

Language for Life:

Nourishing Indigenous Languages in the Home



FIRST PEOPLES'
CULTURAL COUNCIL

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Photos by Carla Lewis

Carla Lewis is from the Gitdumden clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. She is a photographer, anthropologist, and Indigenous knowledge and governance specialist. Carla is a strong advocate for Indigenous language and cultural revitalization in an effort to build strong individuals, families, and communities based on our traditions and relationship to the land. Carla and her family actively learn the Witsuwit'en language, songs, and history. For more information please visit her website at: www.yintah.com.

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The First Peoples' Cultural Council serves:

- 203 B.C. First Nations
- 34 languages and more than 90 dialects
- Indigenous arts and culture organizations
- Indigenous artists
- Indigenous education organizations

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For more information on our funding, please see our most recent annual report.



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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
What Do You Need to Know?	7
Creating a Family Language Plan.	12
Challenges and Solutions	14
Tips and Strategies	17
Conclusion	19
Activities	21
<i>Create a family tree</i>	22
<i>Claiming spaces or activities</i>	23
<i>Seasonal chart</i>	24
<i>UNO</i>	26
<i>Daily activities.</i>	28
<i>Celebrate your language growth</i>	31
<i>Family language plan</i>	32
Resources	35
About First Peoples' Cultural Council	39





Introduction



This handbook has been developed to support families in bringing their Indigenous language into the home.

The purpose of this handbook is to help families bring their Indigenous language into the home. In the past, children learned their Indigenous language when they were infants because their family members spoke to them in the language. This natural practice of passing on the language was taken away from Indigenous families but it can become normal again with hard work and dedication.

Speaking Indigenous languages in the home benefits families and children by creating strong ties to your identity and culture. It also supports efforts to reclaim, revitalize and maintain languages like the ones found in British Columbia (B.C.). Indigenous languages and cultures in B.C. are highly diverse which means that the number of fluent speakers and resources available

for each language varies. Therefore, each community and family will have different needs. The information in this handbook is meant as a starting point for all families wanting to speak their language more often.

Why is speaking your Indigenous language at home important?

Raising your children to speak their Indigenous language will help them develop a healthy identity. Not only will speaking your language at home build your family's connection to your culture and history, but research also shows that using Indigenous languages in the home is one of the most effective ways to revitalize a language¹.

Parents don't have to be fluent in the language to make a big difference in their children's learning. Use your language at home when you can and as much as you can. This will show your children, and your community, that your Indigenous language isn't just for the classroom. It can be a natural part of everyday life. Practice using your language outside of the home when you feel comfortable. Once you incorporate the language into more of your everyday life, the less dominant English will become.



Why Speak Your Language At Home?

Language is used for everyday situations.

- It requires learning and using Indigenous languages for real-life situations.
- The home is the main space for learning and speaking a language.

Language and culture are shared across generations.

- The language is spoken between adults (parents or caregivers) and children, which is also known as intergenerational language transmission.
- Language and culture are connected, and families draw strength from their culture.

Language builds strong Indigenous identities.

- Language supports a strong Indigenous identity for both children and adults.

Language fluency is increased among children (and adults).

- Children are more likely to be successful learning their Indigenous language in school if they also use it in the home and community.
- Children learn a language better when they are supported by parents and other family members.

Languages are used more regularly.

- Regularly speaking Indigenous languages in the home will help make using the language in other areas of life easier.

Language is healing.

- Speaking Indigenous languages in the home is a journey to reverse trauma from language loss.
- Speaking Indigenous languages at home gives children access to their language and culture.
- Speaking Indigenous languages supports individual and community well-being.



What Do You Need to Know?

Learning your Indigenous language and making it a part of your family's everyday life can be challenging, but you can do it! It is important to remember that not long ago everyone in your community spoke your Indigenous language.



This section of the guide will help you start your language learning journey in your home.

Be positive and have fun!

The best way for you to support your children's language learning is to use your language with them. Even if your children are learning your language at school, learning and using it at home will help their language grow. Try to make your family's language learning fun! Don't be afraid to make mistakes. If you stay positive, it will show your children that they can enjoy the learning process.

What if I don't speak the language?

Many parents and caregivers don't speak their Indigenous language because of the history of language oppression by colonization and the residential school system. If you are not fluent in your language, don't worry! You still play an important role in your children's language development, which is to be positive about learning and using your language.



