

Keeping In Touch

Staying Connected, Growing Together • Winter 2025



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Welcome

The **Keeping in Touch** (KIT) resource was created to celebrate and support the creativity and dedication of all who participate in the quality education of young children. The resource strives to provide inspiration and knowledge to professionals in the Early Learning and Care Sector through informative articles and resources which promote inclusionary practices, cultural diversity and competence, programming ideas and community information. The KIT committee is comprised of professionals from various agencies within the Toronto Children's Services Every Child Belongs model. We welcome you to share this resource with your colleagues, friends, and family.



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The Benefits of Using a Timer

NICOLE CALLE, TAYA GRAY, ABIGALE MINKOVICH, HANA NASOORDIN, University of Guelph-Humber
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In an early learning environment, a timer can be used in many ways to help children and educators manage and organize time. A timer can help children understand the concept of passing time and assist children in developing time management skills.

During transitions, educators can set a timing expectation for a specific activity using a timer. This can aid with goal setting regarding time allocated for tasks, along with transitions and expectations with less educator support.

Using timers can be a great way to make routine tasks more engaging. Here are some strategies on how to incorporate them into daily activities:

- Make it a challenge by creating games to make the timer less daunting and more fun. Example: Challenge children to put away as many toys as possible before the timer runs out.

- Integrate timers into daily routines by setting different times for washing hands, getting dressed, packing backpacks, during transitions, etc.
- Use timers during games. Example: the puzzle challenge. School agers can get into groups, have puzzles to put together as a team, set the timer and the puzzle challenge begins. Let's see if the children can finish their puzzle before the timer runs out!

Using timers can be a great way to make routine tasks more engaging.

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The Early Learning Environment

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When using a timer in early learning environments, it is important to supervise children to prevent misuse. Keep the timer out of reach of children to prevent any accidental changes to the allocated time. It is also important to note that some timers may produce a loud sound that may be unpleasant to individuals with noise sensitivities.

A Time Timer® is a tool that uses a large display containing a coloured disk that shrinks as time elapses, visually representing the passage of time. Users can set the timer for any amount of time and children will see the time elapsing as the colour shrinks. When the time is up, an alarm will ring, providing both visual and audible signals.

Time Timer® apps are available for free and accessible on the Apple Store called Time Timer® App and on Google Play called Time Timer® Visual Productivity which can be downloaded on a variety of devices.

A Time Timer® is just one type of timer. Try these other timers as well: sand timer/hourglass, lava/liquid timer, cooking/digital timer, stopwatch, etc.

Learn more about Time Timers® from the resources below:

Using a Time Timer® in the Classroom:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDY70mCcjvY>

Free 5 Minute Digital Time Timer®:

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=FWeiKG1PsFY>

References

Grey, I., Healy, O., Leader, G., & Hayes, D. (2009). Using a Time Timer® to increase appropriate waiting behavior in a child with developmental disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 30(2)*, 359–366. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2008.07.001>

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Physiotherapy Through the Ages: 4–6 year olds

COLLEEN GREASLEY, Physiotherapist, [Kids Physio Group – Toronto](#)

Reaching school-age is an exciting time for children as they enter the classroom setting, potentially start a new extra-curricular, and build upon all of their previous skills to play and explore in more varied ways.

Have you ever watched children interact with their schoolmates or in other settings, and wondered whether they are actually keeping up with their peers? Have you noticed that some children complain their friends are faster than them, and are starting to be unwilling to participate in new activities? Every child is unique and may develop their gross motor milestones at different times, but it is still important to encourage continued physical development so that they can learn age-appropriate skills at their own pace. Achieving gross motor skills not only fosters overall physical health and self-confidence, but also sets children up to achieve the next set of more complex gross motor skills as they get older.

