

Intervention and Removal of Parent Program

Guidelines

*A Community Approach to Reducing
the Trauma of Child Apprehension*





Special Acknowledgements

The Family and Community Wellness Centre would like to acknowledge the following people for their guidance and encouragement in the development of the Intervention and Removal of Parent Program. Many of our Ketiyatisak have passed on but their dream of seeing our First Nation community without child welfare and adapting a culturally sensitive approach has been shared in their teachings. These teachings and wisdom remain a “guiding light” in the aspirations and innovations of the Centre’s programs and development.

Late Jean-Marie Dumas, *Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation*

Joshua Flett, *Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation*

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Board of Directors, *NCN Family and Community Wellness Centre Inc.*,

Chief Jerry Primrose and Council, *Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation*

Chief Marcel Moody and Council, *Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation*

And to the following;

Jacqueline Walker

Ida Moore

Sarah Gazan

Enhancing the Lives of Children by Working
to Keep the Family Together

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Cover Illustration by: GAYLE SINCLAIR

The cover artwork is a symbol of community unity and connectedness; it represents the “circle of supports” for family systems. The core center of the circle represents the “spirit” that gives Mitho Pimatisiwin (a good life). Next to the core is the representation of an infant and toddler that gives purpose and meaning to parents. Around the parents are family supports such as aunts, uncles and grandparent. The grandparents signify the role of “Ketiyahtisahk” (the old ones) who are held in great esteem and respect. They are the keepers and transmitters of cultural knowledge. Around the old ones are the Warriors of the community. They are the protectors and leaders. They ensure safety and wellbeing for all. Each circle is related to the other and has their own role in order to respect, share, guide, and protect the children. The day sun and night moon represents the cycle of life and the life-long responsibility of caring for children. All relationships and interconnectedness to all Creation are of equal value and have strong principles to creating balance in life.

References for this Guideline

Circle of Care Manual
 Consultation with Kihtehayatisak
 Child and Family Services Act
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The concept of the Circle and Native Family Systems was developed and designed by Janet (Jann) Derrick. Jan is of Mohawk Ancestry and specializes in working with Native historical trauma. She is a registered Marriage and Family Therapist and presently a Ph. D. candidate. In 2000, she had published professionally *The Box and The Circle and Native Family Systems*, as well as contributing to books such *The Dispossessed* by Geoffrey York, Chapter 2; *Voices of Color-First Persons Accounts of Ethnic Minority Therapists and Multicultural Couple Therapy* ed. Rastogi and Thomas.



Message from the CEO

Supporting Our First Nations' Children and Families with a Holistic Approach to Care

Tansi. Thank you for your interest in getting to know and understand our *Intervention and Removal of Parent Program*. We first began work on a new way to approach child apprehension in 2001 and started exploring innovative ways to reduce the disruption and trauma to the child and improve community Mithwayawin (wellness).

Today, it remains a fact, there are more than 10,000 children in Manitoba who are wards of Child and Family Services (CFS). A vast majority of these youth are in foster care and most are Aboriginal. The approach and program discussed in this guideline manual, provide an alternate method to care for children that are influenced by child apprehension – where the child is at risk.

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (NCN) has the benefit of a holistic-care facility directly in the community of Nelson House. Care and programs like the *Intervention and Removal of Parent*, *Circle of Care* and *Rediscovery of Families* are instrumental in providing a broad approach to healing, not only for the individuals involved but also the community that embraces them.

The Family and Community Wellness Centre's holistic approach removes the parent(s) from the home to help not only the child but also the parent(s) to seek needed counselling, therapy and an understanding of their responsibilities. We also assist the family in rediscovering methods to help them thrive and grow by reconnecting them to their Indigenous traditions and culture. This service has been successfully provided for the Nelson House community for more than a decade and is generating great interest from other First

Nations and CFS agencies – now adopting similar programs, based on this model.

The catalyst for the development of the program came after a tragic event in 2001 when a 15-year old girl in care died of alcohol poisoning. Immediately, at that time, it was decided to bring the family and community together to discuss the trauma and to deal with unresolved grief, in the hope that it would not carry on into the future. The *Intervention and Removal of Parent Program* officially began in 2002 after discussions and the advice of our Ketiyatisak. It was noted that many parents were not being held accountable for their behaviours and actions in the standard model for child apprehension cases.

