

HONOURING TRUTH, ADVANCING RECONCILIATION

An NWAC Toolkit for Learning, Reflection and Action

September 2026



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

Together for Truth and Reconciliation



The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a time to honour Survivors, remember those who did not return, and commit to building a more just and inclusive future. This toolkit provides resources, reflections and guidance to support meaningful learning, reflection and action in your communities, workplaces, and organizations.

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National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a time to honour First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Survivors of residential schools, their families and communities, and those who never returned home. It is an opportunity to listen, learn, remember, and reflect on the history and ongoing impacts of residential schools and the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Truth and reconciliation require more than remembering the past. Reconciliation begins with a commitment to truth, accountability, and a shared understanding of the ongoing impacts of colonialism. Learning creates an opportunity to better understand the histories, cultures, experiences and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples, while reflection invites us to consider how we each have a role to play in building respectful relationships, supporting meaningful change, and advancing reconciliation.

This toolkit is intended to support learning, reflection and meaningful engagement with truth and reconciliation. It brings together information and activities that can be explored individually, with colleagues, or as part of the broader community. Whether you are beginning your learning journey or continuing work already underway, the toolkit is designed to help encourage thoughtful conversation, deepen understanding and inspire action.

Reconciliation is an ongoing process. It cannot be completed in a single day, not should learning about residential schools, Indigenous histories and contemporary realities be limited to September 30. National Day for Truth and Reconciliation offers an important opportunity to pause and reflect, while reminding us that the work of reconciliation continues throughout the year.

How to Use This Toolkit

There is no single way to engage with this toolkit. You may choose to move through it on your own, explore it with colleagues, or use it to support learning and conversation within your community.

Take the time you need to reflect on what you are learning. Some topics may be difficult or challenging, and meaningful learning may require us to sit with discomfort, ask questions and consider perspectives different from our own.

You are encouraged to return to this toolkit beyond September 30 and use it as a starting point for continued learning, reflection and action. Reconciliation is a shared responsibility, and every step toward greater understanding, respect and relationship can contribute to this ongoing work.

“We can never ‘un-know’ what has been revealed. Canadian laws created residential schools. It belongs to all, including newcomers, to do something about the better-understood consequences today.”

~ Dr. Marie Wilson



The Truth

Understanding truth is an essential part of reconciliation. In Canada, this means learning about the history and lasting impacts of colonialism, including the residential school system and the experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, Survivors, families and communities. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), established in 2008 as part of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, spent nearly seven years gathering testimony from thousands of Survivors, family members and others affected by the residential school system. Through this process, the TRC documented these experiences, increased public awareness of their lasting impacts, and identified steps needed to advance reconciliation. In its final report, the TRC issued 94 Calls to Action aimed at addressing the legacy of residential schools and advancing reconciliation across Canada.

Since the TRC released its Calls to Action, there have been important steps towards reconciliation, alongside significant gaps and challenges. While governments, institutions and communities have taken action in areas such as education, language revitalization, child welfare reform and commemoration, many of the 94 Calls to Action remain only partially implemented or unfulfilled. Ten years after the TRC's final report, Indigenous organizations and other trackers continue to note substantial work remains to achieve the systemic changes envisioned by the Calls to Action, underscoring the importance of sustained accountability and long-term commitment.

Progress requires more than awareness or symbolic gestures; it calls for sustained action, accountability, relationship-building and meaningful change. At the same time, misinformation and residential school denialism continue to undermine efforts to understand the truth and move forward. Denialism can take many forms, including minimizing historical evidence, or dismissing the experience and testimony of Survivors. Such narratives can cause further harm to Survivors, families and communities, erode public understanding, and create barriers to meaningful reconciliation. Confronting denialism means listening to and centering Survivor voices, engaging with credible evidence and historical records, challenging false or misleading claims, and fostering informed and respectful dialogue. In this way, confronting misinformation is not separate from reconciliation; it is an essential part of upholding truth and supporting meaningful action.

This section provides a starting point for exploring what we know about the history of residential schools, the work of the TRC, the Calls to Action, and the ongoing journey towards reconciliation. Understanding the truth is not an endpoint, it is an ongoing responsibility that can help inform how we listen, learn and act.