Typical gross motor milestones for 4–6-year-olds and how to encourage their development through play:

- **Stairs:** Going up and down the stairs one foot at a time, without a handrail or hand-held assistance
- **Jumping:** Two feet forward, 30 or more inches; off and onto steps/different heights, over obstacles; jumping and turning; may start to jump rope
- **Hopping:** on one foot 3-8 times in a row (more times as their age increases); for 5–6-year-olds, also able to quickly switch to their other foot and hop 5-8 times
- **Standing on one foot:** for several seconds – 5-10 seconds (age 4), over 10 seconds (age 5), and 30 seconds (age 6)
- **Balance:** Walk along a narrow beam/curb
- **Ball skills:** catching a ball cleanly with two hands; throwing a ball with twisting their torso
- **Kicking:** more controlled movement - clearing foot from the ground, starting to step forward, twist their torso, and use their arms

Between 4 – 6 years of age, children are typically independent on a set of stairs - by stepping with only one foot on each step, without the need of a handrail

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The Early Learning Environment

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or your hand to assist. One fun way to encourage alternating feet on stairs is using stickers on staircases to give them a visual cue to encourage this pattern.

Balancing on one foot is another activity that is important for children to achieve, in order to be stable and balance for more complex skills. As children at this age often love “challenges”, you can make this fun by timing how long they can stand on each foot and see if they can beat their own score or beat their educator/parents if you’re trying it with them. You can also encourage them to pick up toys with their toes and pretend to be a flamingo.

Jumping and hopping are other foundational skills for various sports and navigating uneven terrain. Fun ways to encourage these skills include creating an obstacle course with different objects using stools, cushions, boxes, etc. that allow children to jump off or onto, as well jumping over small obstacles such as a skipping rope or stuffed animals on the ground. You can also encourage hopping by creating a game of hopscotch.

Playing with a variety of types and sizes of sports balls is a great way to improve throwing, catching, and kicking skills. Make it fun by encouraging children to knock over a tower/target by throwing or kicking the ball or just playing classic back-and-forth games of catch and kicking the ball to one another.

Playgrounds, jungle gym centres, and the outdoors are also the perfect places to grow children’s confidence and physical skills. Between 4 – 6 years old, children are typically able to navigate most of the equipment at a playground, as well as move around various changes in terrain. Encourage children to try new things at the playground or explore outdoor features such as rocks and logs, always staying nearby while they are first learning. Going for hikes or running around while exploring will also help to build leg strength, endurance, and the ability to navigate different environments.

When to reach out to a Pediatric Physiotherapist (the “motor development” experts) After trying out some of these recommendations, if a child in your care has

not progressed in their skills within 6-8 weeks, and/or you notice any of the below, it may be time to consider reaching out to a Pediatric Physiotherapist.

Common reasons you may want to seek out help, include:

- **Walking variations like toe walking, in-toeing, or out-toeing.** Toe walking is when a child walks on their toes instead of their whole foot, in-toeing is when their toes point inward, and out-toeing is when their toes point outward. These variations of walking can cause more trips and falls and even poor walking endurance, as they’re using muscles for longer periods of time than needed.
- **Poor alignment in the legs**, such as knocked knees.
- **Gets “tired” easily** during the day or when performing activities for long periods. They also may tend to seek opportunities to sit or lean against surfaces to support them and sit with a rounded back. This may be a sign of core or leg weakness, and lack of endurance.
- **Poor persistence to gross motor tasks** (“gives up easily”) or strongly prefers sedentary activities. Some children shy away from situations or avoid participating if they struggle to keep up with other children.
- **Trouble with certain fine motor skills** – such as cutting or writing. Though often addressed with an Occupational Therapist, many fine motor skills are also impacted by our core and gross motor strength.
- **Performing gross motor skills on one side only.** Though children at this age will start to develop a dominant side (such as being right or left-handed), they are typically able to perform physical skills on both sides. This helps for skills requiring both hands/legs, as well as helps to prevent injuries as they grow older.

Early intervention can make a big difference in a child's gross motor skill development and allow them the ability to explore their environment in a fun and purposeful way.



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What does Every Child Belongs Indigenous-Focused Resource Consultation Service Look like? A Caregiver's Perspective

MARLEIGH PIRNASAR, M.Ed and CYC-P, Resource Educator, (Indigenous-Focused), City of Toronto

My name is Marleigh Pirnasar, and I am the Resource Educator (Indigenous-Focused Resource Consultation Service) for licensed childcare, Head Start, and EarlyON Child and Family Programs in the City of Toronto. I had the honour of interviewing Ally, a caregiver who is going through the journey of navigating her child's special gifts. Her child is currently attending an Indigenous-led childcare program in the east end of Toronto.

We have been on this journey together for almost a year supporting Ally's child and building community. Ally, like many families, who chose to receive Indigenous-Focused Resource Consultation support are my daily teachers. They help to bring out and shape the core values of this service.

