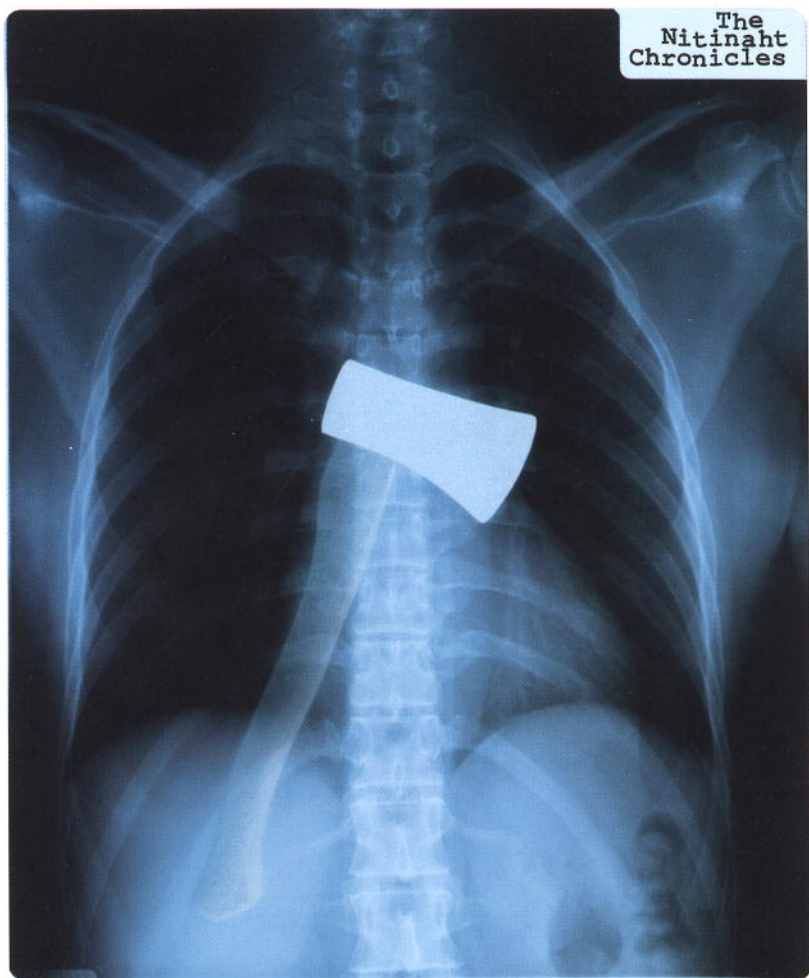


A National Film Board of Canada Release

User's Guide for

The Nitinaht Chronicles



*A film about child sexual
abuse and healing*



User's Guide
for

**The
Nitinaht
Chronicles**

*A film about child sexual abuse
and healing*

User's Guide for **The Nitinaht Chronicles**

A film about child sexual abuse and healing

"As difficult as it is to face - to open up about it - talk about it. You must, because no one deserves that pain. No matter how bad it seems, you are somebody, you are worthwhile, you are a good person. No matter how small you think you are or how small you feel, you've got to believe that there is good for you in the world."

-Bonnie Edgar, 19-year-old sexual abuse survivor

"This film is a gift from the Nitinaht community and is given, in the spirit of healing and well-being, to other individuals or communities facing similar issues and who need support and encouragement to break the wall of silence and begin their own healing journeys."

-Chief Jack Thompson

“Based on the trust established during the making of a previous film (Salt Water People), I approached the Ditidaht people and offered our cameras to help them confront the issue of sexual abuse. Individuals would speak on camera: the resulting footage was shown to members of the community and their reactions were also recorded to be viewed later by those individuals. This “dialogue” lasted from 1990 to 1997. It was only toward the end of this process that the community decided to make these chronicles public - to share their story of pain and suffering, and its message of hope and compassion.”

Maurice Bulbulian, Director

“When viewing this film, remember that just because these individuals and this community had the will and the courage to deal with their issues in a brutally honest and public forum, their problems are not any worse than those of people who veil their abuse in secrecy. In fact, breaking the wall of silence makes healing possible: continued secrecy does not.”

