Vancouver Island and am a residential school survivor.

Jennifer B.: My name is Jennifer Brousseau. My traditional name is Waabishkaa Migizikwe, White Eagle Woman. We're here to help guide you through this course. Traditional teachings from our shared experiences as indigenous peoples are an important part of embracing our new family and parenting after separation.

Speaker 4: When we refer to indigenous peoples in this course, we are referring to First Nations, Metis and Inuit from across Canada.

Jennifer B.: This course may bring up strong emotions for you. If you think this might happen for you, please make sure you have support from someone you trust such as an elder, a counselor, or a friend, or family member. This course was developed for indigenous parents and other family members who are experiencing separation or divorce and needing to sort out issues like parenting time and child support. The course was guided in its creation by indigenous peoples: representatives from family, community and legal support organizations across British Columbia.

Speaker 5: You might be completing this course because it is required by the court so you can move forward with your court application. Or you might be taking it because you may have questions and are looking for information. This course is divided into eight lessons. Each of the lessons contain stories, teachings from elders, and key information to help you and your children on the path of reforming your family circle.

Jennifer B.: You will also have opportunities to participate in exercises and write down your thoughts as you go through the course. There are activities that you will complete based on each lesson. Your goal is to get at least 75% of the answers correct on each of the activities. Don't worry if you don't achieve it on your first try. You can repeat the activity as many times as you need to achieve your goal. After

you've successfully completed all the lessons, you will receive your certificate of completion. Let's get started.

Lesson 1 Topic 2: Why This Course Will Help You

Speaker 1: Separation from your partner and reforming your family is not easy. Let's start by looking at ways this course will help you. As you may already realize, the process of separating is not just one event. Separation takes place over the course of months or even years as shared spaces, responsibilities, and finances change. As a parent, you may not be aware of your legal rights and how family law works to help you coordinate the sharing of parental responsibilities. This course is designed to provide you with information and tools so you can better support your children through separation or divorce.

Speaker 2: Separation affects other relationships in your life too. You may find that while the relationship with your partner changes, so does your relationship with your partner's family, which may create additional stress and uncertainty. Your family and cultural obligations continue, but your connection to them could be strained. Separation brings a lot of new changes into your life. A disruption that may lead to stress, fear, and anger.

Speaker 2: These emotions not only affect you but your whole family, especially your children. You may struggle with how best to support your children while caring for your own needs, which is completely natural. It is up to you with help from your extended family and community to make sure your children feel loved and safe while going through these changes. This course provides you with the practical information to help you make decisions that focus on what's best for your children. It also helps you identify the positive and constructive things you already have in your life.

Lesson 1 Topic 3: Culture is Our Foundation

Speaker 1: Every family is unique with different needs. This course honors those differences while recognizing that, as indigenous peoples, we also have things in common, including shared values about how to care for our children, to make sure they're healthy, safe, and happy. Let's listen to the perspective offered by Elder Laurie McDonald of the Enoch Cree Nation.

Laurie McDonald: My name is Laurie McDonald. I am from the Enoch First Nation. All too often, when clinicians talk about a relationship or a family, they're thinking just mom and dad. In indigenous communities, not so. It goes way beyond that. It goes beyond, being only mom and dad. What our communities would normally do was the natural process. The relatives would form around that child. They're the ones who'd become that parent without question, and if there was a weak link in that circle, then the community as a whole would provide.

Speaker 1: Honoring ourselves as parents.

Speaker 2: In this lesson, we look at our experience as parents going through separation. When you separate your family structure changes. This time of transition requires that you nurture yourself, honor your continued role as a parent, and actively draw from the strength and knowledge of others.

Speaker 3: It's important to recognize that the experience of separation and reforming the family has been well known in indigenous cultures. Since time and memorial, indigenous peoples on Turtle Island have maintained healthy, thriving family systems.

Speaker 2: In many indigenous traditions, separation was not out of the ordinary, but an accepted part of these family systems. So, there was no cause for shame or stigma when partnerships ended.

Speaker 3: During these times of transition, significant family and community members would strengthen their circle of support so that the family

Lesson 2 topic 2

For us to work towards reforming the family while drawing from extended family and community support we need to understand how colonialism has affected indigenous communities.

Speaker 1: Colonialism refers to one state taking control over a territory or people. In Canada, this was done when Europeans seized indigenous people's lands in a process called colonization.

Speaker 1: Colonization can include taking control of systems of government, education, religion, and people's traditional way of life.

Speaker 2: Residential schools were introduced as a tool of colonization, right across Canada. Children were removed from their families and placed in residential schools so they would learn a Western way of life.

Speaker 2: Children were punished for practicing their culture and speaking their language. They learned shame and violence, and many children were abused.

Speaker 2: Colonization and residential schools have led to intergenerational trauma for indigenous peoples.

Speaker 2: Trauma refers to a highly stressful event or series of events that cause lasting emotional, physical, spiritual and mental harm. This harm can lead to negative effects on a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. When trauma is ignored and there is no support in dealing with it, the trauma can be passed from one generation to the next.

Speaker 1: This is what we mean when we refer to the term intergenerational trauma.

Speaker 1: What we learn to see as normal when we're children, such as abuses and unhealthy ways of coping, we pass on to our own children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Speaker 1: For each individual, it is experienced differently. Even if we don't feel it ourselves we may see it outside ourselves in our communities or cities.

Speaker 1: Although many of us were not taught to recognize it or talk about it, we are affected by the impacts of intergenerational trauma. It is one of the root causes of social realities in indigenous communities today. These realities include poverty and poor physical, mental, and spiritual health. The

effects also include higher rates of domestic violence and involvement with the child welfare and criminal justice systems.

Speaker 1: Generations lost the connection to their cultures, traditions, and their healthy, thriving family systems.

Speaker 2: Consider this reality. How does one follow their teachings and traditions as a parent when they weren't given the chance to be parented themselves? The same is true for their parents and their grandparents as well.

Speaker 2: When we reflect on the effects of intergenerational trauma, we see how and why many of our family systems and supports have been disrupted.

Speaker 2: Elder Laurie McDonald talks about intergenerational trauma, drawing on his experience as a survivor of the residential school system.

Laurie McDonald: There comes a time when we're talking to the parents and we talk about intergenerational trauma and what they may have been going in, this may have been a result of their separation. This may have been a result of divorce, is that trauma. I tell my story, for example, I am a survivor of the residential school, so I could... And this is usually where we usually go when we're given lessons to our families.

Laurie McDonald: Again, is bringing that back and using ourselves as that goalpost if need be, to tell our stories and what we may have gone through. Because that usually puts our families that edge that they're not alone and that gives them a venue to think of a much bigger picture. Maybe their own family, their own mother and dad, maybe their own grandparents.

Laurie McDonald: And even if they have little or no knowledge of the residential school, I give them a typical day of what was like for me and what had happened to me. Yes, I survived whatever trauma that I went through in those schools and what I did with it, my life within the last 50 years.

Laurie McDonald: I'll tell them and that never to give up hope because here I stand as a survivor and right now for that parent, they feel that they're at rock bottom, but they could still pick themselves up.

Laurie McDonald: When I do do this, sometimes that parent themselves will reflect and get that aha moment because they have a reflection and they think sometimes what was going on, was this an individual thing? And it isn't.

It's just a roll off of another situation. The roll off of those generational traumas. The roll off of maybe just being a 60 scoops survivor or roll off of being somebody that was adopted and trying to find your way home or the roll off of someone being sexually abused and why and all this stuff going on. Yeah.

could heal and thrive. In this way, community has always held an important role in raising children.

Lesson 2 Topic 1: Honoring Ourselves as Parents

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Lesson 2 Topic 2: Impact of Colonialism and History of Residential Schools

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[Lesson 2 Topic 3: Emotional Experience of Separation for Parents](#)

Speaker 1: Now that we understand a little more about our shared history as indigenous peoples, let's look at what happens when we separate from our partners. It's natural to feel a loss of control over your life during the separation process. Some of the emotions you may be feeling include sadness, guilt, depression, anxiety, resentment, fear and anger.

Speaker 2: Parenting on your own can cause a lot of stress as you manage from day to day. It can also be stressful getting used to an empty home when your children are spending time with their other parent. All these emotions are part of the process of grief and loss. Everyone experiences grief differently.

Speaker 1: Let's look at some of the common feelings of grief and loss that people may experience. Denial.

Speaker 2: This isn't really happening.