Common Myths About Bilingualism^{2,3}

Being bilingual means being able to speak two languages, which is very common throughout the world. Many parents or caregivers worry that if their children learn their Indigenous language, their English will suffer, or they worry that their children's language development will be delayed. The dominance of English can impact the attitudes that individuals have towards learning and speaking their Indigenous languages. It is often thought that there is an “either-or” choice between speaking English and your language in terms of children growing up to be successful in the western world. However, there are many advantages to learning your Indigenous language.



Children who learn their Indigenous language develop a strong identity and connection to their culture. Children also learn that their language is valued in their community if they hear and speak it. Let's look at a few of these myths and discuss the facts.



Myth #1: Speaking only one language is better for children.

FACT: Speaking two or more languages is common throughout the world and is healthy and normal for children. Research suggests that speaking more than one language provides social and cognitive advantages.



Myth #2: Children become confused by knowing words in more than one language.

FACT: Bilinguals are often better at using new words in both languages.



Myth #3: Learning more than one language causes delays in language development.

FACT: Bilingual children are not delayed as compared to English-speaking abilities of children who only speak English.



Myth #4: Learning two languages at the same time confuses children, who then won't learn either language properly.

FACT: Mixing two languages is common and not a sign of confusion. When children use two languages in the same sentence, it is a sign of complex grammatical knowledge of both languages. Fully bilingual adults also mix languages in this way.

Intergenerational language transmission

The goal of language revitalization is for children to grow up as speakers of their Indigenous language. Learning and speaking your Indigenous language at home will make it possible for your children to carry on the language for future generations.

Adult second language learning

Many adults believe they can't be successful learning a second language. As an adult, you have an advantage when learning a second language. You can understand abstract concepts about the language and complex language rules, such as grammar. Research suggests that motivated adults will be highly successful when learning a new language⁴.

Tips to support your own language learning

- **Why do you love your language?** Think about what motivates you to learn your Indigenous language. Use that motivation to get started.
- **Learn the language as you need it.** Don't feel you have to learn everything at once. Memorizing lists of words is not going to help you in the long term. Learn the language you need and keep adding to what you already know.
- **Focus on useful, relevant language.** Use materials and activities that involve real-life, everyday experiences.
 - *For example, learn words and phrases that you need for getting your children ready in the morning. Be sure to include lots of action words (verbs), not just words for things.*
- **Connect certain words or phrases with habits or actions.** These connections will help you remember the words and phrases you need.
 - *For example, put a sticky note by your toothbrush with phrases and vocabulary related to brushing your teeth.*
- **Listen to the language.** Even if you don't understand much, listen to your Indigenous language whenever you can. Find opportunities to be around language speakers, listening to words and phrases on FirstVoices, or use any other audio or video resources available in your community.
 - *FirstVoices is an online Indigenous language archiving and teaching resource that allows Indigenous communities to document their language for future generations. Visit www.FirstVoices.com for more information.*



Language, culture, and identity

Indigenous languages are tightly woven with culture and identity. Language is more than just words and grammar; it is a community, and a way of life. Language is also connected to the land, ancestors, and spirituality. A language expresses a group's beliefs and worldviews, and when children learn a language, they also learn the worldviews of the speakers. When a language is not spoken, cultural knowledge may be lost.

Motivation

Your family's motivation for learning your Indigenous language will influence how much you speak your language together at home. It is normal to become frustrated or feel discouraged, but don't give up! Time and patience are an important part of the language learning process. Here are some key points to remember:

Make it fun

- Try not to let it feel like homework or a school project. Play with the language and have fun with it!

Self-motivation

- Self-motivation is important, because no one can make you learn your language. It is a choice to begin and a choice to continue to learn your language.

Use what you know

- Start with what you know and build from there. Don't be afraid if your pronunciation isn't perfect; it will not prevent your children from learning.

Use it or lose it!

- The more you speak the language, the more you will learn and remember.

Make it meaningful

- Learn language that is meaningful to you. Make your learning personal and integrate the language into your life.

Embrace mistakes

- Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Mistakes are a natural part of learning and actually help us learn better. Be proud of your language learning because it is important.



Creating a Family Language Plan

Make a plan for how you will use your language. A plan will help you take action and make it happen. Use these questions to get your family's language learning started. Write out your plan and post it somewhere you and your family will see every day, such as on your fridge.



Use your plan as a reminder to use your Indigenous language as much as possible. See page 32 for a template to create your plan.

