

Alberta Home Visitation  
Network Association

Vol. 14 Issue 1

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## Be part of the family

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Message from the Provincial Director

# Conversation and Culture

By Lavonne Roloff

This issue of Connections is focused on working with Indigenous families. A number of individuals have shared their experiences about working with these families. They come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Some of the authors are participants in programs while others are staff working in agencies. In all cases they share their experiences and offer an opportunity for us to learn and listen and consider the wisdom in their words.

*The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* document has identified ninety-four items. There is a strong focus on educating and understanding the Indigenous culture across a number of sectors. We encourage you to increase your knowledge of Aboriginal culture especially if you are working with an Aboriginal family. It is important to start the conversation with an effort to find out what is of particular interest and value for this unique family. Because there isn't a cookie cutter approach that will apply to all Aboriginal families, it is important to continue the dialogue to better serve the family and their needs.

One of the ways that AHVNA contributes to supporting its members is through the Aboriginal working group and its projects. The working group provides the network with up-to-date information about working with Aboriginal families. This past year, the AHVNA Board and the network have discussed how we might revive the working group. One of the tasks is to update the toolkit on the

AHVNA website and increase its content. If you have a resource, article or information that would be useful for a practitioner when working with an Indigenous family, please forward this to [info@ahvna.org](mailto:info@ahvna.org) and we will post it on the website [www.ahvna.org](http://www.ahvna.org).

At the upcoming AHVNA network meeting, we plan to facilitate a blanket exercise as another way to continue the conversation. We encourage you to take the time to learn more about the richness of the Indigenous culture in our province. This can be as simple as participating in a blanket exercise, reading a current article, learning a craft such as beading, asking an Indigenous person to tell you more or to participate in a local community event. Take the opportunity to step out and learn more. ■

*Lavonne Roloff is the provincial director of the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association (AHVNA).*

# Aboriginal Home Visitation Practices

By Maureen Callihoo Ligtoet

Upon intake as a home visitor, I have always asked my families if they are Indigenous. I explain that I ask this question because I want to ensure that I am delivering a program that is unique to their culture and their parenting beliefs and practices.

It is important to understand the following when working with some Indigenous families and communities.



## Build a good foundation, one that is sturdy and flexible

- Get back to basics: use appropriate terminology
- Be familiar with colonization, history treaties, Indian Act, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) ([www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca))
- Understand Aboriginal people of yesterday, today and tomorrow
- Understand that harm may have been done to the mind, spirit, heart and body
- Understand individuals, family and their community
- Don't lump Indigenous clients with newcomers; remember FNMI (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) people are the original people of this land and are unique.
- Remember - not they, not us, but "we."
- Use the blanket exercise (BE); it is a great tool. Each BE is unique to each type of audience. I would recommend home visitors do one with their own peer group. (Once is not enough.)

## Build trust, but don't use the 'T' word.

- Honour the healing process. Time will aid in healing.
- Understand why 'trust' is an uncomfortable word.
- Choose your representative wisely.
- Put TRC recommendations into action.
- Include gestures of good faith (e.g. St. Albert built a healing garden to honour the past and future).
- Demonstrate that you have no hidden agenda.
- Say what you mean, mean what you say, but don't say it mean.
- Learn how to be a good ally.

## Build relationships and trust the process

- Demonstrate that you have built a good foundation.
- Understand relationship building – paper vs tongue.
- Respect traditional ways of connecting. Learn protocols from Indigenous leaders or liaison workers.

- Build credibility. Know the FNMI people and communities of your area. Don't assume all are the same. Every group and or family may have different beliefs, customs and values.
- Ask. It's not bad manners to ask a new family to a program if they are Indigenous; just explain why you are asking.
- Ensure that no one feels "exposed" (after sharing deep emotional experiences, not having required supports for action).

## Deliver: "If you build it, they will come."

- Bridge gaps by having Aboriginal consultants, offices or programs available.
- Bridge gaps with liaison workers in hospitals, schools, human service agencies and care centres.
- Deliver programs that demonstrate "we."
- When those individuals living on reserves are ready, they will send the invitation.