We believe it is better for children to remain at home. It is well documented; many children feel the blame and have feelings of guilt when they are the ones removed from the situation. This “removal of parent” solution comes directly from Elders, the children themselves and the community and has had proven results over the years. In the last decade, about 65 parents have been removed and with targeted support, most families have been reunited after a short time in the care program. By listening to community members, building partnerships and remaining committed to the process; these methods and guidelines can be pivotal for the child, family, First Nation and community.

Felix Walker
CEO Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Family
and Community Wellness Centre

“Nisichawayasihk
Cree Nation (NCN)
has the benefit
of a holistic care
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Nelson House.”

A Vision for a Better Tomorrow

The Intervention and Removal of Parent Program will provide a community approach to reduce the trauma of child apprehension and reunite and encourage healthy, thriving families.

Vision: We have undertaken this unique approach not necessarily to reduce the rate of child apprehension but to reduce the trauma to children when these types of intervention are required. As with all of our child protection cases, families are able to access a variety of services through a network of community-based resources. These services are designed to support recovery and strengthen the reunified families.

In-home support and care is only one step to engage the community in the shared responsibility of caring for the children and families of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation.



"You don't choose your family. They are Creator's gift to you"

-DESMOND TUTU

Introduction

Removal of Parent Program and In-Home Support/Care System for Children

A Community Approach to Reducing the Trauma of Child Apprehension

The Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Family and Community Wellness Centre was established in 2001 to support and create innovative approaches to individual, family and community wellness.

In the early development of the program, a statement was made based on an old proverb; “it takes a community to raise a child” and it is up to us as a community to decide what kind of child we want to raise. This idea that raising children is a community responsibility and that our decisions impact the wellbeing of all our members, is founded in the traditional teachings of the Cree people. Applying this communal, holistic approach and worldview to the Euro-centric Child and Family Services system has been a long journey, driven by consultations with our Ketiyatisak (elderly or “old people” in the community) and focused on using our ways and teachings to improve the lives of children and youth.

While we strive to keep families together, like many First Nations, some of our parents struggle to often regain their traditional identities and overcome trauma of the colonial legacy.

Most cases involving families stem from neglect, historical trauma, unresolved emotional or psychological issues from residential schools and removal from connections to First Nation culture, traditions and practices. This struggle for many parents has resulted in a disproportionate number of our children needing care or intervention from Child and Family Services (CFS). It is an unfortunate reality that the apprehension of children continues to be a necessary part of this work.

Today, through the wisdom passed on by our Ketiyatisak, and support from community, government and officials, we



recognize that the removal and separation of children from their homes and families often has long-term and intergenerational impacts. We further recognize children belong with their parent(s) and therefore we have a moral obligation to support the reunification of families. It is for this reason, that the Centre engages in innovative approaches to family enhancement and reunification, using the teachings of our Ketiyatisak as part of our effort to strengthen families and minimize trauma to children.

The *Intervention and Removal of Parent* approach has included the practice of temporarily removing the parent(s) from the family home in situations where children were typically apprehended. Once removed, the parent(s) are then encouraged to seek counselling and healing or are enrolled in a treatment program with the goal of reuniting the families in the home.

This understanding of our moral obligation to support parents and to care for our children is not based in Western ideologies but on Cree oral traditions about family.

Prior to the development and adoption of the Intervention and Removal of Parent program, apprehending a child was the only recognized approach to secure a child or children from an unsuitable or unsafe living environment – usually linked to neglect, domestic violence, abuse or other factors.

Passing Knowledge Through Traditional Story Telling

The following story was told to Ida Moore by her late father Charlie Moore of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. It exemplifies this worldview:

After the muskrat came up out of the water with a piece of earth and the Creator began creation, he thought very carefully of where all the different plants would need to be placed. He knew he could not just sow the seeds anywhere; each little seed would have to go where it would grow the best. As he planted each piece of vegetation he thought about how the weather would impact each seed as it began to germinate. He had to make sure that each seed was in the right type of soil, that the temperature was right and that the moisture level was right.

