PARENTING & DISCIPLINE
As Aboriginal parents we encourage our children to learn values instilled in our culture. “Children are the centre of the community” is a phrase commonly used to explain how children fit into our way of life. It means we are responsible for guiding our children. We must make them feel valued and confident in their identity, ultimately enabling them to share their gifts with the family, community and society.

Traditional values can help guide your parenting. It may take time for a kid to understand and live these values, but they must be given opportunities to learn and grow away from challenging behaviour.
This does not, however, mean we accept children behaving in manners of which we disapprove. All children push boundaries to become independent. They are learning how to feel and react in every situation; we want them to deal with their circumstances in a healthy manner. Children have a number of experiences to sort out and may become overwhelmed. This is typically when they act out in ways that require some form of discipline.

Some parents believe mild forms of physical punishment are acceptable, but it is important to consider the laws concerning discipline in Section 43 of the Criminal Code.

Section 43 of the Criminal Code:
“Every Schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances.”

This means that parents, caregivers or teachers using reasonable force to control a child, or to keep the child or other children safe, may not be guilty of a criminal offence. Because reasonable force is unclear in the Criminal Code, the Supreme Court of Canada set guidelines to ensure discipline did not become abuse or violate human rights. The following chart describes the guidelines but also offers alternate methods of enforcing discipline.
Supreme Court Guidelines of Reasonable Punishment

The child must be between 2-12 years old.

Discipline cannot cause physical harm or injury; it must be minor in nature.

You cannot use objects to hit a child and you can’t ever hit a child’s head.

The child must be able to understand why they are being disciplined.

Even for severe behaviour physical punishment must be minor.

Being angry or having an abusive personality is no excuse to physically discipline your child.

Learn about discipline for each developmental stage. Go to the library, talk to Elders or family and friends or try a parenting class.

It is OK to forcefully remove a child from an unsafe situation. Mild coercion is also acceptable if it helps them focus and listen. A light spank is not recommended but not illegal as long as the spanking is not degrading or harmful.

Even if your parents used ‘willow branches’ to punish it is now against the law. This type of discipline is mistaken as traditional. Aboriginal traditions used lessons and cultural protocol to handle misguided behaviour. Consult an Elder.

Discuss the situation clearly with your child so they learn from the discipline. If your child has a disability research ways to deal with their behaviours in a manner they can understand. Talk to a doctor if needed.

Physical punishment isn’t needed to have a big impact. Ensuring your child is responsible for their behaviour and encouraging them to respect themselves and others can help a negative situation become a positive learning experience for a child.

Be calm. If you feel you cannot control your own actions or emotions wait to deal with the situation.

Children’s understanding of their own emotional, physical, mental and spiritual aspects is essential for their wellbeing.

Caution:
Slapping, punching, pinching, kicking, restraining or even touching are all examples of actions that may be considered assault. There is never a good reason to use these types of physical force.

When children practice cultural ways, they must consider themselves - their thoughts, emotions and actions - to figure out who they want to be.

1 Adapted from Constitutional Challenge – Supreme Court Guidelines for Interpreting S. 43 www.repeal43.org/constitution.html
IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

211 Edmonton and Area/Calgary and Area - services and programs referral
780-482-4636 Services & programs referral throughout Alberta, long distance charges may apply
310-1818 Family Violence Info Line
1-800-387-5437 Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-668-6868 Kids Help Phone

Please go to ncsa.ca or call 780-451-4002 for more information on Native Counselling Services of Alberta parenting and family programs.