

First Nations Parents Club  
**A Handbook for Parents**

Prepared by  
Barbara Kavanagh for  
The First Nations Education Steering Committee and  
The First Nations Schools Association

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Suite 113-100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2  
Toll-free 1-877-422-3672 T: 604-925-6087 F: 604-925-6097

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## *Introduction*

Parents play a key role in the education of their children. They are their children's first teachers. They are also primarily responsible for helping their children to develop strong values and self-confidence. It is especially important that parents, families and caregivers assist First Nations children in understanding and being proud of their traditions and who they are.

Providing ongoing support and being involved in the education process can be very, very rewarding. However, sometimes it can also be somewhat difficult.

Many people are not sure how to become active in the school, or how to best assist children at home. That is why this handbook was written.

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This handbook is intended to provide some general information about the structure of the school system, how to approach the school and build positive relationships to help ensure that children's needs are met, and how to create healthy learning environments at home.

### *A Word About the Language Used in This Handbook*

*For simplicity, this handbook uses the term "parents."* However, the information included relates equally well to parents, family members, and other caregivers. The suggestions may assist anyone who is actively involved in supporting children through the school and learning process.

Using the term parents is for convenience only, and it is not meant to be disrespectful of the many other adults who contribute so much to the lives of First Nations children.

*This handbook also refers generally to "schools."* Of course, there are several different types of schools in British Columbia, the two major types being public

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schools and First Nations schools. First Nations schools are those that are managed specifically by First Nations themselves.

Although there are many similarities between public schools and First Nations schools, there are important differences, as well. Not all First Nations schools are a part of the School District and Ministry of Education structures. First Nations schools generally operate with more flexibility, and sometimes their staffs and governing structures are quite different.

Most of the information in this handbook applies to any type of school. In some cases, the handbook specifically states that certain policies or structures are specific to one type of school or another.

*The information in this handbook is mostly general, referring to programs and services that are relevant to all First Nations children and parents.* Parents of children who have special needs may want all kinds of additional information. For example, parents will often read about Individual Education Plans (IEPs). These

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plans are written for all students with special needs, and they outline specially designed programs that best reflect the strengths and challenges of each child.

Because special education issues are quite complex, FNEESC and the FNSA have created separate resources on those topics. You can call (604) 925 – 6087 or toll-free 1 – 877 – 422 – 3672 and ask for a copy of either *Talking About Special Education Volume 4: A Handbook for Parents* or *Talking About Special Education Volume 5: A Parent’s Guide to Individual Education Plans*. Both resources can also be downloaded free-of-charge from [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca)

**What are FNEESC and the FNSA?** The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEESC) and the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) are non-profit organizations that are directed by First Nations and First Nations schools. FNEESC and the FNSA are committed to assisting First Nations parents as much as possible. You can call their office any time for more information about First Nations education issues in British Columbia.

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## *What Is Parental Involvement, and Why Is It Important?*

All parents want their children to have an education of the highest quality. They also want their children to do well in school, make friends, and have positive experiences.

The research is also clear – parental involvement is one of the most important factors in achieving those goals.

Parents can help their children achieve educational success in numerous ways.

- Parents can encourage their children and show them that education is important.

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- Parents can strengthen the entire school environment by being involved in school activities.
- Parents can provide students with extra assistance, and give children support and understanding.
- Parents can establish a strong learning environment at home by reinforcing the importance of school and encouraging children to do their best.
- Parents can ensure that their children are ready to learn by ensuring that they get enough sleep and eat nutritious foods.
- Parents can demonstrate the importance of reading and writing, and help their children with their homework.
- Parents can promote regular school attendance.



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- Parents can also help with school progress by monitoring report cards and visiting the school for parent teacher conferences.

**Remember ...  
two thirds of a person's learning  
takes place before they enter school!!**

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## *Supporting Your Children's Education*

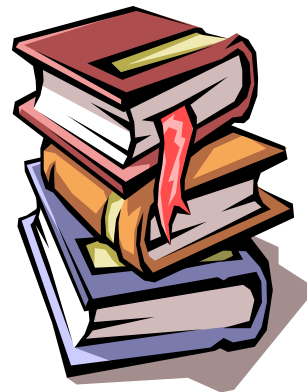
Parental involvement is one of the most important factors in student success. Parents can support their children and encourage them to succeed at school in many, many ways.

Some of the things you can do include the following.

- Reinforcing the importance of a good education, and creating a supportive, healthy environment at home.
- Regularly attending school meetings and participating in school decision-making.
- Getting to know your children's teachers and the school principal.

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- Encouraging regular attendance.
- Keeping track of your children's progress at school.
- Volunteering and helping out at the school.
- Helping your children with learning activities and homework.



**Some of the suggestions outlined in this handbook may be useful to you. You can also talk to your children's teacher or principal for even more ideas.**

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## *Roles and Responsibilities*

Parents play a key role in their children's education. Reflecting that importance, the *BC School Act* states that **parents are entitled to:**

- be informed of their children's attendance, behaviour, and progress in school;
- receive annual reports respecting the general effectiveness of educational programs in the School District;
- examine all records kept by the School Board pertaining to their child;
- be consulted regarding the placement of a child with special needs;
- be involved in the planning, development and implementation of their child's education program; and
- belong to a parents' advisory council.

