

# **WORKING WITH MOHAWK FAMILIES**

**INFORMATION TO FACILITATE A BETTER  
WORKING RELATIONSHIP**

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# VIDEOS

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G04DuSJhBhw>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQwO2pDjwIA>

# OUR CULTURE AND HISTORY

## **Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy**

The original Five Nation Confederacy was made up of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca Nations. When the Tuscarora's were adopted into the Iroquois Confederacy around 1722 the Iroquois became known as the Six Nations Confederacy.

## **Mohawk Nation (Kahníakehaka)**

Mohawks are the “People of the Flint” within the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Mohawks are considered the easternmost Nation within the Iroquois/Six Nation Confederacy and as such are referred to as the Keepers of Eastern Door. Members of the Mohawk Nation include Kahnawake, Kanesatake, Akwesasne, Tyendinaga, Ganienkeh, Kanatsiohareke, the Kahníakehaka of Ohsweken, and Wahta.

## **Mohawk language**

Tyendinaga has a strong Mohawk language revitalization plan. Many efforts are underway on the Territory to ensure that the language remains strong for future generations. Some of these efforts include the Adult Mohawk Language Diploma offered by FNTI, Tsi Tyonnheht Onkwawenna (Language Circle) and its Language Nest day care centre and fully operational immersion school program, and Mohawk language instruction at Quinte Mohawk School.

## **Birthplace of the Peacemaker**

The Bay of Quinte (Tyendinaga) is also the birthplace of Tekanawita, the Peacemaker who brought the original Five Nations Iroquois Confederacy under a constitution of peace in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century (Great Law of Peace). Eagle Hill, located in Tyendinaga, is said to be where the Peacemaker was born.

## **Great Law of Peace**

The Great Law of Peace brought together the five nations-Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca-to end their years of warring and form the Iroquois Confederacy. The Great Law of Peace provides the guidelines for a political, social, and spiritual order for the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and its peoples.

When the countries of Canada and the United States were being formed and their governments created, the founding fathers found inspiration in the Great Law of Peace, drawing from the Iroquois system the concepts of representational government and of the division of governing bodies.

## **Tree of Peace**

To symbolize the Great Peace and the unity of the confederacy, the Peacemaker chose a white pine tree, one that was tall, with long branches that would cover the nations of the Confederacy, and with long roots that would reach out to other nations that would hear the laws of the Great Peace and want to follow them as well.

Under the tree all the weapons of war would be buried, never again to be used by the nations of the confederacy to do battle against each other. On top of the tree sat an eagle, which would act as a guardian to the Great Peace, watching for anything that might be a threat.

## **Two Row Wampum**

The Wampum Belt is the basis of agreements between Haudenosaunee nations and other nations of people. It is regarded as an important covenant that sets the framework for future agreements. The Wampum belt represents relationships between two nations based on the principles of peace, friendship and mutual respect.

Two row Wampum Belt was made with two parallel rows of Purple Wampum on a bed of white beads:

Between the two rows of Purple beads, are three rows of white beads. The white beads are meant to symbolize the purity of the agreement and some say that it represents the "River of Life". These were made to stand for the Friendship, Peace and Respect between the two nations. As much as the three rows keep the two nations separate, it also binds them together.

Some say that the two rows of purple beads represent two separate vessels (or peoples) traveling parallel to each other down the 'River of Life', side by side, incorporated in the agreement. Neither nation will try to steer the vessel of the other, or interfere or impede the travel of the other. Some say it also represents the spirits of Haudenosaunee and non-Haudenosaunee people, past, present and future.

*(Compliments of Akwesasne Official Homepage)*

## **Longhouse**

The Haudenosaunee are the "People of the Longhouse." The Longhouse is the political and spiritual institution of the Iroquois Confederacy. In the times before European contact and up until the 1800's, longhouses originally served as the living quarters of Iroquoian people.

The Peacemaker used the concept of the Longhouse as the symbol of the political and spiritual union of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Today, the Longhouse serves as a gathering place in communities for Haudenosaunee peoples who wish to participate in political, social, and spiritual traditional functions.

## **Mohawk Clan System**

The Peacemaker created a new clan system, with nine clans-Turtle, Bear, Wolf, Heron, Hawk, Snipe, Beaver, Deer and Eel-that would be found across the confederacy. In this way, the Peacemaker reasoned, members of the same clan would develop familial ties, regardless of which nation they were from.

Clans within the Mohawk nation are the Bear, Turtle and Wolf.

## **Lacrosse**

The modern game of lacrosse originated with Haudenosaunee. The original game was full of ritual and symbolism. Lacrosse was used to resolve conflicts, and prepare men for war. Legend has it that sometimes more than 100 players were involved in a game, on fields many miles in length and width, and could last for days. Today, lacrosse remains a favourite sport for the Mohawks.

