Fatherhood is Forever

A resource booklet about providing for a healthy family based on *Inunnguiniq* teachings

In this issue:

- Who is a father?
- Why are fathers important?
- Learning how to be a father
- How can you be involved?
- Family traditions

Inuit have a unique way of thinking. There are people who grew up in strong families and those of us who were orphaned. We look for anyone who is willing to accept and share with us. How Inuit looked after each other and practiced caring for each other led to contentment. Individually we cannot stand on our own. It has always been an Inuit expectation that we help each other. The Inuit way of collective action/shared belief is how it can be done to bring harmony. We have been made as individual people, but we have been born into families for a reason. We need to begin healing with the families and bring back the strengths of Inuit society. If we initiate change, it will be effective. We need to talk to our children and young people in order to have a positive effect.

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This publication is available for download at: nccih.ca.

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How was this resource developed?

This series of resources is designed to help parents and families find strength in these roles according to Inuit teachings outlined in *inunnguiniq* – making capable human beings. To find other resources in this series, see the back cover.

Many people contributed to the content of this resource, primarily Elders. They shared their stories and experiences as well as the teachings and practices of ancestors that ground this information in *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*. The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (nccih.ca) and the Aqqiumavvik Society (aqqiumavvik.com) would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this resource, especially the Elders who live on through their wise words.

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- Rhoda Karetak
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Health through wellness

National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health
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QAUJIGIARTIIT

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The Early Years
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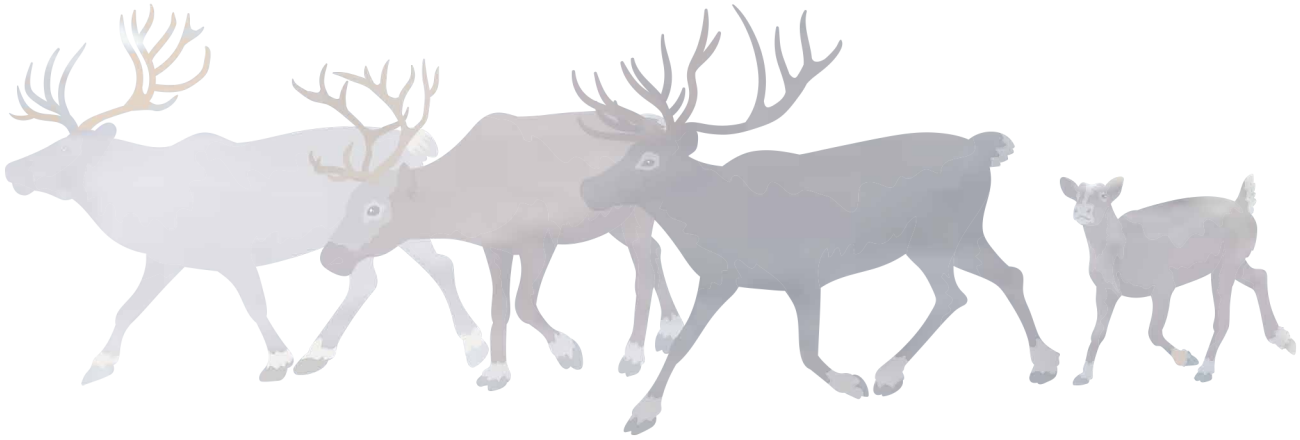


Introduction

Fatherhood is forever – it is a lifelong commitment to supporting each child to become a capable and confident human being. Good fatherhood is about heart-centred parenting that creates a relationship of love that will be one of the most significant in your child's life. This booklet will help you to become a confident and effective father. Fathers are important. The relationship between father and child sets a standard for care and support for every child's development. We hope this information will help you to become involved in actively shaping your child and their future according to the expectations set out in *inunnguiniq*.

I have very clear recollections of being with my family as a young girl. I can remember leaving our winter camp and moving to the spring camp. There would be many days of preparation and planning for the move. My mother would make sure that our clothing was ready, our food was prepared, and that we had what we would need in the new camp. My father would prepare the sled and load what was needed onto it. It was very exciting to hear the dogs' growing anticipation. They were always eager to pull our sleds. When we started off, I would be very watchful, remembering all the points of land that we were passing through and the things that we had done there as a family. Usually I would fall asleep on the sled nestled with my siblings, while my father ran along and encouraged the dogs. I always felt warm in my beautiful caribou clothing and safe with my family around me. When we arrived, my father and the older boys would build the iglu for us and I would be put to bed in a clean new place. What a wonder to wake up in the morning in our new home and think about the adventures and happy times that we would have in the new camp.

