

This New Canadian Holiday Reflects On The Legacy Of Indigenous Residential Schools

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People march during the Every Child Matters walk in honor of children who lost their lives in Canada's Residential School system, in Toronto, Canada, on July 1. *Cole Burston/AFP via Getty Images*

Thursday is Canada's first-ever National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The [new statutory holiday](#) commemorates the victims and survivors of Indigenous residential schools. It was created through parliamentary legislation this spring and codified in June — around the time when hundreds of Indigenous children's remains were [found in unmarked graves](#) at several such sites.

There were 140 federally-run Indian Residential Schools in Canada between 1831 and 1998. The government separated some 150,000 Indigenous children from their families and forced them to attend the Christian boarding schools in an effort to assimilate them into Canadian society. [Thousands of children died of disease and other causes](#), and the Canadian government has acknowledged that physical and sexual abuse was rampant at these schools.



NATIONAL

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Survivors have long advocated for recognition and reparations, and Canada created a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as part of those efforts. The commission ran from 2008 to 2015, and released a final report with 94 calls to action — one of which called for a federal statutory day of commemoration.



WORLD

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The new holiday also falls on [Orange Shirt Day](#), an Indigenous-led grassroots movement that asks Canadians to reflect on the treatment of First Nations people. It was founded by residential school survivor [Phyllis Webstad](#), whose favorite orange shirt taken away on her first day of school.

HISTORY

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The topic is in the news this week for another significant reason: A federal court there has paved the way for billions of dollars in compensation to First Nations children who suffered discrimination in the state welfare system, after a judge [dismissed legal challenges from the Canadian government](#).

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [issued a statement](#) Thursday urging Canadians to reflect on the "painful and lasting impacts" of residential schools, calling the holiday "an opportunity for us all to learn more, and to affirm the need for reconciliation and commit ourselves to the work ahead."

[Here's more information](#) about the history behind the holiday and ways to observe it, as well as mental health resources available in Canada. The CBC has these stories on [why Canada is marking the holiday this year](#), [ways to participate](#) and [how to talk to kids about it](#).

This story originally appeared on [the Morning Edition live blog](#).