



**A PRACTICE GUIDE FOR  
WORKING WITH FAMILIES  
FROM PRE-BIRTH  
TO EIGHT YEARS**

Engaging Families in the  
Early Childhood Development Story

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## GLOSSARY

### Parents

The term 'parent/s' includes 'carers, foster carers, relative carers, stepfamilies, grandfamilies and others who have a direct full-time, part-time or occasional parenting role' (WA Department for Communities, 2010).

### Families

The term 'families' refers to any of the wide variety of home arrangements that people establish to care for and rear children. These arrangements may include children living with their parents, extended family members, community members and other caregivers, and may vary across and within community and cultural groups.

### Early Childhood Development Workforce

The Early Childhood Development Workforce covers professionals and practitioners working with families in health, education, community services and disability services. They can include, but are not limited to, child and family health nurses, pediatricians, allied health professionals, educators, childcare workers, disability services workers, community development coordinators, parenting educators, librarians, and early childhood intervention workers.

## ICONS USED IN THIS GUIDE







# **INTRODUCTION & THE CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**



## KEY POINTS

- This is a guide for professionals and practitioners to share information about early childhood development in a consistent and compelling way with parents, families and the community.
- This guide is based on an international review of the latest neuroscience evidence, which shows that positive relationships and experiences in the early years contribute to children's optimal development and lay a foundation for future development and learning.
- Parenting is a primary influence on children's development, and parents, families and the community can provide children with an enriching environment and nurturing relationships to support growth and development.
- This guide was created because parents revealed, through extensive social research, that they received inconsistent and confusing information about how best to support their children's development.
- The focus of this guide is for professionals and practitioners to work from the same starting point, and to use a common language and provide consistent messages about the early years of child development.
- By applying the information, best practices and shared values in this guide, we, as professionals and practitioners, play our role in supporting families to give children the best start in life.

## 1.1 About this Guide

This is a guide for professionals and practitioners to share information about early childhood development in a consistent and compelling way with parents, families and the community. This guide is based on an international review of the latest neuroscience evidence, which shows that we all have a positive role to play in supporting children to achieve the best possible start in life.

The neuroscience evidence is clear that the early years impact significantly on children's brain development and their future life chances. The first five years, in particular, are vitally important.

Brain development begins in-utero, continues throughout life, and influences development of the whole child – physical, cognitive, social, spiritual and emotional growth and learning. This guide understands the relevance of later stages of development but acknowledges that for prevention and early intervention, the early years are where we can make the biggest difference.

The neuroscience shows that positive relationships and experiences in the early years contribute to children's optimal development. Children begin life with potential, and their genes predispose them to develop in certain ways; their experiences help fulfil that potential and determine how their genes are expressed. We cannot influence genes but we can influence a child's environment.

Parenting is a primary influence on a child's environment, and parents who are confident and well supported can offer their children nurturing relationships and enriching experiences. Communities can support parents directly and indirectly, and create a child and family friendly environment.

### 1.1.1 What is the Aim of this Guide?

This guide was created because parents revealed, through extensive social research, that they often received inconsistent and confusing parenting information from different professionals and practitioners across different disciplines, leading to misunderstandings and a lack of confidence about how best to support their children's development. In response, we looked to the neuroscience evidence to determine what key information and practices will help us, as professionals and practitioners, to support parents and families to achieve the best outcomes for children.

### 1.1.2 How do We Affect Change?

This guide was designed for professionals and practitioners to work from the same starting point, use a common language, and provide consistent messages about the early years regardless of what service, support or information families access.

When we provide consistent messages, we provide parents with the knowledge and skills to better support their child's development. We can further empower parents by working in partnership with families, building on their strengths, and promoting parenting as a learning process rather than a natural or inherent skill. This encourages parents to learn through experience and seek assistance when required, and without stigma.



Communities can provide direct support and care to families and create environments that are child-friendly, non-judgemental, and contribute to a child's optimal brain development. As professionals and practitioners, we play an important role in linking parents to social and community networks. When children connect with their wider community, their environments are enriched and they are better positioned to find their place as citizens in their own right.

### 1.1.3 What Does this Guide Include?

- **Shared Values** that underpin our work with families
- **Four Key Principles** of early childhood development based on the neuroscience evidence
- **Practice Guides** for working with families based around the **Four Key Principles**
- **Self-Reflection Questions** for professionals and practitioners to integrate the principles and practices into their work with families
- **A Planning and Evaluation Framework** for services to plan and assess their parenting initiatives
- **Resources**

## 1.2 Scope

The information, principles and best practices in this resource are aimed at professionals and practitioners. This guide takes a universal rather than a targeted approach to working with families. As a professional or practitioner, you will bring your own knowledge, skills and experience to the information in this guide, and will apply it to your particular work environment and specific client group.

This guide is not an exhaustive resource. There is a large amount of information that could have been included in this guide, particularly on the topics of pre- and peri-natal health, breastfeeding, and the ages and stages of child development. There are, however, already comprehensive resources and websites that cover this information, including the Australian Breastfeeding Association and the Raising Children Network website. Instead of duplicating this material, this guide references these and other existing information in the **Resources** section (page 87).

This guide includes information on four specific groups – fathers, grandparents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families. Although there are other groups that are equally important, the research with families highlighted these four groups as receiving inadequate parenting support or information. We acknowledge that these groups are not homogenous, and each professional or practitioner will adapt the information and best practices to suit their services and families. This guide also acknowledges the specific needs of families raising children with developmental delays and disabilities, and further resources can be found in the **Resources** (87) section.

## 1.3 How to Use this Guide

The guide can be used in a number of ways, including:

- For your own knowledge and self-reflection
- As a professional development module for training purposes
- As a conversation starter with other organisations or stakeholders

The guide is designed to be read sequentially from the first section through to the last. However, it can also be used as a 'dip in, dip out' resource. Each section is colour-coded and tabbed for ease of use. Referencing throughout the text is kept to a minimum to enhance readability and useability. Further references can be found in the **Resources** section (page 87).

The following steps are aimed at professionals and practitioners who are using the guide for their own knowledge and self-reflection.

1. It is recommended that you begin by reading the guide's **Conceptual Foundation of Early Childhood Development** on page vii. This includes an overview of the **Shared Values** for professionals and practitioners, the **Four Key Principles** of early childhood development, and a **Conceptual Model** with a definition of early childhood development.
2. The next four sections cover the **Four Key Principles** of early childhood development. Each section provides a description of the principle, **Practice Guides** and **Self-Reflection Questions**.

It is recommended that you begin by reading the descriptions of the **Four Key Principles**, which provide the underpinning theory. You can then consider the practice guides, and how they apply to your work. Before moving onto the next principle, explore the **Self-Reflection Questions** to reflect upon and deepen your practice. These questions can also be incorporated into work plans, performance management plans or other work-related materials.

3. Use the **Implementation** section as a way to incorporate the values, principles and practices into your organisation or programs. This section supports planning and evaluation and continuous improvement at a service level.
4. The **Resources** section can be used to find additional information on the various topics, and can be used as 'dip in, dip out' reference when needed.
5. To deepen our practice as professionals and practitioners, it is suggested that as you read through the guide, you reflect upon the following questions:

- To what extent do my current world views, assumptions and practices support the values, principles and practices best outlined in this guide?
- What new thinking, insights or practices will help me to align with the values, principles and practices outlined in this guide?
- How can I continue to self-reflect and improve as a professional or practitioner to promote better outcomes for children?

## 1.4 Conceptual Foundation of Early Childhood Development

Neuroscience, the scientific study of the nervous system, provides evidence about the importance of the early years on the development of children's brains. As professionals and practitioners, we can share this information with parents and the community. When the story is clear and consistent, parents and the community can understand their role in supporting children to grow and develop in a positive and enriching way.

The first step in ensuring the promotion of clear and consistent messages about early childhood development is to have a shared Conceptual Foundation of Early Childhood Development. It provides professionals and practitioners from across disciplines, services and communities with a common language to consider early childhood development.

The Conceptual Foundation includes:

- Shared Values for professionals and practitioners
- Four Key Principles of early childhood development
- Conceptual Model for Early Childhood Development (including a definition of early childhood development)

### 1.4.1 Shared Values

Our values shape our thinking, reactions and behaviour, and will impact on our work with families. When we work from a set of shared values, we can build parents' confidence and capability, and empower them to support their children's development. The seven Shared Values are:

#### 1. Partnership and Collaboration

We work in partnership with each other and with parents, families and the community to offer children the best start in life. We openly collaborate to achieve this end.

#### 2. Strengths-based Approach

We work from a strengths-based approach, where each family is valued for their strengths and individual differences.

#### 3. Culturally Competent

We are culturally sensitive and appropriate, and consider the specifics of the local community.

#### 4. Purposeful Relationships

We allow the time to fully commit to building relationships with families to help them achieve their goals.

#### 5. Engagement and Connection

We are committed to engaging with parents, families and the community, and to facilitate connections with and between families in the community.

#### 6. Reflective Practice

We are personally committed to continuous improvement by reflecting on our practice to ensure we are achieving all of the Shared Values.

## 7. Continuous Improvement

We evaluate our programs, projects and initiatives to determine if we are achieving our objectives, and we commit to continuous improvement.

### 1.4.2 Four Key Principles of Early Childhood Development

#### 1. Children are at the Centre

As professionals and practitioners, we do our job to help achieve the best outcomes for children. We can best help children by understanding the most current research on brain development, and knowing how to share this information with parents and the community.

This principle acknowledges that children are at the centre of everything that we do. Neuroscience highlights the importance of the early years for the development of the whole child. Brain development in the early years lays a foundation for future development and learning.

Positive experiences and relationships pave the way for optimal development. Children are active participants within their environment and in their relationships with others. They bring their own personalities and characters to experiences and relationships, and they are acutely aware of family dynamics.

Children make a positive contribution to wider society. They give joy and purpose to many people, and help bring people together.

Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to develop in all areas of their lives and to have their views and opinions heard and considered.

#### 2. Parenting is Important

The neuroscience evidence makes it clear that parents have the most influence on a child's development. It is not 'who parents are' but 'what parents do' that has the most impact. This principle focuses on how to work with parents using a strengths-based approach to help them care for themselves and their children in a nurturing and enriching way.

When parents develop deep and loving relationships with their children, they offer their children an enriching environment in which to grow and learn. Positive parenting involves being loving and setting consistent and clear expectations. Positive parents adapt to their children's changing needs, and raise their children with confidence.

Confidence develops over time as parents build their knowledge and skills, connect with others, and ask for support when they need it. Consistent parenting messages and information, as well as practical and emotional support, help build parents' confidence and capability.

#### 3. Professionals and Practitioners are Partners

This principle acknowledges that, as professionals and practitioners, we play an important role in supporting parents and families to provide a rich environment for their children's optimal brain development. We can encourage parents to be independent and resourceful, and build on parents' strengths and resources.

Providing support to families is a partnership between ourselves and parents, where we work together with parents to enhance and enrich family life. When we also work in partnership with other services, disciplines and communities, we can offer continuity of support.

When we begin from the same starting point, use a common language, provide consistent messages, and use practice guides alongside our current knowledge and skills, we offer families the best possible support.

#### 4. Communities Support Families

While parents play a significant role in a child's development, this does not happen in isolation of their community. Child and family friendly communities are instrumental in providing support networks and services to parents and families. By supporting families to engage with their broader community, a spirit of co-creation and goodwill can reduce isolation and disconnection, leading to better outcomes for children.

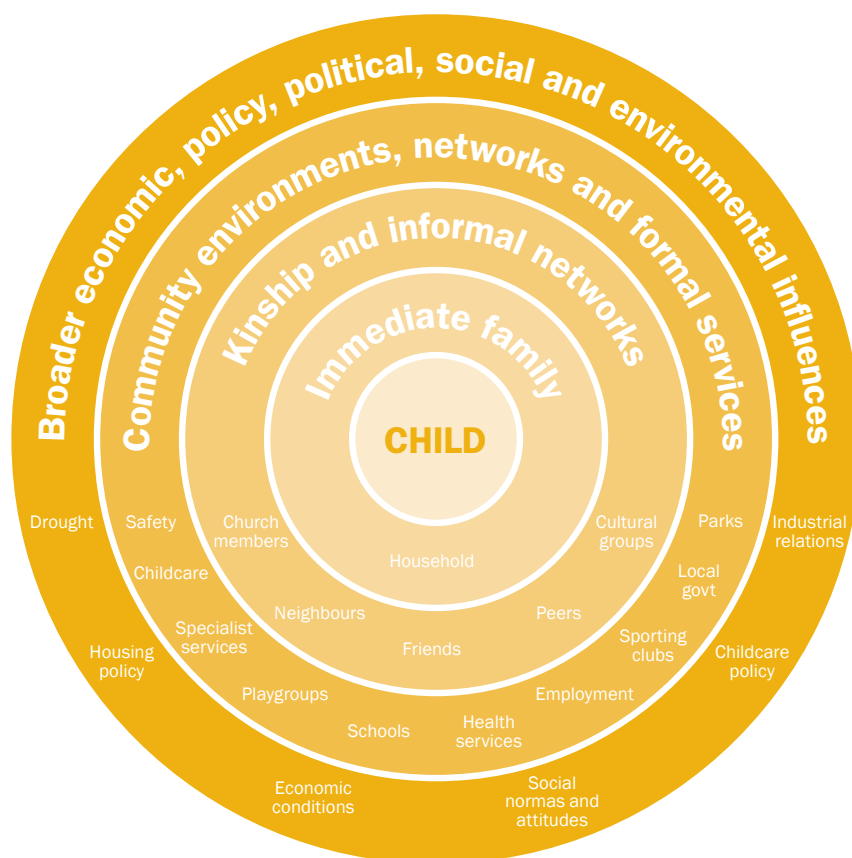
This fourth principle incorporates the neuroscience finding that a child's environment and their relationships with others in their community impacts on their brain development and overall development.

Communities include families, carers, government services, businesses, community groups, public transport, housing, parks and support services. Community also covers wider influences like the mass media, workplace practices and social policies.

