The residential schools in Canada were created and sponsored by Christian churches and the government to indoctrinate indigenous children with Canadian culture and ideals to assimilate them into Canadian culture.

Residential schools became part of the government and church policy from the 1830s with the creation of Anglican, Methodist, and Roman Catholic institutions in Ontario.

With the passage of the British North America Act (1867) and Indian Act (1876) in agreement between the federal government and Plains Nations, the government was required to include schooling provisions to indigenous young as the Indigenous leaders hoped it would help them to transition to Canadian society. The federal government collaborated with Christian missionaries and had hoped that the schooling would encourage religious conversion and make First Nations economically self-sufficient to decrease their dependence on public funds. This however led to custodial schools, which was not what the Indigenous leaders hoped to create.

The residential schools reached their height of 80 institutions around 1930. Three-fifths of the schools were operated by the Roman Catholic Church, one-quarter by the Anglican Church and the rest by the United and Presbyterian Churches.

Children at the schools had an overall negative experience. The children were isolated, separated from their home and parents, and had their culture disparaged or scorned. At school, the children were segregated according to gender, forbidden to speak their first language and to send letters home.

The assimilation began as soon as the children arrived at the schools, their hair was cut (in case of the boys), as well as they were stripped of their traditional clothes and given new uniforms, and even new name sin some cases. Many of the Christian missionary staff would focus on Christian practices while criticizing and even denigrating Indigenous spiritual traditions.

Until the 1950s, the residential schools operated on a half-day study, half-day work system, believing that work would help the students lean skills to allow them to earn a living when they get older. However, the work was mostly related to tasks that would run the school inexpensively. Girls were responsible for housekeeping (cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, sewing). Boys on the other hand worked in construction, carpentry, general maintenance and agricultural labour.

Many of the children were abused at the residential schools, usually from impatience and correction which would lead to punishment, including being beaten, chained or confined. Some children were even exposed to sexual abuse by sexual staff. When such allegations were brough forwards to the government and church officials, the consequences at most would be firing of the staff member. However, they were sometimes allowed to keep teaching.

Overcrowded residential schools would most often lead to deaths of indigenous children. The children were vulnerable to diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza. In addition, due to lack of funding, school menus would serve food that was not very nutritious