



Parenting from Western and Indigenous Perspectives

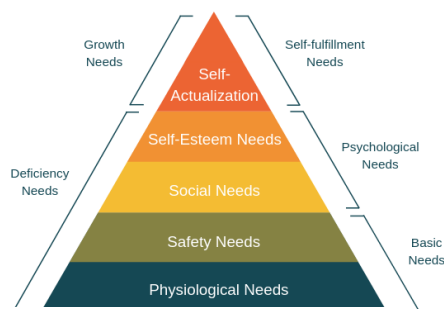
Parenting in our current perspectives hold that parents are responsible for providing the essentials of care for their children. Recommendations are generally provided by extended family members however, due to occasional cases of neglect, abuse and overindulgence, all parents have been recommended tips for guidance about raising healthy children. The National Academy of Sciences have proposed four main responsibilities that are critical to parenting children: “maintaining children’s health and safety, promoting children’s emotional well-being, instilling social skills, and preparing children intellectually” [1].



The current perspectives fall upon a number of previously recognized philosophies around child development and welfare. One in particular is Maslow’s Theory of Motivation, which is illustrated as a hierarchy of how humans meet their needs; from the most basic to more advanced that is in the form of a pyramid [2, 3].

The first level of needs is physiological, such as “providing food, shelter, warmth, rest and health that will maintain homeostasis in humans”. The second level is safety and the ability to provide security in one’s surroundings. The third level is of love and belonging in their communities/society. The fourth level is about attaining esteem needs of gaining respect and status. The fifth and last of Maslow’s initial theory was self-actualization needs of reaching an individual’s full potential. In this pyramid of levels, only the top level is considered a level of growth for an individual. The four lower levels of the pyramid were considered deficiencies, such that if one is living in a state of just meeting basic needs, they are deficient, or incapable of achieving self-actualization [2, 3].

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



From: Psych Mental Health Hub

Maslow’s theory held considerable respect among psychologists and sociologists at the time of this publication; however, his theories and others pertaining to research of social and psychological theories were held in Western and Euro-centered perceptions. Maslow and others have discussed theories about the Blackfoot people on the Blood reserve in Southern Alberta. His theory about meeting children’s needs on the reserve has since been considered a poor interpretation of the Blackfoot social realities and

their perceptions of their needs or self-actualization [4]. A number of theories have been posited with regard to traditional aboriginal parenting and how the aboriginal people

lacked meeting children's needs according to their perceptions. This approach to child welfare did not fully acknowledge the Canadian First Nations people's ways of knowing and family structure; although, it was still used to determine the parenting capabilities of aboriginal people leading to an over-representation of children in child welfare [4,5,6].

The Western social values have been considered organized as a hierarchy that is practiced in terms of becoming bigger, higher, newer, or faster in terms of structure and power [7]. These ideals have thus, created scales for people to adhere to in order to attain their preferred goals. Conversely, aboriginal cultures attempt to mould their children into ideal personalities that will enable their personal strengths, both physically and spiritually. Each child in turn, will contribute to the tribe's society to maintain traditional values and customs. "Children were educated and socialized through praise, reward, recognition and renewal ceremonies and were seldom punished. Poor behavior would be addressed with stern lectures about the wrongful behavior". All children were reared to understand and maintain the balance and harmony through cooperation within their society. Their teachings included to speak the truth, and to uphold strength, kindness, and honesty to maintain a good order among their people [7].

Recognizing and encouraging diversity among the aboriginal people was also practiced; thereby, minimizing deviations of acceptable behavior. Their values and customs were also their law, guiding all members in aboriginal societies to refrain from being ostracized or punished by their group. Good behavior produced rewards and given recognition among group members. Indigenous values promoted equality among its members through sharing, generosity, and importance in communities [7]. The disciplinary practices for children were usually done through aunts and uncles. Mothers were known to be less harsh with lessons by using reasoning and teachings that benefit their children [8].

Western societies have externalized groups that are used for social control, such as the police, whereas indigenous societies collectively agreed on what norms their societies would adhere to in order to maintain harmony among the tribes. The norms were a knowledge that was internalized and also served to minimize the diversity among acceptable behaviors. If an aboriginal person is a criminal, it is because they have not learned the internalized knowledge of social control of their tribe [7]. The Western and Euro-centered misunderstood assumptions of the indigenous cultures are considered to have changed the internalization of knowledge within families, communities, and their parenting ways in a devastating manner [4].