# MOHAWK FAMILY SERVICES

Mohawk Family Services was developed and began its operation in 1989 and will celebrate 25 years of service in 2014.

The program was developed because of the need for the members of Tyendinaga to have access to culturally appropriate and sensitive services when working with outside child welfare systems and the provincial laws governing the authority of the outside systems. Its operation is supported by constitutional rights of Aboriginal peoples, as defined in the Child and Family Services Act and funded by the Ministry of Child and Youth Services.

The following services are offered as part of a comprehensive family support program:

- ❖ **EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION**- Mohawk Family Services is a prevention program involving early intervention and support for families in need. The goal is to reduce the need for protection services and to reduce the need for children to be placed outside their family home. Children and families who are in need of assistance and support with all aspects of family life can call for help. Preventative help is provided through a variety of ways, including:
  - ❖ One to one and family counselling
  - ❖ Family Group Conferencing
  - ❖ Training (parenting, behaviour management, Triple P)
  - ❖ Home visits
  - ❖ Advocacy and referral on behalf of the clients' needs
  - ❖ Capacity building
  - ❖ Community events for families to attend i.e. Charity Family Bingo
  - ❖ Yearly events for children i.e.. Camp Medeba, Youth Awards, Children's Shopping Day
  - ❖ Support and referrals for families who require help attaining membership status

❖ **FUNCTIONS & ACTIVITIES**- Mohawk Family Services is funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and is staffed by 5 full-time frontline community workers, 1 full-time intake and family resource worker, 1 full-time team administrative assistant, and 1 full-time program manager. Our staff also provides assistance for children and families who are not involved in the Child Welfare system, by:

- ❖ Offering one to one and family counseling
- ❖ Grief Recovery counselling
- ❖ Parenting support and support with difficult behaviour
- ❖ Support with educational issues
- ❖ Alternative Dispute Resolution Services
- ❖ Home visits
- ❖ Support at community events and in times of community need
- ❖ Providing referrals to other Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte programs
- ❖ Providing referrals to off Territory programs, depending on client need

❖ **PROTECTION & PLACEMENT-** Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and Mohawk Family Services have a Memorandum of Understanding with Highland Shores Children's Aid Society. The changes in the Child and Family Services Act recognizes the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte's right to support and intervene when their members are involved with the Child Welfare system. The goal is always to provide the most support with the least intrusion possible. Protection services are still required sometimes, and so, along with Highland Shores Children's Aid Society, Mohawk Family Services provides the following services:

- ❖ Court support for Child Welfare proceedings
- ❖ Attendance and family support in child protection investigations
- ❖ Offering alternative placement options for children of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte
- ❖ Customary Care and Foster Care
- ❖ Supportive supervision for supervised access visits
- ❖ Adoption
- ❖ Support navigating the Child Welfare system.
- ❖ Alternative Dispute Resolution

Mohawk Family Services could be available to help bridge the gap and provide a familiar face and sense of comfort to families that are involved in the family court system. Our services are confidential and voluntary. It may be helpful for some families to know who is working with their child and that their cultural and traditional rights and freedoms will be respected and promoted in the Court system.

# **WORKING WITH MOHAWK FAMILIES**

**When working with Mohawk families, it is important to remember that there is a long history of mistrust for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, and any agency that represents those governments. It can be difficult, sometimes, to form a trusting relationship with our families. If you require help in that phase, please ask for help from community services available to help. There are Aboriginal support services available to provide additional support to families.**

**Sometimes our families disclose that they did not feel that they were not being listened to, or respected. Gaining the trust of the family, through respect, will help the relationship develop. This may be common practice, but also may require more diligence when working with Aboriginals peoples who have a lengthy history with Provincial systems.**

**Remember not to pass judgement. Even though that isn't something that you may do, it may be something that they think you are doing. Insecurities about the history between First Nations and any outside agencies are alive and well in most First Nations. Be sensitive to the fact that they have reported feeling belittled or having less importance than the professionals that sit at their table, or across from them at Court proceedings.**

**Mohawk families want what all Canadians do, they want their children to be healthy, happy, and to become respectable adults who contribute to their community. They are looking for equality of rights, freedoms, and justice. They are looking to be seen as an equal, with similar importance in the life of their child and knowledge about their child, as any other professional involved with their child.**

**Mohawk families often present with support from many family members, which can make it difficult to navigate and draw out the priorities for the family, or to seemingly get them to commit to a plan. Including those who make them feel comfortable, is important.**