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In addition to those rights ... **parents are justified in expecting the following.**

- Parents should be informed and involved in education decisions that affect their children, including changes in the courses they are taking.
- Parents should be consulted about the type and nature of assessments for their child. Parents should be asked to give their consent before formal assessments take place. Parents should also be informed of the results.
- Parents should have their concerns listened and responded to promptly and respectfully.



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- Parents should have access to personnel, such as teachers, teaching assistants, principals, and School Board members for information and help.
- Parents should have their concerns treated with confidentiality.
- Parents should receive understandable progress reports.
- Parents should be involved in the planning process and review of their child's Individual Education Plans (IEPs), including signing the IEP agreement before it is used.

**Parents are right to ask school personnel  
to set high expectations for their children.**

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**Parents have a responsibility:**

- to ensure their child's regular attendance at school;
- to be aware of school policies, programs, rules, and routines;
- to share concerns openly and immediately with the appropriate person;
- to respond to notes, memos, and requests;
- to tell their children's teachers when things are going well, and when they are not;
- to describe concerns clearly; and
- to be reasonably patient and respectful with the people responsible for educating their child.



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## *School Personnel*

Many schools include the following personnel. It is important to remember, however, that each school may differ. This is especially true for First Nations schools and public schools. Some schools may not have all of the staff described in this handbook. Also, some schools may use different terms to describe a person in a similar position. You can ask your child's school about the positions that exist there.



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### *The Principal*

The principal has responsibility for managing the school.

The principal's duties include the following.

- Maintaining the school's philosophy, and ensuring that everyone understands what the school stands for and its vision.
- Providing leadership for staff, parents, and students.
- Monitoring the educational program of the school and ensuring that student achievement is adequate.
- Communicating with the School Board or governing authority.
- Overseeing the placement and general conduct of students.

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You can contact the school principal if you have questions about the school's programs, or about your child's learning specifically. The principal can also help you to understand the school's goals and its day-to-day operations.

### *Tips for Parents - Giving Encouragement*

This activity won't take long. You can do it any time you are together, perhaps at dinner.

- Take turns telling each other something good that happened to each of you during the day.
- At first, you can start the conversation. Or ask one of your children "what is something nice that happened to you today? Tell us about it."
- If one of your children says that nothing good happened, ask "what's something nice you did for someone else?" Focus on the positive.

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### *Teachers*

Classroom teachers are responsible for the progress of individual children. The teacher's duties include the following.

- Planning instruction for the class and for individual students.
- Evaluating and reporting on each child's progress.
- Communicating with parents regarding their child's education.
- Supervising and coordinating the work of teaching assistants.
- Modifying and adapting their teaching style and activities to help each student achieve success.
- Implementing the goals and objectives of Individual Education Plans.
- Coordinating and managing information from other support personnel, such as counsellors, speech therapists, social workers, etc.

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Classroom teachers are key to the education of your child. They spend the most time with students when they are at school. Your school should organize parent/teacher meetings at least once each year. You can also arrange to talk to your child's teacher at any other time if you have questions or if you wish to discuss an aspect of your child's education.

### *Teaching Assistants*

Some schools employ teaching assistants who work with classroom teachers. Teaching assistants work with individuals and groups of children. They work under the supervision of classroom teachers.



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The duties of teaching assistants may include the following.



- Helping students with communication and technical equipment.
- Classroom observations.
- Assisting individual or small groups of students with learning activities.
- Following behaviour management programs.
- Following therapy programs for students with special needs.
- Helping students with personal care.
- Helping to monitor social interactions amongst students.
- Collecting data and records about student progress.

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## *Support Teachers*

In some schools, there are other staff people who are not responsible for a classroom of students, but who provide valuable support to the classroom teacher. These support people may include the Learning Assistance Teacher or Resource Teacher.



Support teachers may be assigned to a school full-time, or they may work part-time.

Usually, the duties of support teachers include one or more of the following.

- Providing support or special programs to students with special needs.
- Providing adaptations and/or interventions for physical or behavioural needs.

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- Helping to coordinate the team of professionals who work with children with special needs.
- Assisting classroom teachers.
- Coordinating Individual Education Plans.
- Assisting students through transitions to new classrooms or new schools.

### *Tips for Parents - Giving Encouragement*

Notice when your child helps out, cooperates, or takes responsibility. Let your child know that you have noticed their actions. Use the words “I appreciate.”

- “I appreciated you taking out the garbage without being asked.”
- “I appreciated how you played quietly when I was on the phone.”
- “I appreciated you doing your homework without being told.”

## *First Nations Support Workers*

Many schools, particularly those in the public school system, employ First Nations Support Workers, sometimes called First Nations Liaison Workers. Those individuals are available to help support First Nations students. They also assist First Nations parents and help to connect the school to First Nations communities. In addition, some First Nations education programs are offered or supported by Support Workers.

Speaking with the First Nations Support Worker is often a good first step in approaching a school and learning more about the education programs it offers. First Nations Support Workers can act as advocates and can support parents in accessing information.

Remember ... First Nations Support Workers were hired to help you, so do not be afraid to ask for their assistance.

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## *Other Professionals*

Teachers also work with other professionals such as psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, childcare workers, counsellors, nurses, and doctors. More and more, schools are trying to make sure that strong teams are working together to support students. If a number of professionals are working with your child, someone should be assigned to coordinate the service delivery. Parents should be able to speak with that coordinator and ask any questions on an ongoing basis.