This is her experience.

Marleigh: Hi Ally, Welcome! Please Introduce yourself:

Ally: My English name is Alicia (Ally), but my Indigenous name is Ishkode Kwe. I am a Georgian Bay Métis, and I am part of the Otter Clan. I self-identify and am part of the Toronto Urban Indigenous Community. I am a mother of two boys.

I consider myself a community leader and I am passionate about bridging the gap between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous worldviews by educating and raising awareness in cultural competency.

Thanks again for having me in this interview; I am honoured to have my voice heard.

Marleigh: How did you hear about Indigenous-Focused Resource Consultation Services?

Ally: I first heard about this service from a childcare centre when asking about Indigenous representation for my child and the whole family.

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Specialized Consultation

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Marleigh: What does this type of support mean to you?

Ally: It gives Indigenous Families representation. In the past, it was difficult to work with service providers as they did not understand my family's barriers and systematic conflicts, but what I find is this service is giving me a second chance for my voice to be valued. For myself, outside of the childcare setting, it has given me opportunities to build my cultural supports through engaging with other external organizations that provide additional resources for myself and my boys.

Marleigh: What were/are your expectations when you first agreed to begin Indigenous-Focused Resource Consultation Service?

Ally: When I first heard about this service, I thought it was brief and limited support; aimed for a one-off consultation and referral-based only. Well, it turned out to be for much longer. In my past experiences, I felt it was less holistic. This exceeded my expectations, as the service honours a holistic approach: involving myself, my child, other circles of support, and the childcare centre.

Marleigh: What is your overall experience with Indigenous-Focused Resource Consultation Service?

Ally: It has been informative and supportive. It is good at identifying needs outside the childcare setting for the whole family, as I mentioned, it is holistic. I really enjoy how it is providing a bridge between my family and non-Indigenous Practitioners/ Educators; the service ensures these practices are not harmful and provides opportunities of education in ways to support me and my family. It ensures non-Indigenous Professionals are aware of the needs, values, and teaching practices of my culture.

Marleigh: Why is it important to have Indigenous specific services and supports in Early Years programs?

Ally: Well, why not? It is part of Truth and Reconciliation and repairing the relationship the Eurocentric influences on Indigenous culture. It helps to remove stereotypes and prejudices in childcare as I have heard families not knowing that we exist. We hope it

strengthens the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous families. If non-Indigenous led centres show more visual representation and promote our culture at a young age, children have a better understanding of Indigenous children existing in these spaces.

It is important for childcare staff to receive training around the diverse worldviews that Indigenous Peoples/Communities possess; there is not a one size fits all approach when working with Indigenous Families and their communities. This shows early years programs are taking action to repair the relationship when we see staff participating in Diversity and Equity Inclusion (DEI)/ Culturally Safe Training. In turn, this influences policies that reflect Indigenous Families in all early year's programs.

Marleigh: Thank you, Chi-Miigwetch, Marsi Ally, for your time and insights. I believe you provided readers with an opportunity to reflect on Indigenous-Focused supports whilst encouraging Early Years programs to take more steps to incorporate Indigenous Culture into their programs and planning.

To learn more about Indigenous-Focused Resource Consultation Service from Every Child Belongs, contact: Marleigh Pirnasar at marleigh.pirnasar@toronto.ca

