



## Maintaining Indigenous Parenting in a Modern World

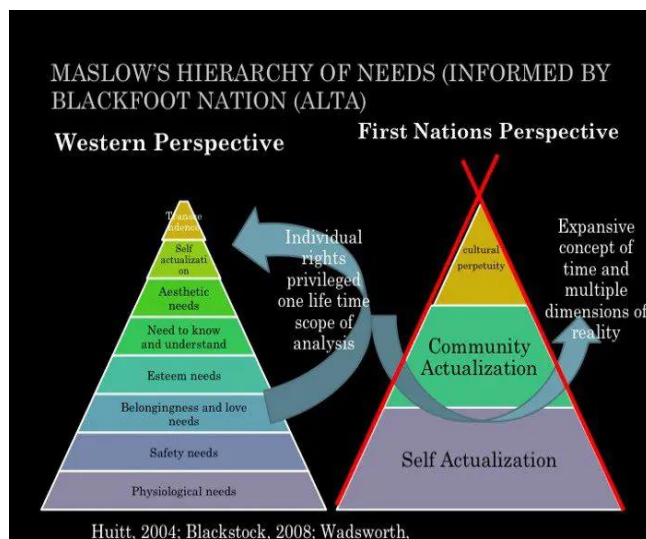
“To understand traditional parenting of children, one must firstly understand the Blackfoot ways of knowing and how the indigenous people used to live together as a community of their tribes, their land and animals within the universe” [1]. Elders from the Blackfoot community have emphasized that family cannot be defined within biological parents alone and that parenting roles include an extended family that transcends familial blood lines. Children learn their community to be their parenting system and cousin’s may be seen more as siblings [2,5].



“Interconnected domains for the developing child” [2]

Each child is considered a gift from the creator with each child having a meaning that is rooted in their spiritual domain and in line with their culture and people. A Blackfoot elder has stated, “if your children are raised with love, understanding, and patience, they will have that belonging and trust, and the consistency of home and love, bonding and belonging” [2].

Nurturing children is a process that is part of all members in the community. “Each child is meant to be the pathway to ongoing generations, so the community ensures their presence in culture”. It is critical that children develop in a community rooted in trust and grounded to their culture, land and family so they learn who they are and become strongly connected in their culture. As children develop their strength, they become equipped to tackle life’s challenges. Traditional parenting is also considered a means for developing healthy and loving relationships within the family, community, and clan [2].



Since Maslow’s first publication of his Theory of Motivation, he revisited this theory to include an additional level in his original hierarchy to include self-transcendence as the highest level sought by human motivation. Self-transcendence refers to a desire for self-fulfillment that would enable humans to become actualized in areas of their desire. For some, actualization might be an ideal mother, for others a great athlete, and it may be expressed in paintings or in inventions [3].

The Blackfoot people believe every child from the creator are already actualized to become their own as part of their community and culture. It is the parent’s responsibility to sense the child’s spirituality that will guide parents with their parenting responsibilities for each child [5]. Indigenous self-actualization is

considered to be innate, whereas Maslow's perception of a hierarchy illustrated it is to be earned or achieved [4].

The tribe ensures the safety and purpose for their community's responsibilities and can be viewed as "Community Actualization". The traditional ways of "maintaining their cultural practices, taking care of each tribe member, living in harmony with the land, and minimizing internal and external conflicts are passed through the generations maintaining cultural perpetuity" [4].

Traditionally, fathers were the head of the home, the providers, and responsible for activities related to hunting and fishing for food. Mothers would stay closer to home with the young children and maintain activities such as picking medicinal plants and berries and cooking for her family [6].



In general, indigenous mothers have been known to place greater autonomy and agency in their children, whereas the community engages in children's competency and mastery of skills. Mothers also provide an emphasis on retaining cultural and spiritual traditions. In areas of discipline, mothers were generally known to use less harsh measures for teaching their children and would rather provide lessons connected to behaviors that would benefit the child within the family and the community. Teaching children also involved an approach using participation in activities where children would learn alongside mothers as opposed to the Euro-centered approaches of using more speech for teaching children [2,5]. The Blackfoot people also did not engage in physical affection with children after the age of six or seven. As a community, they led their children's education and ways of knowing by leading through examples and role models [5].

