

Community Action

FACT SHEET

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

INAC Definition:

“The term ‘residential schools’ generally refers to a variety of institutions which have existed over time, including: industrial schools, boarding schools, student residences, hostels, billets and residential schools. These schools were located in every province and territory, except New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. At any one time, there were no more than 100 such schools in operation. It is estimated that approximately 100,000 children attended these schools over the years in which they were in operation.” *From website: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/gs/schl_e.html*

Residential schooling was seen as a way to “integrate” Aboriginal people into the mainstream Canadian population. The schools were many run by Christian churches, facilitated by priests and nuns. With promises of creating a future for Aboriginal people in a new world, children were ripped from their traditional homes and families. The children were also forced to assimilate into white culture by being punished for speaking their indigenous languages, dressing in a traditional way or practicing traditional ceremony. Attendees suffered multiple forms of abuse, were used as hard labourers and were often left cold and hungry. The following residential school timeline outlines the progression:



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1857 - Gradual Civilization Act passed to assimilate Indians.

1870-1910 - Period of assimilation where the clear objective of both missionaries and government was to assimilate Aboriginal children into the lower fringes of mainstream society

1920 - Compulsory attendance for all children ages 7-15 years. Children were forcibly taken from their families by priests, Indian agents and police officers.

1931 - There were 80 residential schools operating in Canada.

Due to the multiple traumas and abuse suffered by Aboriginal children who had attended Residential School, the children and grandchildren, even great grand children of survivors have been seen to suffer the intergenerational impacts of these experiences. "Intergenerational Impacts refer to the effects of physical and sexual abuse that were passed on to the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Aboriginal people who attended the residential school system (Where are the Children, 2006)."

1948 – There were 72 residential schools with 9,368 students.

1979 – There were 12 residential schools with 1,899 students.

1980's - Residential School students began disclosing sexual and other forms of abuse at residential schools.

1996 - The last federally run residential school, the Gordon Residential School, closes in Saskatchewan.

1998 - The Assembly of First Nations establishes the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Unit.



The list below illustrates a number of impacts that intergenerational Survivors face on a day-to-day basis:



1. Alcohol and drug abuse;
2. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and fetal alcohol effect (FAE);
3. Sexual abuse (past and ongoing);
4. Physical abuse (past and ongoing; especially, but not exclusively, of women and children);
5. Psychological/emotional abuse;
6. Low self-esteem;
7. Dysfunctional families and interpersonal relationships;
8. Parenting issues such as emotional coldness, rigidity, neglect, poor communications and abandonment;
9. Suicide (and the threat of suicide);
10. Teen pregnancy;
11. Chronic, widespread depression;
12. Chronic, widespread rage and anger;
13. Eating disorders;
14. Sleeping disorders;
15. Chronic physical illness related to spiritual and emotional states;
16. Layer upon layer of unresolved grief and loss;
17. Fear of personal growth, transformation and healing;
18. Unconscious internalization of residential school behaviours such as false politeness, not speaking out, passive compliance, excessive neatness, obedience without thought, etc.;
19. Post-residential school community environment, seen in patterns of paternalistic authority linked to passive dependency; patterns of misuse of power to control others, and community social patterns that foster whispering in the dark, but refusing to support and stand with those who speak out or challenge the status quo;
20. The breakdown of the social glue that holds families and communities together, such as trust, common ground, shared purpose and direction, a vibrant ceremonial and civic life, co-operative networks and associations working for the common good, etc.;
21. Disunity and conflict between individuals, families and factions within the community;
22. Flashbacks and associative trauma; i.e., certain smells, foods, sounds, sights and people trigger flashbacks memories, anxiety attacks, physical symptoms or fear; e.g. the sight of a certain type of boat or vehicle (especially containing a social worker or RCMP), the sight of an old residential school building, etc;
23. Educational blocks - aversions to formal learning programs that seem "too much like school," fear of failure, self-sabotage, psychologically-based learning disabilities;
24. Spiritual confusion; involving alienation from one's own spiritual life and growth process, as well as conflicts and confusion over religion;
25. Internalized sense of inferiority or aversion in relation to whites and especially whites in power;



26. Toxic communication - backbiting, gossip, criticism, put downs, personal attacks, sarcasm, secrets, etc.;
27. Becoming oppressors and abusers of others as a result of what was done to one in residential schools;
28. Dysfunctional family co-dependent behaviours replicated in the workplace;
29. Cultural identity issues - missionization and the loss of language and cultural foundations has led to denial (by some) of the validity of one's own cultural identity (assimilation), a resulting cultural confusion and dislocation;
30. Destruction of social support networks (the cultural safety net) that individuals and families in trouble could rely upon;
31. Disconnection from the natural world (i.e. the sea, the forest, the earth, living things) as an important dimension of daily life and hence spiritual dislocation;
32. Voicelessness - entailing a passive acceptance of powerlessness within community life and a loss of traditional governance processes that enabled individuals to have a significant influence in shaping community affairs (related to the psychological need of a sense of agency, i.e. of being able to influence and shape the world one lives in, as opposed to passively accepting whatever comes and feeling powerless to change it.

The Government of Canada finally recognized the impact residential school had on Aboriginal people in Canada in 2005. The following is an excerpt from the Government's *Statement of Reconciliation*:

The Government of Canada acknowledges the role it played in the development and administration of these schools. Particularly to those individuals who experienced the tragedy of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools, and who have carried this burden believing that in some way they must be responsible, we wish to emphasize that what you experienced was not your fault and should never have happened. To those of you who suffered this tragedy at residential schools, we are deeply sorry.