Speaker 1: Denial is a healthy response to crisis. It gives you time to take things in smaller pieces so that the shock isn't as great. Eventually, denial ends and your healing can move forward at a pace that works for you. Anger.

Speaker 2: I'll get them for what they did.

Speaker 1: This is a normal feeling when a long-term relationship ends. The most important thing in dealing with anger is to acknowledge and accept the feelings you have while avoiding behaviors that may hurt you, your children, or your former partner. Finding a safe outlet for these feelings is important.

Speaker 2: Have you ever felt angry and then experienced your heart rate increase or you began to sweat? Anger is your body's way of responding to a threat to your emotional safety or some part of your identity. Your body prepares to fight or flee by sending chemicals into your bloodstream that cause changes to your body, like increased heart rate.

Speaker 1: To help us understand anger, let's think about an iceberg. We usually only see the tip because most of the iceberg is beneath the surface. This is like anger. Anger tells us we feel strongly about something. People sometimes use anger to protect themselves from other feelings that overwhelmed them or feelings they don't want to share with others, so anger becomes the emotion they show others. But if we look deeper, we see there's usually another strong emotion underneath the anger such as fear, sadness, disappointment with yourself, feeling rejected, frustration or embarrassment.

Speaker 2: When something triggers anger for you, it's helpful to learn to pause. Think about what's happening in the moment, including your physical responses and take time to identify other emotions you might be experiencing. You can deal with physical responses to anger by taking deep focused breaths to try to relax your body.

Speaker 1: Once you've managed your initial reactions, you can focus your energy on finding effective solutions. Bargaining.

Speaker 2: I'll do anything to get them back.

Speaker 1: This is when we hope that the source of hurt, in this case the loss of a relationship, can be reversed. For some, this can be the most painful part of the grieving process. It's a stage that holds us in the past trying to negotiate our way out of the hurt. Bargaining is almost never successful and it often leaves everyone feeling bad. Depression.

Speaker 2: Nobody cares what happens to me.

Speaker 1: Some typical responses to depression are withdrawal from friends and work, loss of enjoyment of usual pleasures, and not having the energy or interest to participate in life's activities. It is important to acknowledge this feeling and understand that it won't last forever. Depression can be a normal, temporary response that many people experience. At times, depression may continue for so long that it significantly disrupts your life or may lead to thoughts of suicide or harming yourself or others. If this happens for you, it's time to seek help from a professional, like a doctor or a counselor, as well as from your friends and family.

Speaker 1: Remember, there is no shame in asking for help and pursuing a path that leads you towards better mental health. Refer to the additional resources section of this course for supports that may be helpful to you. Acceptance.

Speaker 2: We won't be together anymore.

Speaker 1: This is when you begin to feel ready to move forward. Although you are no longer trying to change the circumstances with your former partner, it's important to recognize that accepting the situation doesn't mean everything is okay now. It can still feel difficult and painful, but when we start to accept our new situation, we can pursue new goals and begin to create a new life.

Speaker 2: There is no time limit for grieving. It may take months or years and may even shift from day to day. Don't be surprised if you are experiencing acceptance in some areas of your life, but not yet in others. For example, you may now be comfortable in your routine of paying the rent on your own or having free time when the kids are with other family members. At the same time, you may still feel anger or denial and other areas of your life.

Speaker 2: The important thing is to recognize that working through grief and loss is not always a straight path, but a cycle. You don't necessarily pass from one state into the next until the end and then you're done. Whatever you're experiencing is natural and deserving of gentleness with yourself.

Speaker 1: You and your former partner may be at different stages of grief, which may be especially true if the decision to separate wasn't shared. Each parent needs to learn to seek emotional support from someone other than their former partner. Now is the time when you can focus on your own feelings and support network and take some space for your own healing process.

Speaker 2: Contrary to what we might think, the pain doesn't go away faster if we ignore our feelings. In residential school, children were taught not to express their emotions and were punished for expressing their feelings. Many of us have learned this lesson inter-generationally, especially men. For many of us, when we bottle up our feelings, it often leads to anger and lashing out in unhealthy ways.

Speaker 1: It is okay to tell your children that you feel sad or mad, but you also need to remind them that these feelings are yours and not theirs to worry about. You are processing these feelings which will pass. Modeling healthy expressions of emotions is good for your children to witness, but they don't need to know the details of your grief. It's important not to seek emotional support from your children. That is your role for them. You will now hear from elder Sharon Lindley.

Sharon Lindley: Sharon Lindley, I'm from Interior Community. Norman and I, we got together, I was probably 16 he was 17. I had my first son when I was 18, he was 19, so we were very young. I went through so much when I think about it. I think it was a really rough time for me and I would never, ever be able to say to someone, "You get over it." You don't really. But, I started living my life differently than what we did as a couple because there's a lot of things I didn't do that I used to do before. I made a life with my boys, and that was a really important thing for me.

Sharon Lindley: I worked, so that helped me through my rough time was having my family. They were there. They were the ones that really supported me, were my brothers and sisters. Even though they were still involved with Norman, that was their brother-in-law for so long so, they didn't get into this big fight. I was still friends with ... I could still go to his mother and father and talk to them, and his brothers and sisters. It wasn't we were just enemies. I really didn't put it onto the boys because I was saying, "I want my children to be in a happy family," as happy as it can be at the time. But, I remember my grandmother, she always says "Family is important." That was a teaching that was drilled into me.

Speaker 1: Now that we've covered common emotions like grief and loss, let's talk about coping strategies. Some options that may immediately come to mind are arranging to see a professional counselor, visiting with an elder, or spending time with a trusted friend to support you in expressing your feelings in a safe place. The four directions medicine wheel is designed to offer suggestions for coping with grief and loss by listing activities that can help heal the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional aspects of ourselves.

Speaker 2: The medicine wheel teaches us that the four directions affect one another. Often doing something for one direction will have an impact on all the other directions. It is a balance of all four directions that ultimately makes us feel complete. Practices and activities vary from culture to culture. Using this wheel, consider creating your own list of coping skills that will work for you. Look for opportunities every day to take positive steps that will help you cope, heal, and feel more in control of your life.

Speaker 1: Now that you have identified ways to take care of yourself during this process, it's important to understand that your parenting may be affected by the way you manage your feelings and behaviors. It can be challenging to deal with difficult emotions that come up during a separation or divorce, while continuing to be positive and present for your children. Parenting can be difficult at times, even without a separation. We talk more about how to support your children in the next lesson.

[Lesson 2 Quiz](#)

[Lesson 3 Topic 1: Honoring our Children](#)

Speaker 1: Lesson three, Honouring Our Children.

Speaker 2: In this lesson, we offer ways to honor your children and learn how to support them as they work through their feelings and experiences of the separation.

Speaker 1: Before we begin, consider for a moment the following questions. If you could do the very best for your children during this time, what would you do? What do you believe your children need from each of their parents? If your child could put their thoughts and feelings about the separation into a letter to you, what would it look like? Children have said the following about ways their parents can help.

Speaker 3: Dear mom and dad, I'm just a kid, so please ...

Speaker 4: ... don't talk badly about my other parent, this makes me feel torn apart. It also makes me feel bad about myself.

Speaker 5: Don't talk about money or child support, this makes me feel guilty like you're treating me like a thing instead of your kid.

Speaker 6: Don't make me feel bad when I enjoy my time with my other parent, this makes me afraid to tell you things.

Speaker 7: Let me take my stuff to my other home as long as I can carry them back and forth. Otherwise, it feels like my needs aren't important.

Speaker 8: Don't argue in front of me, that hurts my feelings.

Speaker 9: Don't ask me to spy for you when I am at my other parent's home, this makes me feel this loyal and dishonest.

Speaker 10: Don't treat me like an adult, it stresses me out.

Speaker 11: Please talk with a friend or a counselor instead.

Speaker 12: Don't ask me to keep secrets from my other parent. Secrets make me feel uncomfortable.

Speaker 13: Don't ask me to carry messages for you to my other parent. I end up feeling anxious about their reaction.

Speaker 14: Let me love both of you and see each of you as much as possible. Be flexible even when it's not part of our regular schedule.

Speaker 15: Please remind me that you love me, I can never hear it enough.

Speaker 1: Your children will have a lot of different emotions about the separation. Each child deals with these emotions in his or her own way. There are common feelings and behaviors you might see from your children during and after separation that are typical for their level of development. Let's look at what happens for children during separation at each stage of their development.