Continuing Your Learning

These resources offer different perspectives on the history of residential schools, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Calls to Action, and Canada's ongoing journey toward reconciliation. Together, they provide opportunities to learn from the record of the TRC, understand government efforts and commitments, and engage with Indigenous-led perspectives on progress, accountability and the work that remains.

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

A starting point for exploring residential school records, Survivors experiences, educational materials and resources for continuing learning.

Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future - Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

An accessible overview of the TRC's findings and the history and legacy of residential schools.

A Knock on the Door, Phil Fontaine (Forward), Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Author), Aimée Craft (Afterword)

A concise, accessible introduction to the history of residential schools and their ongoing legacy, based on the work of the TRC.

***Paid Content**

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

The 94 Calls to Action provides a framework for understanding the changes needed to address the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation.

Ten Years of Reconciliation and the Path Ahead, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs

A reflection on progress towards reconciliation over the decade since the TRC's Calls to Action, as well as the challenges and work that remains.

Progress on Realizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (September 2025), Assembly of First Nations

An Indigenous-led assessment of Canada's progress in responding to the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. Providing a critical perspective on the pace and nature of reconciliation in Canada.

Listen and Learn

Learning about residential schools means more than learning facts and dates. It means making space to hear the voices and experiences of Survivors, their families and communities, and recognizing the strength, resilience and knowledge that have been carried forward despite the harms of the residential school system.

The stories shared in this section offer opportunities to listen directly to Indigenous voices and to better understand the lived experiences behind the history. Reading, watching and listening to these stories can challenge assumptions, deepen our understanding and help us recognize the human impact of policies and institutions that are sometimes reduced to statistics or historical summaries.

Take time to engage with these stories thoughtfully and respectfully. Some may be difficult to hear, but listening is an important part of learning the truth. Survivor testimonies are lived experiences that have been shared with courage and trust. They should be approached with humility, empathy and respect, recognizing the lasting impacts these experiences have had on individuals, families and communities. By making space for these voices, we can move beyond simply knowing what happened toward understanding why it matters today, and how that understanding can inform the ongoing work of reconciliation.

	Type	Description
NCTR Survivors Statements and Archives	Survivor stories and testimony	The NCTR preserves the largest collection of residential school Survivor perspectives in existence and provides access to oral histories and other archival materials.
The Education of Augie Merasty: A Residential School Memoir, Joseph Auguste Merasty	Book	A survivor memoir that provides a deeply personal account of residential school.
I Lost My Talk, Rita Joe	Poetry, Book	Rita Joe accounts their childhood in Shubenacadie Residential School where her Mi'kmaw language was taken from her.
We Were Children, Tim Wolochatiuk	Video	In this film, the profound impact of the Canadian government's residential school system is conveyed through the eyes of two children who were forced to face hardships beyond their years.
Kuper Island	Podcast	An 8-part series that tells the stories of four students who attended one of Canada's most notorious residential schools.

Picking Up the Pieces: The Making of the Witness Blanket, Canadian Museum of Human Rights	Documentary	A documentary about Carey Newman's Witness Blanket, an important Indigenous-led artistic response to residential schools.
Our People Will Be Healed, Alanis Obomsawin (Naitonal Film Board)	Documentary	This film explores the Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre in Norway House, Manitoba, where Cree students are taught about their own history and culture alongside their regular school curriculum.



“We now know from many Survivors’ testimonies that in building on the strengths of our people, the power is in family. Reconciliation will come through concrete action on these priorities.”

~ Chief Wilton Littlechild



Reflect

Learning about residential schools and experiences of Survivors can bring forward difficult emotions, questions and perspectives. Reflection gives us an opportunity to pause, consider what we have learned, and think about how it connects to our own understanding, relationships and responsibilities.

Reconciliation asks each of us to look beyond simply knowing the history. It asks us to consider how colonialism and the legacy of residential schools continue to shape the lives of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples today, and to reflect on the role we can play in building respectful relationships and supporting meaningful change.

There is no single way to reflect, and there are no simple answers. The questions and activities in this section are intended to create space for thoughtful consideration, conversation and continued learning. You may choose to reflect on your own, discuss the questions with others, or return to them overtime as your understanding develops.