-The Producers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Film	5
Synopsis	5
Purpose of the film and guide	5
Preparing to view the film	6
Who should view this film?	7
Key People in the Film	8
Who are the Ditidaht People?	8
Brief History of the Residential School System	9
Overview of Child Sexual Abuse	10
What is child sexual abuse?	10
How serious is the problem?	10
Who is at risk of becoming a victim?	10
How can I identify a child who has been sexually abused?	11
How can I identify an offender?	12
What are the long-term effects of child sexual abuse?	12
What do I do if a child discloses abuse?	13
What are the myths about child sexual abuse?	14
What can my community do to prevent child sexual abuse?	16
Resources	18
Bibliography	23
References	24

ABOUT THE FILM

Synopsis

The Nitinaht Chronicles is an intimate account of the Ditidaht First Nation as it confronts the cycle of abuse and violence within its community.

The film begins with the story of 13-year-old Bonnie, who was sexually abused by her grandfather, a respected elder among the Ditidaht people. Her disclosure of the abuse forces the once taboo subject out into the open, and members of the community turn to the camera to tell their stories. Survivors of sexual abuse, including Bonnie's mother, share their pain and isolation, and seek closure and accountability. Offenders discuss their actions, accept responsibility, and talk about their own abuse. The community comes together to search for answers and openly acknowledges the impact of the residential school system that was a breeding ground for the abuse of Native children.

Shot over a period of seven years, the film portrays the community's long and painful struggle to heal itself, and uses Bonnie's story to show that both healing and forgiveness are possible.

Purpose of the film and guide

The Nitinaht Chronicles uses the story of the Ditidaht people in the hope of creating a dialogue about childhood sexual abuse in the wider community. The film aspires to:

- create an awareness of the problem of child sexual abuse

- sensitize the viewer to the effects of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors, as well as their families and the community
- offer hope and encouragement to individuals and communities struggling to come to terms with sexual abuse
- educate in both the prevention and healing of child sexual abuse

The user's guide provides information related to the film and on child sexual abuse. To help you get the most from watching the video, review the information contained in this guide first.

If you are showing the film to an audience, share the appropriate information from the guide, keeping in mind your purpose. For more information on child sexual abuse, refer to the list of resources at the back of this guide.

Preparing to view the film

Before watching *The Nitinaht Chronicles*, the viewer should be aware that the personal stories in this film are raw and emotional. They may provoke some powerful, perhaps painful, feelings and memories in audience members. The language is sometimes strong and, in some instances, includes graphic sexual detail. Please preview the video before screening it.

The people in this film are real, as are their stories and experiences. They are not professionals or experts in the field of child sexual abuse. They have many aspects to their lives: this film only captures their lives in relation to child sexual abuse. It is not, nor was it intended to be, a comprehensive look into all aspects of the Ditidaht community. Nothing in the film is rehearsed or scripted.

The story is told as it unfolded.

This film is about child sexual abuse in one community. Although a First Nations group is depicted, it is important to understand that the problem can exist in any community, regardless of race, religion, culture, and socio-economic status.

Who should view this film?

The Nitinaht Chronicles will be of interest to anyone wanting to learn more about ending child sexual abuse. The film will be particularly valuable to:

- victims and survivors of sexual abuse
- families of victims, survivors, or offenders
- support groups for sexual abuse victims and survivors
- educators, social workers, therapists, individuals working in the justice system and other professionals dealing with the issue of sexual abuse
- communities interested in implementing a prevention program

KEY PEOPLE IN THE FILM

The Edgar Family:

Elders Carl and Christine;
their daughters and sons
Linda, Vera, Phillip “Sam”, Carl Jr, and Ralph;
their granddaughter Bonnie.

The Thompson Family:

Elders Ida and Mike;
Chief Jack Thompson and his wife, Nona;
their daughter, Iris;
Charlie Thompson

Other members of the community:

Lou Durocher
Maureen Knighton
Alan “Cat” Joseph
Ernie and Jimmy Chester

WHO ARE THE DITIDAHT PEOPLE?