Expect that you will encounter some challenges along the way. If you reflect on the above points, your own journey with your families will be smoother. If you are not sure what your Indigenous families want, then ask: "What are your expectations?" After all, they are the drivers; we are simply navigators on their journey. ■

*Maureen Callihoo Ligtoet is a Cree Mohawk from the Michel First Nation, and has lived her entire life in Treaty 6 Territory. Maureen's background is in Aboriginal Child and Family Services, and she has used that background in the field of addictions services and as a home visitor and family support program manager in the greater St. Albert area. Maureen also provides services as an Indigenous Doula to expectant families, and is a fierce advocate for parental autonomy during the birthing process. Maureen is very proud to bring nearly 20 years of experience learning from, and working with, Elders and residential school survivors to her work as a blanket exercise facilitator in the Greater Edmonton educational and spiritual community. Maureen lends her life experience as an Indigenous woman and educator to numerous First Nations, Metis and Inuit committees and organizations within Sturgeon and Parkland Counties, whose goals are to translate Reconciliation learnings into Reconciliation practices. Maureen considers her learning journey within the Indigenous community to be a great honour and a lifetime endeavour.*

\*The blanket exercise is "a teaching tool to share the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada." For more information on the blanket exercise, go to <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org>.





## Nurturing the Parenting Process

By Christina Perrott

“Joanna” is a single mother of five children who range in age from eight months to ten years. We started working together when her youngest child was just one month old.

It was through several piles of laundry, unused and soiled baby supplies on the floor, two of her five children underfoot and a variety of caged fish and reptiles scattered about, that I first met Joanna.

She was loud and audacious with a big laugh and easy sense of humour. I knew right away that we would get along. My years as a preschool teacher in a high-risk/early intervention setting had already taught me the importance of monitoring my own perceptions, triggers and judgments. But it was the “Joannas” of my new working world that were allowing me to completely push them aside in order to find the heart - the heart of the home and the heart of a mother who runs that home.

I couldn't seem to get to the heart of Joanna, though. She has a highly traumatic childhood history and she kept that trauma bagged up and close by in her own self-reflection as a mother. Like many mothers who have similarly experienced severe abuse and neglect in their childhood, Joanna's lens of the present was coloured by that past hurt. She simultaneously loved and ached with the same kind of intensity and passion. That came through in her pattern of parenting.

Like many of us on the front line, our instinct is to save and to repair. We see the holes and we are certain we know exactly what is required to fill them. We give the information. We relay the course content. We make the referrals. We get the paperwork done and apply the tools .

None of this alone seemed to be advancing our work together. It was shallow. I knew she could hear me, but I doubted that she could really listen. I needed a new way to engage. Joanna seemed to enjoy our visits; I lavished attention and compliments on the baby and toddler and could help with the one-off questions related to baby's sleeping, eating and the rainbow of stool colours. But substance was missing. I knew there was more I could be doing.

Coaching had already become a framework in our approach with families. However, I had resisted applying it with Joanna as I had experienced a strong, sometimes aggressive resistance around any exploratory conversations.

And so, we started small. I'd join her in folding the laundry and ask simple questions to stir up conversation. I rarely interjected my own ideas or perceptions. Letting Joanna talk, letting her own ideas flow freely from one thought to the next and asking clarifying questions along the way, seemed to reassure her. It also seemed to endorse her own

importance in the grand scope of her family. In time, and with gentle and thoughtful questioning, we began to talk more. Like, really talk.

As visits continued, I was able to integrate the other parts of my work as well. While delivering the Nurturing Parent program, we often ventured into small coaching conversations about parenting. During completion of an Ages and Stages questionnaire, Joanna would initiate discussion of her own development or the development of her other children and how it compared.