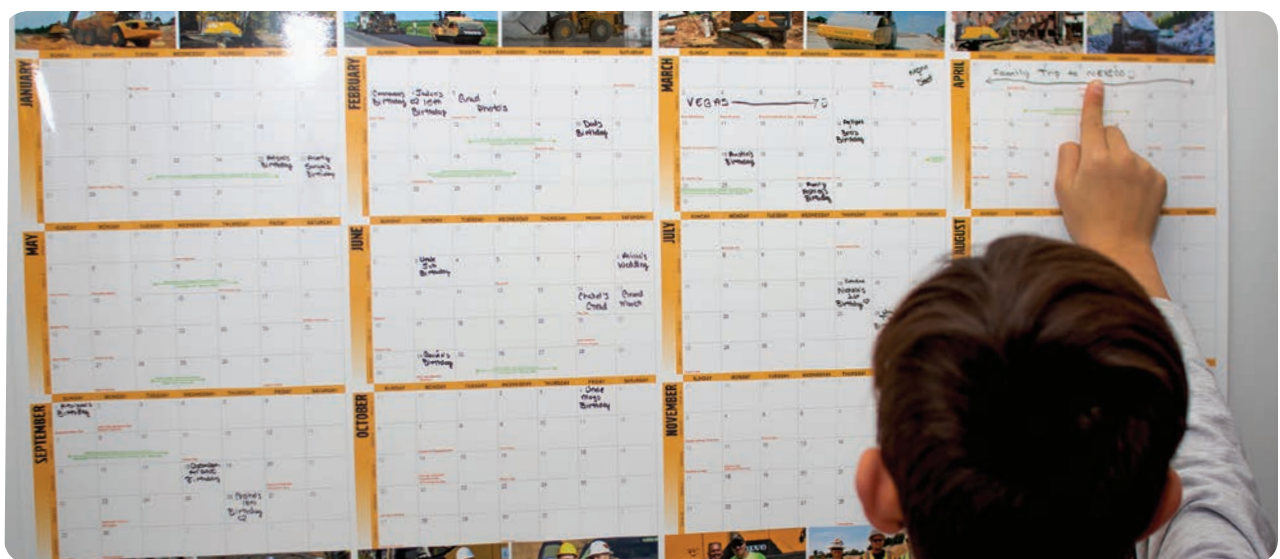
Components of a family language plan⁵

Who will speak the language in your home?

- Your plan might include one parent, two parents, a caregiver, grandparents, or the entire family.

When will you use the language at home?

- Choose specific times, such as during mealtimes, at bedtime, in the morning, or on weekends.
- Identify busy days or times during the week when focusing on your Indigenous language will be difficult.
- Identify days and times when there will be more opportunity to focus on your language, such as weekly night classes, planned family nights, or visits with speakers.



What resources are available to support using your language at home?

- Learn what resources are available in the community and how you can access them. List resources available to you and your family. Include people who can support your language goals, as well as materials such as books, videos, and audio recordings.
- Identify language learning opportunities in the community, such as adult language classes or community gatherings where the language is spoken.
- Create some resources yourself, such as games in the language and labels to put on items around the home.

What are your family goals for learning the language?

- Make your goals realistic. Don't put pressure on yourself and your family to become fluent overnight. Start small. Having many smaller goals and milestones is better than one big goal. For example, an achievable goal could be to learn all the language for one common routine like getting dressed. When you have mastered that, continue to use it and add in a new routine



Challenges and Solutions

Learning a new language is challenging, but don't let that stop you! Use the strategies below, or create your own, to keep your family's language learning moving forward.



Challenge #1: What if I'm not fluent? How can I help my children?

Lack of fluency is often the biggest challenge for parents or caregivers with children in language immersion programs. Parents and caregivers often lack confidence in their own language abilities and fear that not being fluent in the language will delay their children's language development.

Solution:

- Even if you are not fluent, **use what you know**. Any language is better than no language at all, so use what you know and grow from there. Your lack of fluency will not hurt your children's language development.



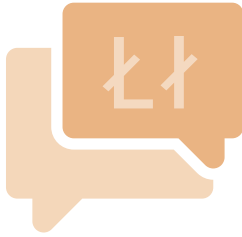
Challenge #2: I'm afraid I will make mistakes or say things wrong.

Many adult learners fear making mistakes in the language and being judged by fluent speakers. This fear makes people reluctant to practice their language.

Solution:

- **Create a safe environment** for you and your family to learn and use your Indigenous language. Have fun and don't be afraid to make mistakes!
- **Reach out to community members** and ask for help – language revitalization is a group effort.
- If people correct your pronunciation, don't be discouraged! **Use it as a learning opportunity** and ask them to repeat the sentence to help you practice.





Challenge #3: It's hard to learn my language. What if I can't do it?