Consider the following questions as your work through this toolkit:

- What have I learned that challenged or expanded my understanding?
- Whose voices and experiences have I heard, and whose perspectives might still be missing?
- How might the history and legacy of residential schools continue to affect Indigenous Peoples and communities today?
- What assumptions or beliefs have I had to reconsider?
- How might colonial systems, policies or practices still be reflected in my workplace, organization or community, and what role can I play in supporting change?
- What barriers might Indigenous Peoples encounter within the systems or institutions I am part of?
- What does reconciliation mean to me, and what responsibilities might it carry?
- What is one thing I can do to continue learning or contribute to reconciliation?
- What actions, beyond learning and reflection, can I take to support reconciliation in my personal life?
- How can I respond when I encounter misinformation, stereotypes or residential school denialism?

There may not be an immediate answer to every question. The goal is not to complete the reflection, but to begin a process of thinking, learning and acting that continues beyond this toolkit and September 30.

Starting Conversations About Reconciliation

Reconciliation is not only something we learn about, but also something we participate in through relationships, choices, and actions. The following can help individuals and groups create respectful spaces for honest conversation about what reconciliation means and what it can look like in practice.

Before beginning, consider agreeing to the following ground rules:

- **Listen to understand, not to debate.** Approach the conversation with curiosity and a willingness to hear perspectives that may differ from your own.
- **Make space for different perspectives and experiences.** Recognize that people may understand reconciliation differently based on their histories, relationships and experiences. While respectful dialogue is important, reconciliation must be grounded in truth. Making space for diverse perspectives does not mean accepting misinformation, racism or residential school denialism. When these arise, respond with empathy, evidence and a commitment to the truth of Survivors' experiences.
- **Do not ask Indigenous participants to educate others.** Everyone is responsible for their own learning. Indigenous participants should not be expected to educate others, speak for all Indigenous Peoples, share cultural knowledge or disclose personal experiences. Contributions should be welcomed but never expected, and individuals should feel free to participate in ways that are comfortable to them. Creating space for choice and respecting personal boundaries are important aspects of respectful engagement and cultural safety.
- **Be willing to sit with discomfort.** Conversations about colonialism, residential schools, racism, and reconciliation may bring up difficult emotions. Discomfort can be part of meaningful learning.
- **Recognize that reconciliation requires action, not only conversation.** Use discussion as a starting point for considering what you can do differently.
- **Respect confidentiality.** When personal experiences or stories are shared, do not repeat them outside the conversation without permission.

Questions to Consider

Choose a few questions rather than trying to answer them all. Allow time for reflection and follow up.

- What does reconciliation mean to you? What experience or learning have shaped your understanding?
- What is the difference between learning about reconciliation and participating in reconciliation?
- What responsibilities do organizations have in advancing reconciliation? What might those responsibilities look like in practice?
- What might reconciliation look like in our own community? What relationships, systems, or practices could be strengthened or changed?
- What assumptions or perspectives might we need to reconsider? What would it take to approach reconciliation with greater humility?
- What is one thing we can commit to doing differently? What is a realistic next step we can take individually or together?

Closing the Conversation

End by returning to action. Invite participants to name one insight they are taking away and one action they are willing to take. Remind the group that reconciliation is an ongoing process, and meaningful progress depends on continuing to learn, build relationships and act.



"The road we travel is equal in importance to the destination we seek. There are no shortcuts. When it comes to truth and reconciliation, we are forced to go the distance."

~ The Honourable Murray Sinclair



Reconciliation in Action

Reconciliation is an ongoing responsibility, not something that happens on a single day or through learning alone. September 30 can be an opportunity to pause, listen, and reflect, but meaningful reconciliation continues throughout the year.

Learning and reflection are important starting points, but reconciliation also requires action. This can include challenging misinformation, building respectful relationships, supporting Indigenous leadership and initiatives, advocating for change, and examining how systems, policies and practices affect Indigenous Peoples. While the actions available to each person will differ, everyone can contribute to reconciliation in their personal, professional, and community life.

Continue Learning

Make learning an ongoing process. Seek out Indigenous voices, knowledge, histories, and perspectives rather than relying on general overviews of reconciliation. Consider:

- Reading Indigenous authored books, articles and resources.
- Learning about the treaties and agreements connected to where you live and work.
- Learning about the Indigenous communities in your area.
- Following Indigenous-led organizations and initiatives.
- Reflecting on the Indigenous territories where you live and work, and considering what responsibilities, relationships and actions should accompany land acknowledgements.
- Looking for opportunities to learn directly from Indigenous knowledge holders, educators and community organizations, where appropriate.
- Returning to what you have learned and considering how it may inform your decisions and actions over time.