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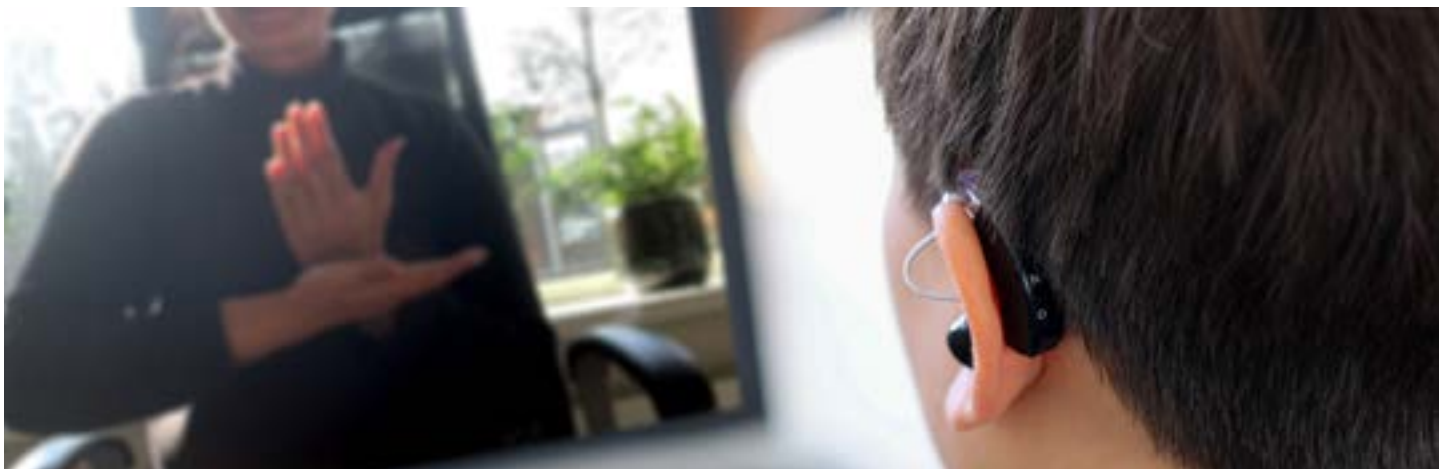


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Living with hearing loss. What educators and peers can do to help

JOSIE IANNAUDIO, RECE, ECAS, BASc, Resource Consultant, Humber Polytechnic

ANONYMOUS CHILD AUTHOR

My name is Alessandra. I am 10 years old and have moderate sensorineural hearing loss in my right ear and mild sensorineural hearing loss in my left ear. Sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL) is a type of hearing loss that occurs when the inner ear or the nerve pathways to the brain are damaged. This means I have difficulty hearing soft sounds, high-pitched sounds, and understanding speech. Some sounds are unclear when people are speaking, and sometimes I experience ringing or buzzing in my ears (I hate when that happens!).

Let me share some tips that teachers, educators, and peers can do at school and in the afterschool program that are helpful.

1. Come closer to me when you are trying to get my attention. Call me by name. I may not always hear you from across the room.
2. I am not as tall as you. Get down to my level so I can see your lips as they move partnered with your messages.
3. All the banging of toys and chairs make it harder for me to hear you clearly. Please wait until it is quieter to share messages with the whole group.
4. Talk slowly and clearly. Use a comfortable volume.
5. Arrange chairs in a circle. This allows me to interact well with other classmates.
6. Close the classroom door to block out noise from the hallway.
7. Cut an 'X' in tennis balls and place them on the feet of classroom chairs and table legs. This also helps with noise reduction.
8. As my teacher/educator, please make sure you know how to use the equipment I need in the classroom because the more knowledge you have of hearing loss the better you can be helpful to me.
9. Please remember, I want to be included in all activities just like my friends, see me for Alessandra and not my hearing loss.

“Hearing loss is not a barrier, it’s an opportunity to find new ways of communicating.”

- Hearing Aid Mom

Prioritizing Your Health in a Demanding Career

BRENDA WILSON, RECE.AS, Montessori, Resource Consultant, Terry Tan Child Centre

The Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) sector continues to place many demands on its educators. From child education and interaction guidance, to supporting families and meeting licensing requirements, some days it can all just be too much. Here are some ideas to take care of yourself.

Set boundaries

- Whenever possible, leave work at the door to your classroom. Setting boundaries helps to separate work and home life so you can truly rest and reset your body and mind.
- Review emails and calls during work hours. Keep your mind peaceful by making choices about how and when you are going to respond, whether it is personal or professional.
- Charge your phone outside of your bedroom so you can wake up before seeing and responding to social media and work-related messages.

Practice a positive culture at work

- Encourage co-workers to focus on their wellness as well. Have conversations that are not work related during your breaks.
- Practice yoga, meditation, or other mental health exercises during your breaks, lunches and during work meetings when possible.

Be aware and reframe your thinking

- When commuting to work, practice saying a daily affirmation to help you get into a positive mindset or practice daily gratitude check-ins.
- When dealing with something that makes you nervous, stressed, or anxious, work at separating facts from your thoughts/assumptions.
- Use these statements from *Declutter the Mind* to shift your perspective.