# **TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON MARRIAGE AND PARENTING**

**Traditionally, marriage in the Mohawk culture was forever. As a Haudenosaunee, you were only allowed to be married once in the longhouse, before the Creator. The expectation is that you would marry a member of another clan, not your own clan, and that the commitment to better each other's lives would include bearing children that the Creator blesses you with. Children were not viewed as something that we create and mold, but rather a gift that we are given the responsibility to teach and to be taught by. Children are loaned to us and belong to the earth. There is no ownership status, only responsibility to ensure that they respected and taught our traditional ways and responsibilities. Traditionally, children would be nurtured and fed by their mother and the other women of the same clan, but there was a difference between the boys and girls. All children were collective responsibilities and it was a communal effort to ensure their safety and protection. However, at the age of 7, there is a right of passage for boys that moves them from under the wing of the women, to learn the responsibilities of being men. At the age of 7, boys then learn the responsibilities of the men, by participating in the hunting, gathering, and ceremony conduction. Men are responsible for teaching the boys for the remainder of their lives. It is also their responsibility to teach the boys how to respect the women of the community. Girls continue to learn the responsibilities of women, throughout their lives. Traditionally, women have accepted roles and responsibilities, and so did men. The communities operated only as well as the members contributed to its' operation. Mohawk people lived in Longhouses, in tight quarters with no privacy. There was no need to have to hide what you are doing from your neighbour. The Community supported marriages and supported raising children together. There were no addictions, and any violation of respect against another person was disciplined harshly to prevent its' reoccurrence. The people were governed by sanctioned spiritual laws.**

# **TODAY'S VIEWS ON MARRIAGE AND PARENTING**

Today, we live in a very different society. While the traditional beliefs are alive and well, the contact with the Europeans has changed how our communities operate and how our children are raised. Today, after many generations of trauma, we have high rates of separation and divorce. We have many broken and blended families. We also have many children with different fathers and fathers and mothers who are not able to fulfill their responsibility of being a parent and role model for their children. However, this is where the strong community and family ties remain in tact from the traditional beliefs in our culture. Many children are cared for temporarily or permanently by Aunties, Uncles, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, neighbours, and other community members. Alive and well is the practice of informal customary care. It has never left our people, it has only been redefined by the Provincial system governing child welfare. There is no current stigma or judgement about separated or divorced families, as it is almost as prevalent, if not more prevalent than families who remain together. The issues of custody and access remain the same as any other separated family. There can be disagreement about who will raise the child, who has access or visitation, and child support payments. There are sometimes issues about substance dependency, low income, lack of appropriate housing and transportation issues. Some of the issues may be slightly exacerbated by the hardships that families face living as a minority in this Country. Gone are the days where the expectations of mothers is to be the primary caregiver for the children until age 7, while it is still in place in some families due to necessity, rather than expectation. Also gone is the need for men to hunt and gather to feed and care for their families, with sustenance so readily available to be purchased. Of special note is that the poverty levels are high, and so that makes food security even more difficult, added to that however, is the fact that the closest grocery stores are between 25 and 30 kilometers away. Packaged food is often bought from local gas stations and convenience stores because of transportation issues or an inability to drive 20 to 30 minutes away for fresh food. Some of our children do not attend school because of a lack of food to bring with them. But, let's not confuse poverty with neglect.

Transportation is an issue for a high number of families living on the Territory. With no access to public transportation, it can be difficult for them to find adequate transportation to attend appointments that are not medical in nature. This can sometimes be seen as a lack of follow through on the parents behalf, but the core issue is poverty and possibly other factors that contribute to barriers of service.

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Today children are still viewed as the keepers of the next generation. They are still viewed as on loan to us from the Creator and the earth, and they still have teachings to give to us. Children are sent to us to teach us what we need to learn or to heal. Parenting children in our traditional beliefs and ways in this current society is very difficult and it is easy to blend into the expectations of every other Canadian family. There are families still committed to providing the two necessary requirements for their children to have a balanced life and understand their belonging and identity. The expectation is to provide your children with roots and wings. Roots ground them to the earth that they have come from, never forgetting their reason for living and respecting all that helps them on their spirit journey. Wings give them the opportunity to break new ground, try new things, explore what the world has to offer, without the fear that their souls will ever be released from their original instructions given by the Creator before they came to this earth. This can be a difficult task for parents, especially parents who have suffered and been victim of, or the product of poverty, abuse, abandonment, and addiction and mental health issues. The legacy of the 60's scoop and the residential schools, and the introduction of commercialism still linger in today's family culture. It still affects how we parent our children and how we keep commitments to our partners and our extended families and community.

There are families who are able to provide a life that is balanced and full of opportunities for their children, when looking in from the outside. No family is perfect and no child will have everything they need in life. It's about making the best from what you have been blessed with and utilizing the resources that are available to you to provide a balance of want versus need.