One of the things that I have been thinking about lately was that for those of us who grew up learning things from our parents, we also had to follow the plan that was laid down for us by our parents and grandparents. We were always being taught in order to get us ready for our future as adults. Families had their own rules to follow.

- Atuat Akittirq, as cited in "The Role of Family in Inuit Qaujimajatugangit – What Inuit have always known to be true" (2017, p. 61).

Who is a father?

A father is a parent who takes responsibility for the children in their life. It is often when parents are holding their newborn child for the first time that they really become aware of what it means to be a father. In the past, young adults were well prepared both for taking on the responsibilities of a partner and family and for fatherhood. Today, many people have grown up without a significant father figure to provide this teaching and preparation.

Inuit knew that the earlier fathers were involved with their children, the more connected they would become. Fathers have very specific roles in the support of the expectant partner. In many Inuit regions, fathers were all trained to deliver their babies since a midwife might not be available.

Fathers also have critical roles in supporting the development of their children. Although fathers are typically very involved with the training of a son, they also have very special roles with their other children. In both cases, the effectiveness of fathers requires a balanced connection with a child in which fathers provide love and direction and model the ways to live a good life.

Providing the necessities of life

Fathers provide for their families. A father is critical to the provision of food, especially country foods. You need to provide safety and security. Although there may be struggles required to meet these needs, every father can provide the security and ultimately the trust that comes from being a loving, present, and committed father. In the end, no matter how or where you live, every child can be cherished and cared for. Love and attachment are the most important necessities of a child's life.

Being present

From the very first days, a child will begin to notice the people around them. When you spend time with your child, giving them your full attention and speaking to them in loving ways, they will understand the importance you have in their life. They will also understand that they are important to you. Listen to your child as they try to communicate and respond in your own special chats. Involve them in what you are doing by talking about those things. A child can be in a jolly jumper beside you as you work on a task, but engaging them in your work will show that they are important. You can also spend time engaging in what interests them. You can feed the baby, play together, or take them outside to explore with you.

In the early years, babies will begin to mimic what others do and say. They learn very quickly from those they are closest to. It is important to always be aware of what you might be teaching your child through your own activities, conversations and behaviours. As your child grows, also get to know their friends and become friends with them as well. Closely observe your child and discover their interests. Each child is unique and follows a unique path. The role of a father is to provide the support, stimulation, and opportunities to help a child discover and explore these unique interests in life.

Showing affection

Your child needs to hear you say words of love. Fathers usually have an *aqausiq* for each child that is unique to them. Use this often. Fathers often give nicknames to a child. Nicknames are a sign of close relationship and affection. It provides you with an opportunity to single out a child by using this special name. Signs of affection can come in many forms – a wink, a smile, a tease or a squeeze. Find special ways to show affection for your child. Children feel secure when they know they are loved. Find ways to tell them and show them they are loved often. They also feel secure when they have routines and know what to expect.

As a child grows, giving them responsibilities or special chores is also a way of showing that you trust their abilities and have enough confidence in them to give them special roles. When assigning these chores, it is important to explain that the task is being given because the child is becoming capable and trusted.

Being in respectful relationships

Couples who shared the workload got a lot more things done. Whenever we can spread the workload well, then there is less stress being dumped on someone. When children were asked to do chores, like removing snow near the entrance, getting ice and any kind of small work, [it] was part of our daily activities. Children learnt how to work, learnt how to do what they will need to know to survive, becoming able to make their contribution to society, and to have a purpose in life.

- Rhoda Karetak

Respectful relationship is one of the four big laws/ *maligarjuaq* for Inuit. It is also the foundation of family. It begins with the very close relationship between partners and then parents. Partners need to work together in order to set a strong foundation for a family. They need to come to agreements and plan ahead for how they are going to achieve goals. Inuit emphasize *piliriqatigiingniq/* teamwork as an essential cultural principle because it is understood that all success is reliant on collaborative efforts and shared understandings. Be a good husband; care, provide for, support and honour your wife/ partner. Even if you are not living together, you will be parenting together throughout life, so work at coming to agreements and working together to provide in all the best ways for your child.