Speaker 2: An infant from birth to 12 months can notice when a parent is absent. They can sense when their parents are upset, but they don't understand what's happening. The main focus at this stage is developing trust and a sense of security through their relationship with their primary caregivers. Parents do this by providing consistent routines and predictable caregiving. Conflict between important caregivers can impair an infant's ability to learn to trust and may lead to stress. Changes in routines can also be stressful for infants. You can tell your infant might be stressed if they start to develop sleeping, crying, or eating problems, signs of severe stress, or non-responsiveness, withdrawal, or intense upset.

Speaker 1: Children from one to three years develop a sense of self and an identity separate from their parents. They start to show that they are independent by saying, "No!" Toddlers have a short memory and usually can't understand time beyond today or tomorrow. Toddlers still show stress more through their behavior than through words. They may develop a fear of separation that they show by crying, clinging, and taking a long time to calm down after a transition. Signs of stress might also include changes in sleeping habits, getting sick more often, or anger.

Speaker 2: Preschool children from three to five years usually have a unique relationship with each parent. Your child will begin to share with other children, feel and express sympathy, enjoy being with friends, imitate grown up behaviors, ask lots of questions and may stretch the truth. Preschoolers don't understand that they had nothing to do with the separation or divorce. They are most likely to act up with the parent they feel most secure with. It's common for them to act differently with each parent, which could be how they are adjusting to the separation or in response to different parenting styles and personalities. Preschoolers show their stress by whining, clinging, being fearful or acting younger than their age. They might experience nightmares, confusion, aggression, sadness, and neediness. In some cases, they might even present perfect behavior.

Speaker 1: Early school age children from six to eight years begin to make friends outside the home, but family relationships are still important in developing their self worth and everyday skills. They often see things as right or wrong and they like rules. Children often have preferences in their relationships with their parents. They may particularly want attention from their father or another male. This age group takes separation very personally.

Speaker 1: Early school age children may experience guilt about the separation, feel a deep loss, and may feel betrayed or rejected. They may feel they weren't good enough for their other parent to stay, which may lead to fears of being replaced by other children in that parent's life. They may have fantasies about their parents getting back together. Signs of stress may include behavior problems like aggression, impulsivity, or being manipulative. You might also see long periods of sadness, crying, depression, and anger. There may be problems in school with difficulty concentrating, daydreaming, or having a hard time with their schoolwork.

Speaker 2: Children between the ages nine and 12 enter a time of increased independence and developing more outside interests. Friends are very important. For this reason, they tend to be concerned with what others think, especially their peers. They want to have their maturity respected, even though they may switch between child and teenage identities. Preteens are able to see the separation as their parents' problem, but may need to find a reason or someone to blame. They're likely to take sides often against the parent they think is responsible for the separation. Signs of stress for this age can include intense anger at the parent they blame for the separation. They may also have difficulty

at school, seem sad or depressed, or have more physical complaints such as headaches and stomach aches. It's important to watch for eating disorders, drinking, smoking, and premature sexual behavior.

Speaker 1: By the time your children become teenagers, they are in the process of forming a separate identity and creating connections outside of their family. At the same time, teens still need love, support and guidance from their parents. Teens are more involved in activities and relationships outside the home and need the freedom and opportunity to make important choices. When parents separate, teens may feel concerned about the loss of their family and worry about their own future relationships. They may even feel responsible for family members. Signs of stress might include risky behaviors like alcohol and drug use, sexual activity outside of healthy relationships, and behaviors causing physical bodily harm like cutting.

Speaker 1: Teens may have changes in school achievement, may often feel tired and find it hard to concentrate. Many youth experience some of these behaviors, even when parents don't separate. This is normal. But if you're worried about what you're seeing, or if the behaviors are extreme or carry on for a long time, take extra care to get some help, which can be found in places like your child's school, friendship centers, and child and youth mental health centers. Sometimes children and youth need extra supports from a doctor or counselor.

Speaker 2: As in all other stages of separation, supporting your child's continued connection to family, elders, and cultural activities helps to strengthen their physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual wellbeing. Ability beyond a teen's ability and maturity can lead to too much dependence on their peers.

Lesson 3 Topic 2: Ways to Support Your Children

Speaker 1: Now let's look at ways that you as parents can support your children through the separation. Some of these may not apply to you if your situation involves domestic violence.

Speaker 2: For infants and toddlers, frequent and regular contact with the other parent is important and helps your child keep an image of the other parent. Keep consistent and predictable routines. It helps if schedules are the same in both homes. You should also allow favorite toys, stuffed animals and blankets to be brought back and forth between both homes. Let your toddler know when there is a transition coming and give them simple explanations of what to expect.

Speaker 1: For children ages three to five, keep routines the same as much as possible. Explain what will happen as decisions are made, like if daycare is changing, or how often they'll see their other parent. When needing to go to work or be absent for awhile, reassure your child that you will return. Encourage your child to tell you about their feelings, such as fear or sadness, and always remind them that their feelings are okay.

Speaker 2: For children ages six to eight, have both parents remain involved. Both of you should spend as much time as possible with your child. Encourage frequent phone calls or video contact with the other parent. It will help if such contact is predictable and regular. Allow time for your child to adjust at the beginning and end of time together, and reassure your child that the separation is not their fault.

Speaker 1: For children ages nine to twelve, you can help by accepting and encouraging your child to talk about feelings, avoiding power struggles, setting structure and routines, and developing predictable visits and schedules. Always support your child's visits with the other parent and encourage this relationship. They need permission to keep loving both parents. It helps to keep rules the same in both homes and to communicate with the other parent about what's happening with your child. It also helps to encourage activities and relationships with friends. Participating in cultural activities such as camping, trapping and fishing, dancing or drumming with your children, shows them the importance of their cultural connections, to nurture their sense of belonging and security.

Speaker 2: For teenagers, be available when your teen wants to talk. If they ask for help, you can reach out to school staff or other professionals. If your teen asks, provide a non-blaming explanation of the separation, encourage visits with the other parent, but understand that they may wish to spend less time with one or both parents. Give teens a lot of input into the parenting schedule, but don't give them responsibility of the final decision. Make sure you continue to set limits while still letting your teen make choices. Too much freedom and responsibility beyond a teen's ability and maturity can lead to too much dependence on their peers.

understand that today. I didn't understand that back in the day. But his family was always there for me and so it was literally my choice at the time. I could have stepped away and just raised them by myself, but it felt good to be part of a large family. I wanted that for my sons.

Lesson 3 topic 3: Importance of Cultural Identity

Speaker 1: Cultural identity is important to children's wellbeing and mental health. This knowledge and connection can give your children a sense of stability and strength. It will also help them deal with the stress and change of separation. You can help them with their cultural identity by giving them access to their cultural teachings and traditions, the lands they belong to and the people who are their family and ancestors.

Speaker 2: Many of us may not be as connected to our cultures as we would like. This is one of the effects of colonization that we talked about in lesson two. There are places where you can look for this knowledge and connection, like Friendship Centers and other indigenous support organizations where they interweave teachings with their services.

Speaker 1: The circle of courage can be a helpful tool to support your child's healthy emotional development around commonly shared values of generosity, belonging, mastery, and independence. Let's take a closer look at each of these values and how they can help your child feel stronger when they are hurting or feeling vulnerable.

Speaker 2: Belonging.

Speaker 1: Children need to feel that they have a significant connection to their family and their community. Belonging has been described as a core value in these simple words. Be related somehow to everyone you know. Treating others as kin creates powerful social connections based on respect.

Speaker 2: Mastery.

Speaker 1: We have a built-in need to be competent and solve problems. In many traditions, children are taught to carefully observe and listen to people with more experience. This need is strengthened when we have success in solving problems or dealing with challenges.

Speaker 2: Independence.

Speaker 1: In indigenous traditions, a child's right to independence is respected. Indigenous teachings are designed to build respect and teach inter-discipline. From their earliest years, children are encouraged to make decisions, solve problems, and show personal responsibility. Adults model, nurture, teach values and give feedback, but children are given lots of opportunities to make choices.

Speaker 2: Generosity.

Speaker 1: The central goal in many traditions is to teach the importance of being generous and unselfish. In helping others, children and youth create their own meaning and self-esteem by contributing positively to others.

Speaker 2: When completing lesson one, you created a picture of your family circle with your children at the center. Take a few minutes to look at this picture again. Take note of the people and teachings that wrap around your children and give them strength. There are important people who are connected to your children through your former partner as well, although it may feel difficult to maintain these connections at times, it's important to nurture these relationships for the benefit of your children.