## *Support Staff*

In addition to all of the other staff described above, schools also employ janitors, bus drivers, secretaries, and administrative support personnel. These people play a very important role in the school and they should be recognized for their valuable service.

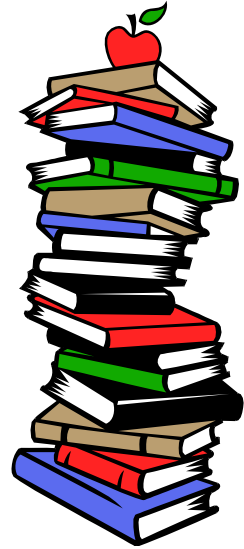
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## *School Governing Agencies*

### *First Nations School Governance*

Many First Nations communities have established their own governing structures for their schools. In some cases, the Chief and Council are responsible for the school governance. In other cases, communities have chosen to establish a separate group for this role. The names of these agencies can differ, sometimes being referred to as Community School Boards, School Education Committees, School Advisory Committees, or others. Sometimes the groups are voluntary, they could be appointed, or they could be elected.



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Whatever form of governing agency exists, they are often responsible for working with the school Principal to establish and regularly review the school's vision and goals. The school governing agencies for First Nations schools help to monitor student achievement. They can also play an important role in connecting schools and communities.

Parents of children who attend First Nations schools can find out more about the governing agency in their community, and can even find out about how to become involved!

It is also very important for parents to ask for more information about how to communicate with the governing agency. Usually it is best to talk to the school principal first if you have any questions or concerns about something that is happening in the school. You can find out more by talking to people in your community.

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## *BC Public School Boards*

In the public education system, the School Board is responsible for the following.

- Establishing priorities for the operation and administration of the schools within the District.
- Managing school property.
- Employing teachers, administrators, and non-teaching staff.
- Establishing regulations for the functioning of students, staff, and schools.
- Ensuring that decision-making at all levels is fair.

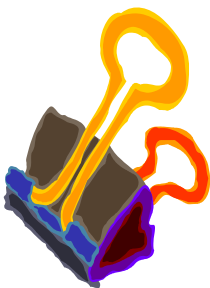
School Boards employ a Superintendent of Schools, who is the chief administrator of the School District, and an Assistant Superintendent, who is usually assigned a specific area of responsibility such as instruction, personnel, or special education.

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Parents have the right to ask for the School District's philosophy, policies, and procedures, including information about any First Nations programs and special education policies.

Parents also have a right to be informed of School Board activities and decisions.

### **Parents can get involved by:**



- attending School Board meetings;
- participating at parent advisory meetings;
- making personal or phone contact with School Board members, who are called Trustees;
- reading the local paper about School Board decisions;

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- asking for School District policies; and
- talking to other parents and community members who have experience with the School Board.

The BC Ministry of Education has links to the web sites of each School District at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/>

*Tip for Parents*

**If you have a concern, talk to the school staff. They won't know you have a concern if you don't tell them.**

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*The Aboriginal Education  
Enhancements Branch*

The Ministry of Education has established a special branch dedicated specifically to Aboriginal education. That branch is called the Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, and the staff is more than happy to talk to First Nations parents at any time.



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The goals of the Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch are:

- to improve school success for Aboriginal students;
- to increase Aboriginal voice;
- to promote knowledge of Aboriginal language, culture, and history for all students;
- to ensure an effective use of resources; and
- to increase Aboriginal communities' satisfaction with the public school system.

First Nations parents can contact the Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch at 1-888-879-1166 if they have any questions about public school programs or services.

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Parents can also use the toll-free Enquiry BC number to reach the Branch at no charge. The toll-free number is 1 – 800 – 663 – 7867. This is the general provincial government information line; callers simply have to ask for the Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch.

Another resource for parents is the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Committee (BCCPAC) Parent Advocacy Hotline. Parents are welcome to call that number with any questions about the education system. The phone number is 1 – 866-529-5397.

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# *Specific Opportunities for Parental Involvement in the Public Education System*

## *School Planning Councils*

On July 1, 2002, the provincial government passed legislation that requires each public school in the province to establish a School Planning Council. The goal of this initiative is to formally recognize the importance of parental involvement in improving student achievement.

School Planning Councils provide advice to School Boards in the areas of allocating school resources, creating accountability contracts, and making decisions about education programs.

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The Councils are supposed to consult with the school community in developing, monitoring, and reviewing school plans for improving student achievement. The school community means all parents, students, administrators, teachers, support staff, and other people interested in student success.

School Planning Councils consist of the school principal, one teacher representative, and three people elected by the school's Parent Advisory Council. The Councils are meant to be pro-active in reaching out to all members of the school community.

School Boards must ensure that a School Planning Council is in place for each school.

School principals provide leadership for the School Planning Council, and are required to notify the community about its formation. The principal also gathers together information about student achievement to share with the school community.

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For more information about School Planning Councils, you can visit <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/spc/>, call the Ministry of Education Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, or contact your child's school. First Nations parents are particularly encouraged to become involved with School Planning Councils. It is very, very important that First Nations parents share their ideas when schools are planning for improvements. You know more about your children's needs than anyone else.