Learning is most meaningful when it informs actions. As your understanding grows, consider how it can shape your relationships, decisions and contributions to reconciliation in your personal, professional and community life. For example, you might incorporate Indigenous perspectives into projects or programs you support, share trusted resources with colleagues, or reflect on how your work may affect Indigenous communities.

Learning about treaties, traditional territories and land acknowledgements can also be an opportunity to think beyond recognition. Consider what responsibilities, relationships and actions should accompany an acknowledgement of the Indigenous territory where you live and work.

Examine Your Assumptions

Consider what you have learned, or not learned, about Indigenous peoples and histories, and how those experiences may have shaped your assumptions. Ask yourself:

- What assumptions do I hold about Indigenous peoples, communities, or reconciliation? Where did those assumptions come from?
- What perspectives or experiences have been missing from my understanding?
- Am I approaching reconciliation with curiosity and humility?

This reflection is not about achieving a perfect understanding. It is about developing the willingness to recognize gaps in our knowledge and continue learning.

Work With Others and Your Community

Reconciliation is not something we do alone. Look for opportunities to learn and act with others in your workplace, school, organization, neighbourhood, or community. Working together can deepen understanding, strengthen relationships, and help turn learning into meaningful action.

This might include:

- Participating in community events, discussions, or learning opportunities led by Indigenous Peoples and organizations.
- Creating space for conversations about truth, reconciliation, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism.
- Supporting Indigenous businesses, artists, authors, organizations, and community initiatives.
- Building respectful relationships with local Indigenous communities and learning about the Nations, histories, and territories connected to the places where you live and work.
- Sharing resources and learning opportunities with others to help foster greater awareness and understanding.

Meaningful action does not always require large-scale initiatives. Small, consistent actions taken alongside others can help build stronger relationships, create more inclusive communities, and contribute to ongoing work of reconciliation.

Reconciliation Commitment

Use the prompts below to turn reflection into personal commitment. Write down your own response and return to them throughout the year.

- One thing I will continue to learn:
- One assumption or perspective I will reflect on:
- One action I will take:
- One way I will continue this work is beyond September 30:

Advocate for Action

Reconciliation also involves asking governments, institutions to fulfill their responsibilities. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action provide a framework for governments, organizations, and individuals to consider what meaningful action requires.

One way to support reconciliation is to advocate progress on a Call to Action that matters to you. Different Calls to Action are directed at different audiences, including federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, as well as schools, post-secondary institutions, healthcare systems, churches, businesses, media organizations and professional bodies. Understanding who is responsible for a particular Call to Action can help make advocacy efforts more effective.

Here are some steps to get started:

1. **Choose one or two Calls to Action that matter to you.** Learn what they call for and identify which government, institution or sector has responsibility for implementation.
2. **Find the appropriate decision-maker.** Depending on the Call to Action, this could be your Member of Parliament, provincial or territorial representative, municipal council, school board, employer, professional association or another organization.
3. **Learn about current progress.** Review what actions have been taken, what commitments have been made, and where gaps remain.
4. **Make your request specific.** Ask what actions are being taken, what progress has been made, and what further steps are planned.
5. **Share why the issue matters to you.** You do not need to be an expert. A respectful message explaining why reconciliation and accountability are important can be impactful.

6. **Ask for a response.** Invite the individual or organization to share information about their commitments, priorities, or progress.
7. **Keep engaging.** Advocacy does not have to end with a single email or conversation. Consider attending public meetings, participating in consultations, supporting Indigenous-led initiatives, or connect with organizations working to advance reconciliation.

A sample message could begin:

I am writing as a constituent to ask about the Government of Canada's progress on Call to Action [#]. I would like to understand what concrete steps are being taken to advance this Call to Action and what further action the government intends to take. Reconciliation requires ongoing commitment and accountability, and I hope you will continue to advocate for meaningful progress.



Organizational Action

Reconciliation is not an individual responsibility. Organizations also play an important role in advancing reconciliation through their policies, practices, relationships and decision-making. Meaningful action requires moving beyond awareness and intent to examine systems, address barriers, and create environments where Indigenous Peoples are respected, included and supported.