The interruption of traditional family practices through colonization and the Indian Residential School has been noted to bring numerous dysfunctions and maladaptive behaviors in parenting in aboriginal families [5]. Children who attended residential schools were often raised with neglect and abuse and all children did not experience measures necessary for learning healthy parenting. The trauma from residential school is still reflected in our society as intergenerational trauma. Maladaptive behavior patterns with underlying health consequences have been perpetuated among families who have been unable to re-connect to their culture, land, and spirituality [5,7,8].



"Jagged worldviews" is a term put forth by Leroy Little Bear to highlight the fragmentary worldviews among aboriginal people as a colonial legacy. "People no longer had an aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview. In attempts to understand a modern life for indigenous people, their consciousness consists of overlapping, contentious, fragmented and competing for desires and values". There is no longer an aboriginal worldview for the indigenous people as it was known, rather, everyone tries to understand the various values posed within their societies and make adaptable decisions based on their collective knowledge and experiences. The tendency to revisit traditional practices intermingled with modern day practices can make choices about how to live out their lives difficult [9].



There have been success stories around the Indian Residential School system as some families were able to evade having their children attend residential schools. Blackfoot elders have brought forth how these families have resilience with maintaining their ways of knowing by having a foundation for safety, nurturance and cultural connections that will guide their people to reconnect to their heritage and ancestry. “When children come to know their place and identity in society it gives them self-

esteem to have identity and they have pride.” [2].

A revival of indigenous identity in modern times include important components of protective factors for families; factors such as residence, education and income can provide increasing resilience for indigenous families. Furthermore, having a focus on strengthening protective factors with aboriginal identity, people will have an ability to learn how to meet the challenges in their lives withing the larger society [10].

The indigenous family model provides the “optimal conditions for child-rearing is in a socially fulsome environment where children have access to a relatively large number of parental figures”. Indigenous parenting customs provide natural attachment and cultural attachment among their people that will contribute to healthy brain development and should be revived and maintained for modern day parenting that can begin to reverse some of the maladaptive effects from the Indian Residential School system [5].

Modern aboriginal Canadian mothers are still more likely than European Canadian mothers to provide child-centered goals for behavioral issues such as aggression. The goals promoted are to teach their children social guidelines and important life lessons that will benefit the child’s understanding. These traditions continue to be practiced by the plains Indians, such as the Blackfoot and Sioux tribes. Conversely, European mothers are known to continue emphasizing a stopping of the child’s behavior to attain an obedient and respectful child [11].



Indigenous fathers are considered the most affected from European-centered and are most often incarcerated. This has provided a “fissure in the sociocultural transmission of father roles across generations” [12].

Many fathers have not grown up with the “experiential learning, affection, and play that have been hallmarks of providing strong role-modeling for their families.” If boys become estranged from their fathers during their developing years, they can have challenges while learning parenting from only one parent; usually their mother. Fathers who become separated from their families often view parenting as a continuous struggle with their children, especially when having few opportunities [12].

Modern programs have been developed for fathers, such as the Aboriginal Head Start program. Modern fathers are reclaiming their roles in families; some by participating in “circles

of care” and “kinship care or shared care” as a healing journey to that will enable them to lay strong foundations of “Indigenous Fatherhood” [12].

Reclaiming and maintaining the traditional practices of parenting are necessary for providing a natural protective network for children, teaching them the ways of knowing through an extended family, and incorporating cultural attachment. Traditional practices continue to be considered “a main impetus to developmental learning” for future generations in indigenous communities while residing with European Canadian communities [5].



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For more information of the Blackfoot ways, visit:

Family Centre for father involvement: <https://www.famcentre.ca/the-blackfoot-framework>