

Isolation of an Indigenous Child

Kacy's parents carefully considered her schooling options, hoping to find a place that felt connected to their culture. Having recently moved from a First Nation near Calgary, they missed the sense of community they had left behind. They recognized the value of an educational experience grounded in Indigenous cultural norms and initially considered sending her to an Indigenous school. However, both Piitoayis and the Niitsitapi Learning Centre were much farther from their home than the local community school. Ultimately, they chose the community school so that Kacy didn't have to spend so long on the bus every day.

In her first week, Kacy quickly noticed that there were very few Indigenous children in her new classroom and none of the teachers or staff shared her cultural background either. Kacy struggled to make friends and some of the other children made jokes about her braids. Kacy's teacher had to keep reminding Kacy to call her Ms. Robinson instead of calling her by her first name. The new school felt so formal and Kacy struggled to find people with whom she could connect. The unkind behaviour from classmates continued and Kacy found herself feeling isolated from her classmates.

As these challenges mounted, Kacy's confidence began to wane. She found herself less motivated to engage with her reading assignments, and her frustration sometimes manifested as acting out in class. This prompted her teacher to email her parents, requesting a meeting to discuss Kacy's progress and behaviour. For Kacy's parents, this email was distressing for many reasons, but mainly because they felt a profound mistrust of the school system. They worried that this kind of attention at school could lead to Kacy being labelled or scrutinized or could trigger the family to be put under the microscope of social services. Her parents wanted to help Kacy get out of this feedback loop but they didn't know how.

Feeling their anxiety, Kacy sensed her parents' distress, compounding her struggles. Gradually, she began to internalize doubts about her abilities, convincing herself that she wasn't good enough. This belief further diminished her engagement at school, creating a troubling cycle that made it increasingly difficult for her to thrive academically.



Kacy

Community Context

Experience in the Classroom

LACK OF SCHOOL & COMMUNITY CONNECTION

DISTANCE BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL/SUPPORTS

*Psychological & spiritual disconnect from home/community/culture

NON-INDIGENOUS TEACHERS

BULLYING

RACISM

- Under-representation of Indigenous resources & curriculum
- Relationality: familiar cultural norms not being used in class (how kids connect/relate to others)
- Lack of cultural connection

Child's Internal Environment

Home Environment

ISOLATION

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

*Disengagement from school, acting out/behavioural issues

Struggling Student

Need for parent intervention/collaboration

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

PARENTS/ GRANDPARENTS NOT FEELING WELCOME IN SCHOOLS

DISTANCE BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL/SUPPORTS

- Distrust of education system
- Skills to support child through a struggle
- Fear (child being flagged, child being labeled not being good enough, further perpetuation racism/othering)