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### *Accountability Contracts and District Reviews*

In the public education system, School Districts are required to create Accountability Contracts. Those Contracts outline the specific goals the School Board has set to improve student achievement. Accountability Contracts reflect the unique priorities and needs of each District, so they are different throughout the province.

Parents should have access to the District's Accountability Contract. You can request a copy if you are interested.

Each year, up to 20 School Districts will be visited by District Review Teams, which include parents, teachers, school principals, and administrators. The team that visits your District will include people from other parts of the province so that they can provide objective feedback.

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District Review Teams visit the District to review the work being done to improve student achievement, and to provide feedback about the plans that have been made for improvement. District Review Teams will specifically examine the District's plans to ensure that First Nations students achieve greater levels of success.

Parents can contact their children's school, the School District, or the Ministry of Education to ask about the Accountability Contract and District Review in their area. First Nations parents are also encouraged to apply to be a part of a District Review Team. You can learn a great deal about education programming by participating. Your ideas are also extremely valuable. The Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch is happy to help parents interested in the application process.

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## *The First Nations School Assessment Process*

Parents whose children attend First Nations schools in BC may hear about the First Nations School Assessment Process. Each First Nations school is invited to participate in that process once every five years. However, doing so is voluntary.

The First Nations School Assessment Process involves a very thorough review of all school programs, which includes surveys of parents, students, and teachers to determine how they feel about the school's programs and services and to help make plans for school growth. Following that review, a team of people who work in other First Nations schools will visit the community to talk about what is working well and to offer suggestions about the school's improvement plans.

If your child's school is undertaking an assessment process, it is important that you take part. Your ideas are crucial for effective school planning.

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## *Parent Groups*

For public schools in British Columbia, parents have the right to assume an advisory role in every school. For most public schools, and for some First Nations schools, a Parents Advisory Council (PAC) exists to formally undertake that role. Parents who are interested are encouraged to find out more about the PAC for their school. Your participation would help very much.

FNESC and the FNSA also sponsor a First Nations Parents Club. That initiative involves groups of First Nations parents coming together to share support and talk about parenting and education issues. Groups of parents whose children attend First Nations schools, public schools, or both are more than welcome. Any Parents Club that registers with the FNESC/FNSA office is provided support materials, newsletters, and fun parenting materials. Please call (604) 925 – 6087 if you are interested in more information.

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## *Preparing for Meetings With School Staff*

Once in awhile, parents, school staff, or other professionals may call meetings. Meetings may take place for many reasons.

Meetings can allow teachers and parents to get to know one another, which in itself is very worthwhile. Meetings can also allow you to:

- discuss a child's progress in school;
- plan a child's educational program;
- prepare for a transition to a new class or school; and/or
- resolve an important issue about a child.

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**Meetings can be intimidating for all of us!!** Many people feel nervous when they are going to meet with professionals. It can be even more challenging when the meeting is about a subject as emotional as your child's education.

But remember ... some meetings may be to talk about positive aspects of your child's education and progress. Don't expect the worst.

If the meeting is being held to discuss a particular challenge, the focus should still be what is best for your child. Everyone should have your child's best interests in mind.

**Some of the following suggestions are offered to help you make meetings between parents and school staff more successful.**

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### *Pre-Meeting Preparations*

- Be clear about the purpose of the meeting. If you call a meeting, inform the people you are meeting with why you want to speak to them. If someone else has organized the meeting, ask for an agenda. Also, clarify if any decisions are to be made. If so, what are they?
- Prepare any questions you might have. Write those questions down if that will help you. Remember to stay focused on key issues.
- Ask who will be attending the meeting, and what role they will play.
- Invite a person or a few people who can support you. Let those people know the purpose of the meeting.
- If possible, have both parents attend the meeting. This may mean asking the school staff to meet at a time that is convenient for everyone.
- Take careful notes, or ask someone to come with you to take notes.

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## *At the Meeting*

- Make sure that any information presented by professionals is clear. Ask questions to ensure you understand what is being said. If they use difficult language, ask them to simplify what they are saying. Do not be shy.
- Try to have patience, but be assertive and firm about what your child needs.
- Seek solutions to challenges. Do not focus on what you don't want; focus on what you *do* want.
- Review the decisions made before leaving the meeting.
- Do not agree to anything you are not sure about. Take extra time if you need it. Agree to meet again if necessary. Do not feel rushed.
- If someone else has taken minutes, ask for a copy.



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- Understand the next steps before the meeting ends. Make sure you know who is responsible for actions to be taken. Clearly state who you think will undertake any follow-up.
- Ensure that *everyone* agrees to respect confidentiality.

## *Following the Meeting*

- Think about whether you are satisfied with the information you received and any decisions made.
- Check how you are feeling. If you are not feeling good after the meeting, try to talk to a support person about how you are feeling.
- Review your notes of the meeting. Are they complete? If there is something you don't understand, call someone who was at the meeting and ask them to explain it again.

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- Compare your own notes with any other minutes taken.
- Make sure you are clear about next steps. If you are not sure what to expect, call and ask for clarification.
- Send a letter to the people who were at the meeting. Outline your understanding of the major points and next steps. Describe what decisions you think were made. Indicate whether or not you agree. State who you think is responsible for follow-up. Keep a copy of the letter.

Most importantly – ask as many questions as you need before, during, and after the meeting. Make sure you have enough information to feel informed. Only agree to decisions when you fully understand the issues.