Being a positive role model

Children are visual learners. They will learn from what they see you do. They will observe even when you are not aware of their close observations. They are like sponges taking it all in. Children especially pick up on attitudes from those around them. They will come to understand you through how you speak with others, how you behave, how you handle emotions, how you apply yourself to tasks, and how you meet with challenges. A child will become what they see most often. Being a positive role model may be your greatest accomplishment in life.

If children understand that I love my neighbours, they too will want to be loving. We will teach them about love, not hate. When they hear nice things being done or said, they will follow them and do them themselves.

-Mark Kalluak

A young male will follow his father's way – what he sees, what he hears. He starts to think that he will be like his father. While helping his father, he goes out on the land and because he likes the scenery, he starts to learn hunting skills. This is a time to talk to your child. He needs to hear useful information and learn ways of doing things well, keeping in mind that we have to plan for our future – our Inuit ways are like that. There are many things that we need to be aware of so we will always be prepared, not wasting anything because everything is precious. This is how a father instills good life habits in his child.

-Louis Angalik

The most trusted beings were our fathers. I was very close to my father. If someone did something wrong to me, I would go home and say, "Someone was bad to me." He would always respond, "Did they tell you to tell me this?" or the other response would be, "If you are nice to them, they will be nice to you too." I always received a cold shoulder rather than sympathy. Later on, I realized that this was teaching me not to become a gossip about my neighbors and to learn how to resolve conflict on my own. It was done in love.

-Annie Kappianaq

Embracing a lifelong commitment

Your role as a father begins before pregnancy and continues throughout the life of a child. Inuit say that once you are a parent, you continue to be responsible for a child until the day you die. As your child grows, the roles will change but your commitment to the relationship is the constant in your child's life. Children need to be continually reassured of your love and commitment to their well-being.

Being your child's first teacher

Children look to their father to teach them about life. In Inuit tradition, it was usually the mother's role to train a child in *inunnguiniq* ways to be compassionate and heart-centred. The father's role was generally focused on *pilimaksarniq,* or training the children to develop skills and abilities to be able to become confident in living well. However, both parents also shared clear expectations for how children should develop into capable human beings. It was a responsibility for both parents to teach and train children in these expectations and life lessons whenever an opportunity came along.

Often these teachings are ones that have been passed down from your parents/grandparents. Sharing these teachings is an opportunity to also share stories from your childhood, about family and culture, and about how your child fits into a much larger relationship network.

Building a sense of place

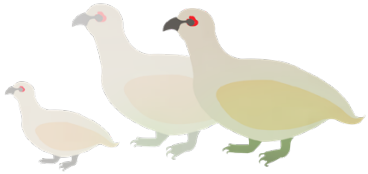
Building a sense of connection and community is important for a child's sense of belonging. Sharing experiences with your child on the land and sea, helping them to feel at home in nature, and building an understanding of respectful interaction with their environment will help build a sense of place. Share the place names of locations you visit and the stories that those spaces hold. Inuit families operated around seasons. There was always much preparation required for each new seasonal move/activity. They paid careful attention to weather and what needed to be done. By understanding these events and actively participating in them, children develop confidence and a sense of place and belonging. Share other cultural experiences with your child and explain the significance of events like drum dances, feasts, throat singing, Inuit games and art.

Why are fathers important?

Children want to look up to their father. A father needs to provide moral guidance and teach his children by example. Setting clear expectations for children is important, but it is also important to provide the support and guidance they need to meet those expectations and feel accomplished.

Give clear guidance

- Care about your child and their learning first.
- Be calm, consistent and firm.
- Inuit say "never in anger" – train children to manage their emotional responses to difficult situations.
- Create opportunities for correcting, practicing and experiencing consequences.
- Praise successes and welcome mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Teach your child to apologize when it is needed.
- In correcting a child, always ask, "What could you have done instead?" Inuit believe that changing behaviours/attitudes requires "causing thoughtfulness."



I witnessed a family with their two children crying while they were trying to eat the little bit of food they had. I couldn't quite understand why they were crying, I couldn't forget them so I shared the story with my mother, and as I asked my mother why they were crying. My father overheard me and in an angry voice, he asked me suddenly why I didn't let them know right away. My father went on to say that if I had told him sooner, he would have given them some food to eat. He commanded me to let them know instantly if I ever witness such people again, so we could share our food with them and feed them. My father reminded me once again and said, "You should never ever just watch a hungry person who is starving without giving them anything to eat." I found out the hard way to always help others that have become absolutely helpless.