Communities can provide direct support and care to families, and can create an environment in which children are welcomed and encouraged. Early childhood development then becomes a platform for community development, and economic and social prosperity.

#### 1.4.3 Conceptual Model

The Conceptual Model for early childhood development used in this guide is Bronfenbrenner's 'Ecological Theory of Child Development' model, which emphasises the interaction between a child, their genetics, their environment, and their relationships with others. The model is consistent with the Four Key Principles of early childhood development outlined in this guide (see page 4).



**Bronfenbrenner's 'Ecological Theory of Child Development' model (1979).**

This model views the child as central. It acknowledges that children are influenced by the settings in which they live, and that the child's family and home life is the most important setting.

Other important settings are the child's extended family, friends, childcare, playgroups, preschools, schools, health services, and other cultural groups. A child's wider social setting, including economic, political and environmental issues, also influence development.

#### 1.4.4 Definition of Early Childhood Development

There are various age ranges used to define the early years. The **National Early Childhood Development Strategy: Investing in the Early Years** identifies early childhood development as ranging from before birth through the first eight years of life. The definition in this guide uses the same age range. However, there is an understanding from the neuroscience that the first five years are vitally important for brain development.

Consistent with the **Four Key Principles** and the **Conceptual Model**, early childhood development is defined as:

*The physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth, learning and change that is influenced by the interplay between the whole child, their genetics, the environment and their relationships with others.*

This definition focuses on development as a process rather than a set of outcomes or policy interventions.



## SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PRACTITIONERS

- What new insights can I gain from the view of early childhood development outlined in this guide?
- How will a common view of early childhood development help me when working with families, and across services and disciplines?
- To what extent does the way I work reflect the **Shared Values** in this guide?







**KEY PRINCIPLE:  
CHILDREN ARE  
AT THE CENTRE**



## KEY POINTS

- Children are at the centre of everything that we do, and the early years are an opportunity to foster development of the whole child.
- Neuroscience research shows that the interactions between genetics and early experiences shape the architecture of the brain, and impact on a child's future development, learning and wellbeing.
- The neuroscience review from the first stage of this project identified eleven Child Development Statements to share with parents and the community. These statements convey evidence about the importance of the early years.
- Social research was conducted to test parents' understanding of the Child Development Statements, which were then translated into ten Parenting Behaviours.
- The Parenting Behaviours offer suggestions for what parents can do with their children in the early years to give them a positive start, and are grouped around the four themes of Play, Talk, Learn and Care.
- Most parents are well intentioned but are worried about whether they are raising their children in the best way, and they like to have a sense of control and choice over how they raise their children.
- As professionals and practitioners, we can present the Parenting Behaviours as themes or a 'framework' for raising children rather than prescriptive practices. In this way, parents can tailor the information to their children.

The first of the **Four Key Principles** in this guide is that children are at the centre of everything that we do. Neuroscience highlights how brain architecture is built from the 'bottom up', so experiences in the early years provide the scaffolding for future development and learning.

Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the early years are also about respecting and encouraging children's participation, hearing their voices, and valuing their strengths. Children are active members of a vibrant community, and they contribute energy, creativity and character to places and relationships.

This section includes information on brain development, the identified **Child Development Statements** from the neuroscience evidence, and ways to share these statements with parents and the community.

## 2.1 Brain Development

This project began with an international review of the latest neuroscience evidence to answer two important questions:

1. What is the impact of brain development upon early childhood development?
2. What important information about brain development and early childhood can we share with parents and the community?

Neuroscience research shows that interactions between genetics and early experiences shape the architecture of the developing brain, and impact on a child's future health, their cognitive, social, spiritual and emotional development, and their learning and wellbeing. The evidence suggests that development of the human brain begins before birth and continues throughout life. The first five years of life are the most significant time for brain development, while the most rapid growth occurs in the first three years.

Both nature and nurture shape the growth of children's brains. Children begin life with potential and their experiences help fulfil that potential. Genes predispose children to develop in certain ways, and the environment determines how these genes are expressed. Early experiences create a platform for the development of future brain connections and skills. The evidence suggests that these early experiences have a greater impact on development than heredity. Adverse experiences lay a fragile foundation, whereas enriching experiences lay a solid foundation.



Toxic stress can damage the developing brain and lead to lifelong problems in learning, behaviour, and in physical and mental health. Toxic stress can begin before birth, as shown by recent studies on the negative impacts of alcohol and tobacco on the unborn child. In contrast, positive conditions support healthy development. Good nutrition, both during pregnancy and after birth, and good experiences repeated consistently and predictably contribute to healthy brain development.

The active ingredient in developing early brain architecture is the nature of children's relationships with their parents and other carers. Nurturing relationships engage children in the human community and help them define who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people. Children experience better outcomes when they form a secure attachment with someone who responds with consistency and warmth to their physical, emotional, social and learning needs.

We have an opportunity to help shape positive early environments and relationships by communicating to parents in a clear and consistent way the importance of the early years, and how parents and communities can support children to achieve a positive start in life.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University outlines these important points about the science of early childhood development.

'Toxic stress' refers to when a child experiences strong, frequent or prolonged adversity without adequate adult support. Adversity may include physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, or sustained economic hardship.

The 'serve and return' interaction between parent and child is when a child interacts by babbling, using facial expressions and gestures, and adults respond with a similar vocalising or gesturing. This back-and-forth process impacts significantly on brain development.

## THE SCIENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

1. Childhood development is a foundation for community development and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society.
2. Brains are built over time.
3. The interactive influences of genes and experience literally shape the architecture of the developing brain, and the active ingredient is the 'serve and return' nature of children's engagement in relationships with their parents and other caregivers in their family or community.
4. Both brain architecture and developing abilities are built 'from the bottom up', with simple circuits and skills providing the scaffolding for more advanced circuits and skills over time.
5. Toxic stress in early childhood is associated with persistent effects on the nervous system and stress hormone systems that can damage developing brain architecture and lead to lifelong problems in learning, behaviour, and in both physical and mental health.
6. Creating the right conditions for early childhood development is likely to be more effective and less costly than addressing problems at a later age.

Reference: Center on the Developing Child (2007). *The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing The Gap Between What We Know and What We Do*, Harvard University.

## 2.2 Child Development Statements

The neuroscience review from the first stage of this project identified eleven **Child Development Statements** to share with parents and the community.

Once the **Child Development Statements** were identified, extensive social research with parents was conducted to explore their knowledge and understanding of the eleven statements. The research found that parents generally recognised the importance

of nurturing relationships, a language-rich environment, and good health and nutrition. But they were less knowledgeable about brain development and its impact on children's overall development and longer-term outcomes. The parents were also confused about what to do with their children in order to offer them the best start in life. There is more information about the social research conducted with families in **Appendix 2**.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: CHILD DEVELOPMENT STATEMENTS

#### 1. The first five years matter and last a lifetime

Brain development is strongly influenced by good and bad experiences. Experiences shape brain development by connecting neurons and forming neural pathways. The brain remains plastic throughout life, but the early years are particularly important for shaping the brain.

#### 2. Children are born ready to learn

A child's brain begins developing at conception, and during the first five years it grows faster than at any other time. Children need good early experiences throughout pregnancy and childhood to help build strong brain architecture.

#### 3. The brain develops through use

The brain relies on experiences for growth and development. The brain does not change unless it is stimulated by the environment. There are some critical periods when particular areas of the brain are more sensitive to environmental cues, and growth is accelerated.

#### 4. Good nutrition, health and exercise are critical

Good health for children begins with the mother's health in pregnancy. Children need healthy and nutritious food, exercise, and a good night's sleep to make the most of early learning experiences and to set themselves up for future health.

#### 5. The best learning happens in nurturing relationships

The active ingredient in brain development is relationships. Children's brains develop best when they feel loved and secure, when they experience a warm and calm environment, and when people pay attention and respond to their needs.

#### 6. Children's wellbeing is critical to brain development and learning

Wellbeing is an indicator of healthy brain development and functioning. It is linked with self-regulation, improved problem-solving and effective learning. Wellbeing incorporates physical, social, emotional, cognitive and spiritual aspects, which are interrelated and synergistic.

#### 7. Children's self-regulation is critical for learning, responsibility and relationships

Self-regulation, or the ability to regulate your behaviour, emotions and thinking according to the situation, is a cornerstone of early childhood development. Relationships that respond to a child's changing moods, feelings and interests help a child develop self-regulation.

#### 8. Children learn through being engaged and doing

Children learn by doing, trying things and exploring their world. Play, more than any other activity, promotes healthy development in children, including the development of emotional, social, motor and cognitive skills.

#### 9. Children learn from watching and copying

Repeated observation of actions increases brain activity and allows children to understand and imitate the actions of others. This helps children to learn without requiring direct instruction.

#### 10. Children learn language by listening to it and using it

The brain is biologically primed to acquire language, and experience is the catalyst. Reading and talking to children develops their language skills, vocabulary and verbal abilities.

#### 11. Children are born ready to use and learn mathematics

Experience is also the catalyst for acquiring numerical skills. From birth, babies are open to mathematical ideas such as counting, adding, subtracting, dividing, sorting, shapes, patterns and matching.

## 2.3 Parenting Behaviours

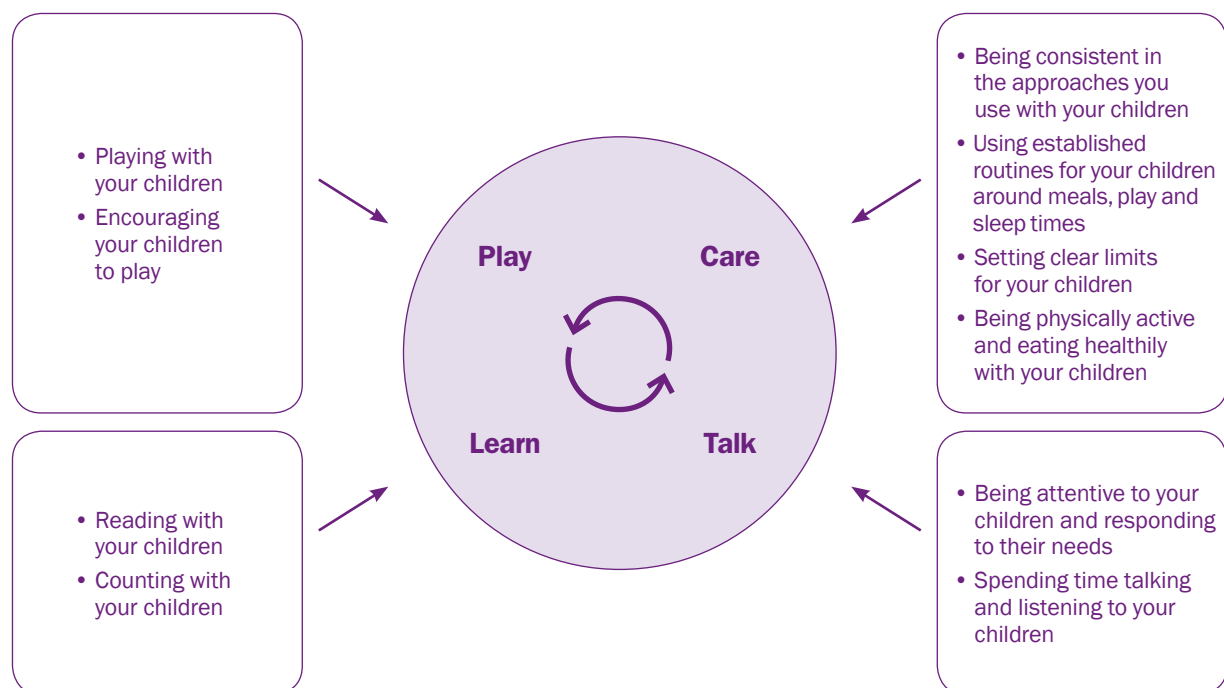
Based on the research with parents, the **Child Development Statements** were translated to focus on ten **Parenting Behaviours** so parents were aware of what they can do with their children to support their development. The ten Parenting

Behaviours are grouped around four themes – **Play, Talk, Learn and Care**, and they include the **Brain Development Story** as the underlying core message.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: THE BRAIN DEVELOPMENT STORY

Most of the brain's development occurs in the first five years. How the brain develops depends on the quality and frequency of positive activities, including parenting.



The social research then tested the Parenting Behaviours with parents to discover how they were received.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: PARENTING BEHAVIOURS

Parenting Behaviour	Parents' Views	How to Help Parents
<b>Play</b>		
Playing with your children	Some parents, particularly fathers, enjoy playing with their children. But when there are competing demands, play is overlooked, which can lead to emotional conflict and guilt.	Discuss the importance of play for growth and development. Encourage parents to have fun and enjoy play with their children.
Encouraging your children to play	Play is seen as 'coming naturally' so it isn't viewed as important to encourage children to play. But parents agree that it is important to get children away from television and 'get them started' with play.	Discuss how play with everyday objects and outside play benefits children. Confirm that too much screen time can be detrimental to children.
<b>Talk</b>		
Spending time talking and listening to your children	Parents understand that talking and listening to children develops communication skills, helps children feel valued, and develops loving relationships. However, they acknowledge that day-to-day pressures can get in the way of talking and listening.	Explore ways that parents can talk to their children about what's happening throughout the day. Explain how listening to children develops their communication skills.
Being attentive to your children and respond to their needs	Parents initially view their children's needs as physical, including being safe, warm and fed. They are often overwhelmed by their children's needs and do not want to 'spoil' them by responding to every request or demand.	Discuss how responding to children's physical and emotional needs helps children feel loved and valued. Reassure parents that they can still be loving and attentive without responding to their child's every demand.
<b>Learn</b>		
Reading with your children	Parents understand the importance and value of reading with their children. Many parents have time to read with their children every day.	Confirm the value and enjoyment of reading with their children.
Counting with your children	Counting with children is well accepted by parents, but many are unaware of its long-term benefits. Parents see ways to count with their children as part of everyday activities rather than as a discrete activity.	Confirm that counting with their children is also valuable and enjoyable. Discuss ways parents can incorporate counting into their everyday life.
<b>Care</b>		
Being consistent in the approaches you use with your children	Parents struggle to be consistent with their children. Parents' emotional energy, patience, guilt and fatigue often lead to inconsistencies. Parents are more likely to 'cave in' in certain situations, such as when out in public.	Discuss how consistency can help children to learn more quickly. Suggest that parents don't have to be too rigid for children to benefit from consistency. Encourage parents to practise self-care so they have more energy to be consistent.
Using established routines for your children around meals, play and sleep times	Routines polarise parents. Some parents believe routines can provide order in the house, creating a sense of security for children. Other parents reject routines that are too inflexible or strict.	Explore how flexible routines and rituals can be enjoyable and create a sense of security for children.