Coaching is now a constant underlay of our work together. The heart of the home and the heart of a mother who runs that home is easier for me to see now. I am confident that our gentle, reassuring, engaging, empowering conversations have allowed her to feel brave enough to put that heart on display. ■

*Christina Perrott is with Children's Cottage Society in Calgary.*

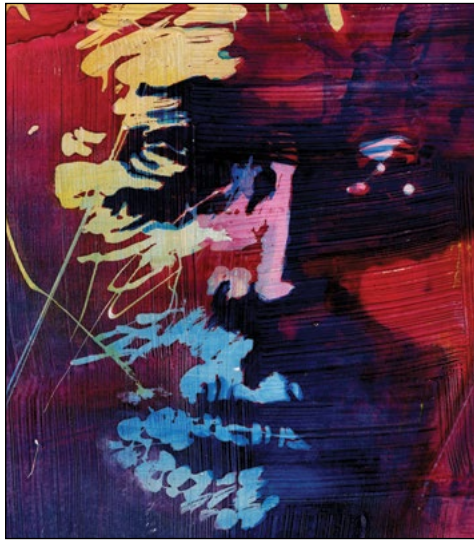
# Working with Aboriginal Families

By Lauren Reige

In working with Aboriginal families, my experience has taught me that the key to success is mirroring the language the clients use and knowing their personal beliefs and identification. In modern society, there is emphasis on 'politically correct' language and terminology. Should we say Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native or First Nations? If there is ever a reason to refer to a person as their ethnicity, one should reflect the terminology the person uses.

I have met people who do not like the term "Aboriginal" as 'ab' means not, therefore suggesting a person is not original. On the other hand, there are people who do not like the term "Indigenous" as they feel it is a term coined by white society to try and repair damages done. Just as we cannot assume that a person named Elizabeth would want to be called Beth, Betty or Liz, we cannot assume the term a person prefers to identify their ethnicity, even if the ethnicity is the same as our own.

We must ask ourselves: For what purpose would we need to refer to a person as a specific ethnicity? Often it is because someone is implying a stereotype that is commonly associated with that ethnicity. Although stereotypes can be true, they are not a baseline representation of all members of an ethnicity or culture. Even the idea that a certain culture is associated with an ethnicity is not always accurate. I have worked with many families who believe in Creator, smudge often and participate in medicine pickings and powwows. I have also met families who identify as Aboriginal but believe in Jesus/God and partake in Christian practices. Furthermore, there are families who may not practise or believe in any culture at all, yet still identify as Native. Just as there are many differences between families of Caucasian, Latino or African-



Canadian identity, there are differences between each Indigenous family.

A common assumption about people identifying as Aboriginal is that they have endured much hardship and trauma in their lives. In Canada, curriculum is taught in schools and homes regarding Canadian history and its impact on Aboriginal communities. We can strive to understand what people have endured and the resounding effects that historical events have had

on them. By listening to a person's story, it is possible to imagine and empathize about a hardship or trauma. But without first hand experience, truly understanding another person's experience is arguably impossible.

In working with Aboriginal people, it is important to keep in mind that no two people's experiences are the same. Although many people may have similar experiences, there are

others whose life occurrences have been completely different. It is important for front line workers to be aware of Canadian history but not assume that what we have been taught or previously told by other families applies to every family. The effective way to work with a family is to engage them in conversation about their beliefs, practices and self-identification.

The bottom line is that every individual comes with a unique story and identity. It is the responsibility of front line staff not to make assumptions, but be open to listening to a person's story and viewing them through that self-defined lens. This perspective is an excellent first step in successfully working with Aboriginal families. ■

*Lauren Reige, RSW, E4C Early Learning, Family Support Worker*



## What I Learned Changed Me

By Maria Goodnough

There was a time that all I could think of was disgust when I saw an Indigenous person drunk or passed out on the street or pushing a cart full of collected items and belongings. It puzzled me why these people couldn't just sober up and find a job so that they didn't have to panhandle or live on the streets. I never realized the complexities of the issues they were facing.