Speaker 2: Speak respectfully about extended family with your children and maintain shared family routines as much as possible, including visits, birthdays and holidays. Children feel love and a sense of belonging when they spend time with their relatives. This connection grows when they hear teachings and learn from them.

Speaker 2: Extended family can also provide stability as a place to go that is predictable and safe, especially when children fear upsetting their parents with needing to talk about their own feelings or ask questions. Just as you and your former partner are a team, you can talk to your child's extended family about how they might be able to provide support.

Speaker 2: It's important for your child that their extended family also avoid blaming the other parent. If there's been a move, your children might not have regular or ongoing contact with relatives after the separation. It's important to set up ways for communication to continue, including regular phone calls and connecting through technology such as email.

Speaker 1: It is important that both parents remain involved in the lives of their children.

Joe Landrie: My name is Joe Landrie. I'm a Metis elder here in Victoria. I've known I was Metis all my life. I was brought up Metis. My dad was a hunter, trapper, fiddle player and we did all that stuff at home, and we had a kitchen party once a month. It was a lot of fun growing up. It's very important for dads to stay involved. It's just the right thing to do for men to stay involved. Just being close to your family is the most important part no matter how poor or how rich, it's just a necessary part of life for a child to grow up into becoming a better human and to learn respect.

Joe Landrie: Also, for parents on both sides, it's a very important part of their way of thinking to teach them the beliefs that Metis people have, like being kind. Metis people are very kind, , mostly soft-spoken people and they need to learn all that, and they also need to learn respect. They need to know a little bit about their culture, where they come from and how to respect the land and the animals that they do hunt, and stay close to their roots.

Joe Landrie: Metis men, especially they do a lot of hunting and harvesting. It's when they take their kids out that their kids learn. They learn about their culture. They earn respect for the land.

Speaker 1: Christina Draegen speaks about the experience of raising her children following separation.

Christina D.: My name is Christina Draegen. I'm a proud Ojibwe and Algonquin First Nations Woman. I'm so proud to be able to identify as an indigenous woman in today's world. I wanted to share a big part of my past in raising my two sons.

Christina D.: In my early 20s, I ended up having two sons and I knew at the time that it was really important to raise them in a good way. I knew that based on how I was raised. I had great role models and strengths to draw from. I knew that culture was very significant because my role models were very proud Cree women and they role modeled that to me every day. They raised me to be proud to be indigenous and I appreciated that, and I knew that there was significance in that.

Christina D.: When I thought about the kid's dad, I knew that I wanted them to have their identity because I didn't have my Ojibwe or Algonquin identity. Thankfully, I made the decision to embrace their father's family and their culture, which is the Carrier Nation culture. Their grandparents were huge cultural leaders in their community. They led a dance group and they performed all over the world. I felt proud to be indigenous, just being near them and I wanted that for my sons.

Christina D.: We took every opportunity to bring my sons to spend time with their grandparents and to learn their Carrier cultural practices such as salmon harvesting, picking berries, knowing how to set net, and just having a relationship with the land that the grandparents are role modelled for their family. We went and spent time with them every summer. My sons today are grown up and they're very secure and they're confident and they have their complete identity of who they are and they practice their culture.

Christina D.: They decided themselves to follow their grandfather's teachings. I'm just so proud of them. So, today as their mother, I could not be more proud of how my sons turned out as two grown indigenous men to follow their path now. I could have made a decision to disconnect from their dad's family because of my experience with their dad. I know today that by doing that, it would have been my story and it's not the story that they deserved.

Christina D.: They deserved to know and to experience to be on their own land and to know who their aunties and uncles are, and their cousins because they have a huge family, a beautiful family, and they would have lost out on all of that if I had made a different decision when our relationship broke down. I'm so grateful that I made that choice back then knowing nothing about what I was doing being a single mom. Today, I'm looking back, I'm so glad that I did what I did.

Christina D.: It's so important today to have that foundation, that firm foundation in life in order to be part of the solution in our society and to be a complete and a happy individual. Everyone needs to have that solid foundation underneath them. I believe that foundation is culture for indigenous people and family.

Christina D.: You know what? I'm so lucky because their family embraced me right at the beginning. They welcomed me into their family unit and in their clan system, and even though they knew that I was struggling with their son, they always supported me and they were hurt themselves by what their son was doing.

Christina D.: Today, I understand the kid's dad, because he was a residential school survivor. His story was going on and I understand that today. I didn't understand that back in the day. But his family was always there for me and so it was literally my choice at the time. I could have stepped away and just raised them by myself, but it felt good to be part of a large family. I wanted that for my sons.

Lesson 3 Quiz

Lesson 4 Topic 1: What is Domestic Violence

Speaker 1: Lesson Four: Domestic Violence.

Speaker 1: By including a lesson on domestic violence, we do not suggest that there is violence in your family. As we covered in Lesson Two, many people are learning healthy ways to care for one another as a result of intergenerational trauma we have experienced in our families. We know that violence in indigenous families is often reinforced by extended family and community. It's important for all indigenous peoples to look at the root causes of domestic violence, know what resources are available, and reflect on how communities can heal.

Speaker 2: These lessons may bring up strong emotions for you. If you think this might happen for you, please make sure you have support from someone you trust, such as an elder, a counselor, or a friend, or family member.

Speaker 2: Domestic violence is any physical or sexual assault or threat of physical or sexual assault by one partner against the other partner. This refers to a partner that you have been in an intimate relationship with, whether or not you were or are legally married, living together, or even dating at the time that the assault or threat took place.

Speaker 2: Domestic violence can happen even when the relationship is over. Most violence in relationships involves male abusers and female victims, but it can also happen in same-gender relationships. In a small minority of cases the abuser is female and the victim is male. Sometimes it's also called intimate partner violence, but in this lesson we'll refer to it as domestic violence. Domestic violence is an abuse of power within relationships when there is intimacy, trust, and dependency.

Speaker 1: It includes abusive behaviors like the ones on the power and control wheel, such as physical abuse, like pushing, including if you're being held where you can't move, hitting and punching; sexual abuse; threats of harm to a partner, children, pets or other family members; emotional abuse

such as insults, intimidation, neglect and control; financial abuse, when money is withheld, controlled or stolen: and spiritual and cultural abuse that restricts practices or beliefs.

Speaker 1: Women who have lived in abusive relationships describe living with abuse all the time. It was a constant. Even when their partner was being nice, they still lived with fear because of the controlling behaviors of their partners. Christina Draegen tells us about her own experience.

Christina D.: When it came time to be a mother myself, I found myself in, unfortunately, an abusive relationship. I didn't have very much knowledge about that, and there was so much fear and stress in my life at the time. I wanted desperately to have a family unit because I was raised up by a single mom, and I had always hoped to be able to break that cycle and raise my children with their father. Unfortunately, it didn't work out for me to be able to do that.

Christina D.: I knew from growing up that when I found myself realizing that I am in an abusive relationship, I had to make a very difficult decision and I tell you, it wasn't an easy decision at the time. I must have gone in and out of that relationship a number of times before I came to the point of making a decision to end that cycle of abuse. I knew that I didn't want my two sons, my beautiful two sons to think that mistreating women was okay, so I made the decision to end our relationship and to become a single mom. I was so scared at the time. I had no idea what I was doing, but thankfully, I still had my role models and my supports to help me.

Speaker 1: Let's get a better understanding about abuse in relationships and the cycle of violence. The rate of reported violence against indigenous women is almost three times higher than the rate reported by non indigenous women. What accounts for this level of violence against indigenous women? It can be partly explained by the intergenerational effects of the residential school experience. Children in residential schools no longer had a parental role model, so they relied on school staff to teach them how to manage relationships.

Speaker 2: Many of these school staff were violent towards the children, which meant they learned that violence was a normal way to resolve conflict. The experience resulted in some of the children turning their anger, pain, sadness, and hopelessness inwards. Many didn't learn how to manage their own behavior or emotions, and some went on to use violence in their relationships outside of the residential schools. Exposure to violence leads to confusion and accepting it as a normal part of life. Leaving an abusive relationship is difficult. A person may try to leave many times before they successfully end the cycle of abuse.

Lesson 4 Topic 2: How Abuse Affects Children

Speaker 1: Children's health is linked to feeling safe and secure, which means that they're also affected by domestic violence. Many parents involved in an abusive relationship believe their children don't know the abuse is occurring. We know from what children have said that this is not true. Children almost always know the abuse is taking place. Children can be affected by violence in their home, not only by being the direct victim of violence but also by seeing or hearing it.