**And if you're not comfortable with how the meeting went,  
talk about it with someone you trust.**

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## *What To Do If You Have a Concern*

Establishing good communications with your children's teachers and principal often prevents concerns from arising. Many problems result from misunderstandings. That is why everyone should be pro-active about getting to know each other early in the school year, before any concerns have come up!

If a problem does arise, it is almost always best to begin by trying to address it at the school level first.

Some general suggestions if a concern arises include the following.

- Listen carefully to your child. Try to understand all points of view. Why do you think the people involved behaved the way they did? What were their reasons? Try to be logical and set aside strong feelings for the time being.

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- Decide if your child can handle an issue or if your support is needed. Don't step in unless you think it is necessary.
- Think carefully about your concerns. Keep an open mind about the reasons for the actions and responses of others.

If you decide that you should act upon your concern, it may be useful to take the following steps. And if you do, remember to keep a record of the phone calls you make, letters you send, and meetings that take place. Note the date of each one.

### *Meet With Your Child's Teacher*

- Set up a meeting time that is convenient for your both.
- Present your reasons for the meeting.
- Listen carefully. Take notes.

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- Follow the tips for meetings, outlined on pages.
- After the meeting, think about whether you are satisfied. Is another meeting necessary? Is progress being made?

If you do not feel that you are getting anywhere with the teacher, let the teacher know how you feel. Suggest that the principal, another teacher, or a First Nations Support Worker might be able to meet with you both and try to resolve the issues.

If this does not work and you are still not satisfied ...

### *Meet With the Principal*

- Bring a support person with you if that will make you feel more comfortable.
- State your concerns.

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- List the steps you have already taken.
- Do not focus on what has happened. Focus on moving ahead.
- State the action you would like to happen. What do you expect?
- Listen carefully, and take notes.
- Note any agreed upon course of action.
- Send a letter to confirm what you think is going to happen next.
- Discuss your concerns with a friend or support person.
- Decide what actions are best. Make sure you gather as much information as you can to make an informed decision.

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If you are still not satisfied after meeting with the principal ...

### *Talk to School District Personnel*

In the public school system, you can ask to meet with School District personnel. If you do, follow the same suggestions outlined above.

The *BC School Act* requires that each School District have an internal appeal process for decisions or non-decisions that significantly affect the education, health, or safety of a student.

Ask your School District about its appeal process. Have support people help you through that process.

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## *Ombudsman's Office*

If the appeal process is not satisfactory, the Ombudsman's Office can review decisions and procedures within the school system. The Office cannot make a binding decision. It can make recommendations to the Minister of Education or School District Superintendent. The Office will also try to help resolve issues. You can learn more about this possibility by visiting [www.ombud.gov.bc.ca](http://www.ombud.gov.bc.ca).

## *BC Human Rights Tribunal*

If a School Board makes a decision that you believe discriminates against your child on the basis of race or disability, you can file a complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal. The Tribunal is responsible for accepting, screening, mediating and adjudicating human rights complaints. The Tribunal offers the parties an opportunity to try to resolve a complaint through mediation. If that process does not resolve the complaint, the Tribunal holds a hearing.

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The BC Human Rights Tribunal publishes many information sheets and forms that can help you through its processes. You can learn more from [www.bchrt.bc.ca](http://www.bchrt.bc.ca) or you can contact the Tribunal directly using the following contact information.

BC Human Rights Tribunal  
1170 - 605 Robson Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 5J3  
(604) 775-2000 phone  
(604) 775-2020 fax  
(604) 775-2021 (TTY)  
1-888-440-8844 toll free (in B.C.)

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### *The Seventh Generation Club*

Have you ever heard of the Seventh Generation Club? That Club was specially designed for First Nations students, and it is intended to encourage them to stay-in-school and make healthy life choices. Membership in the Club is free, and students attending First Nations schools and public schools are welcome to join. Members receive regular newsletters and a school daytimer, and they also have opportunities to take part in special events, enter contests, and win great prizes. If your children are not yet members of the Seventh Generation Club, you can get more information by calling (604) 925 – 6087, or by checking out the web site at [www.seventhgenerationclub.com](http://www.seventhgenerationclub.com)

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## *Volunteering*

Parents' contributions to school activities are invaluable, and can help to make education programs and services much more effective.

If you are not able or comfortable volunteering to help with in-school programs, you can still contribute a great deal by attending school events. If your children's school hosts a Christmas concert, fun night, parent breakfast, parent/student night, or other social gathering, your attendance is very important.

Visiting the school for fun, informal events can help you become more familiar with your children's school environment. You may also have a chance to get to know your children's teachers in a relaxed atmosphere. Finally, attending a school event is a fabulous way to show your children that you value their education and want to know more about that important part of their lives.

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If you can contribute time on a more regular basis, contact your child's school and ask about how you can help. The following is a list of some of the things you might choose to do.

- Join the parent group that helps to make decisions for the school.
- Read with children in the classroom or in individual settings.
- Share your special talents, including your skills in crafts, sewing, cooking, story telling, dancing, singing, carpentry, carving, language ...
- Help supervise a school field trip.
- Do one-on-one tutoring with a child.
- Exchange babysitting with another parent who wants to volunteer or attend a school meeting.
- Help the school contact other parents about upcoming events.