-Atuat Akittirq

Set the standard

- Set the standard by being the standard.
- Have clear expectations for your child. Share these often.
- Ground your expectations in cultural values and use these to teach your child.
- Challenge your child to "watch me carefully while I do it" or to "figure it out and I'll watch you."
- Don't expect your child to do something until they are ready to experience success at it.
- Be honest and open in discussing challenges a child is facing. Always support your child, but step in only when it is needed.

Provide experiences and opportunities

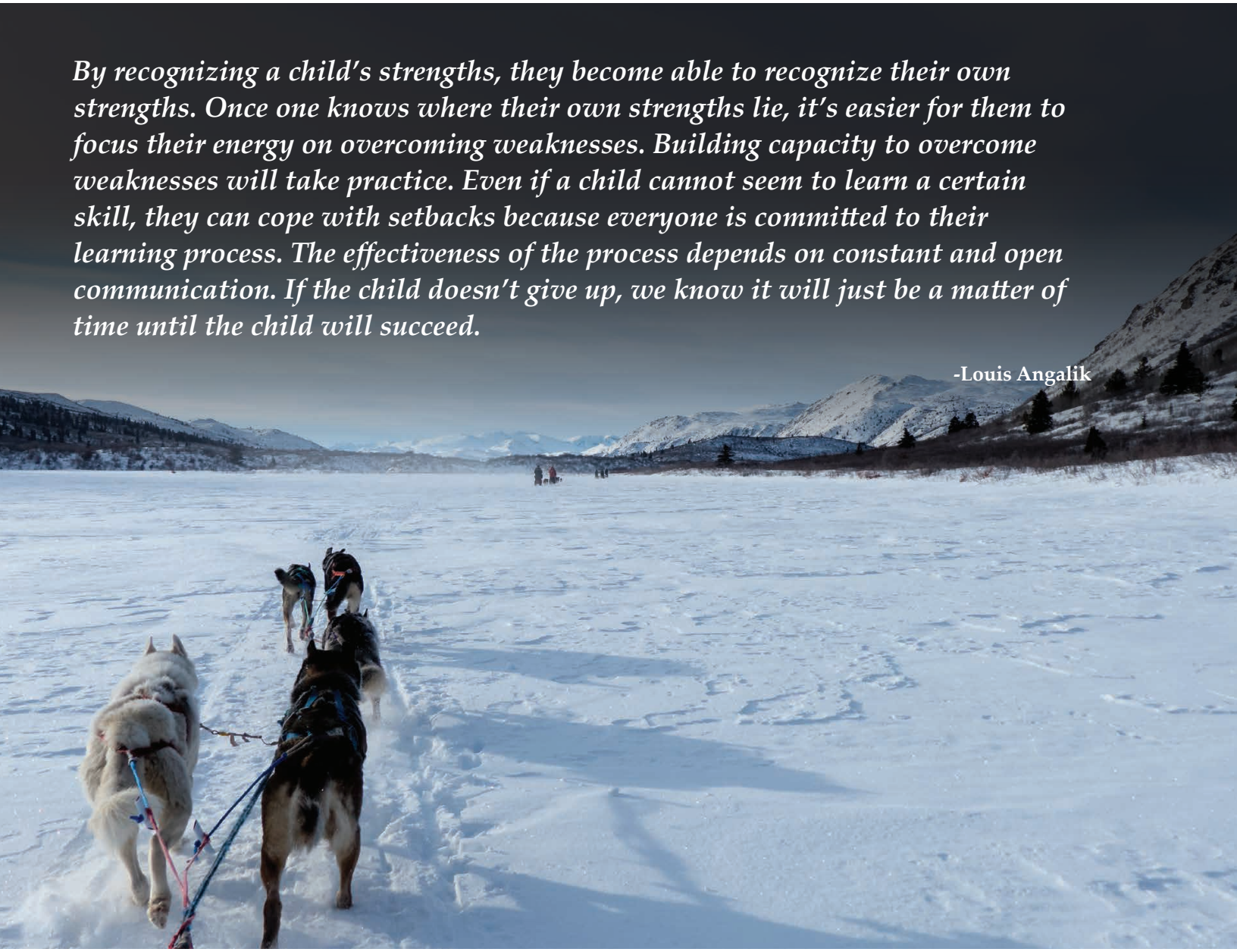
- Inuit believe that learning only comes through experiencing and that you do not truly know something until you can do it by yourself.
- Experiences are lived and relevant to what you need to learn in life.
- Create opportunities to try new things, to meet new people, to explore new places.
- Help your child to understand experiences by talking about them together.
- Make memories and remind your child of them often.
- Spend time with your child to support new experiences.