Find and do things you enjoy

- Spend time with your family, friends and pets.
- Listen to or read a book, make art, engage in your hobbies, put together a puzzle or complete a crossword.
- Bake, try a new recipe or cook a healthy meal.
- Take a walk, enjoy nature, join a dance class or sports team, take time to relax in the evenings and/or treat yourself to a bath, or dress up and take yourself out.
- Talk with a close friend regularly.



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Take care of yourself

- Check-in with yourself by asking, “What makes me happy/joyful/laugh? What makes me feel stressed out/sad/worried/anxious? What does my mind or body need?”
- Set up therapy or counseling—talking to a professional is quite different than talking to friends!
- Increase foods that contain magnesium (which helps to reduce anxiety and stress). Food high in magnesium.
- Use your sick time for mental health appointments—mental health is health!

As you support the well-being of the children you care for, prioritizing your good health puts you in the best place to do your job well. The only one truly taking care of you, is YOU! Advocate for your own mental and physical well-being and focus on your needs.

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Gingerbread Cookies

BRENDALEE SIMAS, RT, RECE, Child Care Consultant, CDI

This is my favourite gingerbread cookie. A recipe passed down from my grandmother to my father and then to me. Made with pure molasses and flavourful spices, this cookie is sure to warm not only your tastebuds, but also your heart and soul.

Prep Time: 4 hours

Cook Time: 10 minutes

Total Time: 4 hours, 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 3 and 1/2 cups (440g) all-purpose flour (spooned & leveled)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger (yes, 1 full tablespoon!)
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice (You can omit this and add ground nutmeg if you like)
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 10 tablespoons (142g) unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 3/4 cup (150g) packed light or dark brown sugar
- 2/3 cup (160ml; about 200g) un-sulphured or dark molasses
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Optional: easy cookie icing or royal icing

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Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, allspice, and cloves. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, using a handheld mixer or stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter for 1 minute on medium speed until completely smooth and creamy. Add the brown sugar and molasses and beat on medium high speed until combined and creamy. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl as needed. Next, beat in the egg and vanilla on high speed for 2 full minutes. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl as needed. The butter may separate; that's ok.
3. Add the flour mixture to the wet ingredients and beat on low speed until combined. The cookie dough will be quite thick and slightly sticky. Divide dough in half and place each onto a large piece of plastic wrap. Wrap each up tightly and pat down to create a disc shape. Chill discs for at least 3 hours and up to 3 days. Chilling is mandatory for this cookie dough.
4. Preheat oven to 350°F (177°C). Line 2-3 large baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats. Set aside.
5. Remove 1 disc of chilled cookie dough from the refrigerator. Generously flour a work surface, as well as your hands and the rolling pin. Roll out disc until 1/4-inch thick. Tips for rolling—the dough may crack and be crumbly as you roll. What's helpful is picking it up and rotating it as you go. Additionally, you can use your fingers to help meld the cracking edges back together. The first few rolls are always the hardest since the dough is so stiff, but re-rolling the scraps is much easier. Cut into shapes. Place shapes 1 inch apart on prepared baking sheets. Re-roll dough scraps until all the dough is shaped. Repeat with remaining disc of dough.
6. Bake cookies for about 9-10 minutes. If your cookie cutters are smaller than 4 inches, bake for about 8 minutes. If your cookie cutters are larger than 4 inches, bake for about 11 minutes. Keep in mind that the longer the cookies bake, the harder and crunchier they'll be. For soft gingerbread cookies, follow my suggested bake times.
7. Allow cookies to cool for 5 minutes on the cookie sheet. Transfer to cooling rack to cool completely. Once completely cool, decorate as desired.
8. Cookies stay fresh covered at room temperature for up to 1 week. Enjoy!



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Are You Watering the Flowers, or the Weeds?

ELAINE COOK, PhD, Manager Humanistic Education & Training

If there was one skill I could offer everyone, with the wave of a magic wand, it would be the consistent ability to ask generative questions, which enables generative dialogue and conversations, which enables the building of enduring personal resources. These are attributes and skills necessary for mental health and wellbeing, necessary for our engagement with the ups and downs of life, necessary for meaning and purpose. Enduring personal resources include attributes such as: coping, resilience, executive functioning, critical thinking, self-regulation, self-reflection, social engagement, problem solving, and others. The most important aspect of these skills is their enduring nature. As enduring, they are built into who we are and how we might respond in difficult and challenging situations, they help protect us from stress, they enhance learning and are directly correlated to our wellbeing. Yet, to build the enduring nature of these skills and attributes, we must be intentional, strategic and generative.

