



Parent Tips

The following suggestions were made by Aboriginal parents.

- Come to the school — the school belongs to your child.
- Visit your child's school anytime throughout the school year. At the beginning of the school year, ask your child's teacher if there are any procedures about visiting the classroom.
- Let your voice be heard by the teacher and, if need be, by the administration. If you have a concern, continue to speak up as it is the only way positive changes will happen.
- Ask to sit in on classes to see what is happening.
- Talk with other parents who have children in special education programs.
- Look for local parent support groups and find out about other resources.
- Make an appointment with the teacher, if possible, so the teacher will be free to see you, to discuss any specific concerns.
- Tell the teacher to feel free to phone or write if you are unable to meet.
- Tell the teacher how you may be contacted if you don't have a phone.
- Get to know the teacher by name and make sure he or she knows how to contact you.
- Read the school newsletters as they often contain valuable information that concerns your child.
- Become familiar with the school's policies and procedures about attendance, discipline and suspensions.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Go to all parent-teacher conferences.
- Keep all school information in one place so it is handy for meetings at the school or when seeing others in the community about your child.
- Ask that the teacher, principal, liaison worker or school counsellor meet with you in your home if you would feel more comfortable about meeting there.
- Volunteer to teach a craft or special skill from your culture.



Parent Tips

Individualized Program Plans (IPP)

The school will make sure that an IPP is made for each student who has been identified as having special needs. An IPP is a plan of action. The IPP shows what your children know and what they can do. The IPP also explains what your children will be learning and how they will be learning. The IPP lists the learning goals for your children's programs. Parents, teachers, school administrators and others involved with the student work together in preparing the IPP. Often the student is involved as well.


The following tips may help you get ready for an IPP meeting.

Before the Meeting:

- find out what will be discussed and who will be at the meeting
- if you want, have an advocate parent, teacher or liaison worker to help and support you at the meeting
- write down concerns before the meeting and go over them with your support person
- write down your goals for the IPP and what you expect from your child and from the school
- if you want, invite family members that will be a support for you.

At the Meeting:

- your support person is there to assist you if you have any questions
- ask questions about the program — if anything is unclear to you, feel free to ask for more details
- ask how you can help your child at home with school goals.



A Handbook for Aboriginal Parents of Children with Special Needs



The Handbook is available from

Alberta Learning
Customer Service and Marketing
Learning Resources Distributing Centre
12360 – 142 Street N.W.
Edmonton, AB T5L 4X9
Telephone: (780) 427-5775 in Edmonton or
toll-free in Alberta by dialing 310-0000
Fax: (780) 422-9750






Introduction

This brochure contains information from *A Handbook for Aboriginal Parents of Children with Special Needs*. More information can be found in this handbook on the following topics:

- parent rights
- Alberta Learning requirements for special education
- roles and responsibilities for family members, school staff and the community
- tips for parents
- problem solving and dispute resolutions
- special education funding frameworks for both Alberta Learning, and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
- names of First Nations' support groups.

Special Education

All children are unique and learn differently. Special education is about providing extra support to help your children. In order to know how to help your children, the school may assess them to find out their strengths and areas of need. This information will help the school develop programs that are suitable for your children. An important part of making programs to suit your children is the individualized program plan (IPP). (See Parent Tips.)



What should you do if you think your child has a special need?


If you are concerned that your child may have special needs, talk to your child's teacher. The teacher has a number of ways to assess your child.

The teacher, after talking with you, may then decide that further assessment is required. Some schools have staff who are qualified in these assessment procedures. If qualified staff are not readily available at the school, your child will be referred to qualified persons outside the school. Each school jurisdiction has different assessment procedures and can provide you with information regarding the steps to be taken for assessment.

Philosophy

Within our Aboriginal communities, we are faced with many challenges, one of which is providing quality care to our children with special needs. Our Elders say, "long ago we did not treat our disabled children differently, they were special, special in a way that they were a gift. There was a reason why disabled children were put on the earth and they were included in all parts of the community. These children are a gift to show an appreciation of life. Disabled children are on loan to us and we must nurture and love them."

Our Elders say, "Nowadays some parents have lost their traditional parenting skills and values." They say, "Today's parents need to relearn parenting skills, whether they are traditional or modern. They must be learned then practised." They say, "Aboriginal parents must become actively involved with the education process, by working with the people who make the decisions about their children's education." The Elders say, "Including disabled children was always a part of First Nations' traditional philosophies."



With this in mind as we look toward the future of our children with disabilities, we must have a . . .



"Link to the past,
focus on the future
as we deal with
the present."

Rights

As a parent, you have rights that allow you to have a say in your child's special education program. These rights give you a chance to be involved in developing the program for your child.

- **You have a right** to be involved in the decisions affecting your child's education.
- **You have a right** to be told all about the school's programs.
- **You have a right** to be consulted before your child is placed in a special education program.
- **You have a right** to give or deny your permission, in writing, for any formal testing to be done on your child.
- **You have a right** to be an informed member of your child's education team. Team members may include parents, school staff, consultants and sometimes the student.
- **You have a right** to get information on your child from teachers, principals and the local school board.
- **You have a right** to ask for reports on your child's progress during the school year.
- **You have a right** to look at all the information in your child's school files.
- **You have a right** to appeal (talk to higher authorities) if you do not agree with decisions on where your child is placed.