Setting clear limits for your children	Parents agree that setting clear limits is important, but they are not always clear about what limits to set. Limits are commonly set around safety, eating, television time, bedtime and manners. But parents acknowledge that it is not always possible to enforce limits particularly when not at home.	Discuss how setting limits helps children learn. Explore ways that parents can set manageable limits in their household.
Being physically active and eating healthily with your children	Parents are aware of the benefits of being physically active and eating healthy food but they do not always act accordingly. Some parents use food as treats or bribes, and some parents struggle with fussy eaters.	Confirm the importance of the whole family being physically active and eating healthy food. Explore ways to increase physical activity and healthy eating to suit their lifestyle.

Most of the **Parenting Behaviours** were accepted by parents, but some of the behaviours need to be validated and reinforced amongst parents. For other behaviours, parents need to be motivated and encouraged to use them more frequently.

The social research also revealed valuable information about the world of parents, which influences how parents interpret the early childhood development information and the ten **Parenting Behaviours**.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: THE WORLD OF PARENTS

- Parents want their children to grow to reach their potential and be happy, well-adjusted adults who can work within and contribute to society.
- Parents are well intentioned and are trying to do the 'right thing' by their children, but most parents have a constant, underlying sense of guilt about not doing enough of the 'right thing'.
- Raising children is both fulfilling and frustrating. Parents take joy in watching their children develop and grow, and they love to see them happy and fulfilled. Parenting is also frustrating and challenging.
- Parents do not necessarily think of their children's development in years, but rather in 'stages' or 'milestones'.
- How parents were raised shapes the style and approach of their own parenting. They either wish to replicate or avoid what they experienced growing, or do a bit of both.
- There is a very strong sense that all children are different, and this requires different parenting approaches across families and within a family.
- Parents do not like being judged by other parents but they frequently judge others and themselves.
- Daily parenting is a habitual, largely unplanned activity. It is not on the 'jobs to do' list.

Parents find raising their children both challenging and rewarding. Most parents are well intentioned but are worried about whether they are raising their children in the best way. They view their children and their family situation as unique, but don't often self-

reflect on how they are raising their children. Below are factors that are more likely to engage parents in the early childhood development story, and factors that are likely to disengage parents.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: ENGAGING WITH PARENTS

Factors to Engage Parents	Factors to be Cautious of With Parents	Factors to Avoid with Parents
<b>Empathy and Realism</b>	<b>Common Parenting Approach</b>	<b>Generalising Parents</b>
Parents like others to acknowledge that raising children can be challenging and that it is not always possible to be the 'perfect parent'. It is important not to dwell on this issue because parents can see change as too difficult.	Parents resist the idea that there are specific activities that all parents 'should' do, as children are viewed as unique. Parents are also worried about not doing the 'right thing' by their children.	Parents do not like to be viewed as one homogenous group. They see themselves and their families as unique and different. They do not want to be grouped with 'bad' parents.
<b>Control and Choice</b>	<b>Parents are the Primary Influence</b>	<b>Specific Behaviours</b>
Parents like to make their own choices. It gives parents a sense of control and acknowledges that every child and every situation is different. Parents do not like specific 'must do' lists.	Parents feel pressure and guilt at being the primary influence on their children's development. They also acknowledge the important role that other people play in their children's lives.	Parents do not want to be told to raise their children in an overly prescriptive way. They want control and choice.
<b>Holistic View of Childrens' Development</b>	<b>Importance of 0–5 Years</b>	<b>Judgements (Positive or Negative)</b>
Parents like the 'whole child' view of development. They do not like a sole focus on academic achievement.	Parents do not like to hear about how important the 0–5 years are for their children's development. They worry that their children are doomed if they have not done enough. They also believe that there are other important stages of development.	Parents do not like being judged or compared to other parents. Feeling judged adds pressure and discourages engagement.
<b>Positive and Hopeful Tone</b>		<b>Condescending Language or Tone</b>
Parents respond well to positive and hopeful language and tone. Negative statements are de-motivating.		Parents do not like to be 'told what to do'. A patronising tone leads to disengagement.

Parents like to have a sense of control and choice over how they raise their children. They view their children and their family as different and unique. Parents do not like to be told what to do. Instead, they prefer empathy, understanding and support to raise their children in a way that suits their family.

For this reason, we can present the ten **Parenting Behaviours** as themes or a 'framework' for raising children rather than

prescriptive practices. Parents can then try a range of options and tailor the information to their children.

You can explore with parents ideas and suggestions for interacting and engaging with their children. You may like to use these ideas as discussion points or as handouts or information sheets.



## **PRACTICE GUIDE: KEY IDEAS TO DISCUSS WITH PARENTS**

### **Play**

- Play with your children, and encourage your children to play
- Sing songs, draw, read, write, tell stories and share jokes
- Do pretend play with boxes, pots, pans, dress ups
- There's no need for expensive toys, products, programs or equipment – an interested parent is a child's best toy
- Keep television to a minimum as children learn best from hands-on activities rather than television

### **Talk**

- Be attentive to your children and respond to their needs
- Spend time talking and listening to your children
- Ask your child questions, ask for their ideas and opinions, and include them in conversations with others
- Ask your child to recall things they've done, places they've visited, and people they've seen to build their memory
- Talk to your child as you're doing everyday tasks – tell your child what you're doing and what's happening around them

### **Learn**

- Read with your children
- Count with your children
- Read books and poetry, tell stories, sing songs, write and play sound, letter and word games
- Explore maths ideas with your child when cooking and sharing, do jigsaw puzzles, block building, board games, and guessing and memory games
- If you speak a second language, use it with your child from birth so they can learn the two languages from an early age

### **Care**

- Be consistent in the approaches you use with your children
- Use established routines for your children around meals, play and sleep
- Set clear limits for your children
- Be physically active and eat healthily with your children
- Cuddle, kiss and smile with your child to show warmth, love and affection, and comfort your child when they are upset so your child feels safe and secure



## PRACTICE GUIDE: HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN GET A POSITIVE START

**Parents can help their children enjoy a positive start by:**

- Being loving and affectionate, warm and responsive
- Speaking, playing and engaging with their children
- Using a wide vocabulary with their children and talking about numbers, patterns and time
- Involving their children in everyday tasks and going out into the community
- Establishing routines, rituals and rhythms for the day
- Establishing limits and offering calm, clear and consistent guidance suitable for their children's developmental stages
- Helping their children understand and express emotions
- Eating a healthy diet, being physically active, and establishing good sleep routines
- Being a good role model for their children, and protecting them from anti-social or aggressive behaviour



## SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PRACTITIONERS

- How can the neuroscience evidence enhance my understanding of early childhood development and help in my work with families?
- How can I explain the **Brain Development Story** to parents and families in a way that will be engaging and help to support their children's development?
- How can I help parents to find positive ways to **Play, Care, Learn and Talk** with their children?
- What assumptions do I make about parents 'these days'? How does the way I was raised and the way I raise my children impact on my view of parenting?









**KEY PRINCIPLE:  
PARENTING  
IS IMPORTANT**



## KEY POINTS

- The neuroscience evidence shows that parents play an important role in providing positive experiences and a positive environment for their children.
- Children can flourish in a variety of settings and family situations; it is 'what parents do' rather than 'who they are' that impacts on children's growth and development.
- Research shows that the best outcomes for children occur when parents are warm and loving, and set consistent boundaries. This activates the 'serve and return' dynamic between parent and child, which supports the developing brain.
- The majority of parents report that they value and are enriched by their parenting role, but they also acknowledge challenges and stresses, which impact on their parenting.
- Parents' self-efficacy, confidence and their own good health and wellbeing are associated with more effective parenting and better outcomes for children.
- When parents understand and live by their values, they are more likely to manage the challenges of raising their children, create experiences that foster positive brain development, and support their children to thrive.

The second of the **Four Key Principles** in this guide is that parenting is important. The neuroscience evidence shows that parents play an important role in providing positive experiences and a positive environment for their children. Children can flourish in a variety of settings and family situations as it is 'what parents do' rather than 'who they are' that impacts on children's growth and development. Research shows that the best outcomes for children occur when parents are warm and loving, and set consistent boundaries. This activates the 'serve and return' dynamic between parent and child, which supports the developing brain.

A supportive parenting style encourages children to adopt appropriate behaviour, learn self-regulation, and build capability and autonomy. This also encourages healthy relationships that foster solid brain development. In contrast, parenting that is harsh, abusive or neglectful can create toxic stress, which can damage the developing brain architecture and lead to lifelong problems.

Parenting styles are influenced by many factors. These factors include the individual character, personal background, and health and wellbeing of the parent, the environment in which the family lives, and a family's support networks. Factors that support parents include good mental health, a positive relationship between parents, social and community connections, stable finances, workplace flexibility, and family routines and rituals. The characteristics of the child also impact on parenting styles as children play a dynamic role in their relationship with their parents and have their own character and temperament.

The majority of parents report that they value and are enriched by their parenting role, but also acknowledge the associated challenges and stresses, which impact on their parenting. Parenting self-efficacy and adaptability, and their positive emotional health and wellbeing are associated with more effective parenting and positive outcomes for children. Also, when parents understand and live by their values, they are more likely to manage the challenges of raising their children, create experiences that foster positive brain development, and support their children to thrive.

### 3.1 Parenting Styles

Psychologists have identified four broad parenting styles – supportive, authoritarian, permissive and disengaged. These styles differ across two dimensions – responsiveness (from ‘warm’ to ‘hostile’) and demandingness (from ‘disciplinarian’ to ‘permissive’).

The most effective parenting approach is the supportive parenting style. This approach allows parents to develop loving relationships

with their children and offer them an enriching environment in which to grow, learn and develop. Within the supportive parenting style, there is room for parents to create rituals and routines that suit their family so they can respond to their children’s needs and lay a solid platform for their development.



#### PRACTICE GUIDE: PARENTING STYLES

Parenting Style	Supportive	Authoritarian	Permissive	Disengaged
<b>Responsiveness</b>	Parents are warm and responsive	Parents lack warmth and responsiveness	Parents are warm and responsive	Parents lack warmth and responsiveness
<b>Demandingness</b>	Parents have firm rules and clear boundaries	Parents use firm discipline and are controlling	Parents are lenient and make few demands of their children	Parents are disengaged or neglectful and make few demands of their children
<b>Approach to Discipline</b>	Discipline is aimed at supporting children rather than punishing them	Discipline is aimed at obedience and structure rather than supporting children	Discipline is minimal to non-existent	Discipline is minimal to non-existent
<b>Parenting Orientation</b>	Parents <b>give choices</b>	Parents <b>give orders</b>	Parents <b>give in</b>	Parents <b>give little or nothing</b>

There are some questions that can help parents to explore the supportive parenting style, and how it might work in their family. These can be discussion points to use with parents.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: A SUPPORTIVE PARENTING STYLE

### Love and Warmth

- Does my child know that it is their behaviour and not them that I don't like?
- Is my child scared of me? Am I calm enough?
- How do I show them I love them?

### Talking and Listening

- Have I said clearly how I want my child to behave?
- Have I listened to them?

### Guidance and Understanding

- Does my child understand why that behaviour is not acceptable?
- Do they see how their behaviour has affected others?
- Have I helped them to work out better ways to get what they need?

### Limits and Boundaries

- Consistency and Consequences
- A structured, secure world

Reference: Strategies with Kids: Information for Parents (SKIP) New Zealand, <<http://www.skip.org.nz>>.

## 3.2 Parenting Self-efficacy

Parenting self-efficacy is the extent to which parents feel confident in their ability to raise their children. It is about parents believing they can have a positive impact on their child, and that they have the necessary skills to raise their child. Parenting self-efficacy is derived from psychologist Albert Bandura's 'General Theory of Self-Efficacy', which includes people's beliefs about their abilities to reach certain goals or have an influence over important aspects of their lives. Self-efficacy is significant because it can influence people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Research has shown that parents with high self-efficacy are more effective at adapting to their child's changing needs and developmental stages, and are more warm and responsive. These parents also experience better personal wellbeing and a stronger relationship with their partner. High parenting self-efficacy is also linked to positive developmental outcomes for children. Parents with low self-efficacy are more likely to struggle with the demands of raising their children, and are more likely to suffer from stress and depression.

A review of parenting self-efficacy identified four possible ways that parenting self-efficacy can develop.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: HOW PARENTING SELF- EFFICACY DEVELOPS

### Childhood Experiences

Parents have a model or an idea of what parenting will be like, and these beliefs are based on the parenting style they experienced in their own childhood and their experiences of other significant relationships in their lives.

### External Messages

Messages parents receive about parenting behaviours, values and child development influence self-efficacy. Cultural or societal messages can have an influence, but a greater influence comes from parents' own social networks, including family and friends.

### Own Experience of Parenting

Parents' own experience of raising their children, including the interactions they have with their children and with family, friends and other community members, impacts on their judgment of their parenting competence and their self-efficacy.

### Preparation for the Parenting Role

There is some evidence to suggest that parents' ability to prepare mentally, emotionally and behaviourally for parenting can influence their self-efficacy once they become parents.

Reference: Strategies with Kids: Information for Parents (SKIP) New Zealand, <<http://www.skip.org.nz>>.