As a non-Indigenous person, I was not fully aware of the issues Indigenous people were facing except for what I saw, or heard and read in the media. I never fully understood the issues they were going through from pre-contact history to residential schools to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) or the social justice for which they continue to fight.

I have always wanted to learn more about these topics and the culture. So, in the summer of 2017, I registered for an online course through the University of Alberta. The course changed my views and perspective about Indigenous people and their culture. Before taking the course, I could only think of the negatives. I found my answers in the course.





# Terra Centre: Supporting Aboriginal Culture in Raising Healthy Children

By Nicole Van Kuppeveld

Terra Centre serves more than 1000 teen parents annually. Over 50% of our teen parents self-identify as Indigenous, so we work with Aboriginal families every day at Terra Centre. In March 2017, we committed to provide our staff members and volunteers with Indigenous knowledge and traditional teachings, cultural supports and ceremony so that they can more aptly serve participants who self-identify as Indigenous.

We want our Indigenous youth to better understand and access cultural supports for the trauma they may have experienced in their early years or inter-generationally. And, we want our staff and participants to better understand the importance of culture in raising healthy children through their participation in ceremony and ongoing formal and informal learning. We offer development opportunities at Terra Centre:

- Weekly smudges at Braemar school
- Seasonal sweats with various elders from various First Nations
- Agency Diversity Day on October 20, 2017, when all 65 staff and some volunteers participated in the Blanket Exercise and Metis and Cree teachings from Elder Elsie Paul
- Three full-day workshops on traditional child-rearing practices prior to European contact, with staff from Ubuntu and Terra Centre.

Opportunities to attend ceremony are powerful. Some of our staff shared their reflections following our Fall Sweat:

*Stepping back into the sweat lodge was absolutely breathtaking for me. It felt amazing to be sitting around all my co-workers and having my ancestors come to me in prayer, very powerful!*

*I felt like I could see the world through different eyes after the Sweat, and I'm so grateful for that experience!*

*After the Sweat, I felt passionate about learning even more about cultural practices I am not familiar with!*

I learned the following facts about Indigenous culture and history:

- Storytelling was passed down from generation to generation. These stories were told to teach life lessons and used for conflict resolution.
- Mothers were responsible for caring for the children while the men went to hunt.
- Mothers prepared animal hides to sell.
- Families had a very close relationship with each other.
- When someone asked "Where are you from," they were not asking what part of the world you came from but rather from what clan.
- Children were taken away from their families and placed in residential schools in the hope of erasing their culture.

I also learned about land claims, Treaty 6, MMIWG and the Oka crisis.

Upon completing the course, my views and perspectives changed forever. I am no longer hesitant to participate in any Indigenous activities. For example, I attended an Indigenous culture awareness and celebration in my neighborhood of Prince Charles in Edmonton on September 16, 2017. I watched how a teepee was set up; I talked to elder Francis Whiskeyjack; I talked to parents who were tending the bannock table and to children who were cooking bannock over a fire. It was a nice feeling.

Let's join forces and spread awareness to change our views one person at a time.

*Maria Goodnough, ECE, Childcare Consultant, Child Development Dayhomes, Edmonton*

We plan to expand our offerings of cultural supports individually and in group settings through the relationships we are starting to build with our Indigenous staff, our Elder, partners and other cultural resources in the community. We want to ensure this knowledge reaches participants across the Agency, specifically teen parents living in our supportive housing, families attending our weekly parenting program, participants in our leadership program and our teen dads.

Our goal is to fully integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into our organizational culture and practices for volunteers, staff and participants. Success will include participant-driven discussion topics and activities:

- Our recent drum making or ribbon skirt workshops
- Initiation of programs like our Birthing Circle for our pre-natal moms
- Specific types of ceremony and outings, such as hiking for medicinal and ceremonial plants (e.g. sweet grass)

We know that embedding knowledge into our practice and organizational culture, and building capacity will take time. We are committed to sustaining this initiative until this knowledge is integrated into Terra Centre's organizational culture and professional practices.