Adult language learners are sometimes not motivated to learn their language. The following are some common challenges that affect motivation:

- Speaking Indigenous languages was once normal for families, but today it is a choice that requires a commitment of time and effort.
- Adults can become discouraged if they don't meet their own expectations for how well and how quickly they should learn their language.
- Everyday challenges, such as not enough time or resources, can delay the language learning progress.
- Some adults feel embarrassed about not being able to speak their Indigenous language.

Solution:

- **A strong sense of identity** supports motivation. Recognize that your language is part of your Indigenous identity.
- Don't be embarrassed if you do not speak your Indigenous language. Instead, **be proud of your language**. Use this pride as motivation to reclaim your language. Your language is your right.
- **Be consistent and start small**. Overwhelming your family can be discouraging.

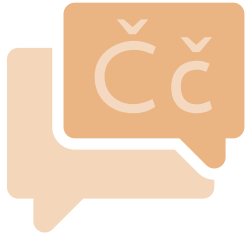


Challenge #4: I don't know any fluent speakers who can help me.

Not having access to fluent speakers makes it more difficult to learn and practice Indigenous languages.

Solution:

- **Interact with your family**. Even if you are all new speakers, you can practice your language together. If your children are enrolled in an immersion program, they will have a language base. Ask them to teach you what they know.
- **Go to community events** where you can listen to fluent speakers.
- **Use any available technology** to allow you to hear your language being spoken.



Challenge #5: We are too busy; there's no time to learn. It is difficult for families to find the time to commit to learning their Indigenous language at home.

Solution:

- Make an effort to **use your language every day**, even if it is only for a few minutes. If you use it often, the language will start to feel like a normal part of your day.
- **Set aside time for your language.** This could be in the morning while getting ready for the day, anytime you are preparing and eating a meal together, or at night while getting ready for bed. If it helps, set a daily alarm on your phone so you won't forget your language time.



Challenge #6: I don't have any language resources and don't know where to find them. A lack of resources to support language learning limits Indigenous languages from being spoken in the home. Many resources are classroom-based and do not support the language needed for activities in the home. Most Indigenous languages do not have any resources available to support families, and even if resources exist, families don't know how to access them.

Solution:

- **Talk to your band office, community schools or language programs, and language champions** in the community to learn what resources are available.
- **Get creative!** Make your own resources as a family, such as labels to place around your home, storybooks, or a calendar.



Tips and Strategies

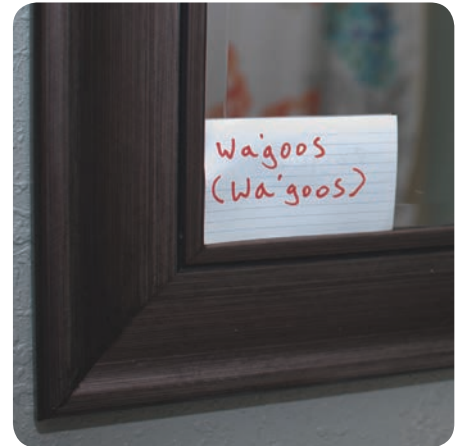
Using your Indigenous language in the home will require some planning. Following these simple tips and strategies will be a good starting point for your family as you bring more language into your home.

1. Create a family language plan.

- Use your family language plan to identify your family's needs and goals and to guide you as you get started.
- See page 12 for more information and page 32 for a template to create a plan.

2. Use everything you know throughout the day.

- Use any words and phrases you know whenever you can.
 - For example, if you are able to write in your language, make lists for grocery shopping or running errands in the language.



3. Make your language visible in your home.

- Label household items. When you learn a word or phrase, label the item or location in your home. Include the action phrase that goes with it.
- Create a seasonal chart in your language to talk about the seasons and the different cultural activities associated with the seasons, months, and weather.
 - See page 24 for a template to create your own season chart.

4. Use your language for activities and games with your family.

- Try learning your Indigenous language together as a family outside on the land.
 - For example, go for a walk and talk about what you see.
- Use your language for cultural activities.
 - For example, learn words related to berry picking, canning fish, or tanning hides.
- Adapt games for your language.
 - See page 26 for how to play UNO in your language.

5. Make using your Indigenous language at home feel normal.

- Use your language with your family as part of your daily routines so it feels natural.
- Use your language inside and outside of your home to show that it is important and valued.

6. Dedicate space in your home to your Indigenous language.

- Dedicate a space or activity in your home where only your language is used.
 - For example, you could decide to use only your language in the kitchen, or for activities such as cooking, bathing, bedtime, or brushing your teeth.
- See page 23 for steps on how to claim spaces and activities in your language.