Parents' emotional health and wellbeing have been linked to their capacity to be effective parents. There is evidence that parents', particularly mothers', depression, can be associated with more ineffective parenting strategies, which link to a higher risk of children developing behavioural problems. Alternatively, parents' positive wellbeing is associated with more effective parenting strategies and less behavioural problems. Parents' self-care is an important and often overlooked aspect of parenting. Self-care includes physical, social and emotional care, and is particularly important during periods of challenge and change.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: STRATEGIES TO MANAGE STRESS AND RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND CHANGE

### Action Oriented

Can the situation be changed to reduce stress?

- A new or change of routine
- Time management
- A new, more effective approach
- A change in the environment
- Additional help from others
- Using assertiveness skills

### Emotionally Oriented

Can parents change the way they think about the situation so that negative thinking becomes more positive?

- A more positive interpretation
- A better perspective
- Boosting confidence and self-esteem

### Acceptance Oriented

If the situation is something that parents have control over, there needs to be an emphasis on surviving the stress.

- Relaxation techniques
- Exercise
- Distraction such as watching television, reading, leisure activities

Reference: Children's Workforce Development Council (2011), 'Supporting Family Change and Transition, Key Notes Day 01', Children's Workforce Development Council, UK.

## 3.3 Parent Adaptability

Effective parenting involves parents being adaptable. A parent's adaptability is 'the capability to adjust constantly to meet a child's changing needs'. Adaptability reflects parents' ongoing ability to learn and adapt to the changing demands of raising children at every developmental stage. Parent adaptability is consistent with psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's well-known and accepted 'Ecological Theory of Child Development' and acknowledges that parenting occurs within a context and that situations vary from family to family and over time.

Parent adaptability is also consistent with neuroscience findings that the active ingredient in developing early brain architecture is the 'serve and return' nature of children's relationships with their parents and other caregivers. Adaptability encourages parents to respond to their children in a way that fosters brain development and positive developmental outcomes.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: PARENT ADAPTABILITY

### Parent Adaptability Includes Three Factors:

#### Perceptiveness

The extent to which the parent is 'tuned into' their child, the situation and their own behaviour.

#### Responsiveness

The parent's ability to continually adjust to their child's behaviour and the situation.

#### Flexibility

The parent's ability to use problem-solving, self-regulation and self-efficacy to try new approaches when old approaches are no longer working.

Reference: Department of Family and Community Services (2004), Parenting Information Project: Main Report, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.

### 3.4 Parenting Values

When people live by their values they are more likely to enjoy an enriching, rewarding and fulfilling life. Values are a person's deepest desire about the person they want to be and the life they want to live. They are principles that can guide a person through life and help overcome challenges. They give people a sense of purpose, help people lead a more meaningful life, and contribute to deeper and stronger relationships. There are values outlined in this guide for us as professionals and practitioners, and we can help families to identify and live by their own values.

For parents, being aware of and understanding their values is a powerful resource. Values offer parents a firm foundation for how to raise their children. Values help parents interpret conflicting or confusing parenting information, make better choices about their parenting, and consistently apply those choices. They offer a way for parents to overcome feelings of inadequacy, guilt or a sense of being judged, and can help parents through challenges with their children or challenging times.

Professionals and practitioners can help parents to identify their values and then apply them to their parenting. As professionals and practitioners, when we understand parents' values, we can make suggestions that are more likely to resonate with parents and be more achievable. Parents can then better support their children's development in a way that is enriching for both the children and the parents.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: IDENTIFYING VALUES

**Help parents to identify their values by asking them to go through this list and circle 5 to 10 values they feel are most important to them. (Full descriptions of the values can be found at [www.actmindfully.com](http://www.actmindfully.com))**

- Acceptance
- Adventure
- Assertiveness
- Authenticity
- Beauty
- Caring
- Challenge
- Compassion
- Conformity
- Connection
- Contribution
- Cooperation
- Courage
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Equality
- Humility
- Encouragement
- Excitement
- Independence
- Industry
- Intimacy
- Fairness
- Fitness
- Flexibility
- Forgiveness
- Freedom
- Friendliness
- Fun
- Generosity
- Gratitude
- Honesty
- Humour
- Justice
- Kindness
- Love
- Mindfulness
- Open-mindedness
- Order
- Patience
- Persistence
- Pleasure
- Power
- Reciprocity
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Romance
- Safety
- Self-awareness
- Self-care
- Self-development
- Self-control
- Sensuality
- Sexuality
- Skilfulness
- Spirituality
- Supportiveness
- Trust

Reference: Harris, R. (2011). The Confidence Gap, Melbourne, Australia, <[www.actmindfully.com](http://www.actmindfully.com)>.





## PRACTICE GUIDE: EXPLORING VALUES

**Help parents to explore their values by asking them to consider the following sorts of questions:**

- What sort of parent would I like to be?
- How would I like to behave with my children?
- How would I like people to describe me?

Reference Adapted from Benveniste, J. (2011). The Parent Manifesto, Adelaide, Australia, <[www.parentwellbeing.com](http://www.parentwellbeing.com)>.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: APPLYING VALUES

**Help parents explore how to apply their values to their parenting by asking them to consider these kinds of questions:**

- What is the situation I'm facing right now with my child?
- How does it make me feel?
- What do I believe is causing the situation?
- How would I like my child to behave in this situation?
- What can my child learn from this situation?
- How would I like to behave in this situation so that I can help my child learn?
- Next time this situation happens, I will create an action plan by considering:
  - This is what I will do ...
  - This is how I will feel ...
  - This is what my child will be learning from this situation ...

Reference Adapted from Benveniste, J. (2011). The Parent Manifesto, Adelaide, Australia, <[www.parentwellbeing.com](http://www.parentwellbeing.com)>.



## FATHERS – KEY POINTS

- Fathers are just as important to their child's healthy development as mothers. Mothers and fathers often bring different but complementary strengths and styles to their parenting roles.
- Involved fathers have a positive impact on child and family wellbeing, and play a unique and critical role in nurturing and guiding children's development.
- Research reveals that fathers often feel excluded from services, which appear more targeted at mothers.
- Like mothers, fathers benefit from having an understanding of their child's development and needs, which leads to increased confidence in parenting. They also benefit from having better connections with other fathers.
- Services or programs that are most successful at engaging fathers are tailored to men or offered exclusively to fathers.
- Employing male staff, marketing services and programs specifically to men, and having flexible hours of operation all support fathers' involvement.
- Fathers are not a homogenous group, and each professional/practitioner and service should respond to the specific needs of the fathers in their community.

### **Fathers, Grandparents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Families**

Research with parents revealed that four specific groups – fathers, grandparents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families – were receiving inadequate parenting support or information. This section provides specific tips for working with these groups.

## 3.5 Fathers

Father involvement is men participating in their children's lives in a positive, active and extensive way.

When fathers have frequent and quality interactions with their children, they can impact positively on their children's social, emotional and cognitive development, and their behaviour and success at school. The emotional and practical support fathers provide their partners also influences children's wellbeing and overall family wellbeing.

Services have an important role to play in supporting fathers' skills and confidence, and in celebrating and valuing fathering. However, research with fathers has revealed that they often feel excluded or marginalised by services, which appear primarily targeted at mothers. Fathers are involved in a wide range of parenting services and programs but their participation is much lower than mothers' participation.

Like mothers, fathers can benefit from having an understanding of their children's development and needs, which leads to increased confidence in parenting. Fathers can also benefit from having better connections with other fathers. Services that are most successful in engaging fathers offer programs that are tailored to men or offered exclusively to fathers. Many father-inclusive services employ male staff, market services and programs specifically to men, and have flexible hours of operation.

In general, fathers prefer programs that are informal, hands-on and solutions-focused, with opportunities for interaction and open discussion. Fathers like to be informed of the purpose and outcomes of the program prior to committing to attendance. The gender of the facilitator is not the crucial ingredient for successfully engaging fathers; male and female facilitators can be equally successful if they possess high-level skills in relating to men.

Fathers who are separated from their partners or in shared custody arrangements are likely to require specific assistance. Fathers are not a homogenous group, and each professional or practitioner and service needs to respond to the specific needs, interests and culture of the fathers in their community.

Fathers' roles have changed over the generations, with many fathers now taking a more involved role in raising their children. A fathers' role can be described within the following six

dimensions and is inclusive of fathers who are parenting in partnership with the mother, sole parenting, or who are non-residential fathers.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: THE ROLE OF THE FATHER

### **A responsible father can be relied upon, is available and accessible and is actively involved in his children's**

- physical care and routines such as bathing, feeding and bedtime
- education and care programs, such as preschool, childcare and school
- medical decisions and appointments

### **A remembering father regularly thinks about his children and holds them 'in mind' even when physically apart by**

- maintaining regular contact
- remembering and participating in special events and activities
- knowing and supporting his children's interests and friendships

### **A nurturing father enjoys spending time with his children and actively**

- guides, teaches, supports and encourages
- responds consistently, appropriately and sensitively
- sets reasonable and fair limits and boundaries
- supports his children's self-confidence and independence
- delights in his children's accomplishments and progress

### **An affectionate father lets his children know they are loved and cared for by**

- showing physical affection
- soothing and comforting his children when upset or hurt
- listening, watching, attending and responding
- cherishing the moments spent together

### **An interactive father plays and communicates with his children and expresses ideas and emotions by**

- sharing in everyday activities such as cooking, shopping, gardening, cleaning and mealtimes
- engaging in 'rough-and-tumble' play and encouraging exploration
- reading, talking, laughing and playing
- teaching new skills
- taking his children on outings in the community such as to libraries, parks, playgrounds, beaches and gardens
- planning and taking part in family and friendship outings such as walks, picnics, camping, fishing and holidays

### **A provider/protector father provides for his children and protects their safety by**

- ensuring his children's physical needs are met such as food, shelter and clothing
- ensuring the home environment is safe
- ensuring adequate care and healthy adult/child relationships

Reference: Adapted from Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2009). Father-Inclusive Practice Guide: A Tool To Support The Inclusion of Fathers in a Holistic Approach To Service Delivery, Australian Government, Canberra.

Projects aimed at engaging fathers are more likely to succeed if they take into account the following factors.

The following tips are useful to consider when engaging fathers.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: SUCCESS FACTORS

### 1. A clearly defined conceptual framework

Projects have a clear conceptual framework that is applied throughout.

### 2. Builds on transitions

Projects focus on the important transitions that fathers face and the problems that can occur during these transitions.

### 3. An effective recruitment strategy

Projects use a proactive strategy to recruit fathers into the service or program, which includes directly going to fathers rather than expecting them to come to the service.

### 4. An approach specific to the reality of fathers

Projects are flexible, fun and informal, and they emphasise and value fathers' strengths.

### 5. Promotes fathers' empowerment

Projects include fathers in every stage from planning to project evaluation.

### 6. Strong and respected leadership

Projects include fathers who are passionate supporters of the project.

### 7. Integrates into fathers' immediate environment

Projects reach fathers in their everyday lives – either at home, work, recreational sites or childcare centres.

### 8. Intensive intervention for the most vulnerable fathers

Projects include ways to reach the most vulnerable fathers in a consistent and continuous way.

### 9. Public and political awareness campaigns

Projects include a public awareness campaign that is aimed at strengthening public opinion and influencing public policy makers or people who can advance the cause of fathers.

### 10. Organisational support

Projects are supported by an organisation whose mission is harmonious with the project's objectives, and the project includes resources and ways to support workers to deliver the project.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: TIPS FOR ENGAGING FATHERS

- Ensure staff understand the importance of fathers and male role models in children's development
- Include photographs and pictures of fathers in promotional materials and information resources
- Use visuals in learning materials such as videos, YouTube and DVD clips
- Ask fathers what services and events would suit them, including activities, venues and timings
- Be flexible about meeting times so working fathers are not excluded
- Use technologies to engage with fathers such as text messaging, blogs, Facebook, online polling
- Use men, who are fathers, to deliver programs, and give examples of how other fathers have been involved in services and why
- Refer to male role models or famous fathers to reinforce the value of fathering
- Communicate directly with fathers by asking for their work/home details and sending them emails and letters directly
- Be mindful of single fathers and fathers living away from their children, including 'fly in, fly out' families

Reference: Adapted from Children's Workforce Development Council (2011). *Parent and Carer Engagement Guide*, Children's Workforce Development Council, London, UK.

Reference: Public Health Agency of Canada. *The Father Guide*, <<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/prog-ini/funding-financement/npf-fpn/father-papa/index-eng.php>>.



## GRANDPARENTS – KEY POINTS

- Grandparents play an important role in supporting families and raising children. They are the largest provider of informal childcare in Australia, and they are increasingly becoming primary carers of children.
- The needs of grandparents providing childcare and those acting as primary carers are likely to differ.
- Many grandparents providing childcare enjoy developing strong and meaningful relationships with their grandchildren, but also report that the caring role can impact on their income, health and lifestyle.
- Primary carer grandparents generally take on a more intense caregiving role, and can also be faced with family trauma and upheaval. They can benefit from support that develops their coping skills, builds their social and emotional wellbeing, and increases their community connections.
- All grandparents seek information that is reliable, consistent, easily understood, readily available and widely promoted. But many grandparents are unaware of the information and services available to them, or they receive conflicting information from services.
- Grandparents are not a homogenous group. There is variation in their willingness, capacity and beliefs about taking on a caring role.

## 3.6 Grandparents

Grandparents play an important role in supporting families and raising children. Grandparents can provide practical and emotional support to parents, act as an information source and mentor, and develop loving and strong relationships with their grandchildren. Grandparents are Australia's largest provider of informal childcare, and they are increasingly becoming the primary carers of children. Many grandparents become primary carers for their grandchildren in the event of family tragedy, disruption or dysfunction.

### 3.6.1 Grandparents Providing Childcare

The needs of grandparents providing childcare and the needs of grandparents acting as primary carers are likely to differ. Many grandparents providing childcare enjoy the caring role and are happy to support their children to work or study. But their caring role can impact on their income, health, energy levels and leisure time, particularly if grandparents are providing significant amounts of care.

