

*What's **LOVE** got to do with it?*

Parenting and programs centred on responsive care

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Thank you to the W̱sáneć
People on whose land I am
an invited guest.

Thank you to the Elders,
parents, organizers and
other participants of *Let
The Rivers Flow* conference



This presentation highlights learning I have gleaned from partnering with many Indigenous communities, activists and investigators across Canada over 30 years. Reports and videos from these partnerships can be found on my website.



Early Childhood Development
Intercultural Partnerships

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Learning is holistic and relational

- Indigenous Peoples view learning as holistic, involving spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical domains, and aims to acknowledge and foster each person's gifts and abilities.
- Learning is grounded in relationships, and must include parents and the community, the family's language and culture, and place-specific knowledge



Mi'kmaw educator Marie Battiste

LOVE and brain development go hand in hand....
because LOVE promotes brain development.



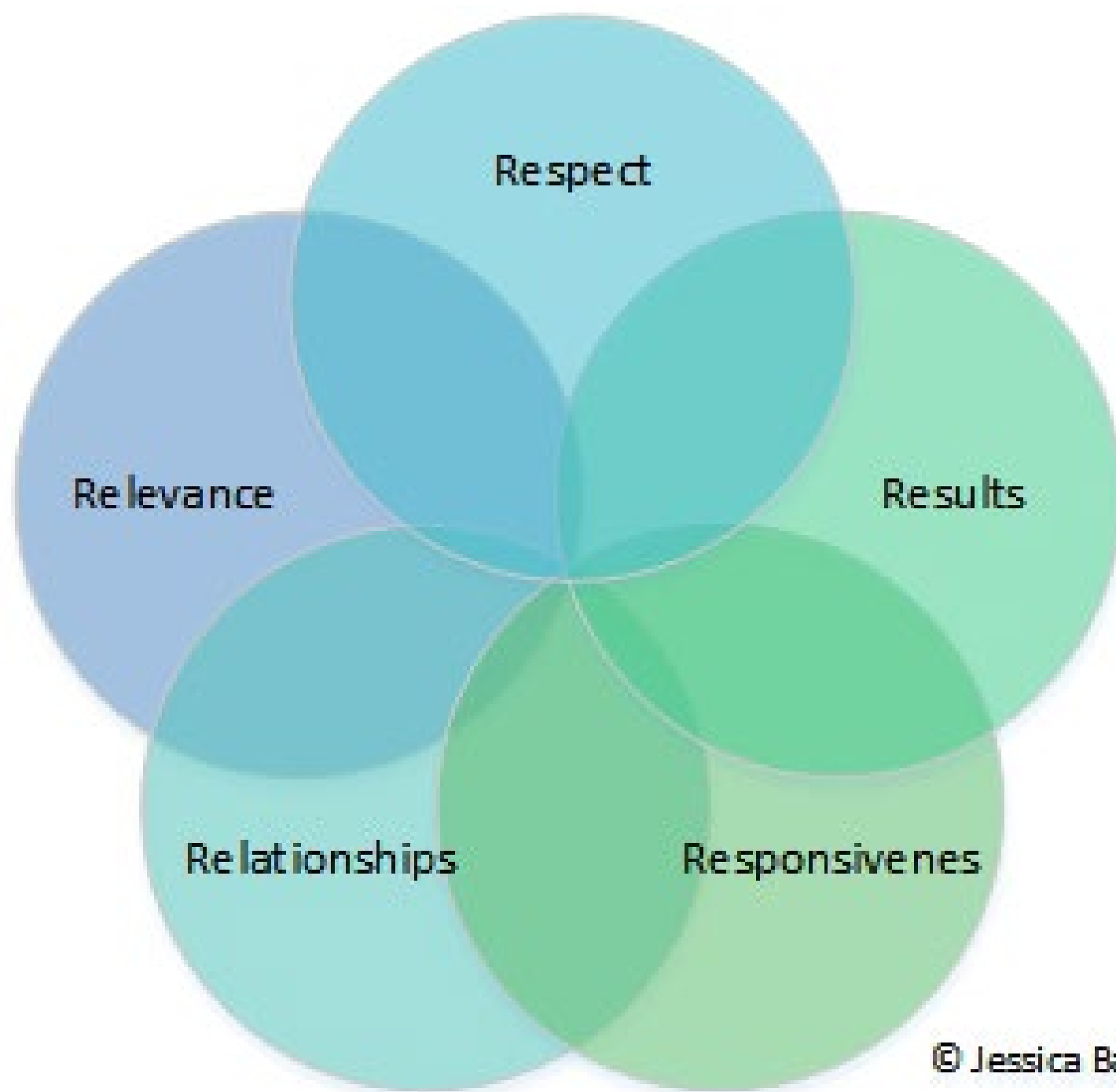
*What do we mean by **LOVE**?*

I hope that when you were very young, there were times when you felt loved. *What was going on that created that feeling of being loved?*