As a seed began to grow and the seedling popped out to the ground the conditions needed to be right for it to grow. Seedlings are very fragile. A plant like the tree will not grow into a strong healthy tree if it is not nurtured and cared for. If a tree begins to grow in wet ground, the roots will be weak. If it does not get the proper amount of sunlight, it will be small and never grow tall. If a tree gets too much wind, it will bend and not grow straight. Creator watched each little seed and seedling



very carefully; he made sure each little plant was nurtured with the right conditions to make sure it would grow into a strong beautiful plant.

This is the same way a parent raises their children. You need to understand the needs of each child because they are not all the same. From the time of conception until they are adults, children are very fragile. Children need the proper environment to grow into strong healthy human beings. They need to have their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs fed and nurtured. They need this balanced nurturing by their parents and community and in turn, when they become parents, they too can look after their children and their community.

Background and “Needs For” Evaluation

The idea for the *Intervention and Removal of Parent Program* was first conceived in 2001 and 2002. During this time, children in the community were being removed from homes in CFS cases. Our Ketiyatisak told us that children are the “Center” of our community and the foundation of the home. A focus on a better approach to child apprehension and family-support systems was born from the advice of our Ketiyatisak.

We know that children who are removed from the care of their parent(s) experience

trauma and are often confused by the situation. Removal from the family home further traumatizes children as they are torn from everything familiar and forced to adjust to new and unpredictable settings. We believe that children need to feel safe and to have a voice during difficult periods, when their lives are in turmoil. It is for this reason that we developed the *Intervention and Removal of Parent Program*, a holistic healing and care approach to child apprehension.

Facing Challenges of Child Apprehension with a Unique and Alternative Approach

The *Intervention and Removal of Parent Program* approach is based on the following understandings:

- The Ketiyatisak tell us that “it is the children that create the home.” The house belongs to them and they should never be forced to leave.
- The Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Chief and Council as the landlords of band-owned houses have, by Band Council Resolution, authorized the removal of the parent(s) to allow for the provision of in-home care for children. *Please refer to Chief and Council’s Band Council Resolution for more information.*
- In accordance with the *Child and Family Services Act*, the safety security and wellbeing of our children and their best interests are the fundamental responsibility of our Nation. As a result, there will be times where children will be in need of protection resulting in apprehension.
- In the case of a child apprehension, whenever possible, it will be the parent(s) and not the child who will be removed from the home.
- The apprehended child, whenever possible, will remain in the home with provisional care by extended family or an In-Home Care support worker.
- The parent(s) will be responsible to find alternate accommodations and will be able to access a variety of out-of-home supports in an effort to reunify the family and as a mandatory requirement detailed in the *Family Service Plan*.



The 5-Step Process to Family Healing

The *Intervention and Removal of Parent* process requires the joint involvement of many support organizations and dedicated workers cooperating to provide immediate action and specialized care. The process generally includes, but is not limited to, these five steps:



- 1 Initial Assessment (Removal of the Parent)
- 2 Intake Process: Intervention and Support Procedures
- 3 *Circle of Care and Rediscovery of Families*
- 4 Reunification
- 5 Aftercare and Follow-up

1. Initial Assessment

Off Hours and On Call – A Dedicated Staff Committed to Immediate Care

As per policy, two Emergency Duty Workers (EDW) are required to be on-call to attend to after-hour emergency calls related to children and youth in need of protection. When called to a home, the EDW first conducts a safety assessment to determine if the child is in need of protection.

If it is determined that a child is in need of protection, the Emergency Duty Workers shall:

- Contact the on-call supervisor to authorize and/or provide direction as to the apprehension of the child



- Contact the RCMP or local constables to request the removal of the parent(s) from the home
- Complete the Place of Safety form included in the on-call package to allow the child to remain in the home after the parent(s) have been removed.
- Ensure that supports are put in place which may include:
 - Placing a suitable family member or respite worker in the house
 - Ensuring that the child feels safe, is calm and is fully aware of what is happening and what may occur over the next few days
 - Taking children to the nursing station for a medical examination, if required.

If it is determined that a child is in need of protection the R.C.M.P. and/or local constable will be responsible to ensure that the parent(s):

- Are informed of the reasons for their removal from the home
- Understand that any disturbances or interference with the in-home supports may result in further legal actions.