# **PARENTING- TRADITIONAL AND SOCIETAL LAWS**

Traditionally, children were raised from early walking days to be contributing to the community and to work for the community and the Nation. The expectation was that they would be learning how to cook, clean, care for others, respect others, participate in ceremonies, meetings, and fulfill expectations based on their gender. Disciplining children was about respect for their person and their rights, and often involved communicating, role modeling, giving them the opportunity to understand and be taught the expectations and allowing them to make efforts, even if it means making mistakes. However, there were times when physical discipline was allowed and an expectation. There are teachings about using cold water and splashing it on the child's face when the child isn't listening to the instructions or is in a tantrum state. This shock to their system helps stop the behaviour so they can hear the instructions and choices that are being given to them. Another, more drastic discipline technique was for a child who needed to learn a lesson and be accountable for their wrongful actions to go into the bush and pick a red willow branch and return to their caregiver with the branch. The caregiver would explain why the red willow is being used and for what purpose. The child may be able to correct the behaviour and understand the expectations without the branch being used against them. The branch would be hung over the door as a reminder to the child that the behaviour must not happen again. However, sometimes the branch was used to physically discipline the child, not to hurt the child, but to make the child aware of consequences that his or her behaviour carries.

Societal laws against child abuse and the Provincial legislation that gives the authority of the protection of children to the Children's Aid Society have changed over the course of a few generations. A few generations ago, children had less rights than adults and were less respected in society. Today, children have been afforded rights that they have not always had and children hold a special and respected importance in the lives of the Canadian Public. The power has shifted. Children now, more than ever, have power over their own wellbeing and lives and can use that to their advantage, making it difficult for parents to be able to protect and teach their own children. Children also have the ability to assert their power over their peers, leaving professionals sometimes helpless to protect other children from children.

As society has changed and evolved there are pieces of traditional beliefs and customs that have gotten lost or are harder to enforce. We are desperately seeking the ability to teach and govern our children according to our traditional beliefs and ways, but the influence of Canadian culture and societal norms and expectations are making it almost impossible to bring our children back to a place of being grounded in our beliefs. We are competing for their attention with the development of technology and the influence of the generic Canadian culture and laws of the Canadian society.

# WORKING WITH MOHAWK CHILDREN

- ❖ **Build the trust.** Trust is paramount in the relationship you have with both the child and the parents or any other significant people in the child's life.
- ❖ **Remember that a lack of trust is not always directly related to what you have or have not done.** Sometimes it is indicative of the government that you represent. Don't take it personally, if you have tried all that you can to build the trust in your relationship with the family.
- ❖ **Learn from your experiences.** Reassess what you could do differently, when reviewing your involvement in a case. Seek guidance from another service organization, including an Aboriginal service organization, if possible, when working with an Aboriginal family.
- ❖ **Ask for and accept feedback from the families you have worked with.**
- ❖ **Listen to all the family has to say.** References like "I have seen this a million times before..." make what they are going through less personal for them. Minimizing their experiences or information indicates that you are not interested in their story. Mohawk families believe that children have just as much to teach us as we have to teach them.
- ❖ **Respect the child and the family.** No matter what the family has been through, the children love their parents. It is hard to understand sometimes and makes no logical sense in a society where there are unlimited options and choice, there is a loyalty to each other that cannot always be easily described.
- ❖ **Culture ties children to their family and to their community.** There is usually a sense of community that cannot be described. There is a level of comfort that may not be described in words and it is important to understand that the pull towards that gravitational force is a factor in the plan for representation.
- ❖ **Be aware of judgement.** Judgement takes place even when one has the best of intentions. You may see families struggling with poverty, who have incomplete construction of their houses, cluttered yards, tattered furniture, or other standards of living unlike what you have encountered before. It does not mean that they do not love their children, or that their ability to parent is less than that of someone else who has more economic means. The Children's Aid Society has the responsibility to help ensure the wellbeing and protection of children. Sometimes there is negotiation regarding the law as it pertains to child abuse and neglect, and cultural differences. Poverty does not equate to neglect.

# **REMINDERS FOR WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL FAMILIES**

**Remember to ask about First Nations affiliation, early on in the initial contact phase, and get the information you require about the Band registration. Get consent to speak with the representative of the Band, if required.**

**Make the effort to contact the Band and if necessary, make the effort again. Bands are not funded to provide any Band representative services, so there is likely no direct contact person other than the Chief. The Chief may direct you to a Band worker, if there is a family support worker on staff.**

**If you are involved with a case where the family is from the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte or identify themselves as from “Tyendinaga”, please contact Mohawk Family Services at 613-967-0122 and ask to speak to Lacey King, or by fax at 613-967-8990. We will try to assist with your case as best as we can. We can even get information for you about whether the family is registered or is entitled to be registered with the Band.**