7. Plan family language nights.

- Plan family language nights once a week, once every two weeks, or once a month.
- The goal is to make time for you and your family to be together and have fun in the language by playing games, doing arts and crafts, or participating in some other activity.
 - Invite a fluent speaker to join you and your family on these nights.

8. Take it one day at a time.

- Start off slow and be patient with yourself.
- Create a schedule. Choose a day or multiple days of the week where you will focus on the language and pick activities for the days that involve communication.
- Choose a specific part of the day to use your language. You are not putting on the stress of committing to speaking the language full time, but you are at least making it a part of your everyday life.

9. Once you learn a word or a phrase in your language, don't say it in English again!

- This tip is simple, but so important. Once you start learning words in your language, let it replace English in your mind and in your home.

10. Celebrate your language growth.

- Make sure to celebrate your efforts to bring your Indigenous language into your home. Acknowledging your family's language growth is so important. Celebrate what you have achieved, no matter how big or small! See page 31 for a chart to track how your language has grown in your home.



Conclusion



The purpose of this handbook is to get families started learning and speaking their Indigenous language in the home.

As the information in this guide suggests, time, patience, motivation, and commitment are all key factors in your language learning journey. You might experience days when it feels like too much, or you might feel that using your language at home is not worth the challenges.

Try to remember that learning your language *is* worth it, and that your efforts to bring your Indigenous language into your home will help revitalize your language. Your journey may be difficult at the beginning, but it will get easier. Envision your goals for your language – both your family goals and your own individual goals – and use this vision to keep you moving forward.





Activities

- 1 Create a family tree
- 2 Claiming spaces or activities
- 3 Seasonal chart
- 4 UNO
- 5 Daily activities
- 6 Celebrate your language growth
- 7 Family language plan

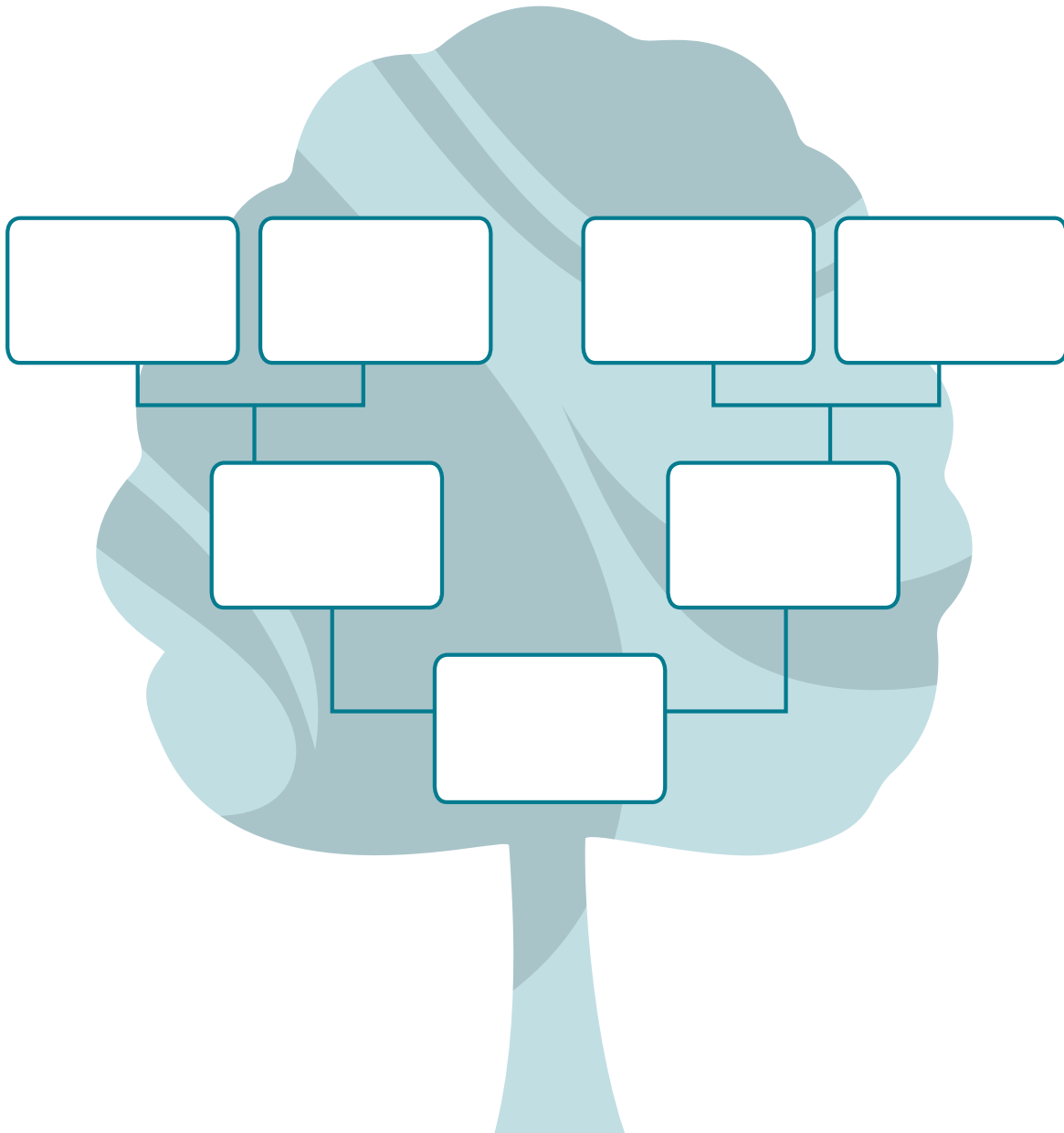
"You only need to be committed in the very beginning to get you started. That commitment will push you through to the next stage and keep you moving."