The EDWs must fill out a Place of Safety form to legitimize application for foster home licensing.

In cases where the parent is removed from the home, it is the legal right of the Chief and Council, as the landlords/owners of the house to remove the individual. This temporary eviction can only be done on the reserve land where Council has the right and ownership of the home.

2. Intake Process

Ensuring Intervention and Support Procedures for Prompt Care

Following the initial immediate assessment, and within the first 48 hours the worker assesses the situation, the EDW reports apprehension and all transpiring information related to apprehension to the Intake worker.

It is the Child and Family Services intake worker's responsibility to:

- Investigate the situation in accordance with the timeframe outlined in the *Child and Family Service Act* on the following business day
- Identify service needs for both the child and parent(s)
- Report conclusion of investigation to the supervisor of CFS Case management and supervisors of Family Enhancements.

The Child and Family Services Supervisor and Family Enhancement Supervisor are responsible to:

- Determine the status of the apprehension
- Recommend services for the whole family system
- Assign case to a CFS Case Manager and/or Family Enhancement Worker
- Notify the Director of Operations, who is responsible to submit a letter, in accordance with Section 26 of the *Child and Family Service Act*, to the Chief Executive Director of NCN Chief & Council Government Office to inform them of the apprehension of the children and the removal of parent(s) from the home.

The ultimate goal of the *Intervention and Removal of Parent Program* is to provide services and support for family reunification. Parents, NCN CFS, and all other NCN community services must share the responsibility of ensuring children are raised in healthier environments.

The Child and Family Services Case Manager is responsible to:

- Develop the case plan and treatment plan based on the recommendation of CFS and FE Supervisors
- Contact the parent(s) to inform them of the status of apprehension, to discuss the reunification process, to ensure necessary documentations are signed and to make referral for Parental Capacity Assessment. Once Parental Capacity Assessment is complete, the therapist will meet with the Case Manager to review the results of the assessment. An Accountability Case Management Service approach shall be used.
- Coordinate a *Circle of Care* planning process, which uses a shared decision-making model to identify service goals and treatment
- Coordinate *Circle of Care* meetings that should include at minimum: a) initial meeting as soon as possible after intake; b) one progress review meeting; c) a discharge meeting, and d) a follow-up meeting.
- Make necessary referrals to service providers within and outside of the community
- Work closely with the Foster Care worker to ensure an in-home-support system such as respite services, parent aides, and/or parent coaches are in place
- Monitor children on a regular basis.

3.

Circle of Care and Rediscovery of Families

An Integrated Approach to Family Care

Once the parent is enrolled and agrees to further their involvement in the program, the appropriate *Circle of Care* and *Rediscovery of Families* (RDF) on-the-land Program may be used as part of the sharing and decision-making model.

Circle of Care

The NCN Family and Community Wellness Centre uses an integrated approach to family care. The *Circle of Care* is a service-planning model designed to:

- Provide children, youth, families, elders and their communities multi-service support in an enriching and inclusive environment
- Build on the collaborative strengths, which already exist in the Centre and community, as well as other services and programs external to the centre

The *Circle of Care* is based on the principles of the holistic teachings of the Medicine Wheel and the disciplines of *Respect, Caring, Sharing* and *Honesty* via self-awareness and determination. It acts as a spiritual, mental, emotional and physical guide to help families find balance in their lives. The purpose of the *Circle of Care* Program is to help facilitate a process and offer support to families with a number of challenges and provide opportunities that will benefit from two or more services. It supports and encourages the active participation of extended family, elders and spiritual leaders.

By evaluating and identifying the individual needs and supports that the parent(s) and families require, the program offers a “hand-up” to families in times of crisis or difficult situations.

To find out more, please see the Circle of Care Planning Guidelines Manual available at the Centre.

Rediscovery of Families

Often recommended as part of the *Circle of Care* programming for parents and families is the opportunity for “on-the-land” rediscovery. The *Rediscovery of Families* Program, implemented in 2002, is designed to re-engage individuals or families with their traditional cultures and who they are as parents. It is held at traditional campsites near Nelson House with full-time support from counsellors, Keti'yatisak and treatment support providers.