We do this through

- providing ongoing staff workshops
- supporting participation in ceremony and cultural teachings
- deepening relationships with our Indigenous and non-Indigenous community partners
- sharing resources, information and assets to sustain our cultural support services.
- developing tools to measure change

If you would like to discuss our approach, activities or tools, email

[nvanKuppeveld@terracentre.ca](mailto:nvanKuppeveld@terracentre.ca) or call her at (780) 428-3772 (ext. 239).

*Nicole Van Kuppeveld is the Strategic Projects and Supports person with the Terra Centre for Teen Parents in Edmonton*

# A Home Visitation Client: Success Story

By Anonymous Client

Dear Maureen,

My personal experience in the home visitation program is nothing short of amazing. Every need I have requested was met completely. As you know I had many questions and also requests regarding-breastfeeding, housing, funding for school, therapy, etc. to make me become the best person and especially mother that I could be!

I could say that 2017 was a horrible year for me because of the things I have been through, such as complications during pregnancy, becoming a single mother of two and turning to income support and housing support. Despite all of that and more, I choose not to refer to 2017 as my worst year because it was definitely a most needed learning experience. I believe the program has changed not only my life, but my children's life for the better. I have gained so much knowledge about being a better parent to my kids due to the helpful information I have received. I had always said on top of receiving basic and significant needs and knowledge, this program has been therapeutic as well. 2018 is going to be a bright, successful and positive year for me due to this program.

Having an Indigenous worker to connect with every week has made a great difference to me. Being an Indigenous woman myself, I felt I had someone to relate to my experiences. Being a descendant of those who were victims of residential schools and colonization is not always a positive experience in upbringing. There is a deeper connection and understanding of everything including family, abuse, culture and tradition.

As a parent, I would absolutely love to see an Aboriginal liaison in the schools and community. I graduated from Canmore Collegiate High School, due to the fact that they had an Aboriginal liaison. The Aboriginal worker was such a positive, caring, smart teacher. He gave not only me, but all the Aboriginal students a safe place to go to. He related to all of us on a deeper level than any other teacher in the school. He was a positive encourager, influencer and motivator to all Aboriginal and also non-Aboriginal students in the school. He put together events, school trips and banquets for the Indigenous students. One example would be an

Outward Bound trip for Aboriginal students to attend each year, to teach them the old ways of the native people. I experienced a five-day, four-night hiking trip through the mountains of Canmore. We climbed an 11,000 foot mountain. (It's been six years so that number could be way off. We hiked up a large mountain nonetheless). That trip gave me many life skills including survival, confidence and endurance. It made me appreciate life more.

To support the program funding, I wrote and presented a speech at many events he held because I truly believe that it had helped me and many others. This is just one of many examples I experienced in high school due to having an Aboriginal liaison. I believe every school should have one. There are so many children, teenagers and adults out there who I know personally who could benefit from having someone or some place to go to, to escape the everyday pain or experiences that come with being raised in a home as a descendant of residential school/colonization survivors.

I hope my feedback helps, and as I reflect on the home visitation program, I can't help but feel so humble and appreciative to you, Maureen, and also everyone involved with Health for Two and home visitation. This New Years, I had a bright and positive feeling about 2018, and it's all thanks to you!

Thank you from the bottom of my heart! If there is any more I can say or do, please let me know how I can help.

Yours truly,

This letter was written by a home visitation client to Maureen Ligtvoet, Family Support Manager at the St. Albert Family Resource Centre. ■

# Reconciliation and Indigenous Place in the Early Years

By Kristin Webster

My name is Kristin Webster, and I am a long time early childhood educator in Vancouver, B.C. I supervise a multi-age program called Salal for UBC Child Care Services. Since 2014, my colleague Lisa McArthur (Raven Daycare at UBCCCS) and I have felt it is important for our children to see the long standing presence of the First People of this place, rather than positioning ourselves as strangers.

Inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action and a massive open online course (<https://www.edx.org/course/reconciliation-through-indigenous-education>), I began implementing an curriculum with a focus on Indigenous place and social justice issues. It was important for me to not only decolonize myself, but also my early childhood practices. Increasingly evident to me was that the current colonial structure of our education system was not benefiting our most vulnerable populations. I believe that children are capable of understanding topics of deeper meaning. The process of listening to children and considering their theories is important. This supports deconstructing the colonial structures in education.

What started in 2014 is now an organic cultural piece of the curriculum program we deliver. What





began as my interest became the children's interest (they wanted to know what 'teacher Kristin' was learning). It is visible in our environment and our pedagogical narrations. Learning how to be responsible and empathetic to all living and non-living entities who share this world helps shape a future that will be the change we aspire to be.

As an educator, I found a good starting point for me is PLACE (here and now):

- where we are
- what needs to be remembered
- what needs to be recovered
- what needs to be conserved and maintained
- what needs to be transformed or changed
- what needs to be created

The provocations within the childcare environment are based largely on Indigenous place, global responsibility and reconciliation. The experiences focus on story, history and being in nature reflecting on the intersection of colonial impact and Indigenous stewardship of land.

Children see the world in which we live through a different lens - one that isn't restricted by the subjective outside influences such as our mainstream media. The staff team, children and I acknowledge the unceded territories on which the childcare location is situated. This is seen in our participation in circle times or rituals in the forest where we take a few moments to ground ourselves, be present and orally acknowledge the Coast Salish Peoples and thank them for always being the caretakers of this place. We learn their language, explore the art and history and engage in the culture that is 'native' to this place since time immemorial. The children understand that while Canada itself is 150 years old, Turtle Island has been home to the First People since long before a ship set sail looking for new land.

By looking at the world through an Indigenous perspective, we see that Mother Earth and all her creations are deserving of the same rights. My hope, as a settler ally, is that through this learning lens, the children will become responsible social and global advocates for vulnerable people and the environment. My wish is for them to use this foundation of empathy and compassion to build on their strengths in becoming future leaders. ■

*Kristin Webster, ECE/IT, is currently undertaking a BECEd at Capilano University. She is the senior supervisor at the Salal Multi-age childcare services at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, B.C. (<http://www.childcare.ubc.ca/>)*

## Tips for Working With Indigenous Clients

By Tammy Woroschuk

I have had the privilege of working with Indigenous families in the past as an early interventionist. In that role, I provided in-home visitation to families with children who were identified with a developmental need. Any time that a family allows you into their world, you need to treat that with respect and appreciation. Provide the same courtesies you would offer in any home.



Here are some tips that I have found successful in my practice in the home of Indigenous clients:

- Be respectful and be yourself.
- Use respectful humour.
- Take it slowly - you cannot expect the family to warm up to you right away; forming a relationship with the family is important.
- Call the family in advance of your visit to remind them you are coming.
- If you know you are stopping for coffee, be polite and see if you can bring anything for them.
- I will bring a toy or book that I can leave with the family.
- Dress respectfully
- Model and coach with the family (if that is why you are there).
- Praise any successes.
- Schedule a time to visit the family again.
- Be respectful of the culture of the home you are entering. It is not the responsibility of the client to inform you of this, it is your responsibility to learn before the visit.
- Be aware of the importance of children in the home.
- Be clear in your communication.
- Don't assume anything (e.g. that English is the first language).
- Use active listening to engage and move the conversation forward
- Be respectful of the family's schedule and end your visit on time.

Be respectful of professional and personal boundaries. Share only what you are comfortable sharing and respect what they are comfortable sharing.

If you have to take notes during your visit, be honest about why you are taking the notes and the purpose of the notes.

Socially locate yourself and be aware of the systems of oppression, power and privilege.

Some resources that may be valuable to read include: Fontaine, P., Craft, A. and The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). *A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. U of M Press Series.