Speaker 1: How children react to witnessing abuse will depend on things like how often or how severe the abuse is, the developmental stage of the child, what family supports are in place, and what

supports there are outside the family. It's typical for children and youth to be afraid, upset, and even angry. Even when they seem to be coping well, you need to give them extra care and attention.

Speaker 2: Children who witness abuse are more likely to have problems in one or more areas of their lives. They may have behavioral problems like becoming more aggressive, acting out or being hyper-watchful. They may have emotional problems like anxiety, difficulty managing their anger, and low self esteem. Some physical problems may include being unable to sleep, having bad dreams, and issues with eating.

Speaker 2: Children may have problems concentrating, have difficulty learning, or may be delayed compared to their peers. They are also more likely to experience isolation and bullying, and have difficulty with their social skills. Youth from families where there is domestic violence have an increased risk of self-harm, drug and alcohol misuse, and running away from home. Children often have a fear for their own safety or the safety of their siblings and their abused parent.

Speaker 2: They might blame themselves for not being able to stop the violence. As a reaction, they may try to be the perfect child. Your child needs to understand that they didn't cause the violence, and they couldn't have stopped it. They need to know that it's okay for them to feel angry and sad as a result of the violence.

Lesson 4 Topic 3: How to Talk to Children About Abusive Behaviour

Speaker 1: If your children have been exposed to domestic violence, either by seeing it, hearing it, or being hurt themselves, they need to be told that it is not their fault. Your children may be feeling torn as they may love the parent who is also causing the harm. Give them reassurance that you love them unconditionally. Let them know that it is still okay to love an abusive parent, but it is not okay what they are doing.

Speaker 1: You can call your local transition house for help in how to do this. It's also important they know it's not safe to try to get in between adults when they're fighting and it's not their responsibility to protect their parent. If possible, connect your child to a supportive professional like a counselor or a support group where they can talk about their feelings.

Lesson 4 Topic 4: Safety Plan

Speaker 1: Some victims of domestic abuse are afraid or embarrassed to admit that they have been abused. Some don't recognize that the behavior they've been living with is abusive. There is help available from people who won't judge you and who will give you practical help.

Speaker 1: If you believe you're in immediate danger, call 911. There are places or people you can get help from if you believe you've experienced domestic violence or are feeling fearful. These include a community-based victim services program, women's transition homes, legal advice or legal aid assistance or a family justice counselor who can refer you to the supports that can best help you.

Speaker 1: If you believe that a partner may try to harm you. It is important to create a safety plan.

Speaker 2: A safety plan involve taking precautions to reduce the risk of being hurt by this person and is best created with the help of someone who is trained in safety planning.

Speaker 2: This will involve thinking about and planning for your safety when you are at your home, at work, and out in the community including traveling to and from different places. You will need to think about things such as sticking to places where there are lots of people around, keeping your car and home doors locked at all times, letting friends, family and neighbors know about your safety concerns. Having emergency numbers programmed into your phone and having a plan for emergencies.

Speaker 2: Safety plans vary from person to person. It will be different for you depending on whether you have separated from the person who makes you feel afraid. In some instances, you may need to develop a safety plan for when you are preparing to leave a relationship and then another one once you've left.

Speaker 2: Creating a safety plan doesn't take away the need to make a report to the police about your concerns, when someone makes you feel unsafe. You may be able to get an order through the police or the court that legally restricts someone from being able to contact you or be in the places you regularly go.

Speaker 2: Make sure you understand exactly what it means and that arrangements can't be changed except by going back to court. Keep to this rule no matter how persuasive your abusive ex-partner is. If you've got a protective order, this doesn't take away the need to create a safety plan because a person who wants to hurt you may not be stopped by an order.

Speaker 2: It is also important to write down information about times when you were harmed, threatened, or felt unsafe. You need to keep any evidence such as emails, text messages, or doctor's reports, which will be helpful if the police or courts become involved.

Speaker 1: Go to the additional resources section of this course to find links to victim services and domestic abuse centers.

Lesson 4 Quiz

Lesson 5 Topic 1: Creating a New Family Circle

Speaker 1: Lesson five, Creating Our New Family Circle.

Speaker 2: In this lesson, we look at some ideas on how to reform your family circle after separation.

Speaker 1: This means developing ways for you and the other parent to work effectively as a parenting team. Cultural teachings that may come from your family, elders, friends, or significant community members, can help guide the way you care for your children. Community elders, knowledge keepers and organizations, have teachings about responsibilities, which include parenting.

Speaker 1: If you can't access the teachings of your community, modern indigenous teaching models may be found through family or counseling organizations, books or on the internet. One example you might find helpful comes from the Metis Values Wheel, taken from modern Metis teachings that focuses on community values and those that give us hope.

Lesson 5 Topic 2: Positive Parenting After Separation

Speaker 1: The relationship between parents changes after separation. And with the end of your committed intimate relationship with your former partner, your focus as parents becomes the co-parenting relationship. This transition to co-parenting may include love/hate feelings you have for your former partner.

Speaker 1: Separating couples often interfere with each other's parenting as they work through new routines and living situations. As both parents stop seeking emotional support from one another and move on with their lives, they can focus on co-parenting with the goal of meeting the needs of their children. Creating this new positive co-parenting relationship will keep a shared focus on your child's wellbeing.

Speaker 2: It will also help you talk to each other and about each other in a respectful way in front of your child. Let's consider some basic ideas for positive parenting.

Speaker 1: Keep your child out of the middle.

Speaker 2: It's important not to ask your child to take messages to their other parent rather than speaking directly to them yourself. Also, resist asking them about the other parent's life. Your children shouldn't be asked to get or give information about one parent to the other. This also includes not asking them to take sides in any disagreements with the other parent or criticizing that parent in front of them. Making sure your child is in another room doesn't mean that they don't hear the conflict. When children hear bad things said about their other parent, they may start to believe you feel that way about them too, which leaves them hurting.

Speaker 1: Provide useful information that's consistent with your child's age.

Speaker 2: Give your child information about why you are separating or divorcing without placing blame on the other parent. Tell them what's going to happen, when and how. In particular, explain what the living arrangements will be. Encourage your child to make decisions about what they can have control over. This does not include where they'll live. That's a decision for parents to make. For example, decisions they have control over would be the activities in which they want to participate.

Speaker 1: Avoid blame.

Speaker 2: Reassure them that the separation is not their fault. They may need to hear many times that they aren't to blame and that there is nothing they could have done to prevent it.

Speaker 1: Be available.

Speaker 2: Be available to listen. Give them love, attention, and reassurance and keep your promises. Make sure you stay in touch with them as regularly as possible. Even if you are separated by distance. Try to have regular one-on-one time. This is often when your child will be able to open up about how they're feeling. It's important to make sure you continue to do this if you begin a new relationship.

Speaker 1: Make changes slowly.

Speaker 2: Try to minimize changes by maintaining relationships and routines. The fewer changes you make in the first year following separation or divorce, the better. Familiar routines will help your child adjust to the changes in your lives. Be especially cautious when introducing a new relationship you might have.

Speaker 1: Accept your child's feelings.

Speaker 2: Your child may feel differently than you do. It's okay for your child to feel angry or sad, even when you don't. And you need to be open and accepting of how they feel. Keep conversations about things like child support away from your child so they don't feel their needs are a burden to you.

Speaker 1: The language we use is important.

Speaker 2: When your child is present, keep the focus on an ongoing parenting relationship rather than the end of the couple relationship. Try referring to your child's mother, father or other parent rather than your ex. It recognizes the other parents important and continued role in your child's life. It's also important to be aware of the tone of voice you use when speaking to or about your child's other parent. Parenting from two homes regardless of custody arrangements means your children are living in both homes, not just living in one and visiting the other. It will help your child if you refer to it as their other home.

Speaker 1: You will now hear from Elder Sharon Lindley about her experience with healthy communication and positive co-parenting after separation.

Sharon Lindley: And we were together for 32 years. We were married for 25 years and then we separated. So, I had three boys at the time we separated that were living at home. I remember he and I arguing a few times in front of the boys. And I told him, I said, "We can't be doing that." I told him, I said, "You and I are not a couple anymore. You and I aren't a husband and wife. We are the parents of these children."

Sharon Lindley: I said, "That's what we have to be." And that's what I really stressed. I don't know how many times we argued about that. And I told him, I said, "I want that because I didn't have a father." And I told him, "I want my boys to have a father." We didn't argue all the time. I think we tried to make sure we didn't do it in front of the boys because I didn't want them to see that. Because as I grew up, I've seen enough of that. And it became easier as time went on.

