Children Are Medicine: Teachings of Coast Salish Children

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Member of Katzie First Nation

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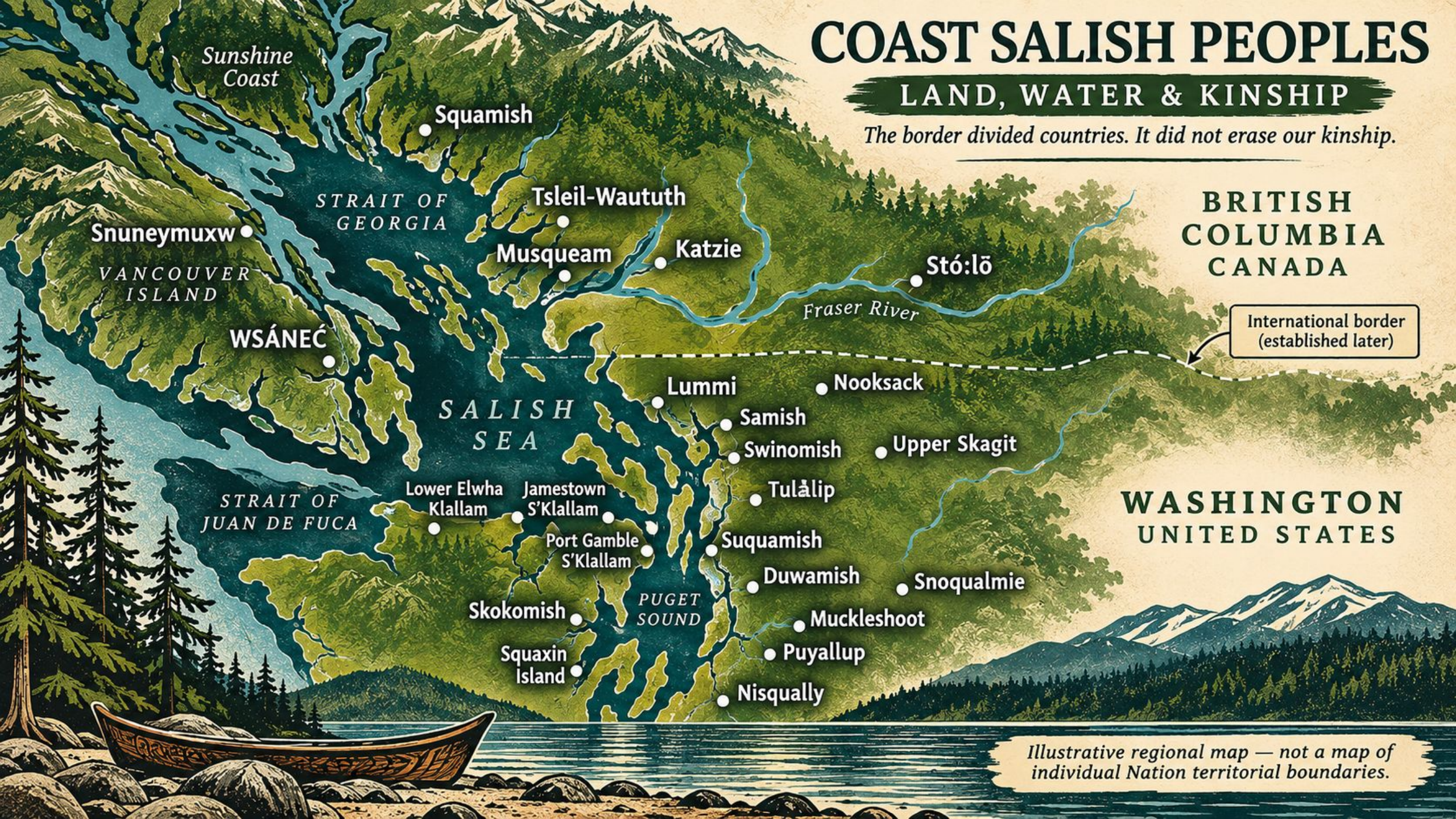