The Ditidaht First Nation is one of many Aboriginal communities that make up the Nuuchahnulth First Nations, or the Nuuchahnulth, as they call themselves. The name means “the row of mountains, surrounded by waters.”¹ Nuuchahnulth territory extends from the west coast of Vancouver Island into northwest Washington. Together, the tribes govern themselves through the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

The residential school system was created by the federal government in the 1920s² as part of its plan to assimilate Aboriginal people into Canadian society. The teachers for the schools, who came from churches and religious orders, viewed educating Native children as part of their missionary work. The responsibility - and right - to raise and educate their children was legislated away from Native people and handed over to the residential school caregivers, as Native children were taken out of their homes and placed in the government-run schools. This policy fostered an atmosphere that led many of the caregivers to abuse their power.

An investigation by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples addressed the “destructive consequences” of residential schools. “Enforced separation from family and community at an early age, deliberate suppression of language and culture, substandard living conditions and second-rate education...”³ Worse still, the evidence of physical abuse and sexual assault is now a matter of record. As a result, Aboriginal children “learned to despise the traditions and accomplishments of their people, to reject the values and spirituality that had always given meaning to their lives, to distrust the knowledge and lifeways of their families and kin. By the time they were free to return to their villages, many had learned to despise themselves.”⁴

The impact of the residential school system continues to be felt by Native people today:

“Two-thirds of that last generation to attend residential schools has not survived. It is no coincidence that so many fell victim to violence, accidents, addictions and suicide. Today the children and grandchildren of those who went to residential schools also live with the same legacy of broken families, broken culture and broken spirit.”

Chief Councillor Charlie Cootes
Uchucklesaht First Nation
Port Alberni, British Columbia, 29 May 1992⁵

OVERVIEW OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation of a child for one's own gratification. The abuse may range from fondling (molestation) to sexual intercourse, and includes, but is not limited to, exhibitionism by the offender, having the child pose for or view pornographic material, and oral or anal sex. Emotional or physical abuse often accompanies child sexual abuse.

An abuser, or offender, can be a family member, someone the child is acquainted with, or a stranger. Sexual abuse by a family member is called incest. At one time, incest referred only to sexual abuse by a relative in the child's immediate or extended family, ranging from a parent or sibling, to an aunt or uncle, a cousin, or a grandparent. In recent years, however, just as the definition of family has expanded, incest has come to include any person who fills the role of a family member in the child's life, such as a step-parent, a step-brother or step-sister, or the boyfriend or girlfriend of a single parent.

How serious is the problem?

An extensive Canadian study on sexual abuse against children and youth revealed that approximately 1 in 2 females and 1 in 3 males have been victims of unwanted sexual acts, and that four out of five of these incidents were first committed when the person was under 18.⁶

Who is at risk of becoming a victim?

Both girls and boys can be victims of sexual abuse. Girls,

however, are at higher risk. Offenders often target children who are isolated - who have little contact with friends, a sibling, or an adult they can trust. Children with physical or mental disabilities are also more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

How can I identify a child who has been sexually abused?

Children who have been sexually abused often exhibit certain signs. Being aware of them will alert you to the possibility that a problem exists. Keep in mind that a child may display some of these signs but be troubled about an entirely different matter. What must be considered in identifying the sexually abused child are 1) *changes* in behaviour, 2) *extremes* in behaviour from what is generally considered normal, 3) the *pervasiveness* of a *cluster* of signs, rather than a single indicator, and 4) the presence of these signs over a period of time, rather than a single occurrence.

Some of the signs that a child has been sexually abused include:

- a change in appetite
- becoming withdrawn
- fear of a specific person or particular place
- age-inappropriate behaviour
- phobias
- self-mutilation
- poor academic performance
- running away
- aggressive behaviour
- delinquent behaviour

- physical ailments (headaches, stomach aches, etc.)
- sleep disturbances (nightmares, bedwetting, etc.)
- promiscuity
- venereal disease

How can I identify an offender?

The answer is simple: you can't. Contrary to the stereotype that deranged-looking strangers lurk in parks, abusers are normal-looking individuals who can blend into any given neighbourhood easily. Offenders come from all backgrounds, without respect to age, race, religion, ethnic group, education or economic status. They can be either male or female, although in most cases, an offender is male.

What are the long-term effects of child sexual abuse?