Tell your child the truth. Let them know you are serious. If you scold the child, let them know that it is because they did something wrong. Let them understand.

-Louis Angalik

Have reasonable expectations

- As soon as a child is capable of taking on a task, give them responsibility for it.
- Observe your child's abilities closely and when a child shows ability, set tasks that they will succeed at.
- Celebrate their success at doing tasks; let them know their help is valued by the family.
- Encourage your child to take on difficult tasks, challenging them to persist and not give up. If you set expectations beyond the level of the child, you set them up to fail. This can create a hardened rock person who doesn't care anymore because they can never achieve.
- Our goal is to build capable human beings who can meet expectations and look for new challenges with a good heart as they experience success.



By recognizing a child's strengths, they become able to recognize their own strengths. Once one knows where their own strengths lie, it's easier for them to focus their energy on overcoming weaknesses. Building capacity to overcome weaknesses will take practice. Even if a child cannot seem to learn a certain skill, they can cope with setbacks because everyone is committed to their learning process. The effectiveness of the process depends on constant and open communication. If the child doesn't give up, we know it will just be a matter of time until the child will succeed.

-Louis Angalik

Be supportive

- Listen to and comfort children when they need it. You are their safe place.
- Pay attention to moods, body language and emotions to "hear" what your child might not be telling you.
- Develop a relationship based on trust and open communication.
- Once your child has calmed down, discuss ways to address the things that have bothered them.
- Share some of your own difficult experiences and what you did in that situation.
- Encourage your child to think of ways to avoid a repeat of the difficult experience and build strategies for what to do next time.

Inuit fathers prepare their sons to be able to go through harsh and dangerous situations. Using cultural principles as a foundation and knowledge base for teaching our sons will help them act and think consistently as they grow. Such a teaching practice also builds integrity in a person, helps them set goals, prepares them for things yet to come, and teaches them to be considerate of the people around them.

-Louis Angalik

Learning how to be a father

There are many challenges to becoming the father you want to be. Do not expect to be able to handle it all at once. Like anything, fatherhood is learned through practice, trial and error, and experience. What is important is to work this out, with good intent and constant love for your child.

Caring is not just cuddling and *kuniit*. Caring involves changing diapers and soothing a fever. It is cleaning up the spills and bandaging the scrapes. It is also about spending time in play, in teaching, in planning ahead, and in meeting the individual and changing needs of a child. As you explore fatherhood, you will also become more aware of all the fathers you have encountered in life.

Our past affects fatherhood

Many Inuit families have been impacted by the overwhelming disruptions brought with colonization. The resulting trauma and societal impacts have meant that many young adults did not benefit from *inunnguiniq* methods of childrearing. Many families do not have a stable father figure. These changes in social structure have made it difficult to ensure adequate or consistent childrearing practices. Inuit Elders are very aware of the significance in this breakdown in sustaining family relationships. They are actively trying to reinstate *inunnguiniq* teachings. Their contributions to this book are an example, but there are other resources available to men who want more information or better preparation for fatherhood. Look at the final section of this booklet for supports for healing and resources to help you become the father you want to be.