Another theory that has been applied to aboriginal peoples' parenting ability in Canada is John Bowlby's attachment theory [8]. Bowlby proposed that attachment is biologically based and instinctually guided from infants' needs of reliable and consistent care from their primary caregiver. Identified behaviors include "crying, clinging, following and smiling" that are exhibited to keep the caregiver in close range. Those who are reliable figures in the infants' attachment and



who responded quickly to distress calls would be viewed by infants as a trusted and responsive security. This is considered critical to lay a strong and healthy foundation for developing children and to trust in others their environment. Conversely, if a mother/caregiver was slow or unable to respond to their infant's needs, the infants would view aspects of their environment with mistrust and uncertainty [9]. Mothers also taught their children by showing as opposed to solely talking through instructions [8].

Parenting from an indigenous perspective is considered to be shared as their cultural beliefs and practices don't follow a Western construct of a sole mother/caregiver as being the only contributor to children's well-being [8,9]. The Western concept living in a "nuclear family" of mother, father, with children is not as recognized in aboriginal culture, rather they are known to engage in the extended family "to include clans, kin, elders, and leaders in their community. These members are all collectively responsible for caring, nurturing, and raising the children. The "effect of these diverse and overlapping bonds ensure an effective safety net is in place" [8,9]. The mothers' role in parenting children was to place great importance in their autonomy and agency that would foster their learning abilities to make good decisions and to become a valued member of their tribe [9].

Traditionally, the aboriginal perspectives of family extended beyond kinship as the people learn their 'personhood' and connection to the 'communal soul' of their people who are interdependently connected with the natural world. Their communal beliefs understand a worldview of which we are all related". The attachment theory proposed by Bowlby and others also is not considered appropriate to attach to indigenous cultures way of living and knowing [4].



Indigenous approaches to adoption are considered acts of generosity from one family to another. If one family cannot have children or had a child pass away, they were usually given a child(ren) as part of the tribes' collective community for caring for each other. This process could have been performed formally, or informally. The legal transference of adoption known in Western cultures are not recognized with indigenous practices [4].

If an indigenous child was born with disabilities, it was viewed that this person was not deficient, but could be part of their society in their own special way. Assumptions from research in Caucasian people have been made that child development and psychology theories are universally acceptable; thereby providing a standard profile for developing milestones for all groups. Children have always been part of a group who are connected and supported by an extended family and community members [10]. Prior to removing protocols of institutionalizing people with physical and intellectual disabilities, Western cultures practiced institutional care for children with various disabilities for hundreds of years.

For many years, indigenous people have been viewed as having deficiencies with parenting skills with their children, lack attachment to their children and how parenting traditions were deemed inferior in comparison to Western ideologies. This article by no means identified all of the differences between cultures and parenting practices. It does however highlight some of the true cultural ideologies behind approaches to Western and Indigenous practices of family life.

“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” [11].



References

1. A Parents Role. Retrieved online from: [Parenting | Psychology Today](#), March 2022.
2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - Overview, Explanation, and Examples. Retrieved online March 2022 from: [corporatefinanceinstitute.com](#).
3. Maslow, A.H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50: 370-36.
4. Lindstrom, G., Choate, P., Bastien, L., Weasel Traveller, A., Breaker, S., Breaker, C., Good Striker, W., and Good Striker, E. (2016). Nistawatsiman: Exploring First Nations parenting: A literature review and expert consultation with Blackfoot Elders. (pg. 11, 12). Calgary, AB: Mount Royal University.
5. Choate, P. & Lindstrom, G. (2018). Parenting Capacity Assessment as a Colonial Strategy. *Canadian Family Law Quarterly*, 37 (4): 40-60.
6. Blackstock, C. (2009). Why Addressing The Over-Representation Of First Nations Children In Care Requires New Theoretical Approaches Based On First Nations Ontology. [Abstract]. *The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 6 (3): 1-18.
7. Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged worldviews colliding. In M. Battiste (Ed.). *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision*. 77-85. Retrieved from: [Leroy Little Bear.Jagged Worldviews.pdf \(utoronto.ca\)](#).
8. Lindstrom, G. & Choate, P. (2016). Nistawatsiman: Rethinking assessment of aboriginal parents for child protection following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *First Peoples' Child and Family Review*, 11 (2): 45-59.
9. Neckoway, Brownlee & Castellan. (2007). Is attachment theory consistent with aboriginal parenting realities? *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 3 (2): 65-74.
10. Gerlach, A. (2008). "Circle of Caring": A first nations worldview of child rearing. *The Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 75 (1): 18-25.
11. Basteine, B. (2004). Blackfoot ways of knowing: the worldview of the Siksikaititapi. University of Calgary Press, Calgary, Alberta, 2004. <http://hdl.handle.net/1880/49840>