– SŢÁSEN TŢE SENĆOTEN, 2016



1 Create a family tree

Learn and practice family terms (mother, brother, grandfather, etc.) in your language by making a family tree. Keep in mind that your Indigenous culture's view of a family may be different than what you often see in the media. The terms used for family in your language are also probably quite different than they are in English. Feel free to draw your family tree in a way that reflects your language and culture. Add family photos to the template provided or create your own family tree. Post your family tree in your home and practice different family terms regularly. Write the name of the person as well as the term in your language you use to refer to them. Note that this may change depending on who is speaking!

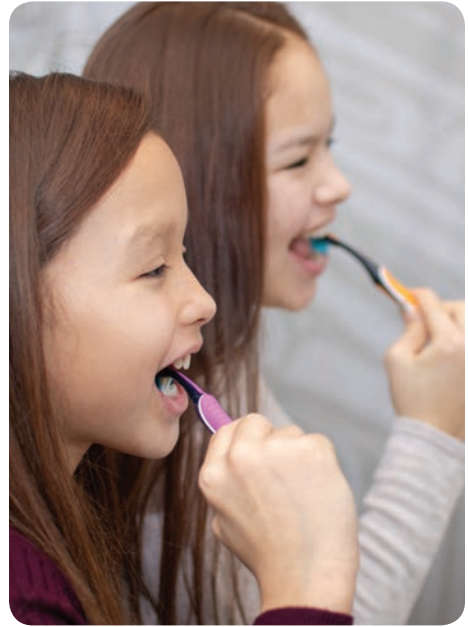


2 Claiming spaces or activities

Making space for your language in your home⁷

Claim a place or activity where only your Indigenous language is used. This could be an entire room in your home or a single activity.

1. Choose an area in the home or an activity where you have some knowledge or familiarity with your language as a starting point – this could be a place such as the kitchen, or an activity such as doing laundry.
2. Once you have chosen your space or activity, build up your language knowledge related to it. For example, if you choose the kitchen, learn how to make one meal at a time in your language, or focus on specific activities like washing the dishes or setting the table.
3. Make a list of the language that you need for that space or activity. Include words for items and the actions involved, as well as any descriptive words that are needed. Create labels from this list to post in your home as reminders when you're in the space or doing the activity.
4. Practice the language needed for the activity or area that you chose. Don't move on to another one until you've learned the first and no longer need to rely on English. Continue this process until you can use your language for all parts of the activity or space.
5. Be consistent using your language for that space or activity. Consistency will reinforce your learning, but do not stress about being perfect. It will get easier with time and practice.
6. Once you have taken over that space or activity in the language, keep it that way – don't use English anymore.
7. Work together as a family to keep your chosen area or activity English free – this will create the expectation that only your Indigenous language should be used, and it will encourage a sense of responsibility among your family members.



3 Seasonal chart

Use the templates provided to create your own seasonal chart. This chart can be used to discuss the different seasons, weather, months and moons **in your language**. You can also list different cultural activities associated with each season. Ask a fluent speaker or look on FirstVoices for help writing the activities and months in your language.



