



Ten soft skills for families



GENERIC SKILLS

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING OUR COMMUNITIES' VITALITY

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This skills framework is intended for field workers, stakeholders and facilitators who work in official-language minority communities in Canada.

It was designed to support the practices of those who wish to strengthen parenting abilities and linguistic continuity among the families they work with..

It also aims at reaching the parents themselves and support them with their parenting role.

The ten skills below were selected from an existing framework: *Nos compétences fortes*, by Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes (ICÉA).

We chose to work from *Nos compétences fortes* as this framework was designed after extensive research in the field of generic skills; Moreover, it has been put to the test since its creation in 1995, and recognized for its coherence and relevance.

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Ability to trust others

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to trust others reflects the ability of individuals to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with their human environment.

This skill refers to the ability of individuals to trust the various people around them. It assumes that individuals are capable not only of recognizing the people they can trust, but also of determining the level of trust they can put in them.

From this perspective, the ability to trust others is not blind at all. It stems in part from the ability of individuals to see primarily the good in the people around them, but it is also based on sensitive observations related to past experiences, familiar action contexts, special circumstances and knowing the people in question.

Definition specifically related to the family context

In a family context, trust in others reflects parents' ability to establish and maintain a mutually trusting relationship with their family members. Parents who trust others are also tolerant and flexible. They respect, embrace and support family members' ideas, opinions and contribution. In addition, they acknowledge and respect diverse points of view within the family.

This skill draws on parents' ability to demonstrate their awareness of family dynamics and proficiency at dealing with these dynamics. Consequently, parents are able to give and receive feedback constructively, while being respectful of family members.

Moreover, a sound ability to trust others allows parents to interact more effectively with others in stressful situations. They can detect, understand, manage, control and overcome their own emotions and those of others in such situations. They also recognize that emotions can guide their decision-making when solving problems or managing conflicts within and outside of the family unit, for instance in school settings.

Self-confidence

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

Self-confidence reflects the ability of individuals to believe in their abilities and to base their actions on this sense of internal security.

This skill refers to a sense of internal security that allows individuals to recognize the value of what they believe, say and do. Self-confidence thereby requires a good knowledge of one's potential and abilities. The more individuals are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, the stronger and truer their self-confidence will be.

Being self-confident is more about seeing what we can do, when and how, than about believing or saying that we can do anything.

Self-confidence allows individuals to accept difficult challenges, not out of pride, but because they know that they can do it. Likewise, these people will not be afraid to expose their work to criticism, because they are aware of its value and are proud of the results achieved. Finally, they will not be afraid either to talk in the presence of people who do not agree with them.

Definition specifically related to the family context

Self-confidence relates to having good knowledge of one's own strengths and weaknesses as a parent, and recognizing one's full potential by referring to this sense of internal security. Among other things, this means that self-confident parents know their own value, even though they are not constantly praised. They rely on their skills to make appropriate choices. It could be said that they are "comfortable in their own skin".

As self-confident parents, they are able to gauge the quality and relevance of their actions. Therefore, they recognize and assess consequences of their actions on family members. They can also express their opinions and assert their choices while respecting others. In that sense, they are aware of their influence on family members; they are sensitive to the impact of their own behaviour and attitudes on them. They feel responsible for their actions and their effects, and can explain reasons for their actions or comments.

Resourcefulness

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

Resourcefulness reflects the ingenuity of individuals who find practical solutions to problems that occurred in action.

This skill refers to the qualities of an individual who knows how to muddle through easily. We will say that this individual is skillful, deft or clever. In common language, resourcefulness is synonymous with ingenuity. This is why it is associated with an individual's inventing capacity.

However, resourcefulness differs from creativity in that it is generally subject to the imperatives of a context requiring a short-term response: solve the problem (or accept to be caught off guard). As such, a resourceful individual is able to "get off the hook" and does so primarily out of necessity.

Resourceful individuals will thus be able to invent things or imagine solutions that meet the requirements of unexpected situations. To do this, they will use resources available in their immediate environment. They will find by themselves the means for achieving their project.

Definition specifically related to the family context

Resourceful parents know how to find or imagine practical solutions to resolve an immediate problem, by using their ingenuity, finding tips and improvising with whatever means available. Resourceful parents find the information and help when they need it, sometimes from unexpected sources. They are able to turn some constraints into opportunities. In that sense, they know how to tap into neighbourhood or community resources, such as educational and community programs.