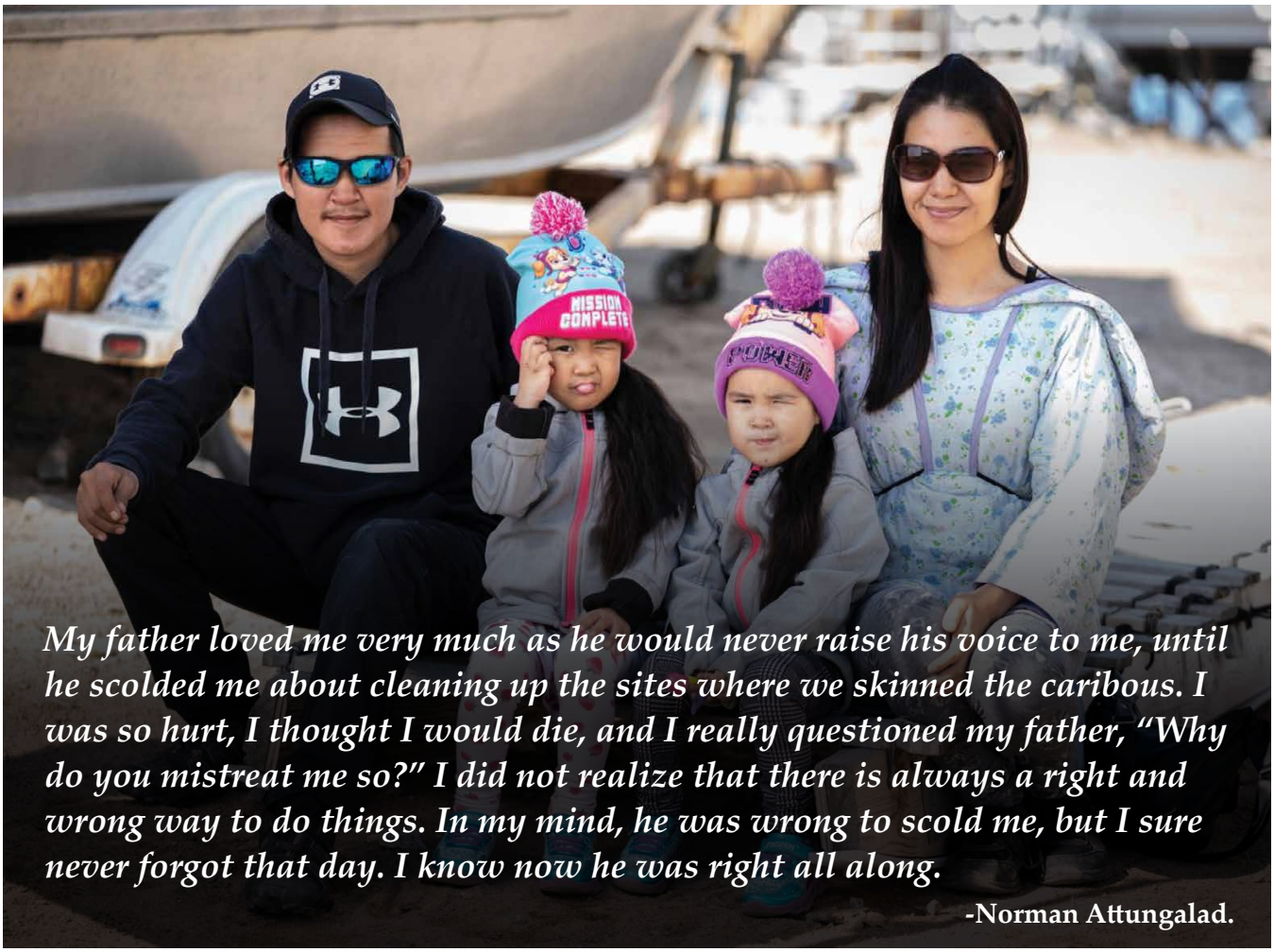
Healing and moving forward

- Do not neglect self-care; commit to your own healing if needed.
- Look for those father figures in your community who can be role models for you; ask for help.
- Find a trusted Elder to spend time with. Offer to do small chores, visit and seek advice.
- Work on your parenting with your partner so that you can plan and come to agreements about how you will parent together.
- Put the needs of your child first and find ways to spend quality time together.

Fathers and grandfathers, because they have a great love for their grandchildren and their children, don't hold back in telling them how to live well or in punishing them when they are going off the good path. They say, "If you are going to do the same thing over again, you will not be able to improve." They give instructions in such a way as to strengthen the child so they won't turn away or ignore the correction. Some children today, when you try to give instructions, seem to do things in the opposite way or talk back. That is what is making it hard for them in their lives. The instructions we are given are the things we must hold onto – things like living decently and being watchful.

-Henry Isluanik

Different situations,different approaches



My father loved me very much as he would never raise his voice to me, until he scolded me about cleaning up the sites where we skinned the caribous. I was so hurt, I thought I would die, and I really questioned my father, "Why do you mistreat me so?" I did not realize that there is always a right and wrong way to do things. In my mind, he was wrong to scold me, but I sure never forgot that day. I know now he was right all along.

-Norman Attungalad.

Fathers are not the same

There are many different kinds of fathers. There are also important male figures in a child's life who provide support in addition to you as the father. For Inuit, uncles, grandfathers, *avvaq*/namesakes, and many other people will be involved in your child's life. If you are not able to be present, find ways to connect with those people who are so that you can remain involved in your child's life from a distance.