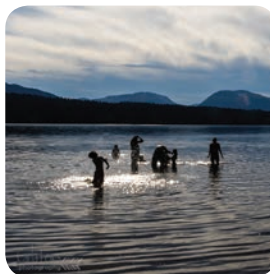
Winter



Spring



Fall



Summer

Seasonal chart continued...

Write the names of the months and moon cycles in your language to complete your seasonal chart. There are 13 spaces provided in the chart, but keep in mind that the number of moon cycles may be different in your culture.



4 UNO

The game UNO can be a great language learning activity⁶. All you need is a deck of UNO cards and the language to play. Play by UNO rules, adding this language rule: every time you pick up or place down a card, you must say what you picked up or placed, and when your turn is over you have to say “your turn” (in the language), or else you lose your next turn.



UNO Vocabulary: Do you know these words? If not, work them out together.

Numbers

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Useful verbs

to gamble; to play cards

to shuffle / mix up the cards

to deal / hand out

to win

to pick up, to draw a card

to skip a turn

to reverse direction / turn around

The four UNO colours

- red _____
- yellow _____
- green _____
- blue _____



Other useful vocabulary

I lay down a red one

I lay down a [number and/or colour]

Do you have a [number and/or colour]?

Pick up one!

Did you pick up one?

I don't have a [number and/or colour]

Your turn

What colour do you want?

I want [colour]

Sorry!

UNO! *(This should be the word for 'one' in your language)*

You didn't say [____]!

I said [____]!

Grammar

Be able to give commands for the verbs above, such as “deal,” and use first, second, and third person. For example:

- First Person – “I deal”
- Second Person – “You deal”
- Third Person – “He/She deals”

Learn how to use the different verb tenses. For example:

- Past tense – “I dealt”
- Present tense – “I deal”
- Future tense – “I will deal”

TIPS

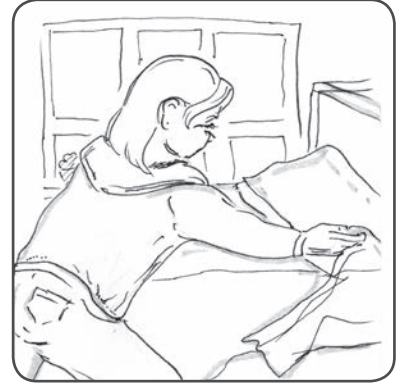
- Learn how to ask “What is this?” in your language so you can ask fluent speakers for vocabulary.
- Practice together so you understand and recognize the vocabulary.
- Gesture to show what you mean; non-verbal communication is a helpful and normal part of learning a language.
- When someone picks up the right card, give praise.
- Mimic vocabulary by repeating the word after hearing it.
- Most importantly: HAVE FUN!

5

Daily activities

Use the following illustrations to talk about each daily activity in your language. Discuss what is happening in each picture. Make a list of the sentences you could use and learn how to say them in your language.

Morning routine



Daily activities continued...

Use the following illustrations to talk about each daily activity in your language. Discuss what is happening in each picture. Make a list of the sentences you could use and learn how to say them in your language.

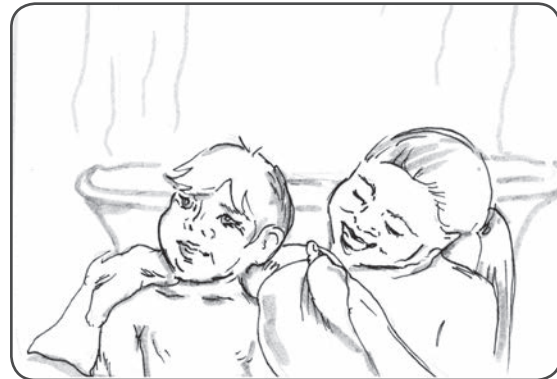
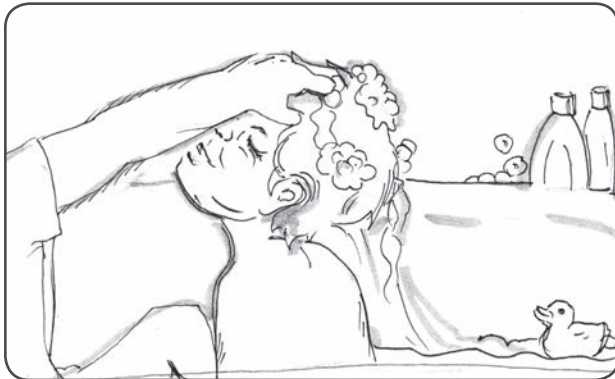
Caring for a sick child



Daily activities continued...