Sharon Lindley: And I remember when we separated, that was a real traumatic event for our whole family. Not just us as a couple, or my boys, it was both sides of our family. Or even our community: How could you do that? You guys were together all these years?. I told them, "Well, it just didn't work."

Sharon Lindley: One of the things that we found, was the boys trying to play us against each other. And I think that's something that we were aware of. And I was telling Norman, I said, "Well, you know my rules." "When I say something, I'll stick with it. I'm not going to change my mind." So, I said, "Whenever he asks you something, you ask, 'Did you ask your mom?'" And then I said, "I will do the same thing if he asks me something."

Sharon Lindley: I said, "That's really important." Because I didn't want them to be playing us because we got into a few arguments because of that. And I said, "We really need to be clear on that." I said, "I really want us to be parents. We have to support each other that way." I said, "If you're not sure about something phone me and I'll do the same thing." That is one of the things that was really important I think because they could have played us. Especially about asking to stay over at someone's house or asking for money or asking for something.

Sharon Lindley: So, that was something that maybe after about a month that we were separated that came into play. And I think we argued a few times about it, but after about three, four months, it settled down because the boys knew that they couldn't get away with it with their dad or with me. I said, "I may not like what you're doing." But I told him, I said "I'm not going to say that to the boys. To me, you do the same thing."

Sharon Lindley: I said, "That's just really respecting each other. And I don't want to be bad-mouthing you, and you shouldn't be bad-mouthing me." Because I don't want my boys to get to the point where they need to choose their mom or their dad. I don't want that. And you know, I think that was important to have that show of respect for each other. And sometimes it wasn't always easy.

Sharon Lindley: We can't be belittling each other. We have to get together as families, you know, and be there as someone that they could look up to and feel free to go for support because that's what kids need today. They need someone there in their corner. I think it's important that we know what our roles are as mom and dad, grandma and grandpa, auntie or uncle.

Sharon Lindley: It wasn't always perfect for us. We had real rough times, but at the end, it worked out. But like I said, we worked at it and we talked about it. We disagreed with each other and there's nothing wrong with disagreement. That's something that some people have a hard time with; disagreeing and not getting mad about it, wanting to be right about something. I wasn't always right about some of the things.

Sharon Lindley: There were times it was a long time before we agreed on something. There's some things that he did I didn't agree with, but afterwards, I said, "I don't always have to be right." And he says, "Right." I think anybody going into any separation should actually think about their children, first and foremost.

Sharon Lindley: We could've given up and you know, for me, it would be scary as to where my boys would be today. Because I think we would probably scarred them for life if we didn't come to terms with some of this. And I remember many times I've really had to bite my tongue and I think he did the same thing too. Sometimes it's not always easy to talk. But I said, " foremost, I wanted to do something for my boys." That's what it was for me. I want the best for them.

Speaker 1: Let's take a moment to reflect on what we've just learned. We've talked about recognizing natural feelings and reactions, as well as identifying coping skills during the separation process. With these in mind, write a few words in response to the following questions.

Speaker 2: What attitudes or behaviors may be holding you back from giving your children the best from each of their parents?

What are some of the things that you're doing well right now that you might be able to build on, which will help you and other family members focus on what is good for your children?

Lesson 5 Topic 3: Developing a Parenting Plan

Speaker 1: One way to help move to a positive co-parenting relationship is to create a parenting plan.

Speaker 2: A parenting plan is an agreement in writing between parents on how they will raise their children after separation. You can use your own words to describe your parenting arrangements around issues like:

Speaker 1:

- Who will make major and daily decisions about the children.
- The schedule of where the children live and when.
- Who will care for the physical, emotional, psychological, cultural and spiritual lives of the children.
- How to handle disagreements that arise, and
- How parents will communicate with each other about the children.

Speaker 2: There's no right or wrong way to create a parenting plan, but it will mean both parents need to communicate with each other. You may need a more detailed plan depending on how comfortable you are communicating with each other. For example, parents who are able to communicate comfortably about questions or concerns as they come up, may have a simple, straightforward agreement. But parents who feel that communication will always be a struggle, may want a written agreement that clearly identify as many details, problems and how they'll resolve them.

Speaker 1: The decisions you make together as a team to support the happiness and wellbeing of your children will help you move more quickly towards a positive working partnership. If you're finding it difficult to get started, here are a few helpful tips:

- Meet in public or neutral places rather than in one of your homes.
- Make appointments with one and other, and list the topics that will be discussed.
- Be courteous with one another as you would with someone at work, and
- Make sure your communication is direct, not indirect through other people or your children.

Speaker 1: When you're working out your parenting plan, asking your child for input and really listening to what's said, will help your child feel cared for and respected. It will also help them if they feel powerless about their changing family. It's important to give your child a voice, but not a choice. Making the final decisions is the responsibility of the parents, not the child. We know that when we ask children what they would like to see, both parents and children are happier with the parenting arrangements, and are less likely to want to change them. It can also improve the quality of the family relationships. One tool you might find helpful is to consider using on communication book that goes

back and forth with your child. Think about the things you might want to know about when your child is in their other home.

Speaker 2: Elder Sharon Lindley will share her experience of working together as parents.

Sharon Lindley: Times that my sons played hockey, so we went to their games together, because they were on rep team so we'd travel. A lot of times we'd end up traveling. Like for example going to Osoyoos Or the next day we're in Revelstoke, so we're traveling all the time. So we shared those driving times, shared expenses. So that is the times we came together as a mom and dad to the boys, and we were there. And I think it became easier as time went on. Sure, we had had our disagreements, but it wasn't like when we were together as a husband and wife. And I think that was something that we both had to come to terms with, that we are not husband and wife anymore. We are mom and dad, and then we became friends.

Speaker 2: It may be difficult to come together and find common ground just after separating, because of the emotions that can get in the way. If this is the case, you may want to invite an objective helper, mediator, or elder with skills in resolving conflict to help work through the plan with you.

Speaker 1: For the next exercise, think about items you might want to include in a parenting plan. Feel free to stop the video at any point as we review the list, so that you can record your answers to the questions, or make notes about what works for you. You can also add anything that is missing, that you think is important to your situation.

Speaker 2: First step is decision making:

- Who is responsible for making day-to-day decisions?
- How will major decisions be made such as education, medical, and dental?
- What happens if one of you wants to move with the children?
- How will disagreements be resolved in the future?

Speaker 2: Next think about the parenting schedule:

- What is the schedule for the time the children will spend with each of you? What is the plan for picking up and dropping off the children?
- How will you contact the children when they are with their other parent?
- How will you communicate changes to the schedule?
- What is the plan for childcare and the children's activities?
- What is the plan for holidays and special occasions?
- How will you handle travel? and
- Who keeps the children's passports?

Speaker 2: There are a few other things you might want to think about:

- How will you share information about the children?
- How will you include important people in the children's lives like grandparents?
- How will you introduce new partners to your children?
- Which cultural events are important, and who will take the children?
- Are there important religious celebrations? And finally,
- It's important to talk about child support, which we'll look at in lesson seven.

For child support, your parenting plan can include:

- what is the payment schedule and date, and when do payments start?

- How will payments be made?
- What date will child support be reviewed?
- Are there any special expenses that need to be shared like childcare or medical costs?
- Be sure to add other items that you think are important to your situation.

Lesson 5 Topic 4: Introducing a New Partner

Speaker 1: At some point it is natural to move on and start dating again. Dating with your children around is a different experience which will require you to support them through this new development in your life. Elder Laurie McDonald offers some important advice to keep in mind when you bring a new partner into your life.

Laurie McDonald: If parents marry, let's say they take on another spouse and what we have to work on again is to refocus on the children. These children are still going to be tied in to an extended family. Let's say Mom marries a fellow from another district, another area, even maybe a blend from another culture altogether, and I'll focus the mom back again and try to remind her that this connection should be maintained. By saying maintained, it's much bigger than her family because these children are technically from two families and it's huge. I always have to remind the parents: yes, you're going to have a new partner and you're going to be taking that child away from his community. You must always, always remember that the child here must maintain those ties and he or she still has roots to that community. So, I tell families to be aware and try to maintain that.

Speaker 3: Consider the following before introducing your children to new partners.

Speaker 1: Depending on where children are in their grieving process, they may still want their parents to get back together. Meeting a new partner may be difficult for them and require time to adjust. So, try to avoid introducing a new relationship too soon. Keep in mind that dating and remarriage can increase conflict between co-parents, especially if only one parent has a new partner. Your child may worry about being replaced by a new relationship. As much as possible, tell your children that they are loved and no one can replace them. Reassure them that their other parent will never be replaced. Show them how important they are by continuing to do fun and special things together, just the two of you, as well as with the family.