At the core of The Family and Community Wellness Centre is the belief in families and a “family first” philosophy. We believe that it is the strength of families that has sustained our community through difficult times.

This direction in partnership with the guidance, knowledge and teachings of our Keti'yatisak provided the development and delivery of the *Rediscovery of Families* program.

For the past 13 years, the NCN Trust has provided funding for this cultural and community-based project. Thank you very much trust office-CAP/SIP for your continued support to this project.

This RDF program is designed to provide families with the opportunity to learn new skills, to learn about each other and recognize and celebrate strengths. The RDF Program evolved out of discussions with Ketiyatisak and community members who saw the need to build on the strengths of families using our values and our traditions. It was this recognition, that there is something good in how we live and the teachings that we hold, that guided and continue to guide how this program is delivered.

Taking part in the RDF self-awareness program is one of the main criteria to reunite the family and “to get children back” parent(s) must:

- Actively adhere to recommendations outlined in the *Circle of Care* program
- Commit to the process
- Demonstrate change and the will to change

■ Demonstrate positive improvement. During the several-week program – based on the parent’s progress – the children are included in the latter parts of the sessions. Together, the family is introduced to traditional practices and living on the land while being supported by counsellors and guidance of our Ketiyatisak.

Traditional and cultural activities include:

- Ceremonies
- Cultural teachings and aspects of “living on the land”
- Gathering traditional medicines (plants, roots and berries)
- Fishing and hunting
- Techniques for working as a family, without the distractions of everyday life.

Although a number of the original Ketiyatisak, who represented and designed this program have since passed, their spirits and teachings live on and their legacy lives on in the RDF Project. Special recognition is given to Joshua Flett, the last surviving member of the original Ketiyatisak group, who tirelessly shared his knowledge to the many participants who have benefitted from this project. On behalf of the Family and Community Wellness Centre, we say, “Thank You.”

4. Reunification Process

Reaching the Goal to Reunite the Family

We believe that children belong with their parents and it is our community's responsibility to do all that can be done to reunite families and ensure our children are raised in healthier environments.

As a condition of reunification, the parent(s) must be actively engaged in the following process:

- Parent(s) must meet with their assigned case manager to review and consent to the *Family Reunification Plan*.
- Parent(s) must participate in the *Circle of Care* process. The parent(s) may request that family members participate in this process as part of their support team.
- In cases where an addiction problem is an issue, the parent(s) must undergo an addictions assessment with a NADAP worker and complete any required treatment/aftercare programs.
- The entire family shall attend *Rediscovery of Families* Culture Camp to work on Mithwayawin (wellness). The purpose of camp is to provide staff with the opportunity to evaluate parent/child interactions. Wellness activities may include; communication skills, problem-solving, identifying individual and

family needs and developing a wellness plan. The modality of treatment will include Sharing Circles, cultural activities to support family unity, individual and couple's counselling.

- Parent(s) must attend all services and programs as recommended in the *Family Reunification Plan* that may include but are not limited to:
 - Parenting education program
 - Individual, marriage and family therapy
 - Anger-management workshops
 - Domestic violence program
 - Self-development workshops (Raising self-esteem, communication skills, self-care, etc.)

This process has worked for families who choose and believe that there is a better way for their family system to function. It is a process that can reduce the child apprehension rate. When the parent(s) work with NCN CFS, and other services offered to them, the outcomes are positive and families are reunited sooner.

Note: At any point during the reunification process parents may be allowed to return to their home on a conditional basis. They must demonstrate a commitment to creating a healthy and safe family environment.

5. Aftercare and Follow-up

Ongoing Care and Support for a Better Community

Care and support are always ongoing and we recognize the importance of keeping families involved and active in community-driven programs. For this reason, we provide ongoing follow-up meetings, supports to families and aftercare to ensure the child and family have an opportunity to lead healthy and happy lives.

As it was for our grandfathers and grandmothers, the vision we must always carry in child welfare is to look seven generations beyond our own children to ensure that our future generations understand and live the way of Mithôpîmâtîsîwin.

“In unity we promote community awareness,
empowerment and a safe environment as we
move toward holistic wellness.”



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