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- Help to maintain or fix broken equipment.
- Assist in the library.
- Help coach a sports team.
- Join a school committee.
- Take photos at school events.
- Help with a meal program.
- Help keep a bulletin board neat and updated.
- Assist language students with one-on-one conversation.
- Help in the office, answering phones or operating equipment.
- Assist students with extra math drills.
- Type materials at home.

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## *How To Be a Super Volunteer*

If you do volunteer, here are some ideas you may want to think about.

- Let the teacher or school staff know if you can't do what you had planned to do. They are counting on you to be there.
- Read the school handbook so you are familiar with school rules.
- Attend any orientation sessions the school offers.
- If you see something you do not understand or anything that makes you uncomfortable, ask the teacher about it after class.
- Keep everything you see and hear confidential.
- Do not make any negative comments about anyone in front of the students.

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## *Creating Learning Environments At Home*

Whether or not you volunteer in the school, what you do at home is extremely important. The following suggestions have been identified as effective ways for parents to support their children's school success.

- ***Establish a Regular Daily Family Routine.*** Providing time and a quiet place for study, assigning responsibility for household chores, being consistent about times to get up and times to go to bed, and having dinner together regularly helps to establish the secure, dependable environment that is so important for children.
- ***Monitor Out-of-School Activities.*** Setting limits on television, arranging for supervised care, and making sure your children are taking part in positive after-school activities are crucial for children's safety and overall well-being.

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- ***Model the Value of Learning and Hard Work.*** Parents can be excellent role models by communicating with their children regularly, reading at home, visiting the library, and demonstrating that working hard and responsibility are important.
- ***Express High and Realistic Expectations.*** Children benefit when their parents and teachers set goals that are appropriate for their age and maturity and that recognize their special talents. Sharing your children's successes with family and friends will also help to build their self-confidence.
- ***Encourage Your Children's Development in School.*** Parents can inspire and support their children by showing interest in their progress in school, helping them with their homework, discussing the value of a good education, talking about possible career options, and staying in touch with your children's teachers and school staff.

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- ***Read and Write Regularly.*** Research shows that children are more successful when they see their parents reading and writing regularly. Parents can also read with their children, listen to their children read, talk about what is being read, tell stories, and write letters together.
- ***Use Community Resources for Family Needs.*** Enrolling children in sports programs, introducing them to other role models, and using community services as needed can help all children and families create a strong foundation for learning.

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## *Supporting Your Children's First Nations Language and Cultural Learning*

First Nations communities and families can play a key role in promoting the revitalization of First Nations languages. Many First Nations students are now learning their language in school. Parents can support that learning in a variety of ways.

For parents who speak their First Nations language ...

- Make an effort to use your language at mealtime or on other regular occasions during the day. Try to increase its use over time, moving from words to phrases and from phrases to sentences, and using it for longer and longer periods of time. This will take patience and practice. Don't give up.

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- Help out in the school and in your community, and support events that promote your language and culture.

Parents who don't speak their language can also help tremendously.

- Use whatever knowledge you have. Use as many words as you know, and let your children's learning inspire you to learn more words and phrases.
- Attend a language class.
- Encourage people who do speak your language, such as grandparents or other family members, to speak with your children.
- Try to find forms of entertainment that integrate your language. Get together with other families with the same idea. Make learning your language fun.
- Spend less time watching TV, and more time visiting with Elders.

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- Participate in events in the school and in your community that promote your language and culture.
- Let your children know you support the language program. Be enthusiastic and encouraging!!

Remember to set realistic goals. Be patient with both yourself and your children. *Celebrate* the positive steps you take in learning and promoting your language.



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## *Limit Television Watching*

Research shows that children who spend less than ten hours each week in front of the television do better in reading than those who watch more TV. Here are some ideas to help you limit your children's television viewing time.

- Give your children a few television tickets every week, each one good for 30 minutes of viewing. When the tickets are gone, the TV goes off!
- Plan your children's television viewing. Write down the programs each child will watch. This helps your children learn to watch programs, not just anything that's on TV.
- Turn off the television one day each week. Plan other activities. Go for a walk. Read a book together. Play a game. Show your children other types of fun!!

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- Try disconnecting cable. Children who can't find anything to watch on television may choose to do something else.
- Use the money you saved from the cable bill to do other fun things, such as bowling, ice-skating, or swimming.
- Buy a stopwatch. Encourage your children to time commercials during a half hour show. Talk about what is being sold in those commercials.
- Ask everyone in the family to give up one show. Talk about what show you will give up, and how you will use that time instead. Keep track for one month. See if you really miss the TV program.

*These ideas can also apply to computer games and too much Internet use.* Some families set a maximum level of “screen time” each day. The children can use that time for television, computer games, or the Internet. Whatever “screen” they choose is fine, but once the time is used up, it’s gone!

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## *Helping Your Children Select Courses*

It is important to remember that the courses children take in early grades may effect their options later. For example, in order to enroll in many senior level courses like English 12 and Math 12, students must be enrolled in the right courses in earlier grades.

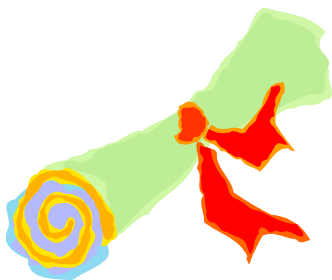
**Parents have a right to know what courses their children are taking. They should also be informed before there are any changes in those courses.**

Course selection is very important. Students must take a number of specific courses in order to receive a Dogwood Diploma. Parents should find out whether their children are taking those courses. If students are not taking the required courses, they may receive the British Columbia School Completion Certificate instead of the Dogwood.