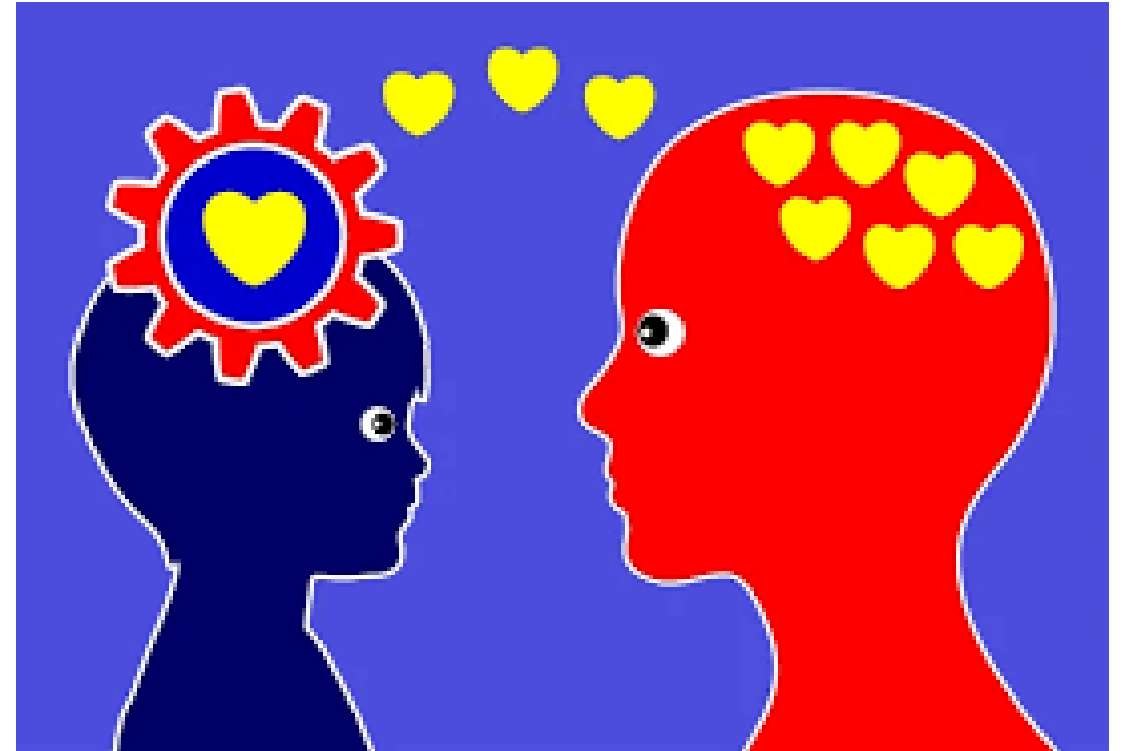
Please try to create that *feeling of being loved* for the young children you parent, grandparent, early childhood educator, teacher or other carer.

5 R's



LOVE is experienced through **R**elationships

- Love is an interactive process...
- Love is a verb...not a noun



LOVE is experienced through Relationships

Promoting optimal development depends on having a **caring relationship** with the child and the child's caregivers (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, others).

Good ECEs and teachers work to build and maintain a **child's trust** that they will be accepted when they make an effort, take risks, and make mistakes.

Effective parent education happens through **two-way communication** and sharing of parenting experiences...not through one-way transmission of information from an expert.

Ethical screening and assessment depends on **respectful relationships** with children and their primary caregivers to ensure that everyone's views, ideas, concerns and goals are considered.



LOVE means **R**espect for a child or parent

Unconditional positive regard – *I love you because you are here.
I don't wish you would just shut up or go away.*

*I love you for who you are. I don't wish you were differently
abled, or a different gender, or were more like your brother, or
had different needs or a different personality.*

*I love you even when you make demands on me and I feel tired,
frustrated, or scared.*

Cultural safety means the *experience of being respected* for who
one is, including the ways one expresses one's cultural identity
and cultural practices.

LOVE involves Responsive Care

Responsive Care - noticing and responding to the other's needs and contributions in relevant, timely ways.

Serve-and-return – this concept describes interactions in which one person 'serves' up a behaviour (say, a smile) and the other person 'returns' with a relevant behaviour.

For example:

Baby smiles.....father brings his face up close and says 'Oh yah, I see you smile!' Baby smiles more. Father says 'Oh yah, look at you smiling, and strokes the babies cheek.

Mother says: 'I'm exhausted.' Her partner says: 'You do look tired! I can help with supper.'



To develop all their gifts, babies and young children need this kind of serve-and-return, responsive caring more than anything else besides food, water and kept warm and dry.

Responsive care should be the central principle of parenting and our early childhood programs.



Responsive care starts with noticing what a child is interested in and trying to do

For example: Watch and wonder: What is this baby trying to do with their foot (using it to push themselves forward? Trying to get it in their mouth?) Notice that a toddler is trying to use a crayon to draw circles on paper. A preschooler is trying over and over to pour water through a funnel into a bottle without all the water spilling out.