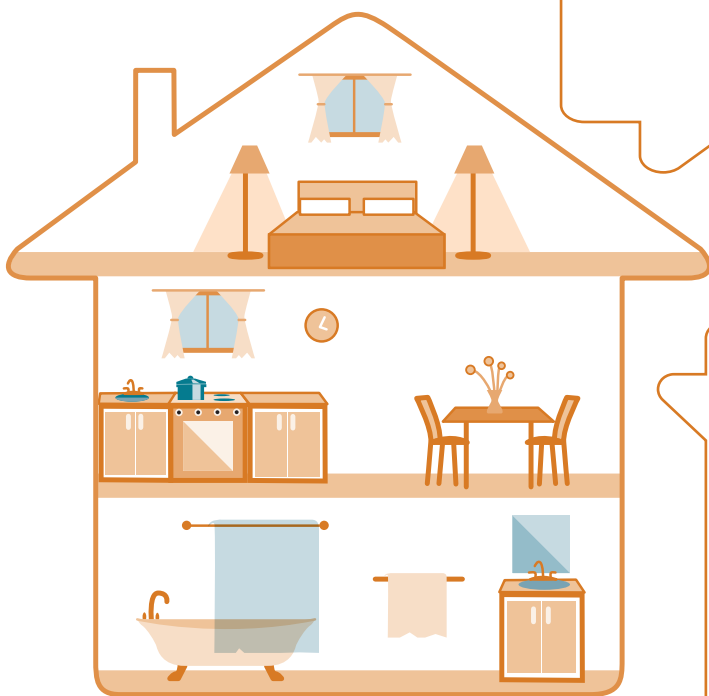
Use the following illustrations to talk about each daily activity in your language. Discuss what is happening in each picture. Make a list of the sentences you could use and learn how to say them in your language.

Bathtime



6 Celebrate your language growth

It is important to keep track of and celebrate your family's language growth. Use the template below to record the activities your family is doing in the language, the areas in your home where language is being used, and accomplishments you are proud of. Keep adding to this chart regularly so that your family can see just how much your language use has grown!



7 Family language plan

1. What are your family's language-learning goals?

Goals for parents or caregivers:

Goals for children:

Goals for other family members or people living in your home:

Goals for the whole family:

2. What specific activities or spaces will we focus on in our home?

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

3. What times will we try to use our language (morning, afternoon, evening, bedtime)?

1. Activity:	Time of day:
2. Activity:	Time of day:
3. Activity:	Time of day:
4. Activity:	Time of day:

4. What resources (people or material) can help us achieve our goals?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

5. What challenges might we face, and what are possible solutions to those challenges?

1. Challenge:	Solution:
2. Challenge:	Solution:
3. Challenge:	Solution:
4. Challenge:	Solution:



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Resources

First Peoples' Cultural Council

www.fpcc.ca

FirstVoices

www.firstvoices.com

Language Nest Online Toolkit

www.fpcc.ca/language/Resources/Online_Companion_Toolkit/default.aspx

Language Revitalization Fact Sheets

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About First Peoples' Cultural Council

The First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) is a provincial Crown Corporation formed by the government of British Columbia in 1990 to support the revitalization of B.C. Indigenous arts, cultures and languages. The FPCC is supported by legislation: the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Act.

The FPCC mandate, as laid out in the act, is to:

- Preserve, restore and enhance Indigenous heritage, language and culture
- Increase understanding and sharing of knowledge, within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities
- Heighten appreciation and acceptance of the wealth of cultural diversity among all British Columbians

The FPCC is governed by a Board of Directors composed of up to 13 members. The work of the Board is further supported by three sub-committees: the Governance Committee, the Finance and Audit Committee and the Human Resources and Compensation Committee. In addition, the Board is supported by a 34-member Advisory Committee, with one representative for each of the Indigenous languages in B.C.

The FPCC is committed to providing communities with a high level of support and quality resources. Our cultural heritage and the living expression of our identities is integral to the health of all members of our Indigenous communities, as well as to the well-being of all British Columbians. Since 1990, the FPCC has distributed over \$40 million to Indigenous communities in British Columbia for language, arts and culture projects.

Feedback on this Handbook

This handbook is available on our website at: www.fpcc.ca/about-us/Publications. Like all of our resources, they are considered works in progress, and we welcome your feedback so that we can improve future editions of the handbook. Please contact us at:

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“Treat your language with patience and love and do the same for yourself and your family.”

—jessie little doe baird, 2013



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