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**But remember ... many post-secondary programs require the Dogwood Diploma for entrance, and will not accept the School Completion Certificate.**

It is also important to know if your child is on a modified program. An adapted or modified program may be appropriate for *some* students with special needs, but it is not right for all children. Talk to your children's school. If your child is going to be placed on a modified program, find out why. Ask questions. Make sure you agree. Students on a modified program will graduate with the School Completion Certificate, not the Dogwood. This may affect their future education opportunities.



**All parents should be also aware that the Ministry of Education has approved a new Graduation Program for those students entering Grade 10 in September 2004.**

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### *Graduation Program 2004 Highlights*

- Grade 10 courses will now count for credits.
- Students will have choices in electives. Other learning opportunities will be recognized for Grade 10 - 12 students. School Districts will have increased flexibility to develop courses and programs that respond to local needs.
- A new Planning 10 course will encourage students to explore a range of career options, plan their futures, and develop skills in areas such as employability, healthy decision-making, and financial management.
- Students will be required to write five exams in Language Arts 10, Science 10, Mathematics 10, Social Studies 11/12, and Language Arts 12.
- Starting in the 2007/2008 school year, Graduation Transitions replaced the Graduation Portfolio Assessment. All BC secondary school students who are enrolled in Grade 10, 11 or 12 as of September 1, 2007, and beyond must demonstrate they have met the following requirements for:

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- Personal Health - maintain a personal health plan and participate in at least 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- Community Connections - participate in at least 30 hours of work experience and/or community service and describe what was learned.
- Career and Life - complete a transition plan and present significant accomplishments.

More information is available at [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/graduation/grad2004.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/graduation/grad2004.htm)

If you have questions about the courses your child is taking, talk to the school counsellor or teacher. Ask whether your child will be eligible for senior level courses later. Don't wait until it is too late! **Find out early whether your child is on track to graduate with the Dogwood Diploma.**

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## *Parents' Role in Career Planning*

You may also want to talk to a counsellor or teacher about help with career planning. Many jobs require specific post-secondary programs. To enter those programs, certain courses are needed. Post-secondary institutes will also consider students' grades before accepting them. Parents should therefore encourage their children to do their best and maintain the highest grade point average they can.

It is important that students find out early what courses they will need in order to get the further education they want. English 12 and Math 12 are two common requirements. Students should work toward those courses to allow them a range of options later.

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A great deal of other information is available to help parents and students with career planning. You may want to ask the school principal, a teacher, or a counsellor to help you in this area.

For people who have access to the Internet, the BC Ministry of Education provides a range of resources to help parents with career planning for their children. You can look at [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/careers/planning](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/careers/planning) for some ideas.

FNESC and the FNSA have also published a document to help with career planning ideas. *Finding Your Path* is available from the FNESC web site at [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca), or you can get a copy by calling the FNESC/FNSA office at (604) 925 – 6087.

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## *Preparing Children for Reading*

Reading to your children, no matter what their age, is one of the most important things you can do. Showing that you read is also key. Whether you point out signs as you drive, read a menu, or read the grocery list, it is important that your children see how useful it is to know how to read and how often you use that critical skill.

There are also many games you can play and activities you can do at home with your pre-schoolers and early elementary children to promote reading.

1. Do jigsaw puzzles. Children will learn to look at shapes and see where pictures fit, just as they will later learn to recognize words by their shapes.

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## 2. Play memory games.

- Use six pairs of playing cards. Turn them face down on a table, and then turn up two at a time, trying to find pairs.
- Talk about the sequence of your children's day, asking what they did first, second, and so on.
- Ask your children to put away five grocery items. When they are done, ask them to name the five things they put away.
- Put 5 to 10 items on the kitchen table. Allow your children to look at them for 30 seconds. Have your children turn around. Remove one item. When they look again, do your children know which one you removed? Or cover the items with a cloth. How many items can your children name?

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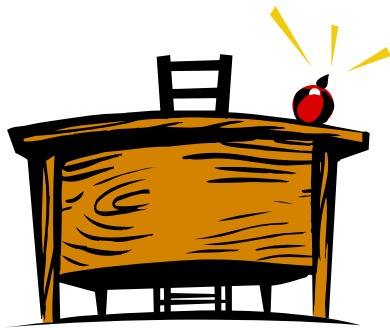
## 3. Categorize

- Give your children a box of 5 to 10 buttons. Ask them to put the buttons into "families," using categories such as size, colour, number of holes, rough or smooth edge. This can be done with nuts, crayons, paper clips, etc.
- Write the word "animal" at the top of a page. Ask your children to name as many animals as they can, while you write them down. Look at the list and put them into families, such as big or small, domestic or wild, fur or feathers, etc.
- When going on walks, look at categories of things, such as animals, plants, things made of cement, things made of wood, things that are blue ...

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#### 4. Create patterns

- Arrange toothpicks in a specific pattern and then ask your children to copy your pattern. Next, let your children create a pattern and you copy it.
- Thread beads on a string in a pattern. Encourage your children to copy your pattern.
- Use nesting blocks or varying lengths of paper towel rolls. Have your children put them in order from longest to shortest.