Grandparents providing childcare range from those providing extensive care, regular part-time care and ad-hoc care. Research shows that the majority of grandparents provide less than nine hours of care a week, and this is probably due to both parents and grandparents negotiating a mutually beneficial arrangement. Grandparents are popular childcare providers because of the flexibility, cost-effectiveness and trustworthiness of the care. Many grandparents can provide care during nights and weekends, in unusual situations or in emergencies. Sometimes grandparents are the only available childcare option. Grandparents are often viewed as the best form of childcare in terms of children's wellbeing.

Grandparents providing childcare benefit from local councils and community organisations providing information about free or low-cost local activities that grandparents can enjoy with their grandchildren, including attending libraries, playgroups and other organised children's events. This group of grandparents, however, cannot be viewed as a homogenous group. There is variation in their willingness, capacity and beliefs about taking on a caring role.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: UNDERSTANDING GRANDPARENTS PROVIDING CHILDCARE

### Primary benefit stated by grandparents for providing care

- Developing a strong and meaningful personal relationship with their grandchildren

### Factors helping grandparents connect with their grandchildren

- Regularity of contact
- Exclusive interactions
- Active engagement with grandchildren around everyday activities
- Continuity of care

### Types of stress associated with providing childcare

- General stress, particularly when caregiving for long periods
- Stress around the perceived lack of autonomy and choice about providing childcare, particularly when grandparents feel unable to set boundaries around caregiving
- Stress when caregiving commitments exceed or conflict with grandparents' lifestyles

Reference: Jenkins, B. (2010). 'Grandparent Childcare In Australia: A Literature Review', *Elder Law Review*, 6: 1–19.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: A TYPOLOGY OF GRANDPARENTS PROVIDING CHILDCARE

### Avid Carers

Care role central to life goals; family focused; a belief in the superiority of family care over other types of care; highly value passing on family and cultural traditions

### Family Flexible Carers

Care role important but not the sole determinant of a meaningful life; family focused; care one way of supporting family; expect some personal priorities

### Selective Carers

Partial to care role but not the sole determinant of a meaningful life; independent life; own determinant of family contribution; expect multiple priorities and some care

### Hesitant Carers

Care role does not really contribute to meaningful life; independently minded; limited exchanges with family; expect multiple priorities and little care

Reference: Jenkins, B. (2010). 'Grandparent Childcare In Australia: A Literature Review', *Elder Law Review*, 6: 1–19.

### 3.6.2 Primary Carer Grandparents

Primary carer grandparents generally take on a more intense caregiving role than grandparents providing childcare, and can also be faced with family trauma and upheaval. They can benefit from support that develops their coping skills, builds their social and emotional wellbeing, and increases their community connections.

Primary carer grandparents' information needs include requiring an understanding of child health and development, up-to-date information about parenting techniques, and recognition of their prior knowledge, experience and life skills. They seek information that is reliable, consistent, easily understood, readily available, and widely promoted. Many grandparents are unaware of the information and services available to them, or they receive conflicting information from services.

Primary carer grandparents also benefit from support that helps them to build children's socio-emotional, cognitive and physical development, and improve children's response to stress or trauma. Programs that help grandparents manage the financial impact of raising children are also valuable. When professionals and practitioners demonstrate a genuine understanding of the special needs of grandparents raising grandchildren, the difficulties and stigma associated with accessing services can be minimised.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: PRIMARY CARER GRANDPARENTS' INFORMATION NEEDS

### Legal Matters

Family Court responsibilities including residency and custody, shared responsibility and access, Children's Court responsibilities, legal aid eligibility, and application processes

### Financial Issues

Allowances, concessions, education and other subsidies, assistance with initial set-up costs and emergency aid

### Respite and Childcare

Allowances, eligibility for free or subsidised places, availability

### Services Available for Grandchildren

Counselling and other children's services, camps, out-of-school-hours care

### Services Available for Grandparents

Counselling, parenting support and training for carers of traumatised children

### Support groups

Contact details and information

### Community Resources

Sources of advice and information about community resources

Reference: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2003). *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*. Australian Government, Canberra, <[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/pubs/parenting-grandparents\\_raising\\_grandchildren/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/pubs/parenting-grandparents_raising_grandchildren/Pages/default.aspx)>.



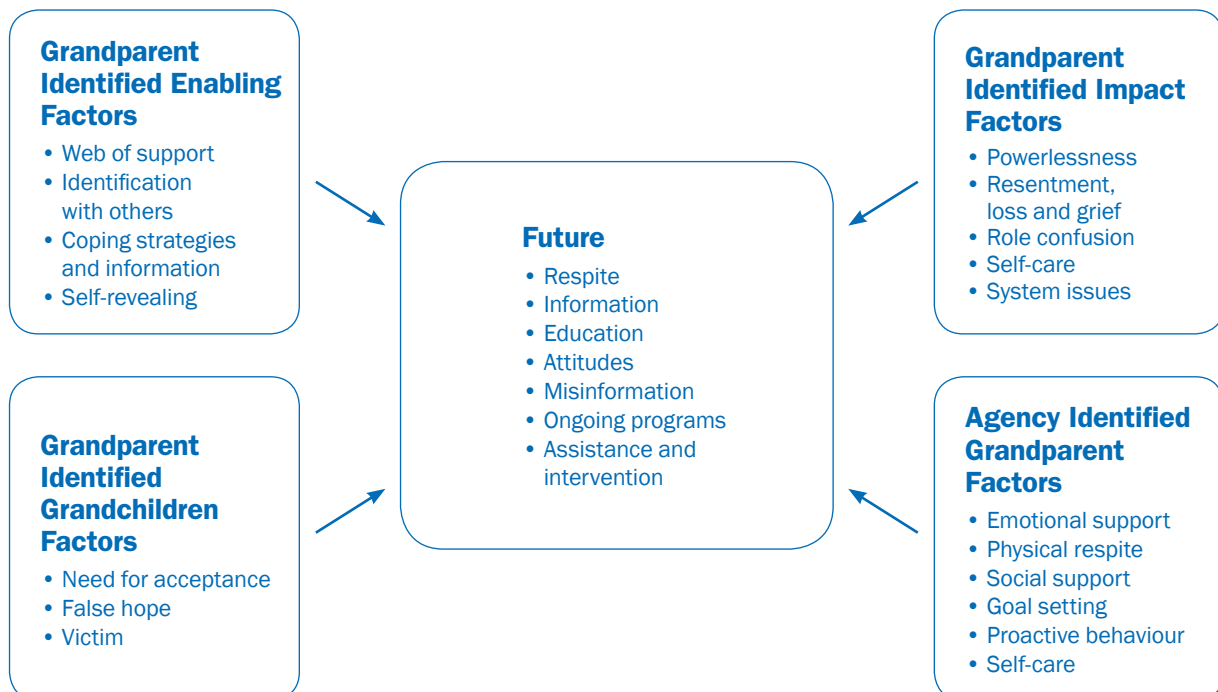
## PRACTICE GUIDE: PRIMARY CARER GRANDPARENTS' SUPPORT NEEDS

- Empathy and understanding of their situation
- Not to be viewed as simply a 'placement' for a child 'at risk', but for the needs of the whole family to be seen
- Recognition of their needs and not just those of the grandchildren or the birth parent
- Encouragement to ensure their needs are met
- Empowerment to cope better including having access to information and referral to services
- Regular respite care including time away from grandchildren, and activities and holidays they can do with their grandchildren
- Confidentiality and reliability
- A non-judgemental attitude
- One key worker across all relevant agencies
- The opportunity to be involved in a support group

References: Adfam (2011). *Working With Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren Due To Parental Substance Abuse*, Adfam, UK, <[http://www.adfam.org.uk/docs/adfam\\_grandparentsparentsguide.pdf](http://www.adfam.org.uk/docs/adfam_grandparentsparentsguide.pdf)>.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: SCHEMA OF ISSUES, STRESSORS AND SOURCES OF WELLBEING FOR PRIMARY CARER GRANDPARENTS



Reference: Horner, B., Downie, J., Hay, D. and Wichmann, H. (2007). *Grandparent-headed Families in Australia*, Family Matters, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Canberra.





## ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES – KEY POINTS

- Family is the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and kinship structures and family networks have a significant impact on raising children.
- Historical factors have impacted significantly on parenting capacity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The removal and institutionalisation of children is associated with the loss of culture, parenting techniques, extended family, and appropriate role models.
- To work effectively in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, services need to be culturally competent and deliver culturally appropriate initiatives.
- Successful parenting initiatives take a strengths-based approach that recognises the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, builds upon existing skills and resources, and respects culture, values and parenting practices.
- Information resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities need to be culturally relevant, respectful and appropriate.

### 3.7 Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Families

Family is the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and kinship structures and family networks have a significant impact on raising children. Historical factors have impacted on parenting capacity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The removal and institutionalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is associated with the loss of culture, parenting techniques, extended family, and appropriate role models.

Working effectively in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities involves being culturally competent and delivering culturally appropriate programs. Cultural competence includes having a knowledge and appreciation of history and cultural practices, taking a genuine interest in building strong relationships, and being respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander beliefs, opinions and lifestyles. It also includes allowing time for discussions and relationships to build, and recognising that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to programs and services.

A strengths-based approach is most beneficial, one that recognises the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, builds upon existing skills and resources, and respects culture, values and parenting practices. Successful initiatives involve community members in their design and delivery, use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff as facilitators, and take a whole-of-family, holistic approach.

The best information resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are culturally relevant and respectful, visually appealing, and include culturally appropriate images, family stories and language. Family gatherings, children's activities, yarning circles, and word of mouth are effective ways of disseminating information. Cartoons, DVDs, plays, and a travelling 'fun bus' with local voices are other preferred information sources.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: PRINCIPLES FOR CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMS

- Recognise the ongoing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families of policy and practices in previous generations that separated children from their families, and families from their lands and country.
- Accept that trust and honest dialogue between governments and communities and a shared commitment to finding solutions is an essential starting point to building an effective and integrated child and family wellbeing system.
- Respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices, cultures, diversity, and the importance of family in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as central tenets of service provision.
- Recognise the need to build family capacity and responsibility as the most important lifelong support system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Recognise that family is the foundation of the social, cultural and emotional infrastructure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development.
- Recognise the value of family and community based decision-making with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Commit to re-building the capability and available resource base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and families across generations to raise strong, healthy, happy children.
- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to child rearing and family centred strengths-based practice.
- Recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are each unique with their own histories, cultures, circumstances, needs and capabilities, and that program design and delivery needs to be flexible so that resources are used most effectively at the community level.

Reference: Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (2010). *Working And Walking Together*, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, Melbourne.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL PARENTING PROGRAMS

- They use a strength-based model that acknowledges strengths rather than deficits, sees difficulties as setbacks rather than failures, and builds confidence and empowers
- They are culturally sensitive and appropriate, and are specific to the local community
- They address both historical and current issues that impact on parenting capacity
- They include community consultation, collaboration and partnership
- They involve community mentors and role models without over-using Elders
- They use trusted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff as facilitators or as partners in facilitating programs
- Facilitators share stories, use role plays, recognise informal learning opportunities, and use the skills of the group to help each other.
- They target specific groups where necessary such as fathers, new parents, teenage mothers, incarcerated parents or grandparents
- They use venues where participants feel safe and comfortable, including venues where parents already gather such as playgroups, kindergartens, health services and schools
- They provide transportation and food to encourage participation
- They take a holistic, whole-of-family approach
- They offer ongoing support at key transition points

Reference: Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (2004). *Indigenous Parenting Project*, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, Melbourne.



## CALD FAMILIES – KEY POINTS

- CALD families enrich community life, and bring diversity and encourage tolerance and the sharing of cultures.
- CALD families face many barriers to accessing services including trust and shame issues, language difficulties, concerns about confidentiality, and insufficient knowledge of systems and services.
- Engaging CALD families involves building respectful relationships based on cultural competence and understanding.
- Cultural competence is based on an awareness of cultural diversity and the skills to work respectfully with CALD families.
- Community outreach and engagement are important processes in overcoming barriers to CALD families accessing services.

### 3.8 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Families

Australia is a multicultural country and CALD families enrich community life, bring creativity, new perspectives and experiences, and encourage tolerance and the sharing of cultures. But CALD families and communities also face challenges.

Cultural norms, values and expectations may lead to different child-rearing practices and different ways of understanding and interpreting children's behaviour. Cultural and religious practices may impact on children's activities, including food they can eat and games they can play, and CALD parents may experience a loss of power as their children learn another language and engage with the community in new and increasingly independent ways.

CALD families may not have extended family or community support, and refugee families may be suffering from trauma associated with fleeing difficult situations. There are barriers that may prevent CALD families from engaging with services, including trust and shame issues, language difficulties, concerns about confidentiality, and insufficient knowledge of systems and services.