Parents who are resourceful can act independently, perform tasks in multiple ways, create games or carry out projects, by using what they have at hand, sometimes with limited resources! They quickly understand circumstances, draw on various sources of inspiration and experiment new combinations of ideas, strategies or techniques to enhance the family situation. They can think out of the box to find solutions or new ways of doing things, outside of conventional paths. Resourceful parents do not fear change and can deal with uncertainty.

Ability to learn from one's experiences

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to learn from one's experiences reflects the ability of individuals to improve continually, and to draw lessons from their successes and failures.

This skill refers to two personality traits in individuals: their willingness to learn and their ability to draw lessons from experience.

These personality traits are found among individuals who take a reflexive attitude toward their choices and actions. By trying to understand what was effective and what was not, they are able to learn from their own experiences. They draw lessons that are useful in new action contexts. They thereby avoid repeating mistakes of the past. Also, they have tools to change their ways of doing things and improve their practices.

Definition specifically related to the family context

Within a family, the ability to learn from one's experiences allows parents to maintain a positive attitude toward learning. To do so, they are open to continuously acquiring new knowledge. They are curious, seek opportunities to learn, ask questions to find out how things work and welcome new learning challenges.

Parents who learn from their experiences do not dread their own mistakes or bad decisions. Rather, they acknowledge and talk about them, apologize and correct them. Consequently, they accept positive feedback and constructive criticism from family members. They also recognize and admit that they don't know everything.

Such behaviour allows parents to become learning models for other family members, with whom they share what they have learned from various life experiences.

Ability to communicate

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to communicate reflects the ability of individuals to express themselves in plain language, to formulate effective and understandable messages, regardless of whom they are addressing.

This skill refers to the ability of individuals to express themselves in plain language and to make themselves understood both orally and in writing.

That said, the ability to communicate goes beyond mastering a code (oral or written), beyond simple information transmission. The ability to communicate implies a willingness to share, defend and argue one's ideas. This willingness, in turn, implies an ability to organize available information, filter it and grasp the essentials.

In a way, the ability to communicate is based on actively listening to others, being willing to understand their concerns, and even being sensitive to their worldview. Finally, communication would not be effective if it is not understood.

Definition specifically related to the family context

The ability to communicate reflects parents' capacity to clearly express themselves, both verbally and in writing. It also implies listening effectively and being sensitive to children's body or non-verbal language. Parents who communicate effectively keep updated about what their children are doing, going through or witnessing, therefore instilling an open climate that nurtures communication in all interactions.

Parents must often analyze and manage communication, by taking into account factors that foster or hinder its effectiveness. They must choose a language that is appropriate to the situation, the family context and the intent of particular comments. They are sensitive to the impact of language and consider the other person's point of view in order to improve their ability to communicate. They can distance themselves from their own perspective, pay attention to their interlocutors' reactions and adapt their way of communicating accordingly. They detect strategies that are adopted throughout the process, as well as their effectiveness. They comply with established rules and develop an appreciation for rich and precise vocabulary, relevance of comments and cohesive reasoning.

In supporting children in their educational path, parents aim to express themselves as adequately as possible. They can interpret and explain to their children the events they experienced or witnessed, such a fight in the schoolyard or an accident.

Perseverance

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

Perseverance reflects the ability of individuals to make, voluntarily and deliberately, every effort required to perform lengthy tasks or activities.

This skill refers to the action of “persevering” with the completion of a task, to carry it out despite the fact that it requires sustained efforts. This ability is seen in the various aspects of individuals’ lives, depending on the obstacles they encounter.

Perseverance is most often associated with character traits such as steadfastness, patience, persistence and tenacity. It also suggests that individuals will be able to stay cool and regular in their efforts, that they will not give up and will rather keep up their courage when faced with obstacles.

Finally, perseverance assumes that individuals are able to motivate themselves or to identify adequate sources of motivation helping them to complete tasks.

Definition specifically related to the family context

In a family context, perseverance is found in parents who succeed in upholding their decisions, their educational objectives and resulting actions, despite daily life difficulties. Persevering parents recognize that their interventions are based on long-term thinking, and they maintain a constant course of action.

They are skilled at establishing routines and habits required in family life. Acting with flexibility and patience, they demonstrate stability, even in the face of possible failures along the way. They seek means of overcoming obstacles.

Persevering people are determined to complete projects they have initiated, not giving in to discouragement. They frequently sacrifice things they like to do in order to fulfill important tasks they had already started. They understand that they may serve as models of perseverance for other family members.