Victims often continue to feel the effects of abuse long after it has ended – frequently into adulthood. Some block out the traumatic experience and may only realize the reasons for their difficulties later in life.

As a result of sexual abuse, victims may:

- suffer from low self-esteem
- carry around feelings of guilt, shame, and anger
- feel isolated
- abuse alcohol and drugs
- turn to prostitution
- suffer from eating disorders
- have difficulty dealing with authority figures
- have difficulty trusting

- have difficulty forming healthy relationships
- continue to experience feelings of victimization
- attempt suicide
- suffer from depression

Many victims successfully overcome the effects of their childhood sexual abuse. Once they start regaining a sense of control over their lives, they are able to stop thinking of themselves as victims and begin thinking of themselves as survivors.

What do I do if a child discloses sexual abuse?

When sexual abuse is disclosed, you need to communicate the following messages to the child:

- “I believe you.”
- “It’s not your fault.”
- “It should never have happened to you and I’m sorry that it did.”
- “You were right to tell.”
- “I care about you and will help you.”

You will also want to keep the following in mind:

- The child needs to be in a private setting and feel safe. Allow the child to set the pace. Avoid “interviewing” the child to get all the details.
- Your reaction can make a difference. A child who senses you are uncomfortable—about learning of the abuse or the explicit language being used to describe the abuse, for example—may withdraw the allegation or be reluctant to continue talking. If you are unable to hold back feelings of anger about the abuse, let the

child know that you are angry at what the offender did, not at the child.

- Validate the child's feelings. The child may be experiencing a range of emotions, from fear and anxiety to anger and confusion, all of which are understandable under the circumstances.
- Don't promise the child you will keep the abuse a secret. The laws in your area may require you to report suspected child abuse. Other than informing the proper authorities, however, you need to respect the child's right to privacy and avoid betraying the trust the child showed by disclosing the abuse to you.
- It is not your responsibility to determine if the abuse actually took place or to confront the alleged abuser. Your responsibility is to get assistance for the child. Contact the local child protection agency or other social service organization, or the police.

What are the myths about child sexual abuse?

Myths about child sexual abuse exist as a result of misinformation and generalizations. The myths that are found within a given community depend on its experience with, and understanding of, child sexual abuse. Some of the more common myths are addressed below.

Myth: Children lie about being sexually abused.

Fact: Children rarely lie about being abused. Some may take back an allegation of abuse because they are afraid of the offender or, in cases of

incest, to protect the abuser and maintain harmony in the family. This does not necessarily mean the abuse did not take place.

Myth: Offenders abuse because they can't control their sexual needs.

Fact: Although it may appear that offenders abuse to satisfy their sexual needs, child sexual abuse is really about control and power. This is why abusers target children, who are vulnerable by the mere fact that they are dependent on adults for their physical, emotional, and economic needs.

Myth: It isn't abuse if the child consents to the sexual contact.

Fact: A child is not mature enough to realize the consequences of sexual contact with an adult and therefore can never be in a position to give informed consent. The power difference that exists between a child and an adult makes any sexual contact abusive, whether or not the child is perceived as having given consent.

Myth: In most cases, the offender is a stranger to the child.

Fact: In the vast majority of cases, the victim knows and has an on-going relationship with the abuser. Offenders go out of their way to befriend children. They often seek out positions where they will have easy access to children, have authority over them, and be able to gain their trust.

Myth: Some children are seductive and provoke the offender into the sexual abuse.

Fact: This is an attempt to place the blame on the victim. Abusers alone are responsible for controlling their actions and should not be allowed to rationalize their behaviour.

Myth: Offenders were themselves sexually abused and therefore aren't responsible for their behaviour.

Fact: While it's true that many offenders were sexually abused as children, this does not justify, excuse, or explain their actions. Not all victims of childhood sexual abuse go on to become offenders, just as not all offenders were sexually abused.

What can my community do to prevent child sexual abuse?

An effective community-based approach to child sexual abuse prevention:

- Recognizes child sexual abuse as the serious and widespread problem that it is and makes prevention a priority.
- Recognizes that every sector of the community – from the individual to government bodies – shares responsibility for protecting all children from abuse.
- Provides sufficient resources for dealing with both the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse, including child protection services, social workers, support groups for child abuse victims and their families, prevention educators and therapists.