Engaging CALD families involves building respectful relationships based on cultural understanding, and acknowledging that not all families from one cultural group are the same. Community outreach and engagement are important processes in overcoming barriers to CALD families accessing services.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: BARRIERS TO ENGAGING WITH CALD COMMUNITIES

### Communication Barriers

- Language skills
- Interpersonal communication
- Cross-cultural communication
- Jargon

### System Barriers

- Complex systems
- Lack of understanding of procedures and processes
- Technological barriers
- Type of engagement (meetings, small groups, large groups)

### Trust Issues

- Fear of authority
- Lack of relationship-building skills
- Shame and stigma issues
- Concerns about confidentiality
- Cultural competence of staff

### Information Barriers

- Lack of information
- Lack of multilingual information
- Problems with accessing information
- Conflicting information from different services

### Accessibility Barriers

- Opening hours
- Transport
- Childcare issues

Reference: Queensland Government, *Community Engagement Guides And Fact Sheets: CALD Communities*, Queensland Government, Brisbane, <<http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/cald-communities/index.html>>.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH CALD COMMUNITIES

- Engage communities as early in the process as possible
- Build trust
- Recognise diversity within communities
- Allow time
- Build capacity
- Avoid over-consultation
- Address language issues
- Ensure engagement is adequately resourced
- Demonstrate respect
- Provide feedback on the outcomes of engagement

**Reference:** Queensland Government, *Community Engagement Guides And Fact Sheets: CALD Communities*, Queensland Government, Brisbane, <<http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/cald-communities/index.html>>.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE

### **Awareness: Having the capacity for cultural self-assessment**

- Requires recognition that our culture and belief systems influence our interactions with others
- Involves an awareness of our own beliefs, values, expectations and cultural practices, and the awareness that they may differ from others

### **Sensitivity: Becoming conscious of the dynamics of cultural interactions**

- Enables us to recognise and evaluate how our own culture impacts on people from other cultures
- Fosters mutual respect and understanding

### **Knowledge: Developing a knowledge base about other cultures**

- Involves knowledge of other cultures and how they differ from our own
- Avoids stereotyping, generalising or being ethnocentric

### **Skills: Reflecting competence in relationships**

- Uses our cultural knowledge in practice
- Involves sensitivity, awareness, flexibility, non-judgemental thinking, knowledge, and an enquiring mind

**Reference:** Waitemata District Health Board (2010). *Guide For Staff Working In A Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Health Environment*, New Zealand.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: CHECKLIST FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL COMPETENCE

- How self-reflective am I about my interactions with people from other cultures or minority ethnic groups?
- Do I recognise prejudices I may hold about certain ethnic groups, or about their practices and beliefs?
- Can I identify how ethnocentric I might be in my interactions with people from different cultures?
- Can I greet people from any other culture in their own language (verbal or non-verbal)?
- Do I know anything about where they come from and the circumstances under which they might have migrated?
- Do I know anything about their traditional practices and expectations?
- How does my ethnic identity affect my decisions when working with members of other cultures?
- How often do I attend functions or take part in any activities with people from minority ethnic groups?
- Have I read any books or articles or seen any films recently about people from other cultures, particularly minority ethnic cultures?
- Do I respect religious or spiritual beliefs that differ from my own? Am I able to appropriately incorporate these in my interactions with people who hold those beliefs?
- Have I discussed any cross-cultural issues that might have arisen in my work with a colleague or supervisor?
- Have I attended any training or sought education on cross-cultural issues?
- Have I ever challenged a racist attitude by someone or realised I might have made or thought one?
- How much do I value the skills of 'compassion', 'neutrality', 'non-judgement', 'acceptance' and 'listening' in my interactions?



## SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PRACTITIONERS

- How can I help CALD parents explore a supportive parenting style and empower them to make positive choices that will work in their family?
- How I can help build CALD parents' self-efficacy and encourage self-care?
- How can I help CALD parents be adaptable and flexible to their children's changing needs?
- How can I help CALD parents identify and live by their values when raising their children?
- How do I work in a culturally sensitive way and tailor my practices to meet the specific needs of my clients?





**KEY PRINCIPLE:  
PROFESSIONALS  
AND PRACTITIONERS  
AS PARTNERS**



## KEY POINTS

- As professionals and practitioners, we play an important role in sharing clear and consistent messages and promoting the significance of the early years of child brain development.
- A **Partnership Model** acknowledges and builds upon parents' strengths, and encourages parents' confidence and self-reliance.
- The partnership process is influenced by our personal qualities and skills as professionals and practitioners, parents' personal characteristics, and the partnership between ourselves and parents.
- A strengths-based approach is consistent with the **Partnership Model** as it acknowledges parents' personal strengths, encourages empowerment, and focuses on positive improvements.
- An important aspect of working with parents is understanding how adults learn, which helps us to engage parents in the learning process.
- It helps to understand how and why parents seek out parenting information and support.
- Research from the first stage of this project found that there is no one definitive information source for all parents, and that many parents consider that a variety of sources are required to address their information needs.

The third of the **Four Key Principles** in this guide is that professionals and practitioners are partners. As professionals and practitioners, we can work directly with parents and the community to support children's development and their positive futures. As partners, we build on parents' strengths, encourage parents' confidence, and develop relationships of trust and respect.

The **Partnership Model** includes a series of steps in which we build a relationship with parents, and support parents to identify and manage challenges they may be facing. The model also encourages us to make community connections and to collaborate across disciplines and services to ensure the best care for families.

Factors that impact upon the **Partnership Model** include our skills as professionals and practitioners, the personal characteristics of parents, and the nature of the relationship between ourselves and parents. As professionals and practitioners, we benefit from a range of personal qualities including respecting others, communication skills and technical expertise. A parent's motivation, their attitudes and beliefs about professionals and practitioners, and practical barriers also impact on the partnership process.

As professionals and practitioners, we benefit from having a basic understanding of how people function psychologically, including how people's world views impact on their behaviour, and how our own world view impacts on our interpretation of other people's experiences and situations. We also need to understand that parents learn in different ways and seek out parenting information in different ways. By having an understanding of adult learning methods, we can engage parents in the learning process so parents develop their parenting skills and build their confidence.

This section includes information on the strengths-based approach, the **Partnership Model**, and adult learning methods including parents' information preferences.

## 4.1 Strengths-based Approach

A strengths-based approach to working with parents acknowledges parents' personal resources, knowledge and skills. It promotes empowerment, encourages hope and aspiration, and focuses on positive improvements. A strengths-based approach aims to build resilience and focuses on prevention.

Strengths include what people have learned about themselves, others and the world, their personal characteristics, their talents and abilities, and their personal stories and experiences.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

### A Strengths-based Approach

- Focuses on strengths
- Uses long-term thinking where behaviour change takes time and commitment
- Aims for crisis prevention
- Has high expectations of parents and families who are seeking services
- Acknowledges that parents have similar aspirations but different access to resources

### A Deficit Approach

- Focuses on deficits and problems
- Uses short-term thinking with a focus on quick and easy solutions to serious problems
- Aims for crisis intervention
- Has low expectations of parents and families who are seeking services
- Sees parents from lower socioeconomic groups as having different aspirations to those from higher socioeconomic groups

Reference: Children's Workforce Development Council (2011). *Build and maintain relationships in work with parents*, Children's Workforce Development Council, London.



## 4.2 The Partnership Model

The **Partnership Model** includes working actively with parents, sharing decision-making, and showing mutual respect. It acknowledges parents' own expertise and involves a clear process and framework for working collaboratively with parents. The **Partnership Model** is different to the 'Expert Model' or the 'Befriending Model'.

The **Partnership Model** acknowledges our skills as professionals and practitioners, parents' characteristics, and the partnership between ourselves and parents that lead to certain outcomes. An understanding of how people function psychologically also influences the partnership process.



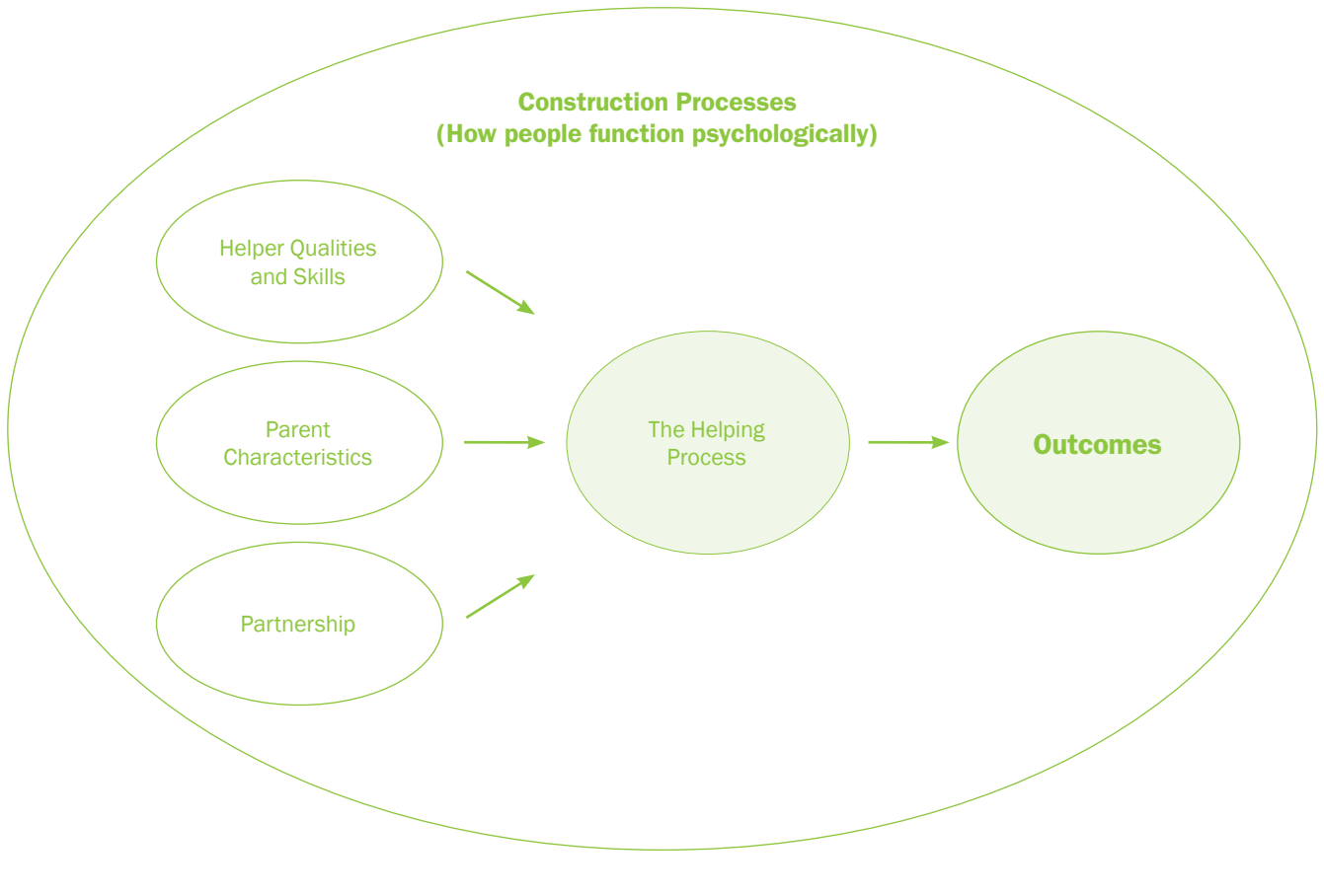
### PRACTICE GUIDE: THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL

The Partnership Model	The Expert Model	The Befriending Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and professionals/practitioners actively work together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionals/practitioners are viewed as experts with superior knowledge and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionals/practitioners are warm and friendly with parents and may offer friendship</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and professionals/practitioners both influence decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionals/practitioners lead and control parents and their interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are no clear boundaries or expectations of the relationship between parents and professionals/practitioners</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and professionals/practitioners value and use each other's strengths, skills and knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionals/practitioners diagnose the parents' 'problem' and outline goals and desired outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no clear model or framework for working through a problem and identifying goals and possible solutions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and professionals/practitioners agree upon goals and desired outcomes and strategies to achieve them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionals/practitioners search for information to support their view of the parents' 'problem'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The relationship between parents and professionals/practitioners have no clear beginning and end</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and professionals/practitioners negotiate when disagreements or conflict occurs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionals/practitioners focus on their own personal or the agency's agenda in outlining goals and desired outcomes for parents</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and professionals/practitioners show mutual respect and trust</li> </ul>		

Reference: Children's Workforce Development Council (2011). *Build And Maintain Relationships In Work With Parents*, Children's Workforce Development Council, London.

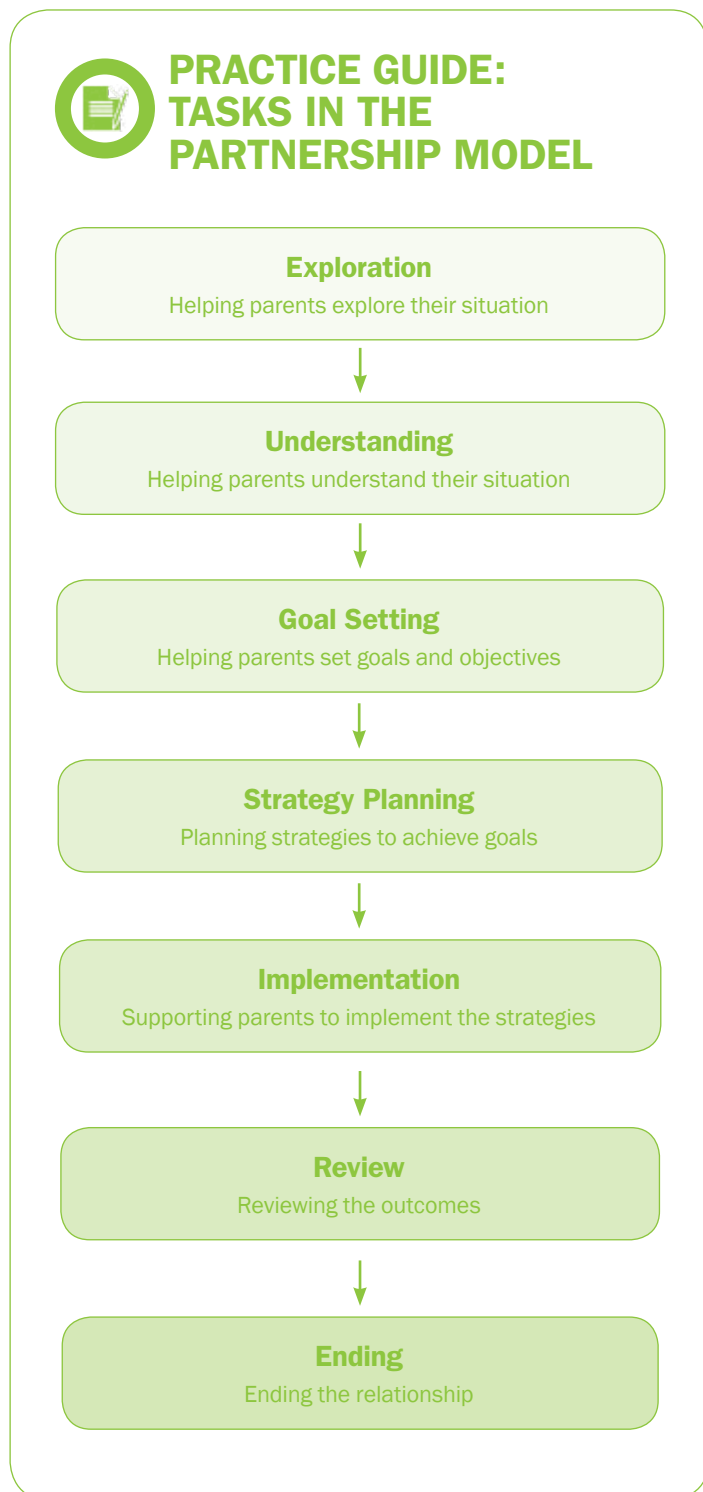


## PRACTICE GUIDE: INFLUENCES ON THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL



Reference: Davis, H. and Day, C. (2010). *Working In Partnership: The Family Partnership Model*. Pearson, London.