COAST SALISH PEOPLES
LAND, WATER & KINSHIP
The border divided countries. It did not erase our kinship.
Sunshine Coast
Squamish
STRAIT OF GEORGIA
Tsleil-Waututh
Snuneymuxw
Musqueam
Katzie
VANCOUVER ISLAND
Stó:lō
Fraser River
BRITISH COLUMBIA CANADA
International border (established later)
WSÁNEĆ
Lummi
Nooksack
SALISH SEA
Samish
Swinomish
Upper Skagit
Tulalip
Lower Elwha Klallam
Jamestown S'Klallam
STRAIT OF JUAN DE FUCA
Port Gamble S'Klallam
Suquamish
Duwamish
Snoqualmie
PUGET SOUND
Skokomish
Muckleshoot
Puyallup
Squaxin Island
Nisqually
WASHINGTON UNITED STATES
Illustrative regional map — not a map of individual Nation territorial boundaries.

What have children taught you?

1. Think of a child who has taught you something important about life.
2. What did that child teach you without necessarily intending to?
3. How might that teaching change the way you support children today?

Traditional Family Structures

The Extended Family Household

- The longhouse (lelum)
- Individual hearths
- Collective child rearing

Kinship and Descent

- Bilateral lineage
- Marriage and alliances
- Lineage property

Social Hierarchy

- 3-class system (Nobles, Commoners, Slaves)
- Siem system
- The Potlatch



Little People, Big Teachings



- Children are watching you
- Parenting focuses on
  - empowerment over control
  - cooperation over compliance
  - Interdependence over independence
- Respect and inclusion from happened from cradle to grave
- Knowing who you are and where you come from means you are a rich person
- Learning happened through observation, participation, and experience

7 Teachings of Coast Salish Children

1. Children connect our past, present and future
2. Children are our greatest teachers
3. Children belong to something greater
4. Children are medicine
5. Children carry the most powerful spirits
6. Children never arrive empty handed
7. Children walk closely with the spirit world



“

"Our responsibility is not to shape children into who we think they should be, but to create the conditions for them to become who they were always meant to be."

Len Pierre



Two-Eyed Seeing

Two-Eyed Seeing embraces “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all”.

— Elder Dr. Albert Marshall



Parenting Through Two-Eyed Seeing

BRINGING TOGETHER THE STRENGTHS OF BOTH WORLDS

INDIGENOUS PRACTICES

RELATIONAL • LAND-BASED • COMMUNITY

Collective Responsibility
It takes a village — family, kin, community, and Elders.

Land as a Teacher
Learning, wellness, and identity rooted in relationship with the land.

Identity, Language & Culture
Nurturing a strong sense of belonging, pride, and who they are.

Relationship Before Correction
Connection, respect, and teaching through example, story, and experience.

Interdependence
Raising children to care for self, others, community, and future generations.

TWO-EYED SEEING

Weaving together Indigenous teachings and contemporary knowledge to support the wholistic wellbeing and thriving of our children.

WESTERN / CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES

DEVELOPMENTAL • EVIDENCE-INFORMED • SYSTEMS

Child Development Science
Understanding brain development, emotional regulation, and attachment.

Safety & Wellbeing
Tools and frameworks to support physical, emotional, and mental health.

Skill Building & Independence
Supporting life skills, problem-solving, and confidence.

Professional Supports
Access to early intervention, counselling, learning supports, and specialized care.

Structure & Consistency
Routines, clear expectations, and developmentally appropriate guidance.

A BALANCED APPROACH TO RAISING
STRONG, CONNECTED AND RESILIENT CHILDREN


Communal & Extended Family Care
Learning Through Observation & Participation
Non-Interference & Autonomy
Discipline as Teaching & Reflection
Storytelling & Oral Tradition
Comnection to Identity, Language & Land
Indigenous Ways of Parenting

Independence vs. Interdependence



A relational way of being

The idea of the “individual” is a Western and colonial construct.
Indigenous worldviews are based on interdependence—our well-being is tied to each other, the land, and all living things.



Community and belonging

We thrive through relationships, connection, and collective responsibility—not isolation.
Social cohesion is a strength, not “tribalism.”