Speaker 1: If your new partner has children, it is important to slowly introduce them to your children, to minimize the feeling that they are rivals for your attention. And you will have a good sense of how your children are responding to the separation. Choose a time to introduce your new partner based on when your children show they're ready. Don't push it.

Speaker 3: Be aware that children and teens need to manage a new relationship at their own pace. This means you can expect hot and cold reactions from them. Liking a parent's new partner may create a loyalty problem for children. If this happens, you might see them warming up to your new partner and then turning cold. This confusion is a normal response.

Lesson 5 Quiz

Lesson 6 Topic 1: People Who Can Help

Speaker 1: Lesson 6 - Who Can Help.

Speaker 1: Separation can make you feel isolated and alone, but it doesn't need to stay this way. This lesson will show who can help.

Speaker 2: A source of support for you and your family during the process of separation can be to receive guidance from an Elder. Elders are important knowledge keepers who are recognized by their nation or community for upholding cultural values and offering wisdom and teachings. They lead by example and are dedicated teachers. They offer holistic guidance to individuals or families, which means that when you seek their advice, Elders will encourage you to think about how the issues impact you and your children at an emotional, physical, mental and spiritual level so you can grow and create balance in your life.

Speaker 2: During an after separation, an Elder in your community can speak with you and help you. For example, they can help you consider how to make sure you and your children are safe, what is best for your children, your needs as a parent, support that is available in the community and how you can look at separation through the lens of your culture.

Speaker 1: Elders in your community are some of the most valuable people who are there to help you. In the following video, Elder Laurie McDonald gives you an idea of what you can expect when you have a conversation with an elder.

Laurie McDonald: In my capacity as an instructor or a knowledge keeper within this community, we'll get to families, mums, even fathers who will come to us and come to me specifically when they're having issues. Issues could be that are that associated with grief, family loss or a break up in the marriage. The first thing I would ask them, to make them at ease is to ask if you know, depending on where they're coming from, for grounding. Do you want to be smudged? Do you want to be brushed? When I say brushed, again, it could be with an eagle fan or it could be with cedar, depending on where they're coming from.

Laurie McDonald: And some of the questions, you know again most often with knowledge keepers, they're there to listen and they're there to be that support. And we normally would just let the families, because they're going through some trauma here, we just basically let them unload and all too often, we find that with our families and our single people that are coming through, the process of grief can be variable.

Laurie McDonald: So I would just ask, basically ask them, how can I help you? Because I don't know it all, right? They have more of the story than I do. And I see my job mostly just listening. Dad and mum may go their own separate ways. They may be still from the same community, but they still have to keep in mind they're going to meet one another all the time. So how are we going to walk in this? How are we going to travel this? How are we going to be gentle?

Laurie McDonald: Our communities being as small as they are, your husband may be living just down the road or even a couple of miles. But within the context of that community, we're going to have

uncles, we're going to have aunts. We're going to have cousins, on both sides, and they may not be at odds. So we have to think again, of what is important here? And what is important here is that little nucleus, that little child.

Laurie McDonald: So I always remind these families, we've got to make peace somehow, and try to make this the separation as less traumatic as possible for those children. Keep them in mind. So these are the lessons we have to work on with them as we go along. Because there's not going to be a simple answer in one meeting and it's going to be subsequent and it's going to be ongoing. Yes. The parents, both sides may have to seek clinical counseling, may have to see mediation. But you know what? We're still here and we'll still guide them on how to go through this process.

Laurie McDonald: So this is why we talk to the parents. Yes, you have your issues going on. Yes, there's separation going on. Yes, you're in a grieving process. But most important, let's deal with how the children are going to handle the separation. And we'll look forward and we'll look for some solutions for to help you in your journey.

Laurie McDonald: And when some parents come to us asking for help, if we're in community, the communities being our own reserves, I have to focus on what's out there. And the same is in the urban area and in the urban area, you'll have a maybe a bigger pool of resources.

Speaker 1: Consider reaching out to family, your local friendship center or a community organization to arrange meeting with an elder. If you do, it's important to follow protocol when asking for help. This includes giving a culturally appropriate gift or money in the form of an honorarium as a gesture of gratitude and respect for the value of what the elder is offering. If you are unsure what's appropriate, ask someone at your band office, family services office or friendship center. The intention is to give what you can.

Speaker 1: There are other indigenous resources and people who may support you during and after the separation. These resources include indigenous family wellness workers, indigenous community social workers, residential treatment for trauma for families or individuals, healing circles, talking circles, sweat lodges, and other cultural ceremonies. You can also keep an eye open for other community programs that heal families and support positive parenting with indigenous teachings.

Lesson 6 Topic 2: Family Justice Counsellors

Speaker 1: Family justice counselors or FJCs are mediators who are employed by the BC Ministry of Attorney General. These mediators work in Family Justice Centers and Justice Access Centers across the province.

Speaker 2: FJCs are not social workers. Their job is to help parents who are separating or have already separated and who need help with sorting out arrangements for their children. FJCs help parents to reach agreement about things like where the children will live and how much child support will be paid. Getting help from an FJC is free. FJCs meet individually with you and the other parent to explain options for resolving disagreements about the children. They can also refer you to other people in the community that may be helpful.

Speaker 2: If you want, you can bring support people with you. In the following video, Anne Reuvekamp, an indigenous family justice counselor, gives you an idea of what to expect.

Anne Reuvekamp: My name is Anne Reuvekamp and I'm a family justice counselor at the Victoria Justice Access Center. I am Ojibwe from Ontario. So a family justice counselor assists families who are separating and divorcing put together a parenting plan that works in the best interests of their children. Parenting plans include the time the children will spend with each parent, where the children will live, who would be responsible for the children's activities, the school they go to, and we'd also include child support obligations.

Anne Reuvekamp: I would meet with each parent individually and explain our services and the options available to them and if mediation is something they're interested in, I would get their permission to contact the other party and have the same meeting with them as well and provide the same information. The best way to explain what mediation is, is that both parties would meet with the family justice counselor in the mediation room and both parties would provide a list of the topics they would like to cover in the mediation and then the mediator would assist the parties to go through that list and come up with an arrangement or an agreement that works in the best interest of their children.

Anne Reuvekamp: So, family justice counselors are impartial third parties. I don't make decisions for parents. I help guide them through the process and provide assistance through supports and referrals to anyone who comes to see me. The information and conversation you have with the family justice counselor is confidential. The only time it wouldn't be confidential is if there is a risk of safety or harm to yourself or to children.

Anne Reuvekamp: Once you've reached agreement, I can put it in writing if you'd like. If you already have a court order, I can submit information to have that court order changed. If you're unable to come to an agreement or there were portion of your mediation that you weren't able to agree to, the family justice counselor could explain the court process to you and assist you with filling in the forms needed.

Speaker 2: An FJC can't tell you specifically what to put in your court forms because they can only give you legal information, not advice. This means they can explain what the law says in general but not what they think you should do. A lawyer is the person who can give you advice about what you should do, and an FJC can direct you where to get legal advice, which is sometimes available at no cost.

[Lesson 6 Topic 3: How Mediation Can Help](#)

Speaker 1: Mediation is a chance for parents to have a different kind of conversation about issues regarding their children. The parents still make the decisions, but the mediator guides the conversation and keeps it focused on the children's needs. Mediation typically happens with both parents in the same room together for one or more meetings. There may be times when it isn't possible or appropriate to have you and the other parent together in the same room. The family justice counselor must be sure that both parents are able to negotiate on their own behalf. This means you need to be able to speak for yourself in a mediation meeting, which isn't possible if you're scared or intimidated by the other parent. The FJC must also be confident that there will not be any harm to either parent during or after the mediation. If there has been a history of violence or abuse, the FJC will speak with each of you to decide if mediation is a safe option. Anne Reuvekamp talks about the advantages of mediation when it is appropriate, and the various ways mediation is used.

Anne Reuvekamp: The advantages of attending mediation is that both parents are the experts of their children. They know what's best for them and what's in their best interests. The times that mediation might not be appropriate is when there is cases of violence, or excessive drug or alcohol use. In those cases, I as a family justice counselor, would most likely refer you to a lawyer to get some legal advice around that.