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#### 5. Talk with your children.

- Ask them what they learned that day.
- Talk about your own day, including the good and bad things that happened.
- Talk about your upcoming day, showing your children that you plan things in an orderly way.

#### 6. Encourage wordplay

- Play Junior Scrabble.
- Do word searches and crossword puzzles together.

#### *Read Anything*

Reading anything with your children is useful – store signs, food labels, traffic signs, comics, joke books ...

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### *Confidence is the Key to Success*

- Every child learns differently. Don't compare your children to others.
- Be your children's cheerleader and advocate.
- Focus on the positive.
- Avoid boring drills. Make learning fun.
- Discuss any concerns your children have about school or anything else.
- Have your children's eyesight and hearing tested regularly.

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### *Tips for Reading With Children at Home - Pause, Prompt, and Praise*

If your children make mistakes or get muddled while reading with you at home ...

*... pause ...*

Let your children try to solve the problem alone. If they still cannot read the word, then ...

*... prompt ...*

by saying: "Try that again," or "Read to the end of the sentence. What word makes sense?"

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If your children lose the meaning while stopping, stop and say ... “Listen to what you said. Does that sound right? Did that make sense?”

After two unsuccessful tries, give your children the correct word. And remember ...

... always *praise* your children as much as possible ...

### *Rule of Thumb*

Have your children read one page of a book aloud and hold up one finger every time they do not know a word. If all of the fingers on one hand are raised by the end of the page, the book is probably too hard for them to read alone.

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## *Different Ways to Read With Children*

- ***Read a book to your children.***  
Children learn well from being read to. Re-reading favourite books over and over helps them to recognize letters and sentences.
- ***Read together in unison.*** You can read together, like you are singing. Reading in unison helps when your children want to read a book that is too hard for them.

### *Avoid Power Struggles*

It is fine to stop reading if it is too hard one night, ... just *try again tomorrow.*

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- *Take turns reading the same passage to each other.* Read together, using a “my turn, your turn” process. Relax – memorizing is the beginning of the reading process for younger children.
- *Read silently first, then out loud.*
- Or ... *your children can read to you.*

Use whatever method works for you and your children.

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## *Helping Your Children Learn to Write*

### *Why is writing important?*

- Writing helps us discover new ways of thinking.
- Writing shows us what we know, and helps us learn at the same time.
- Writing organizes and extends our thinking.
- Writing is important for most jobs and for life skills.
- Writing can be a creative and satisfying activity.
- Writing helps us to become better readers.



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## *How can you help your children become better writers?*

1. Encourage writing outside of school assignments.
  - Find fun and practical purposes for writing, such as thank you notes to relatives, birthday party invitations, and writing contests for kids.
  - Consider writing as gifts. Children can give handmade greeting cards or books.
  - Give your children an attractive journal or diary of their own.
2. Write with your children and show or read your writing to them.
3. Realize that writing is not something that is done all at once.
  - Writing is developed slowly over time.
  - All writers address aspects of their writing in stages.

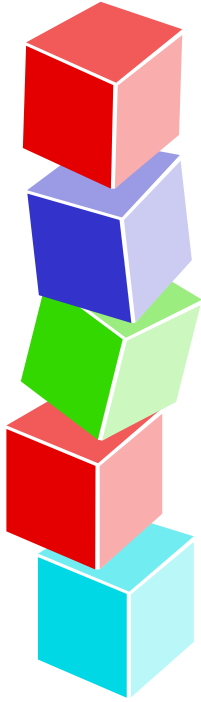
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## *Arithmetic for Young Children*

1. Put up a calendar and check off each day. Record the weather daily. Draw a sun, cloud, raindrop, kites (for windy), or a snowflake.
2. Say the days of the week and months of the year whenever possible.
3. Count the cups on the table, the windows in the bedroom, or the chairs around the table. Take any opportunity to count things around the house.
4. Give your children an opportunity to help set the table. Talk about how each person gets the same set of things – a fork, knife, spoon, plate, cup, etc. Some children enjoy making a placemat out of a sheet of paper and tracing the plate, glasses, and cutlery so they know where each item goes.
5. As your children get dressed, count the buttons as they are done up. Talk about the matched socks, and one sock for each foot, and one shoe for each foot.

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6. Arrange the shoes in a closet from smallest to largest. Is anything else in your home arranged that way?
7. Look for patterns in your home. Check out floor tiles, ceiling tiles, wallpaper, or clothes. Make a pattern using blocks or beads on a string. See if your children can copy it. Start with three or four items and then add more. Let your children make patterns and you copy them.
8. Bake with your children. First read through the recipe and get all the ingredients out on the counter. Talk about measurement. Let your children measure out one teaspoon or tablespoon, one-half or one-quarter cup. Let your kids sift and stir.

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9. Sometimes when your children are skipping or throwing or bouncing balls, count out loud.
10. Play board games with your children.
11. Teach and play simple card games such as Fish, Snap, and Old Maid.
12. When driving in the car, look for, talk about, or count different shaped signs, buildings, clouds, or cars. Some children like to take a pad of paper and divide a sheet into two columns. Then they can make a tick for each red car or blue car. At the end of a specified period of time, your children can add up their ticks.

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## Information to Remember

School's Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Teacher(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_: \_\_\_\_\_

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