Everyone has a place

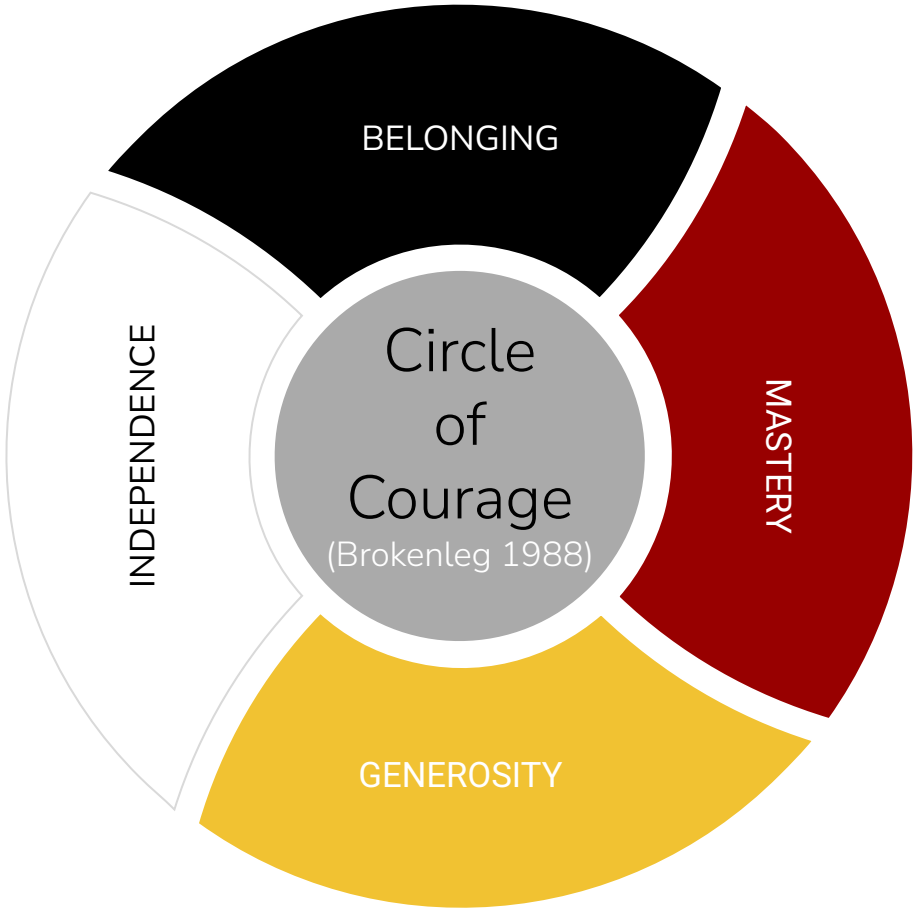
In our communities, everyone has a role and contributes their unique gifts around the fire.
There are no marginalized groups—people are valued for who they are and what they bring.



Strength in diversity

Different abilities, ways of thinking, and lived experiences are gifts to our communities, not deficits to be fixed.

Supporting Indigenous Resilience in Young People



Belonging - relational connection:

- Are youth feeling happy, grounded, and well supported?
- Have I nurtured a sense of trust and connection?

Mastery - self-determination:

- Have I created space for youth to exercise agency and autonomy?
- Do I know their aspirations?

Generosity - collective contribution:

- Have I made room for everyone to meaningfully contribute their gifts?
- Am I encouraging leadership, collaboration, and community-centred contribution?

Independence - creative power and purpose:

- Can I support youth in expressing their unique brilliance and independence?
- Am I shaping roles around youth strengths, rather than forcing them into rigid roles?