When the child starts to become frustrated, respond by offering assistance.

Noticing how a child responds to assistance gives clues about what the child is ready for in their learning journey.

The next activity you offer a child can be **scaffolded** (just a little more challenging) to build on **the child's self-paced learning**.

Responsive care works with a child's zone of proximal development

This means noticing what a child is trying to learn and responding in a **timely way** to *their* apparent needs and goals.

Responsive care contrasts with a directive, authoritarian or one-way teaching approach, in which a parent or practitioner offers what *they* think would be 'best' for the child to do next, or what everyone in a group should do next.



Responsive care reduces or avoids stress

Stress is often caused when caregivers:

- provide stimulation that is *not relevant* to what the child is working on/ready for
- *over-stimulate* a child (e.g., not shielding a child from a chaotic household, offering an overly decorated early childhood environment, having too many high volume, fast-paced songs, stories, or play activities)
- respond *only* when the caregiver has feels like responding, rather than when the child needs a response

Responsive care is *individualized* care

- No child is exactly the way children are described in a textbook.
 - No child marches through their formative years conforming to developmental milestones described in a 'Healthy Children' pamphlet or a developmental assessment tool.
 - Children are not 'a group' even though some ECE practitioners and many teachers act like they can provide the same program for all children.
 - While some group level activity can be fun and worthwhile, parents and practitioners need to form a **relationship** with each child and be able to **respond** to what each child appears to need (in their zone of proximal development).
- ? What is **this particular child** bringing into our shared world and interactions?
- ? How can I respond in a relevant way that is helpful to this particular child?

Responsive, Relevant, Respectful care uses the language of the child and their family

Practitioners need to find out what language or dialect the child and their family uses in the home and use that language or involve a translator.

Indigenous language and Indigenous dialects of English or French are precious resources.

Responsive relationships are rarely built by insisting that a family use a language in which they are not proficient.

Indigenous children can transition to English or French if this is required (regrettably) at the point of school-entry.

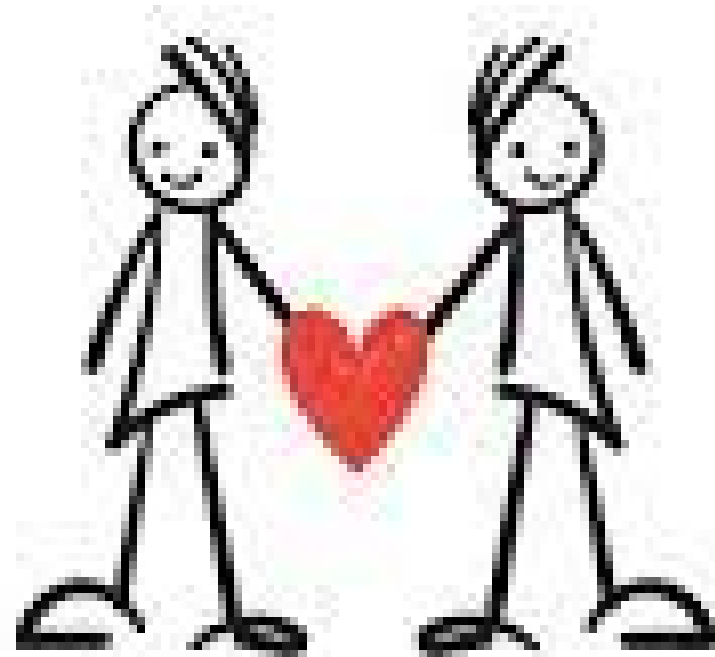
Children benefit from learning more than one language.

Research shows that most differently abled children can become bilingual.

Responsive care yields positive Results

- ✓ Children know they are in a loving, safe environment that is providing **just the right amount of stimulation** - not more than they can handle, which can be stressful, and not less than they can handle, which can be boring and even depressing, even for babies.
- ✓ Children develop **self-confidence, joy in exploring their world** and learning through trial and error.
- ✓ Children develop the capacity for **self-regulation** because they can relax, try new things themselves, and know that they can count on their environment to support them when needed.

✓



Self-regulation is one of the most important results of good quality care

School readiness depends on being able to **regulate** one's ability to

- pay attention
- persist with a challenging task
- calm oneself down
- notice what people around oneself are doing.

(School readiness does not mean learning the alphabet and numbers and correctly holding a pencil!)

A baby who receives responsive care feels safe and does not become endlessly upset or disturbingly too quiet, even when conditions are not ideal (e.g., is being to feel hungry or wet).

A preschooler starts to demonstrate pro-social skills – attending to what others, sharing, and initiating activities.

This self-regulation prepares a child to successfully transition to school.

Intergenerational LOVE

When we show love to a child, they are more likely to be able to love themselves and express love to others, including becoming responsive, loving caregivers for the next generation.





Thank you for your kind attention!
HÍSWKE



Visit ecdip.org for more on the ideas presented here.