- Educates and trains parents, teachers, and others who routinely work with children so they 1) can adequately safeguard children, 2) are able to identify children who are being abused, and 3) are aware of responsibilities and procedures in reporting abuse.
- Provides children with the tools that will help them protect themselves. Since it is impossible to watch children 24 hours a day, and since an offender is most likely to be someone the child knows, children must be given the tools that will minimize the risk of being sexually abused. This includes healthy self-esteem and self-confidence, effective communications skills and accurate information as to who potential abusers might be.
- Provides a supportive environment in which victims may disclose their abuse without fear of being blamed or of not being believed.
- Assists and supports victims in their healing to reduce long-term effects of abuse, including the risk of re-victimization.
- Examines and challenges societal attitudes that foster the tolerance of child abuse.
- Keeps up to date with the latest risks to the welfare of children, such as use of the Internet by pedophiles to seek out and befriend vulnerable children.
- Promotes awareness of laws that reflect a commitment to the prevention of child sexual abuse.
- Encourages all members of the community to become advocates for children.

“Silence, ignorance, and apathy are the child predator’s greatest allies.”

–Dr. Nancy Faulkner, Psychologist

RESOURCES

Books

Bass, Ellen and Laura Davis. *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, New York: Harper and Row, 1994.

Cameron, Grant. *What About Me? A Guide for Men Helping Female Partners Deal With Childhood Sexual Abuse*, Carp: Creative Bound Inc., 1994.

Kehoe, Patricia. *Helping Abused Children*, Seattle: Parenting Press, Inc., 1988.

Lew, Mike. *Victims No Longer: Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1990.

Wells, Mary. *Canada's Law on Child Sexual Abuse: A Handbook*, Ottawa: Communications and Public Affairs, Department of Justice, 1990.

Videos from the NFB

Circles Several Yukon communities integrate Aboriginal sentencing circles into the formal justice system. Instead of meting out punishment, circles focus on healing victim, perpetrator and community. They are a powerful alternative to prison terms imposed by courts. (1998, 58 minutes, order number: C9197 120)

The “Good Things” Package Includes two films: **Good Things Too**, a compelling drama about five teens working to recover from the effects of sexual abuse in the context of a teen group; and **Good Things Can Still Happen**, a critically acclaimed animated film developed for therapists and other professionals working

with sexually abused children aged 6 to 12. (1996, 69 minutes, order number:193C 9195 204) ***Good Things Can Still Happen*** is also available in French under the title ***Tout ira mieux!***

Beyond the Shadows A film on the devastating effects of residential schools on Native people in Canada. The video relates the history of these schools while depicting painful personal experiences and subsequent healing processes. (1993, 28 minutes, order number: C0193 112)

Before Columbus - Programme Two: Conversion The European conquest of the Americas was not just a struggle for territory but a battle for souls. Churches were built on the ruins of temples, sacred relics were plundered, and Native children were forced to attend residential schools. (1993, 50 minutes, order number: C9192 137)

Where Angels Dare In an intensely personal document about healing from childhood sexual abuse and torture, four women and two men speak honestly and eloquently of painful childhood experiences, the "angels" who guided them along the way, and their deeply felt commitment to building a better world for children. (1993, 26 minutes, order number: C9193 054)

The Learning Path Generations of Native children were taught in schools that to be Native was somehow wrong. Meet three remarkable educators who are leading younger Natives along the path of enlightenment. (1991, 59 minutes, order number: C9191 065)

Children of the Eagle This documentary addresses the healing of three sexually abused Aboriginal children. The eagle, representing bravery, leadership and wisdom,

symbolizes the qualities needed by the community to deal with children in crisis. (1990, 30 minutes, order number: C0190 193)

Poundmaker's Lodge: A Healing Place An award-winning portrait of a unique treatment centre where Native people troubled by drug and alcohol addiction participate in healing rituals and rediscover their traditions. (1987, 29 minutes, order number: C9187 011) Available in French under the title *La Maison Poundmaker - La Voie de la guérison*.

To a Safer Place An inspiring film by Oscar-winning director Beverly Shaffer, this is the story of how one woman comes to terms with her life as a survivor of incest. (1987, 58 minutes, order number: C0187 067) Available in French under the title *L'Enfant dans le mur*.