There are also many single fathers who are raising children. They can benefit from a variety of people who are significant in a child's life. There are also stepfathers and foster fathers who have taken on fatherhood.

No matter the situation, every child needs a strong father figure relationship. It is important to put your best efforts into becoming the father a child needs in life.

Staying connected

If you are not able to be with your child every day, make every effort to stay connected with your child.

- Schedule times to chat and interact by phone or internet.
- Plan activities that will interest your child when you can visit.
- Take pictures together and leave some with your child.
- Use email, video chats and send special letters to keep in touch.
- Always let them know you love them and would want to be with them if you could.
- When you are together, share your story and those of your family so your child knows they are part of a larger family as well.

Imagine your future

Consider what the father you want to be is like. Develop a plan for how you can become more like the father you want to be. Consider what things are keeping you from becoming this kind of dad. Find fathers who you look up to and talk to them about the challenges and concerns you have as a parent. Look for parenting activities in the community that welcome dads and kids.

Involve your children

Take clues from your child about what interests and excites them. What are the kinds of things they want to learn from you, to be doing with you? Don't limit your interactions with your child because you think they are too young. A toddler is often very happy sitting on a snowmobile that dad is working on in the garage or playing with toy tools while you use the real ones. Take every opportunity to build a great relationship with your child.

How can you be involved?

Before pregnancy

- Plan your pregnancy.
- Make healthy choices and support your partner in preparing for a healthy pregnancy.
- Talk about your ideas and beliefs about family life and childrearing.
- Seek our trusted Elders to share the teachings about planning for a family.
- Find out what to expect during pregnancy and how to deal with all the changes that are to come.

During pregnancy

- Attend medical appointments and ask questions.
- Be supportive of your partner and their needs.
- Learn about pregnancy, delivery and birth.
- Help to reduce stress and worries for your partner.
- Follow the teachings about healthy pregnancy, especially eating well, exercising and massaging baby and your partner.
- Support your partner's efforts to be healthy and make healthy choices.
- Make a plan for the delivery and birth.
- Talk about breastfeeding and support healthy choices for that to happen.
- Seek advice and support from parents or Elders.
- Talk about the naming of the baby and the ways the child will be welcomed according to cultural practices.
- Talk to your child in the womb, begin to tell them stories or sing songs, let them know they are already loved.

Delivery

- Try to be present during delivery to support your partner.
- If you are unable to be at the delivery, make sure everything is ready for the homecoming.
- Take on household chores to make the transition for your partner easier.
- Be aware of signs of postpartum depression or other medical issues. Get help as needed.

Baby

- Share the care of your baby – bath, change, feed, burp and carry them.
- Talk to baby and observe so you learn to read their cues.
- Give baby a nickname and *aqqaq* them frequently.
- Hold baby on your chest so they learn your heartbeat.
- Respond to baby's needs and offer comfort when they cry.
- Be close during breastfeeding, supporting both baby and your partner.
- Take your turn getting up at night.
- Engage with baby in play and touching, talking and cuddling as much as possible.

Toddler

- Child proof your home.
- Teach safety by letting your child know that some things are not permitted.
- Use the same word and tone of voice to alert a child – *aitaa!* or gently steer them away from things they should not be around.
- Introduce them to the world outside.
- Play games that develop big muscles, are energetic and build skills.
- Read, sing, and continually talk.
- Learn about how Inuit support good behaviour and manage feelings with children. Start to set expectations for identifying and dealing with emotions.

Preschool

- Play and create opportunities for your child to be creative, to explore and experience new things, and to discover connections between things.
- Spend time allowing your child to build skills in areas that interest them.
- Provide opportunities for your child to make choices.
- Begin to give your child chores to do which contribute to the family. Have them take on this responsibility.
- Talk about family and cultural connection.
- Participate in cultural activities with your child and explain their significance.
- Develop a love and appreciation for animals and nature together.

School age

- Encourage the significance of learning and becoming a capable human being.
- Establish routines for mornings, meals, and evenings.
- Spend more time on the land/sea doing cultural activities.
- Pay special attention to friends and important people in your child's life.
- Provide increasingly more difficult challenges in play and other activities.
- Encourage and celebrate successes.
- Expect persistence in attempting difficult things.
- Encourage your child to try new things, make mistakes, and learn from mistakes rather than being told how to do something.
- Limit toys and instead, participate in creative play by repurposing things such as boxes to become part of play.
- Provide significant real experiences for your child, such as cooking, berry picking, fishing, drying meat.