The **Partnership Model** outlines a set of tasks that we perform with parents. The process includes a series of logical steps, but the process is not necessarily linear and may involve moving forwards and backwards through the steps. All of the steps in the process contribute to and impact upon the relationships we build with parents. The first three steps are viewed as the most important, and can sometimes be sufficient to achieve significant outcomes for parents.



Reference: Davis, H. and Day, C. (2010). *Working In Partnership: The Family Partnership Model*, Pearson, London.

## 4.3 Adult Learning Methodologies

An important aspect of working with parents is understanding how adults learn. There are principles, practices, methodologies and outcomes of adult learning.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING

**Adults are internally motivated and self-directed**

They resist having ideas or information imposed on or dictated to them

**Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences**

They prefer to apply their current experiences and knowledge to new learning

**Adults are goal oriented**

They are more interested in learning when they feel there is a need to learn

**Adults are relevancy oriented**

They are interested in how what they are learning is relevant to their goals

**Adults are practical**

They like applying their learning to real-life situations

**Adult learners like to be respected**

This involves acknowledging their previous experience and encouraging them to express their views

Reference: Knowles, M.S., Holton, E.F. and Swanson, R.A. (2005). *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic In Adult Education And Human Resource Development* (6th ed.), Burlington, MA, Elsevier.

Adult learners require respect, recognition of what they already know, and ways to apply new learning to their situation. These practices then lead to outcomes such as increased knowledge and skills and a commitment to ongoing learning.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: ADULT LEARNING PRACTICES, TECHNIQUES AND OUTCOMES

### Adult Learning Practices

- Recognising what adults bring to their learning experience
- Building on their life experience
- Developing respectful and trusting relationships
- Offering opportunities to practise the learning
- Sharing learning with others through group work or communities of practice
- Offering self and group reflection
- Incorporating different learning styles and information

### Adult Learning Techniques

- Reflective approaches
- Self-paced learning
- Workshops
- Action research
- Mentoring
- Modelling and preferences

### Adult Learning Outcomes

- Increased skills and knowledge
- Communication and sharing of knowledge
- Development of analytical skills and knowledge
- Understanding of relevant theory
- Learning applied approaches
- Positive behaviour change
- Increased enjoyment of learning
- Commitment to continuous learning

Reference: Children's Services Central, NSW, *Professional Learning Framework*, <<http://www.cscentral.org.au/Resources/professional-learning-framework.pdf>>.

## 4.4 Parents' Information Preferences

Learning is influenced by parents' preferences for seeking out information. The first stage of this project explored parents' information preferences. The research found that parents are critical consumers and seek out information from a variety of sources including family and friends, parent groups, professionals and practitioners, telephone support, books, DVDs and websites, and parenting workshops and training.

There is no single definitive information source for all parents. Many parents consider that a variety of sources are required to address their information needs. The top three sources of information are family and friends, professionals and practitioners including doctors, nurses and teachers, and parenting books. Parents are also increasingly accessing information online from parenting websites, forums and social media.

Parents generally seek out information or assistance when they are troubled by their child's behaviour or development. Oftentimes, they seek 'just-in-time' information to address a specific problem. Time, cost, relevance and location of information and services can impact on parents' ability to access information. Parents are also increasingly looking for credible and evidence-based information.

Information that is well publicised, credible, consistent and relevant is most sought-after. Information also needs to be relevant to parents' personal, social or emotional circumstances, and fit with their values. Parents who develop a relationship with a warm and knowledgeable professional or practitioner are most confident in seeking information.

## 4.5 Parenting Information Pros and Cons

Parents identified pros and cons for each of the available information sources. Families and friends were one of the most used and least criticised sources of information, but family can also have out-of-date knowledge and practices. The social

research conducted in second stage of this project confirmed that parents are increasingly using the internet and social media to access parenting information.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: PARENTING PROS AND CONS

Information Source	Pros	Cons
<b>Family, friends and other parents</b>	Family, friends and other parents are the most popular and least criticised source of information	Family, particularly grandparents, are sometimes criticised for having out-of-date knowledge and practices
<b>Parent groups</b>	Mothers groups are a highly favoured source of information	Groups are not always available for fathers, grandparents and other specific groups
<b>Professionals and Practitioners</b>	Medical staff are consulted for health issues, and early learning or school staff are commonly consulted about parenting issues	Information from professionals/practitioners sometimes lacks usefulness, relevance and consistency
<b>Telephone support</b>	Telephone services are considered a useful source of information	Telephone services are only used by a minority of parents
<b>Books, TV, DVDs, websites</b>	Books, TV, DVDs and websites are common sources of information	The information may not always be credible, consistent or relevant
<b>Parent workshops and training</b>	Parent training can be effective in producing lasting improvements for parents and families	Parent training is not available to all parents
<b>Written information</b>	Some parents like written information and find it useful	Some parents do not have the time for or interest in written information

**Reference:** Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (2010). *Engaging Families In The Early Childhood Development Story: Research Findings From A Survey Of Parents Of Children From Birth To Age 8*, Australian Government, Canberra.

## 4.6 Working With Parents

As professionals and practitioners, we play a significant role in working in partnership with families to support children's development. We also have a role to play in connecting families with their community so that child development becomes a foundation for community development.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: WORKING WITH PARENTS

- Use a strengths-based approach that acknowledges the resources, skills and knowledge of parents, and encourages their confidence and competence
- Work in partnership with parents to support them in addressing challenges
- Support parents to create their version of the supportive parenting style, which promotes warmth, boundaries and consistency
- Promote parenting as a learning experience rather than an inherent skill or capability
- Encourage knowledge-seeking so parents have realistic expectations of their children's behaviour at each developmental stage
- Appreciate that parenting self-efficacy, which includes confidence and the ability to problem-solve and adapt, is one of the most important factors in effective parenting
- Acknowledge that working in partnership with parents is a process that involves a series of steps, personal qualities, technical skills, and active involvement by all parties
- Understand that parenting and parents are influenced by a complex array of factors, and that a multi-disciplinary approach may be required
- Understand adult learning methods and how adults learn so that you can effectively engage parents to build their parenting skills and knowledge
- Acknowledge that there is no single, definitive information source for everyone. Parents benefit from a variety of information types and forms
- Ensure that the guidance you provide parents is personalised and customised, and takes into account parents' personal circumstances, values and beliefs
- Be positive, helpful and supportive, and not overly prescriptive, so you build rather than undermine parents' confidence



### SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PRACTITIONERS

- To what extent do I use a strengths-based approach when working with families, and to what extent do I value their experiences, resources, knowledge and skills?
- In what ways do I work in partnership and build relationships with parents to affirm their role and help them to support their child's development?
- How do adult learning principles help in my work with families, given that people learn in different ways?
- What is my understanding of why parents seek out parenting information and how they like to receive that information?









**KEY PRINCIPLE:  
COMMUNITIES  
SUPPORT FAMILIES**



## KEY POINTS

- Neuroscience highlights the importance of a child's environment for their overall development. Communities that support families can help create a positive environment.
- Communities can impact on the wellbeing of individuals and families through good-quality community resources and settings, and through the relationships, values and culture of the people in the community.
- Communities contribute to a sense of connection and belonging, can overcome isolation, and offer people social connections, meaningful activity, access to jobs, services, shelter and safety.
- Community engagement is a process that helps build relationships amongst community members to create a better environment in which to live. It involves developing connections with families, between families, and with other services.
- Community connections are at the heart of vibrant communities, and professionals and practitioners can encourage parents to seek out informal and formal supports within their local community to meet their own needs as parents and to improve opportunities for their children.

The last of the **Four Key Principles** in this guide is that communities support families. Neuroscience highlights the importance of a child's environment for building brain architecture. Communities that support families build positive environments for children. Child and family friendly communities can provide formal and informal networks, support and services, and valuable relationships. Child development then becomes a foundation for community development.

Communities can impact on the wellbeing of individuals and families by the quality of community resources and settings, and through the relationships, values and culture of the people in the community. Communities contribute to a sense of connection, togetherness and belonging, and can also impact on a person's sense of identity. Communities are valuable for creating social connections, meaningful activity, access to jobs and services, and also offering shelter and safety. Communities also have a broader responsibility for creating environments in which families and children can thrive.

The features of a community, including the infrastructure, urban design, public spaces, parks and gardens, transport and services such as libraries, schools and childcare centres and health services, impact on people's experiences of living in the community. When parents and families feel connected to their local communities, and feel valued in their parenting role, isolation can be reduced and opportunities for children can increase.

Community engagement is a process that helps build relationships amongst community members to create a better environment in which to live. It involves developing real connections with families, between families, and linking families to support services and social networks. This includes groups that services do not frequently reach or people who are less likely to access formal services.

This section includes information on how professionals and practitioners can encourage parents to seek out informal and formal supports within their local community to overcome isolation and disconnection, and how services can network with other providers and resources to empower parents and families to meet their own needs and enjoy the best their local community has to offer.

## 5.1 Community Engagement

Community engagement is about services, parents and communities working together to improve outcomes for children and families. It takes a whole-of-community approach to early childhood development, and is built on personal relationships. Services consult with parents and community members on their wants and needs, and everyone is actively involved in addressing these issues and co-creating solutions.

There are various ways to engage with the community, including informing, educating, consulting and collaborating. Choosing the right method of engagement depends upon the characteristics of the community, and the skills, time and resources available.

Engagement is most effective when it responds to the specific characteristics, needs and wishes of parents and the community. If services have an understanding of parents' and community members' commitments and limitations, they are more likely to create opportunities for people to be involved.

Services can encourage engagement by being welcoming of parents and community members, offering many ways for people to get involved, and having incentives. Another

important component of engaging with parents and community members is ongoing and clear communication using a variety of communication methods.

The International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2)'s Public Participation Spectrum is a model of engagement in which engagement is seen along a spectrum depending on the community's involvement and their role in decision-making. The spectrum shows that the suitability of an engagement strategy depends upon the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of concern in the community. With each type of engagement, there is a goal, promises that are made to the community, and different techniques that are used to achieve the desired goals.

Achieving the desired goals may mean working at a number of different levels at once. For example, a service may wish to inform the community about a particular issue but is unclear about which communication method to use. A consultation phase can determine the best way to approach this. The goal is to identify the purpose of the engagement process – and to be clear with the community about the what, how and why of the consultation process, while adhering to best practice.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: IAP2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goals	To provide the community with information to help them understand the issue	To get feedback from the community on an issue	To work directly with the community to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered	To partner with the community at every stage	To place final decision-making in the hands of the community
Service's promise to the community	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to you, and give you feedback on how your input has influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed, and we will give you feedback on how your input has influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice in developing solutions and will incorporate your advice into decision-making wherever possible	We will implement what you decide
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committees</li> <li>• Consensus building</li> <li>• Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Ballots</li> <li>• Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

The Centre for Community Child Health's 2009 *Platforms: Guide to Community Engagement* outlines an approach to plan, organise and run a community based early childhood initiative. It involves engaging with the community at every stage. The goal is to develop services and build community to improve outcomes for children. The seven steps involve setting a vision, engaging community members, and creating an action plan.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### Step 1: Establish community leadership

Form a strong group of committed and collaborative people

### Step 2: Establish a vision

Clearly outline the community's hopes for the future

### Step 3: Appoint a community links worker

Employ a community links worker to connect services and families

### Step 4: Document community demographics

Collect information about the characteristics of the families living in the community

### Step 5: Map community assets

Collect information about the skills and resources of the families living in the community

### Step 6: Identify needs

Consult with families to discover what needs are not being met

### Step 7: Create an action plan

Address families' highest priority needs in an action plan

Reference: Centre for Community Child Health (2009). *Platforms: A Service Redevelopment Framework*, Melbourne, <[http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/consultancy.cfm?doc\\_id=10501](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/consultancy.cfm?doc_id=10501)>.

The Family/School Partnership Framework is a nationally agreed approach for schools and families to work together to achieve positive education outcomes for children. The framework is based on existing good practice and includes:

- A vision for improving partnerships between families and schools
- Principles to guide families and schools in developing partnerships
- Seven key dimensions of effective family/school partnerships
- Practical guidance to implement family/school partnerships

The principles can also be applied to early childhood settings.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: FAMILY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

### Key dimensions of family/school partnerships

- Communicating
- Connecting learning at home and at school
- Building community and identity
- Recognising the role of the family
- Consultative decision-making
- Collaborating beyond the school
- Participating

### Supporting structures for effective family/school partnerships

- Leadership commitment
- Respectful relationships
- A supportive and connected school culture
- An involved and diverse team
- School policies and procedures
- Resources allocated for implementation
- Support networks to share ideas
- Ongoing professional/practitioner learning
- Skills-building for families

### Key steps for developing family/school partnerships

- Analyse current practices
- Determine priorities for action
- Implement planned actions
- Evaluate progress

References: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008). *The Family/School Partnerships Framework: A Guide For Schools And Families*, Australian Government, Canberra. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2011). *Strengthening Family And Community Engagement In Student Learning Resource*, Australian Government, Canberra.