Feeling Yes, Feeling No: The Professional Package This internationally acclaimed package is one of the best programs ever produced for teaching children skills to protect themselves from sexual assault. On four videos, with a comprehensive teacher's guide that provides detailed lesson plans. (1984, 71 minutes, order number: 193C 0184 145)

Child Sexual Abuse: The Untold Secret Five teenage girls describe how, over a period of years, they were sexually abused by their fathers or stepfathers. They encourage other young people in similar situations to seek help. (1981, 30 minutes, order number: C0182 119)

Web sites

(Please note that addresses on the Web can change unexpectedly.)

“Pandora’s Box: The Secrecy of Child Sexual Abuse.”
(Dr. Nancy Faulkner)

<http://pages.prodigy.com/faulkner/home.htm>

“Sexual Assault Information Page.” (Chris Bartley)

<http://www.cs.utk.edu/~bartley/saInfoPage.html>

“National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.”
(Health Canada)

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/>

Organizations

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (NCFV)

Health Promotion and Programs Branch

Health Canada

Jeanne Mance Building, Tunney’s Pasture

Ottawa, Ontario

K1A 1B4

(613) 957-2938

Toll-free: 1-800-267-1291

*The NCFV is a national resource centre that provides
bilingual information on family violence in Canada.*

Kids Help Phone

Toll-free: 1-800-668-6868

*Kids Help Phone is a 24-hour, Canada-wide, bilingual
help-line for children and teenagers.*

The CAP (Child Assault Prevention) program consists of workshops for children, parents and school personnel. Each year more than 2 million children in the US, Canada and the UK participate in CAP workshops. The program is also available in French, as ESPACE (Programme de prévention des abus commis envers les enfants).

For more information on CAP/ESPACE, please contact the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre:

Montreal Assault Prevention Centre

P.O. Box 237
Station Place du Parc
Montreal, Quebec
H2W 2M9
(514) 284-1212

The CAP project is a division of the International Center for Assault Prevention. The Center provides training to professionals from around the world to enable them to set up assault prevention programs in their own communities.

International Center for Assault Prevention

606 Delsea Drive
Sewell, New Jersey 08080
(609) 582-7000

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Questions & Answers Regarding Indian Residential Schools."
http://www.cccb.ca/html_commissions/html_missions/questions_and_answers_e.htm

Cooper, Sally, Yvonne Lutter, and Cathy Phelps. *Strategies for Free Children: A Leader's Guide to Child Assault Prevention*. Columbus: Child Assault Prevention Project of Women Against Rape, 1983.

Department of Justice. *What to Do If a Child Tells You of Sexual Abuse*. Ottawa: Communications and Public Affairs, Department of Justice Canada, 1989.

Faulkner, Nancy. "Pandora's Box: The Secrecy of Child Sexual Abuse."
<http://pages.prodigy.com/faulkner/home.htm>

Fay, Jennifer. *He Told Me Not to Tell*. Renton: King County Rape Relief, 1979.

Kehoe, Patricia. *Helping Abused Children*, Seattle: Parenting Press, Inc., 1988.

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. *Child Sexual Abuse*. Ottawa: Health Canada, 1997.

National Film Board of Canada. *Feeling Yes, Feeling No*, video, 71 minutes, 1984.

National Film Board of Canada. *Good Things Can Still Happen*, video, 69 minutes, 1996.

National Film Board of Canada. *To a Safer Place*, video, 58 minutes, 1987.

Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council. *Indian Residential Schools: The Nuu-Chah-Nulth Experience*, 1996.

The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women. *From Victims to Survivors*. Montreal, CCLOW - Quebec, 1988.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council. *Indian Residential Schools: The Nuu-Chah-Nulth Experience* (1996), p. ix.
- ² A number of reports trace the origin of the residential school system back to the late 1800s.
- ³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. *Choosing Life*. Special report on suicide among Aboriginal people. (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing, 1995), p. 57.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 22
- ⁶ Supply and Services Canada. *Sexual Offences Against Children: Summary of the Report of the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youths*. (Ottawa: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1984), p. 1-2.