Over Stimulation





The Teaching of Listening



Great speakers are first great listeners

You have two ears and one mouth for a reason, so that you listen twice as often as you speak

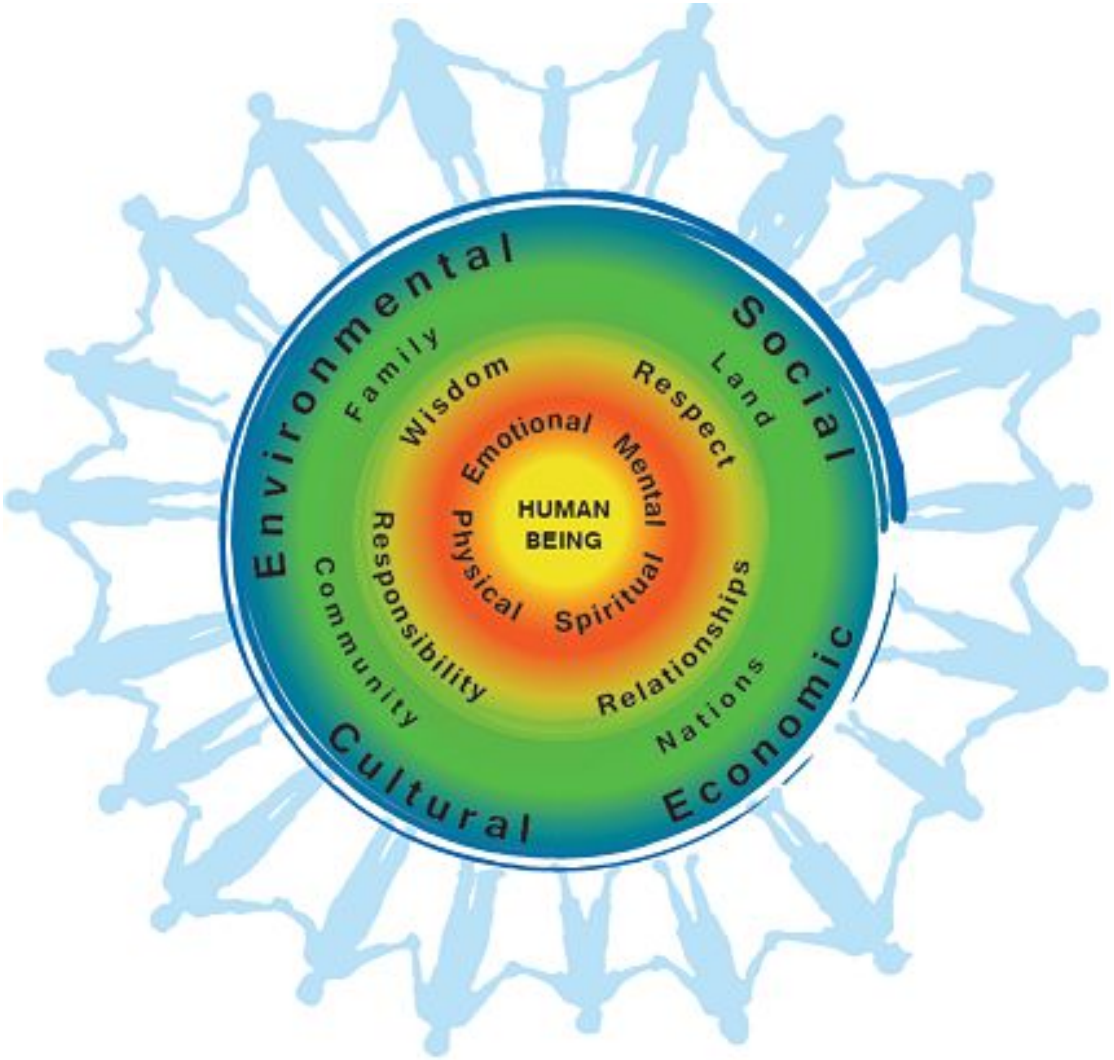
You have 3 ears, the two on the side of your head, and the one inside your heart

Listen to understand, not to respond

- Replacing judgement with curiosity, creating a safe place for someone to say everything without judgement

Listening with your heart creates understanding, it's hard to hate someone you understand, it's hard to be afraid of someone you understand

Indigenous Perspectives on Early Learning





Reflection & Discussion

Let’s take a moment to talk and reflect. In small groups, share:

- What is one thing that has resonated with you?
- What is one thing you already knew about?
- What is one question you have?

Feedback helps us grow!

Session Details:

- Course: Children
- Instructor: Len

CONTACT

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Thank You

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