Ability to solve problems

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The ability to solve problems reflects the ability of individuals to address the issues that they and the people around them are facing, and to implement solutions adapted to everyone's needs.

This skill refers to the ability of individuals to quickly identify any problem limiting or hindering their efforts. These individuals will immediately take action, seeking to identify the causes of the problem, understand its effects and find the best possible solution.

Furthermore, individuals' ability to solve problems implies that they are able to respond quickly where problems arise.

Definition specifically related to the family context

Parents who have developed an ability to solve problems can perceive obstacles and difficulties that occur from day to day, and find solutions to such situations. They can easily:

- Anticipate and recognize a problem
- Share their perception of the challenging situation with family members
- Initiate a problem-solving process
- Contribute to finding a solution that is suitable for everyone
- Take appropriate actions to solve the problem
- Assess the effects of these actions on family members

A challenging situation can be perceived differently by each family member. Indeed, what may seem problematic to a parent may not seem so to the other parent or to a child. In addition, there are multiple ways to resolve a problem.

Sometimes, parents grasp a problematic situation more intuitively. They rely on their life experience and perceive a difficult situation, without necessarily understanding all of its dimensions from a cognitive standpoint. However, they proceed logically to determine causes and put forward a solution that is approved by others. Their decisions are based on common sense, intuition and reflection. Acting effectively while relying on intuition is frequently said to be the prerogative of high-level experts, which often defines people who are responsible for families!

Self-control

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

Self-control reflects the ability of individuals to overcome the emotions that they feel in tense or hostile situations.

This skill is mainly seen in the ability of individuals to remain calm. Individuals who develop good self-control can effectively stifle negative reactions to peer pressure, extended periods of stress, or even the hostility of other people.

Therefore, self-control implies that individuals can stay calm in different kinds of situations, that they will be patient and weigh their actions and words to avoid making tense situations worse.

Definition specifically related to the family context

Parents who demonstrate self-control can interact effectively with family members in stressful situations. This skill allows parents to identify, understand, manage, control and overcome their emotions and those of family members. They also recognize that their emotions can serve as a guide to decision-making.

Self-control draws on sound knowledge of one's self and personality, as well as healthy self-acceptance and understanding of others. Thus, parents are able to identify contexts and circumstances that may trigger negative emotions, anxiety and impulsivity, subsequently controlling and managing them more effectively.

Sense of observation

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The sense of observation reflects the ability of individuals to notice changes that occur in their environments.

This skill refers to the sensitivity of individuals to changes (big or small) that occur around them every day.

It is seen particularly in the ability of individuals to notice the presence of details that other people do not see, to remember them, to interpret their meaning and even to refer to them when the opportunity arises.

Definition specifically related to the family context

Observant parents pay special attention to their family environment and notice new elements. Bolstered by this skill, parents can identify details that will help them understand a situation or interpret various behaviours. The sense of observation will allow them to grasp another individual's personality and adapt accordingly.

Among other things, the sense of observation reflects in parents' awareness of changes that occur in their children from day to day. They identify, remember and interpret details that other people may not perceive. Observant parents remain abreast of what their children are doing, experiencing or witnessing, thus building a climate of trust and open communication.

Sense of responsibility

Definition taken from *Nos compétences fortes*

The sense of responsibility reflects the ability of individuals to assume responsibilities and accept the consequences of their actions.

This skill is seen particularly in individuals who assume their obligations and weigh their actions. We say that they are reliable, and that we can trust them because they fulfil their duties, respect their commitments and accept the consequences of their actions.

Furthermore, the sense of responsibility assumes that individuals do not hesitate to get involved in projects and that they avoid relying on others, even making decisions for them. Finally, the sense of responsibility requires individuals to step back from the decisions made and to avoid taking unwarranted risks, especially for others.

Definition specifically related to the family context

Within a family, the sense of responsibility reflects in people's ability to take charge of their responsibilities as parents, and fulfil their obligations toward their children. Responsible parents make decisions and commitments for the family, which they are able to meet and achieve.

Responsible parents are aware of their role as parents and they participate in family life accordingly. For parents, this skill translates into an ability to adequately meet their children's basic needs (health, safety, food, affection, etc.), and accompany them in their social, intellectual and emotional development.

Actions taken by parents may foster or impede their children's development. Therefore, parents need to assume their responsibilities in terms of the impact of their behaviour on other family members.