

# NO FUN

Kids have always been expected to help with chores, or to do small jobs on the farm, in the fishing boat or in the family store or business. But it wasn't that long ago that many children your age and younger had actual jobs.

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## FORCED TO WORK

Before Canada passed laws saying kids were not to work, many children took jobs. They didn't have much choice — even if both parents were working for money, their families were still terribly poor. These jobs were often hard and dangerous. Kids worked up to 12 hours a day, six days a week. Boys as young as eight worked in coal mines as “trappers.” They sat in complete blackness, ready to open a door for loads of coal. When the Springhill mine exploded in 1891, 21 boys were killed alongside 104 men. City children were often hired because they could be paid less, and because their small hands were useful for some jobs. Children working in a Quebec factory in 1889 were paid a dollar a week, while adults doing the same job earned that much in a day. In many factories, child labourers would have money taken away from them if they talked too much, came in late or didn't do good enough work, according to their bosses. Girls might work at home with their mothers, doing laundry or sewing for other people. Kids also earned money by polishing shoes or selling fruit in the streets.



Men and boys outside a coal mine near Fernie, B.C., 1911

IN 1891, MORE THAN ONE IN 10 KIDS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 10 AND 14 WORKED OUTSIDE THEIR HOME.



First Nations children plant seeds in the garden at the Red Deer Industrial Institute, an Alberta residential school, in 1910

## FROM BAD TO WORSE

Imagine you were taken away from your family and had to live at your school. You only spend a bit of the day in a classroom learning, and almost no time relaxing or playing. Instead, you work, often from early morning until the evening: washing and ironing laundry, hoeing and weeding fields, repairing and cleaning the school buildings, washing dishes, making shoes, cooking and baking, or sewing clothes for your schoolmates. That was what happened to Indigenous children at residential schools, which, despite their name, didn't provide much education. One principal in Saskatchewan wrote in 1886, "the pupils are here to learn how to work as well as to read and write." The government didn't give the churches that ran the schools enough money, so kids were put to work to keep things running. Sometimes they were seriously hurt or even killed while working at jobs that adults would normally do. The injuries were blamed on their carelessness. An RCMP officer visited the Mount Elgin residential school in Ontario in 1943, where students worked on a farm. He reported, "Discipline is too severe, (the students) are over-worked and have little or no recreation." In some schools, Indigenous children made things or harvested crops to be sold to outsiders. This is called forced labour because they had no choice and were not paid.

## RESCUED BY LAW

THE FIRST RULES LIMITING KIDS' WORK WERE PASSED IN THE LATE 1880S. IN THE 1920S, LAWS STARTED REQUIRING CHILDREN TO GO TO SCHOOL. BY 1929, IT WAS ILLEGAL TO HIRE CHILDREN IN MINES AND FACTORIES IN MOST OF THE COUNTRY. KIDS COULD FINALLY JUST BE KIDS, LEARNING AND HAVING FUN INSTEAD OF WORKING LONG HOURS.