Organizational action may include:

- Reviewing policies, programs and practices to identify and address barriers affecting Indigenous Peoples.
- Building respectful, reciprocal and long-term relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations.
- Supporting Indigenous participation, leadership and decision-making in areas that affect Indigenous Peoples and communities.
- Creating culturally safer, more inclusive and welcoming workplaces.
- Providing ongoing learning opportunities on Indigenous histories, rights, cultures, and contemporary realities.
- Supporting Indigenous recruitment, retention, career development and leadership opportunities.
- Embedding reconciliation commitments into organizational plans, priorities and accountability mechanisms.
- Addressing misinformation, stereotypes and residential school denialism through evidence-based learning and respectful dialogue.

Organizational responsibility extends beyond statements of support. Reconciliation can be reflected in how decisions are made, whose voices are included, how partnerships are build, and how accountability is measured. In practice, organizations may:

- Review hiring, retention and promotion practices to identify, and address barriers affecting Indigenous employees.
- Include Indigenous perspectives and expertise when developing policies, programs and services.
- Develop reconciliation commitments or action plans and regularly report on progress.

Meaningful reconciliation looks different across organizations and sectors, but it is strengthened when commitments are reflected in everyday actions, decisions and relationships. By examining how systems operate and where change is needed, organizations can contribute to reconciliation in tangible and lasting ways.

Continuing the Work

Reconciliation does not end on September 30, and it does not end after reading this toolkit. As we continue this work throughout the year, the choices we make, the conversations we have, the relationships we build, and the actions we take all have a role in moving reconciliation forward.

While there will always be more to learn, that learning must also lead to action. Indigenous Peoples and survivors have shared their truths and calls for change for generations, and the responsibility cannot continue to rest on Indigenous Peoples to explain why reconciliation is necessary or what needs to change.

Moving forward can begin by considering what you will carry with you from this toolkit. Whether that means continuing to learn about the Calls to Action, challenging misinformation when you hear it, building meaningful relationships, supporting Indigenous-led work, or asking governments and institutions what they are doing to advance reconciliation, the important part is continuing the work beyond this moment and turning what you have learned into meaningful action.

From Commitment to Accountability

Reconciliation also requires us to look at what has changed while continuing to ask what has not. The 94 Calls to Action provide a path forward and identify areas where governments, institutions, organizations, and Canadians have responsibilities. More than a decade after the Calls to Action were released, it remains important to understand what progress has been made, what remains outstanding, and what still needs to happen.

Accountability can begin by asking meaningful questions about the commitments that have been made and the actions that have followed. This includes asking how progress is being measured, who is responsible for following through, what remains unfinished, and what needs to happen next.

Within our workplace, schools, organizations, communities and governments, these questions can help move reconciliation beyond commitments and conversations. Meaningful reconciliation should be reflected not only in what is said or promised, but also in the actions taken, the progress made, and the changes that Indigenous Peoples and communities can see and experience.

Reconciliation Continues

September 30 is an important day to honour survivors, remember the children who never returned home, and reflect on the ongoing impacts of residential schools. At the same time, it is a reminder that the truth and reconciliation require attention to, commitment and action throughout the entire year. Through the truths shared by survivors and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Canada has been given a path forward. The Calls to Action have identified where change is needed, and the responsibility now is to ensure that what has been heard continues to lead to meaningful action.

As we move forward, reconciliation requires us to continue learning, ask difficult questions, challenge misinformation, build meaningful relationships, and pay attention to the commitments being made by governments and institutions. It also means continuing to ask whether those commitments are resulting in real progress and change.

Most importantly, the work cannot end with this toolkit or with September 30. Reconciliation is ongoing, and each of us has a responsibility to consider what we will carry forward, what actions we will take, and how we continue contributing to this work.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is a national Indigenous organization representing the political voices of Indigenous women in all their diversities in Canada. NWAC advocates and works with First Nations - on- and off-reserve, status and non-status, disenfranchised - Métis, and Inuit people across Canada. As an aggregate of Indigenous women's organizations across Canada, NWAC works to enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of Indigenous women in all their diversity within their respective communities.



For more information on NWAC's work related to National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, or if you have questions about this toolkit, please contact:

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