



# **Indian Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

#### Backgrounder

Indian residential schools date back to the 1870's. Over 130 residential schools were located across the country, and the last school closed in 1996.

During this era, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were placed in these schools, often against their parents' wishes. Many were forbidden to speak their language and practice their own culture. It is estimated that more than 80,000 former students are living today. The ongoing impact of residential schools has been felt throughout generations.

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is Canada's largest class action lawsuit. The Settlement Agreement is an important step towards healing the harm caused by the Indian Residential School legacy.

# What is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada? The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) is an important part of the Settlement Agreement.

The Commission has been given the responsibility of:

- Telling Canadians what happened in the Indian Residential Schools
- Honouring the lives of former students and their families; and
- Creating a permanent record of the Indian Residential School legacy

To do this, the TRC wants to meet with, and collect the experiences of former students, staff, their families, and anyone else who has an experience to share.

# **Your Statement is Important**

Why is the TRC gathering statements, documents and photographs? Your statements, documents and photographs are very important and can help Canadians understand what the schools were like, what happened inside them and how the experience affected people for generations to come. Those that lived, attended and worked at the schools will finally be given a voice through the statement gathering process.

#### Do I have to provide a statement to the TRC?

No. There is no requirement to provide a statement to the TRC. It is completely up to you to decide if you want to share your experiences.

# After I provide a statement about my experience to the TRC, can I still tell it to any one else?

Yes. It is your experience. You can share your experience whenever you want, to whomever you want. The TRC is not asking you to give up your right to tell others.

# What kind of statement can I provide?

The TRC is happy to receive your statement in any way that you feel comfortable.

If you wish, the TRC will record your statement as a voice recording or video by a qualified Statement Gatherer for you. The TRC will provide health supports to assist you during this process and you are welcome to bring extra support people with you.

You are also encouraged to bring any additional documents, photographs or any other materials that will help you in remembering or sharing your experience.

If you prefer, you can put your statement in writing and provide it to the TRC.

You are also more than welcome to submit works of art, poetry, music, and anything else as your statement to the TRC.

What experiences can I share with the TRC during my statement?

You are welcome and encouraged to share any aspect of you life with the TRC. You may wish to share what your life was like before, during and after attending residential school. You can tell the TRC about your direct experiences as a student, as the relative of a student, as someone who worked in the schools or of any other experience related to residential schools.

While you are free to discuss anything you wish, please note that if you tell the TRC that a child is in need of protection – meaning that you have told us that a child is being physically, sexually, emotionally abused or is being neglected – the TRC may be obligated to report this information to the appropriate authorities. The TRC may also be obligated to report if you tell us that you are planning to harm yourself or someone else.

# **Preparing to Provide Your Statement**

What can I do to prepare myself before providing my statement? Providing a Statement can be a difficult and emotional process for some people. Talking to someone you trust about your experience in advance of speaking with the TRC may help you remember details that you would like to share.

Take some time to think about what you can recall from your residential school experience and what you would like to share with the Commission. A safe, quiet place where you can collect your thoughts and not be interrupted may also help recall your thoughts.

The following questions are intended to guide and may assist you in preparing to provide a statement to the TRC. You do not have to answer these questions directly, rather they may help you remember details that you may want to include in your statement to the TRC. Some of the questions may not apply to your personal experience or circumstances.

- What do you recall about your life before residential school?
- When did you first hear about Indian residential schools?
- What would a typical day at residential school be like for you?
- Were there specific tasks that you were responsible for at the school?
- Do you have any particular memories of people, events, or experiences that stand out in your mind, either good or bad?
- What was it like when you left residential school?
- How has residential school had an impact on who you are today?
- What impact has having family or friends attend or work at a residential school had on you?
- What does Indian residential school mean to you?
- How can Canadians and Aboriginal peoples establish new relations with one another based on mutual understanding and respect?
- What does reconciliation mean to you? How will we know when reconciliation has taken place?

### After Your Statement is Provided

### What will the TRC do with my statement?

The TRC will keep the statements it receives in a secure database and record office. Information from the statements will be used by the TRC to research and write a report about the history of the schools and the impact the schools had on people and communities.

The TRC may use some of the statements in books, films, videos and audio clips to educate the public and raise awareness about residential schools.

# What will happen to my statement when the TRC closes?

At the end of its mandate, the TRC will create a National Research Centre (NRC). The TRC will give all of the statements it receives to the NRC where they will be safely stored in accordance with modern archival standards.

#### Who will see/hear my statement?

Workers at the TRC and the NRC who need to see the statements as part of their work will have access to the statements. Students, researchers and members of the public can access the statements, stored by the TRC and NRC to learn about residential schools and the legacy they left behind. They will not be allowed to see any personal information that could identify who gave the statement, unless you have given permission to the TRC and the NRC to disclose your personal information. Information about other people that may be in your statement will not be made available except in accordance with applicable privacy laws.

# What is "personal information"?

It is information such as your name, address, date of birth or other information that might allow you to be identified. If your statement is video-recorded, personal information includes your recorded image. Your photograph is also considered your personal information.

# Do I have the right to see or listen to my statement after I provide it to the TRC?

Yes. On request, a copy of your statement will be available to you at the time you provide it. In addition, you also have the right under the Privacy Act to request a copy of your statement. Personal information about any other person in your statement will be removed prior to being released to you under the Privacy Act.

# What if I want to change my statement?

If you think you made an error or left something out of your statement, you can contact the TRC and request that a correction be made. If the TRC does not make the correction, it will attach a note to your statement that identifies what information you wanted changed.

#### Can I withdraw my statement?

Because providing a statement to the TRC is voluntary, you can choose to stop at any time you wish and if you change your mind after you have provided your statement or at any time while you are providing it, you can ask to withdraw your statement from the TRC collection. If you request to withdraw your statement, we will remove anything submitted to us from the TRC collection. Any physical documents, audio/video, photographs will be returned to you.

# Other Ways to Share Your Experience

Are there other ways to share my experiences with the TRC? Yes, the TRC will be hosting seven (7) National Events. At the National Events, there will be opportunities for individuals to share their experience in a public forum. These public forums are completely voluntary and you are not required to participate in them.

If you choose to share your experience during a TRC public forum, the media or someone with a cell camera or recording equipment may record what you say and they may use the recording as they choose. Your personal information is not confidential if you choose to participate in a public forum. What you say publicly during these events, along with a photograph or video of you, may be used in books, films, videos and audio clips or in any other multimedia presentations.

At TRC public events, the TRC itself may record the event. The TRC may use parts of the recording for public education purposes, on the TRC web site, for TRC research and in TRC reports, in short videos, and may make it available to documentary film makers, and others.



### **Contact Us**

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#### **Health Services**

Health support services are available to you before, during and after you provide your statement to the TRC. Emotional, cultural, and professional support services are provided by the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program. Services can be provided on an individual, family or group basis.

National Contact Information for Health Support Services:

Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward

Island, Newfoundland and Labrador	1-866-414-8111
Québec	1-877-583-2965
Ontario	1-888-301-6426
Manitoba	1-866-818-3505
Saskatchewan	1-866-250-1529
Alberta	1-888-495-6588
British Columbia	1-877-477-0775
Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut	1-800-464-8106

A National Crisis Line is also available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 1-866-925-4419.