Family traditions

An iglu, though made by a man, is not made to just suit the man; it is going to be designed to include the rest of the family.

-Mark Kalluak

Spending time with family is very important. It builds security, trust and memories. Inuit always spent a lot of time together as a family. Establish routines that your family can rely on. This may be a regular getting up time and bedtime, going out on the land together on weekends, or sharing stories over meals.

Inuit emphasize the importance of networks of relationship that support each person. These are established in childhood, often around the naming of a child and the special kinship relations. Make time for your child to visit and spend time with the people who have these special relationships.

Create your own family traditions that allow you to share feelings and your love for each other. These times can also include harvesting together, preparing or preserving food, seasonal and cultural activities. These are also important times to teach cultural skills and encourage your children to explore the land/sea and connect with each other in these activities.

Encourage Inuktut language use in your home and interact often with Elders and family members. Participate in cultural activities that help your child build a strong sense of cultural identity and shared community. Celebrate your child's firsts following traditional practices such as their first kill or first parka. Build connections with the *avvaq* family your child is connected to and share stories about their namesake as a way of building identity and a sense of purpose for your child.

A young boy starts searching for tangible materials and for things to make – something he will play with. He hears people talking but does not seem to pay attention. All the while he is listening, and once in a while he asks questions about what he would like to know. He is learning through play. He wants to go with people who are going out hunting. He has many interests now. He is more able to remember what he is most proud of. His interest in play is so intense, he never seems to get hungry – eating takes too long. He gains many friends. He follows others and sometimes gets into mischief. He is able to stand up for himself.

The child needs to be closely monitored. Do not let them hear things that are not suitable for their age. Do not let them see unacceptable behaviour. Do not leave your children by themselves at home. As a parent, tell your children to be good to others. When handling meat, let them get bloody – the blood washes off easily. Tell them not to think the meat is gross, and not to be queasy about animals. Expect them to be good to people who are picked on. Remind them often about respecting people with disabilities. Tell them to show love, to be helpful, and to help elderly people. Expect them to alert you to people who are in need of your support and let them participate in sharing with those people.

-Louis Angalik

Playtime

Children learn best through play and participation. Knowledge only comes through doing something. Providing lots of opportunities for being active, experimenting, and experiencing through play is the best learning for a child.

Play is the work of childhood

- Play is creative. It builds imagination.
- Play lets a child develop collaborative and team skills.
- Play invites discovery and builds thinking.
- Play encourages innovation and resourcefulness.
- Play promotes observation, making connections, thinking strategically.
- Play gives a child control to make decisions and choices.

Playing with children builds connections

- Playing with your child allows you to observe how they approach things.
- Play allows you to model ways of doing things in non-judgmental ways.
- Play brings you together to have fun.
- Play can help build skills, especially in areas where a child can improve physical and thinking skills.

How you can learn more

If you are having difficulty finding resources in any of these areas and would like more information, please look at the following websites:

Pirurvik Centre

pirurvik.ca

National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health

nccih.ca

Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth and Families

inuuqatigiit.ca

Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre

qhrc.ca

Tungasuvvingat Inuit

tiontario.ca

Aqqiumavvik Society

aqqiumavvik.com

Mamisarvik Healing Centre

tiontario.ca/programs/mamisarvik-healing-centre

Fathers used to warn us about the weather. They were very effective. If we did not listen to our fathers, we could have been lost in the storms many times over. Our fathers let us survive, and that is why we are here today. I often say thank you to my parents for what they did for us, as I dream about them often. I am grateful for I have listened to both of them.

- Norman Attangalaaq

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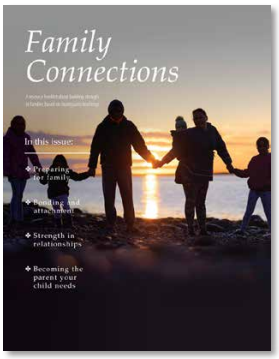

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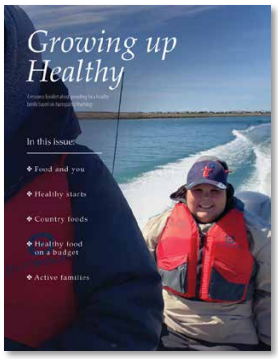

Growing up Healthy

Fatherhood is Forever

Parents as First Teachers

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