

## Background for Parents & Educators

**R**econciliation is described as working together to repair a relationship. The relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people has not been equal for a long time. In 2008, the federal government began the Truth and Reconciliation process with a formal apology to the Survivors of residential schools. As part of the process, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was set up to go across Canada to interview and gather statements from Indigenous people relating to residential schools. Residential schools began in the 1800s, and the last one was closed in 1996.

About 150 000 Indigenous children were taken from their parents to live in these schools. The purpose of the schools was to “eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural and spiritual development of Aboriginal children” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada). Indigenous children were placed in the schools and were forbidden to speak their languages, and forbidden to believe in their own culture and identity. As a result, the intergenerational impact of residential schools is still being felt today in Indigenous communities throughout Canada.

The Commission’s focus on finding out the truth about residential schools was meant to lay the foundation for the reconciliation process. Repairing damaged trust, making reparations, following through with concrete actions, and establishing respectful relationships were some of the recommendations the TRC also described as part of this reconciliation process.

The TRC made 94 *Calls to Action* on how Canadians can make amends for the oppression of Indigenous Peoples and move forward with reconciliation. The Commission singled out education as a key tool in reconciliation, and that children and youth should play a strong part in developing reconciliation policy, programs, and practices.

It is important for students to take note that reconciliation is an ongoing participatory process that ideally includes everyone in Canada. This process includes the learning journey of understanding the historical context that has set the stage for contemporary Indigenous lives in Canada.

### Restoring the Relationship

Two key understandings about the reconciliation process are that it is reciprocal, and that it looks different to each individual. The experience of colonization has been ongoing since the moment settlers arrived on Turtle Island (North America). As such, the process of reconciliation is expected to be lengthy but certainly achievable. Education plays a special role in reconciliation, given that over the course of at least a century Indigenous children were forcibly pushed into residential schools, and most Canadians did not learn about this truth in their own experiences of education. As the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair stated in his role as Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, **“Education is what got us here, and education is what will get us out.”** A key consideration in any action taken is that decisions that are made are guided by Indigenous communities and made with these communities.

*Source: Community Ties TG page 30, 70.*