In conversations, in learning contexts, in our thought processes and in life, what we focus on grows. When we spend our time asking questions about the problem, we put our attention on the problem, we are watering the weeds. Where our attention goes, neurons fire. We inadvertently build neural pathways that reinforce problem thinking and the emotions that surround those problems. Good things cannot grow in a garden overgrown with weeds.

On the other hand, when we water the flowers (or other good garden plants), we are watering enduring personal resources. We direct our attention to what we want instead of the problem we currently believe we have. However, because the human brain loves problems and is predisposed to focus on the negative, redirecting our attention can be a challenge itself, which is why this is such an important skill. Without intention we default to the familiar, those problem pathways that are already deep, rich and thick. Our brains not only prefer the familiar, they take the path

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Professional Learning

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of least resistance and effort. Problems are easily processed, while generativity requires effort to build new neural pathways that enable the building of those enduring personal resources. Intention requires a commitment to persistence and consistency.

To be strategic, we need both principles and practices. We need principles that provide a framework for our practices so that there is a coherence between what we believe and value, and what we are actually doing. This value congruent behaviour enables us to use our expertise in ways that elicit, amplify and reinforce the strengths and resources of children, families, colleagues and staff. We can work from a place that firmly grounds us in acknowledgement and possibility. A place where possibility exists regardless of the problem and neither diminishes the other.

Our fundamental strategic approach is generative, meaning we hold positive assumptions and a stance of curiosity. Instead of telling we ask. We learn to ask questions that build enduring personal resources, questions that elicit new ways of thinking and being in the world, questions that open new perspectives and more positive emotions. Generative questions evoke internal motivation and subsequently, meaningful behavioural change.

Learning to water the flowers is essential to our wellbeing and mental health. It is as important for children, as it is for adults. To build our capacities to thrive in a culture where negative narratives abound in headlines, social media, and our day-to-day conversations, we must learn to be intentional, strategic and generative.



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5 Generative Question Types

Coping Questions

How did you manage to make that good decision despite the chaos in your life?

What helped you to make such a good decision?

Relationship Questions

What might your best friend say is one of your greatest strengths?

Who might you go to for support while you work on this?

Preferred Future Questions

When things are going a little bit better, what might be different for you?

By this time next year, when you are more settled, what might you be doing or exploring?

Outcome questions

Once you get through this, and are feeling more confident, what is one lesson you might have learned?

What else might help you reach your goal of?

Exception Questions

When you think back, to a similar issue you may have had in the past, what helped then?

Can you share one thing you are already doing, that helps, even just a little bit?

Professional Learning and Links

City Wide Training Calendar

(www.citywidetraining.ca)

Connectability

(www.connectability.ca)

About Kids Health

(www.aboutkidshealth.ca)

Zero to Three

(www.zerotothree.org)

On Track Best Start

(www.beststart.org/OnTrack_English)

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

(www.childcareontario.org)

Infant Mental Health Promotion

(<https://imhpromotion.ca>)

How Does Learning Happen?

(<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-does-learning-happen-ontarios-pedagogy-early-years>)

The Mehrit Institute-Self Reg

(<https://self-reg.ca>)



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KIT Resource Committee Partners

CDI

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(<https://www.childdevelop.ca>)

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George Brown College

Jennifer Cloke-Campbell, Resource Consultant

(<https://www.georgebrown.ca/>)

Humber Polytechnic

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Lumenus Community Services

Diana Burgess and Sheri Robb, Resource Consultants

(<https://lumenus.ca/>)

Macaulay Centres for Children

Liliana Pineda, Resource Consultant

(www.macaulaycentres.org)

Strides Toronto

Niki Yeung, Resource Consultant

(<https://stridestoronto.ca/>)

Terry Tan Child Centre

Brenda Wilson, Resource Consultant

(<https://www.terrytan.ca/>)

WoodGreen Community Services

Janet Scott, Resource Consultant

(<https://www.woodgreen.org/>)

“The beautiful thing about learning is nobody can take it away from you.”

—B.B King