Indigenous Awareness Canada

<https://indigenousawarenesscanada.com> ■

*Tammy Woroschuk shares her experiences from her previous role as an early interventionist.*

# connections

## Coming up

The next issue of Connections will focus on Diversity. If you would like to submit an article or resource for this topic, please contact the AHVNA office by June 30, 2018.

## Hearing from you

Connections is published two times per year by the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association. We welcome comments, questions and feedback on this newsletter. Please direct any comments to Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA provincial director, by phone at 780.429.4787 or by email to [info@ahvna.org](mailto:info@ahvna.org).

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Alberta Home Visitation Network Association

If you would like additional copies of the publication, check the AHVNA website at [www.ahvna.org](http://www.ahvna.org) under Resources/Publications/Newsletters/Vol. 14, Issue 1

# Reading to Your Baby Bump

By Michelle Neraasen

As a mother and a birth doula, I have observed how alert newborn babies are to voices they recognize – opening their eyes, turning their head and settling down all in response to familiar voices. I find this fascinating. As an unborn baby can't see or touch the outside world, hearing is a sense that helps this little person prepare for life after birth. Let us take a closer look at this.

The first sound an unborn baby hears is most likely comprised of the normal sounds inside a mother's body – heartbeat, stomach gurgles, blood whooshing, etc. As the unborn baby grows and develops, it starts to hear sounds from outside the womb. By the third trimester, an unborn baby is actively listening to the world around them. Mothers have the advantage of their voice resonating in their bodies and so it can be clearer. Fathers or partners, even siblings of the unborn baby, need not feel left out. When they are close to the unborn baby, talking or reading aloud, their voice too becomes familiar. The unborn baby is surrounded by amniotic fluid and wrapped in the layers of the mother's body. This means all noises from outside the mother's body will be muffled.

Knowing your baby can hear you in utero opens up a whole new world of opportunities to interact and bond even before birth. Singing, talking and reading are great ways to interact with your unborn baby and get them used to the sound of your and your partner's voices. These tiny people do not have to be able to understand language to develop a connection to you through your voice.

In fact, unborn babies learn how to recognize the patterns in their mother's native language, the language they hear most often and most clearly. From my experience as a mother, a simple nursery rhyme, song or story that is familiar can help calm and relax both you and your baby. If you choose to wait until after birth before you sing, chat and read to your baby, it won't hold them back. Everything

your baby needs to prepare for life outside the womb will filter through naturally, as you go about your daily life.

"The main message for new moms is that their babies are listening and learning and remembering during the last stages of pregnancy. Their brains do not wait for birth to start absorbing information," says study author Patricia K. Kuhl, PhD, the Bezos Family Foundation Endowed Chair in Early Childhood Learning and a professor of Speech and Hearing Sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

So take a moment, get comfortable and let the worries of the world melt away as you focus on nothing else but you, your baby, your partner and/or family and a book, rhyme or song. Do not be monotone, use voices for characters, use voice inflections, make it rich and spin a picture with words. Most of all enjoy. ■

*Michelle Neraasen is a mother of five and an independent birth doula in the Edmonton area. For more information, she can be reached at [michellethedoula@gmail.com](mailto:michellethedoula@gmail.com).*

## Storybook List

The following list comprises childrens' books and their authors based on Indigenous traditions and cultures:

- Alfred's First Day at School* - Darrell W. Pelletier
- Chuck in the City* - Jordan Wheeler
- Dreamcatcher* - Audrey Osofosky
- Foster Baby* - Rhian Brynjolson
- Jen and the Great One* - Peter Eyvindson
- My Mom is so Unusual* - Iris Loewen
- Nanabosho Dances* - Joe McLellan
- On Mother's Lap* - Ann Herbert Scott
- Snow Tunnel Sisters* - Leah Dorion
- The Spring Celebration* - Tina Umpherville
- Two Pairs of Shoes* - Esther Sanderson

This link lists books suitable for children in K to grade 4: <http://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/10-beautiful-indigenous-childrens-books-to-add-to-your-library>