Anne Reuvekamp: If it's determined that mediation is appropriate, you could meet in person or you could do a type of shuttle mediation, or what we call distance mediation, which involves from meeting the family justice counselor over video. Shuttle mediation involves the family justice counselor speaking to each party individually, and bringing the information from that party to the other party. In this way, the two parties would not necessarily meet in the same room. It would be done over telephone or in person, but individually. Distance mediation is used when the parties do not live in the same area and distance is a barrier. We would provide mediation services through technology services like video conferencing.

Speaker 2: Mediation is also an opportunity for parents to work on improving their communication. As you go through mediation, you will hopefully learn some different ways of speaking with the other parent that'll allow for better conversations.

Speaker 1: It's also an open an opportunity for you to come up with a plan for how to communicate about the children. This can mean figuring out what sort of information you each need about the children, and how best to share that information. This increases the chances that the parenting plan you come up with will be successful.

Speaker 2: Mediation is often a much quicker way to resolve your disagreements compared with going to court. From start to finish, court can be a lengthy process. Sometimes taking up to a year or longer to resolve. Most people will go through mediation in three to four months or less.

Speaker 1: Mediation can be a great option for parents who are not in agreement. But it's not always possible or appropriate. In lesson five, we considered what to include in your parenting plan such as parenting schedules, decision making for your child, and communication. Here's more on this from Anne.

Anne Reuvekamp: In mediation, the parents could discuss what they would like their children to attend culturally, and how they might be able to contribute to that teaching and learning. It's really important that they have that connection with their culture and traditions, and with their extended family wherever possible. That piece could be included in your parenting plan, and who might take on the responsibilities of that or if the parents would share in those responsibilities.

[Lesson 6 Quiz](#)

[Lesson 7 Topic 1: Guardianship, Parental Responsibilities, and Parenting Time](#)

Speaker 1: Lesson Seven: Family Law.

Speaker 1: There are legal issues you may need to consider when you're separating or divorcing. In this lesson, we're going to look at the following:

- Important legal terms,
- how basic child support is calculated and
- options for resolving disagreements you have with the other parent.

Speaker 2: Parents who have separated or never lived together still have rights and responsibilities for their children. There are important terms related to those rights and responsibilities that we'll explain. Guardianship is a term that refers to a person who has the legal ability to make decisions for a child. Most of the time, parents are the guardians of their children. If you're unsure about your own situation, speak to a family justice counselor or get legal advice. Someone who isn't the child's parent can only become a guardian by applying to court. Only guardians can have parental responsibilities and parenting time.

Speaker 1: The term parental responsibilities refers to the day-to-day decisions that guardians make about their children, as well as making bigger decisions about things like:

- where a child will live,
- a child's cultural and spiritual identity and upbringing, and
- applying for a passport.

Speaker 1: In the additional resources section of this course, you can find a list of all 12 of the parental responsibilities listed in the Family Law Act. The Family Law Act is the BC law that outlines rights and responsibilities for parents who have separated or who've never lived together. After separation, guardians can continue to share parental responsibilities and make decisions together for the child or they may decide that one parent will be responsible for making some or all of these decisions.

Speaker 2: The term parenting time refers to the time a child spends with someone who is the guardian. Someone who is not a guardian may also have time with the child, but this is described as contact, not parenting time. Only a guardian has parenting time. If guardians can't agree on their plan for parental responsibilities or parenting time, they can try mediation with a family justice counselor or they can apply to court and ask a judge to make the decision for them.

Speaker 1: Whether parents or a judge are making decisions for a child, the only thing that can be considered is what is best for the child. Sometimes what is best for a child is not the same as what the parent may prefer. In deciding what is best for your child, you should consider all your child's needs. The child's views must also be considered unless it's inappropriate to do so.

Lesson 7 Topic 2: How Child Support is Calculated

Speaker 1: Another important part of family law is child support.

Speaker 1: Child support refers to the ongoing financial responsibility parents have for the children after they separate, or even when they have never lived together.

Speaker 1: The rules for how to calculate child support are the child support guidelines.

Speaker 1: Child support is meant to help cover the cost of the basic necessities of life for a child, and balance out the child's standard of living at each parent's house. The considerations for determining child support include: which parent the child lives with, and each parent's annual income.

Speaker 1: The child support guidelines use this information to calculate the amount of child support that must be paid each month, depending on the paying parent's income and the number of children.

Speaker 1: If you earn income on reserve and don't pay taxes on this income, the calculation of child support will be different, so it's a good idea to get help from a family justice counselor or a lawyer.

Speaker 1: In addition to basic child support, parents may also have to contribute money towards special expenses, like medical costs or childcare when a parent needs to work or attend school.

Speaker 1: Sports and arts activities or educational programs may also be considered a special expense, but usually only if the child is particularly talented in the activity or if the program is required because the child has special needs.

Lesson 7 Topic 3: Spousal Support

Speaker 1: In addition to child support, family law also provides for spousal support in some cases when one partner may be financially disadvantaged because of the separation. Family justice counselors can help with mediating spousal support, but it's also important to get legal advice. If you are not married, there is a time limit of two years after separation to apply for spousal support.

Lesson 7 Topic 4: How to Apply for Divorce

Speaker 1: If you are married, then you and the other parent might want to get divorced following your separation. The easiest way to get a divorce is with an uncontested divorce application, which means that both parents agree to the divorce. A divorce can only be granted by the Supreme Court. To get a divorce in BC, you need to have been separated for at least one year, have a written agreement or a court order that includes child support, and at least one of you must have lived in BC during the past year. You can get help with your divorce at a Justice Access Center or by using a self-help guide available online. Refer to the additional resources section of this course for more information.

Lesson 7 Quiz

Lesson 8 Topic 1: If We Need to Go to Court

Speaker 1: Lesson 8, If We Need to Go to Court.

Speaker 1: When separated parents are unable to reach agreement about the arrangements for their children, they can file a court application to ask a judge to make a decision for them and their children. You will also have to go to court if you're applying for a divorce.

Speaker 2: In British Columbia you can choose Provincial or Supreme Court if you need a judge to make a decision for you. There are important differences between the two courts. In Provincial Court, there is no cost to start a court application, or to submit forms or documents. Provincial Court can deal with all family matters except property or debt issues, and it cannot grant a divorce. Provincial Court also can't change the orders that have been made in Supreme Court.

Speaker 2: Supreme Court can deal with all family matters, including divorce and property issues. But there is a cost for starting an application, as well as for submitting forms and documents. It is a more formal court that people often find more difficult to go through without a lawyer. Supreme Court can change previous orders made in either court.

Speaker 2: You can choose to use both courts. For example, you could deal with parenting arrangements and child support in Provincial Court, and use the Supreme Court only to deal with your divorce. You can contact a family justice counselor for information on how to start the court process and what to expect if you have to go to court.

Lesson 8 Topic 2: How Decisions are Made in Family Court

Speaker 1: When judges make decisions in court about family matters, their only consideration is what is best for your child. Some of the things a judge considers include:

Speaker 2:
The child's health and emotional well-being,
the child's relationship with others,
the child's need for stability,
what the child may share with the court,
the history of care by the parents or other caregivers,
the parent's capacity to care for the child,
the effect of any domestic violence, and
the cooperation between guardians.

Speaker 1: There may be times when the judge would like to have more information about your child. When this happens, they may ask that a report be completed by a specialized family justice counselor. The judge uses the report to help make their decision.

Lesson 8 Topic 3: Getting Help from a Lawyer

Speaker 1: When you need legal help, there are options available. If you're dealing with an urgent matter, you may be eligible to have a Legal Aid lawyer represent you through the court process. To find out if you're eligible, contact the Legal Services Society or your local Legal Aid office. There are other options for free legal advice.

Speaker 1: To find out more information about these services, visit the Legal Services Society Family Law in BC website, or call your local family justice center or courthouse. You can also refer to the additional resources section of this course on how to apply for legal aid and for more information on free legal assistance.

Lesson 8 Quiz

Course Completion

Speaker 1: Course completion.

Speaker 2: Now that you've finished the course, you might want more detailed information about some of the topics we have covered. You might also need help resolving a disagreement with the other parent. For information and assistance, meeting with a family justice counselor is a great place to start. Contact a Family Justice Center, or Justice Access Center to request an appointment with a family justice counselor. Remember, the services provided to you by a family justice counselor are free and confidential. There is no obligation for you to contact the other parent to receive these services.

Speaker 1: Now complete the exit survey, and let us know how you'd like to receive your certificate of completion. Congratulations, you have successfully completed the parenting after separation for indigenous families course. (singing)