## 5.2 Community Connections

Consistent with the Ecological Theory of Childhood Development (see page 5) and the neuroscience evidence, environmental influences play a significant role in children's brain development and their life chances. A child's environment is influenced by their family's personal support networks and the social connectedness and social infrastructure in their communities.

A family's personal support networks are family and friends, who can provide practical or emotional support, and social infrastructure, which includes the services and facilities available in the community. Family friendly workplaces that help families to manage their work and home responsibilities are also a form of community support.

Many parents report that they lack social support, including the support of extended family. Many also report feeling isolated and that they are more likely to go it alone rather than seek assistance. The most effective social support is informal, where parents can remain in control and confident about their parenting. Informal social supports are also more likely to be flexible, understanding, and share similar values with the family accessing them.

Social support is linked to parents' wellbeing and to better outcomes for children. Parents who have access to social support are more likely to have a supportive parenting style and provide a more nurturing and stimulating home environment for their children.

Communities can support families to be active and to feel connected, confident and safe. Community assets to support families include individual community members, informal networks, and institutions and agencies. The physical environment, including land, green spaces, transport and gathering places, all play a role. These include childcare centres, schools, libraries, churches, businesses, community centres and other community hubs.

Professionals and practitioners can help families to access wider community support by being aware of other community resources and services, fostering strong working relationships between services, community organisations and government agencies, and developing structures and processes that enable services to work together and in partnership with families.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: BUILDING STRONG NETWORKS AND SUPPORT

- Provide opportunities for people of all ages, cultural, language and socioeconomic backgrounds and people living with a disability to participate in social and community networks and feel that they belong in their community
  - Important networks include families and friends, social, cultural, religious and community organisations
  - Networking can be supported through community meetings, sporting and cultural activities such as carnivals, festivals or fetes, and involvement in various community activities
- Consider how belief systems can enhance personal and community resilience by providing people with an additional sense of meaning and purpose in their everyday lives (as well as the many forms of organised religion, community ceremonies, ritual and observance can contribute to community cohesion and resilience)
- Think about what support individuals and families might need to participate in wider networks and in social and economic activity. This might include counselling, affordable childcare, respite for carers and services for the elderly, refugees and people with a disability
- Build resource- and knowledge-sharing networks among community leaders including local councillors, parliamentarians, cultural and religious leaders, teachers, business leaders, government agencies, community organisations and commercial enterprises
- Look for opportunities for various organisations and businesses to work together to provide the services and facilities the community needs, rather than competing with one another
- Promote volunteering and philanthropy, and recognise the role of non-government and community organisations working in the community

Reference: Adapted from Australian Social Inclusion Board Publications (2009). *Building Inclusive And Resilient Communities*, Canberra, <<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/sites/www.socialinclusion.gov.au/files/publications/pdf/building-community-resilience-brochure.pdf>>.

Strong communities involve people working together. Relationships between people are at the heart of community connections and create valuable social capital.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Support and build social capital through community groups, associations, partnerships and networks
- Use the community, and recognise it as a resource to break down social isolation and build participation and inclusion for individuals or groups
- Facilitate opportunities for encounters between community members, particularly those who are vulnerable and isolated
- Encourage and develop community level alternatives to individualised care and support (as opposed to the complete professionalisation of care). For example, it may be better for people to receive informal care from family, neighbours and friends rather than be completely dependent on professional services.
- Develop and participate in partnerships between groups and services focused on the local area to improve networks and work together on local issues
- Build and support local leadership and opportunities for civic and community involvement, particularly those who are socially excluded
- Support the flow of information across the community

**Reference:** Rogers, N. (2012). *Building Communities: Background Paper*, Department For Communities And Social Inclusion, South Australian Government, Adelaide.

An important aspect of the Family/School Partnership Framework is community outreach, which involves connecting schools with their wider community to increase social capital and connections, and to share learning. Similar ideas can be applied to early childhood settings.

By engaging with communities and connecting families to their communities, we can help create an enriching environment. It is also important to consider how our current practices and services align with the principles and best-practice guides outlined in this guide.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: FOSTERING COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- Act as a source of information and referral about services available in the community for families
- Use a variety of strategies to reach out to adults, families and children of all ages, races and socioeconomic backgrounds in the community
- Encourage local civic and service groups to become involved in schools in a variety of ways such as mentoring students, volunteering, speaking to classes, and helping with fundraising events
- Encourage staff, students and families to participate in youth service learning opportunities
- Open buildings for use by the community beyond regular school hours
- Work with the local chamber of commerce or business partnership council and public library to promote adult literacy
- Have a program with local businesses that enhances student work skills
- Widely publish and disseminate school board meeting notices, summaries and board policies and agendas, and encourage the feedback and participation of community members

**Reference** Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008). *The Family/School Partnerships Framework: A Guide For Schools and Families*, Australian Government, Canberra.



## **SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PRACTITIONERS**

- How well connected am I with the community in which I work?
- How do I help families connect with their community?
- How do I work collaboratively with professionals and practitioners from other services and disciplines to better support families?







# IMPLEMENTATION



## KEY POINTS

- A planning framework can be used to implement best-practice guides, assess current parenting initiatives, and create new initiatives.
- The planning process involves defining goals, planning a way forward, and then evaluating outcomes.
- An important starting point for planning is self-reflection, which is a way to strengthen and improve our practice as individuals.
- A consistent evaluation framework enhances improvements in service delivery by examining which aspects of programs are working well and meeting the community's needs, and which aspects can be improved.
- Sharing evaluation results across communities and between services can help us compare results and learn from each other.
- Conducting an evaluation involves assessing the process, outcomes, learnings, value, worth, and the sustainability of parenting initiatives.

## 6.1 Planning Framework

Engaging families in the early childhood development story may require some changes to current practices. A planning framework can be used to implement best practices, assess current parenting initiatives, and create new initiatives. The planning process involves defining goals, planning a way forward, and then evaluating outcomes:

**Step 01: Assess current practices**

**Step 02: Establish a vision**

**Step 03: Set objectives**

**Step 04: Create an action plan**

**Step 05: Evaluate**

### 6.1.1: Assess Current Practices

An important starting point for planning is self-reflection. Self-reflection is a way to strengthen and improve our practice. It involves questioning current ideas, beliefs and practices, and developing new understandings, insights and approaches.

Self-reflection can occur individually, but it is also effective when it happens collaboratively amongst colleagues within a service or across services and disciplines. Self-reflection involves exploring concerns or worries, striving for improvements, and being inspired to implement new possibilities.

Professionals/practitioners and services can reflect on current practices and assess to what extent they align with the principles and best practices outlined in this guide. Individuals can complete the **Self-Reflection Questions** for professionals and practitioners on the next page and services can use the **Checklist for Organisations** (page 62) to reflect and review.

These questions are designed to help us reflect on our current practice. As professionals and practitioners, we can use the information to outline a way forward.



## SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PRACTITIONERS

### Conceptual Foundation

- What new insights can I gain from the view of early childhood development outlined in this guide?
- How will a common view of early childhood development help me when working with families and across services and disciplines?
- To what extent does the way I work reflect the **Shared Values** in this guide?

### Children are at the Centre

- How can the neuroscience evidence enhance my understanding of early childhood development and help in my work with families?
- How can I explain the **Brain Development Story** to parents and families in a way that will be engaging and support their children's development?
- How can I help parents to find positive ways to **Play, Care, Learn and Talk** with their children?
- What assumptions do I make about parents 'these days'? How does the way I was raised and the way I raise my children impact on my view of parenting?

### Parenting is Important

- How can I help parents explore a supportive parenting style and empower them to make positive choices for their family?
- How I can help build parents' self-efficacy and encourage self-care?

- How can I help parents to be adaptable and flexible to their children's changing needs?
- How can I help parents to identify and live by their values when raising their children?
- How do I work in a culturally sensitive way and tailor my practices to meet the specific needs of my clients?

### Professionals and Practitioners are Partners

- To what extent do I use a strengths-based approach when working with families, and to what extent do I value their experiences, resources, knowledge and skills?
- In what ways do I work in partnership and build relationships with parents to affirm their role and help them to support their child's development?
- How do adult learning principles help in my work with families, given that people learn in different ways?
- What is my understanding of why parents seek out parenting information and how they like to receive that information?

### Communities Support Families

- How well connected am I with the community in which I work?
- How do I help families connect with their community?
- How do I work collaboratively with professionals and practitioners from other services and disciplines to better support families?



## PRACTICE GUIDE: CHECKLIST FOR ORGANISATIONS

### Parenting Behaviour

Does our current or future parenting initiative ...

#### Conceptual Foundation

- Align with the view of early childhood development in this guide?
- Reflect the Shared Values outlined in this guide?

#### Children are at the Centre

- Incorporate an understanding of brain development and its impact on development of the whole child?
- Incorporate information about ways parents can **Play, Care, Learn and Talk** with their children?
- Take into account the 'world of parents' and ways to engage parents in the early childhood development process?

#### Parenting is Important

- Promote a supportive parenting style?
- Encourage parents' self-efficacy and self-care?
- Encourage parents' adaptability and flexibility?
- Promote an understanding of how values support effective parenting?
- Promote cultural sensitivity when working with specific groups?

#### Professionals and Practitioners are Partners

- Encourage parents' strengths and value parents' personal resources, knowledge and skills?
- Take a partnership approach with families and focus on building relationships and rapport?
- Incorporate an understanding of adult learning methodologies?
- Provide parents with a range of information types and sources?

#### Communities Support Families

- Foster ways for our service to connect with the local community?
- Include ways to connect families with the community?
- Encourage collaboration with professionals and practitioners from other services and disciplines?

### 6.1.2: Establish a Vision

A vision guides the development of services and programs and offers direction and a rationale for working towards goals and for choosing an approach to reach those goals. When establishing the vision for a service or program, the following questions can be useful.



#### PRACTICE GUIDE: QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING A VISION

- What is our dream for this service or program?
- What would we like to see change?
- What kind of a service or program do we want to create?
- What do we see as families' major issues or challenges?
- Why should we address these issues?
- What do we see as families' major strengths?
- How can we build on these strengths?
- What is the purpose of the service or program?
- What would success look like?

Reference: Centre for Community Child Health (2009). *Platforms: A Service Redevelopment Framework*, Melbourne, <[http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/consultancy.cfm?doc\\_id=10501](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/consultancy.cfm?doc_id=10501)>.

Establishing a vision can happen in a variety of ways, but here are some tips:

- Bring together a cross-section of people to establish the vision
- Brainstorm ideas amongst the group by exploring a range of questions
- Focus on the most idealistic, hopeful and positive ideas
- Incorporate an understanding of families' problems, wants and needs into the vision
- Use the vision to guide development of your parenting initiatives

### 6.1.3: Set Objectives

Objectives identify what you would like the parenting initiative to achieve. Objectives need to align with the vision, and be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely).



#### PRACTICE GUIDE: S.M.A.R.T. OBJECTIVES

##### **Specific**

Ensure goals are clear and well defined

##### **Measurable**

Ensure goals are measurable and that there is agreement about how to gather the necessary evidence

##### **Achievable**

Ensure goals are do-able and link to the vision

##### **Realistic**

Ensure goals are realistic given the available resources, time and skills

##### **Timely**

Establish a timeframe for evaluating the goals

Objectives should be created to align with the needs of the community and the parents and children within it. To identify this information, conduct a strengths/needs analysis for both your community and its parents.

For parents, this assessment asks potential participants questions about both their parenting strengths and their needs. Parenting initiatives can then be designed and tailored to meet the needs of this target audience, and parents are more likely to embrace the initiative and find it useful.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: PARENT ASSESSMENT

### Strengths

- What do you enjoy most about being a parent?
- What is great about your family life?
- In what ways are you a good parent?
- What are some good things you have helped your child accomplish?
- What do you feel confident about as a parent?
- How are you succeeding in your role as a parent?

### Needs

- What would improve your family life?
- What would help you achieve your goals as a parent?
- What would you like to learn more about as a parent?
- Is there anything about early childhood development that you would like to learn more about?
- Is there anything about your child's developmental stage that you would like to learn more about?

A similar assessment can also be carried out at the community level. This involves thinking about the types of parenting initiatives a community requires. This will require gathering data and undertaking consultation with the community (refer to key principle **Communities Support Families** on page 57).



## PRACTICE GUIDE: COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

### Strengths

- What opportunities or capacities exist within this community or group of people?
- How do you intend to engage and facilitate active participation with the community and other stakeholders, including parents?

### Needs

- What is the issue that the program aims to explore?
- What evidence do you have to suggest that this is an issue?
- What may be the contributing factors?
- Who is most affected by this issue?
- Are there examples of approaches or solutions that address the key contributing factors in relation to this issue?

Some of this information will be available in your community's Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) community report, which provides a useful tool for assessing the strengths and areas for development of the children who reside in your area.

### 6.1.4: Create an Action Plan

An action plan outlines how to achieve the objectives of the parenting initiative. It considers people, resources and timeframes, and establishes steps to move forward.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: ACTION PLAN

Activity	Who is Responsible?	Due Date

When creating an action plan, you may like to consider doing the following things:

- List specific actions involved in meeting the objectives
- Prioritise the actions
- Identify the order in which actions need to be completed
- Consider costs and resources
- Establish an achievable deadline
- Charge someone with responsibility for the action
- Establish regular reviews

### 6.1.5: Evaluate

A consistent evaluation framework will enhance improvements in service delivery by examining which aspects of programs are working well and meeting the community's needs, and which aspects can be improved. Sharing evaluation results across communities and between services can help us compare results, learn from each other, and demonstrate a commitment to evidence-based practices.

#### What is an Evaluation?

We live in a world of accountability where there is a constant effort to increase efficiency while maximising effectiveness. We need to ask ourselves:

- Are our current parenting initiatives meeting the needs of parents and the community?
- How can we measure the performance of our parenting initiatives?
- How can we be sure if a specific parenting initiative is working?

Evaluating a program is a reflective practice and allows us to:

- Measure a program's performance
- Demonstrate its benefits to the community
- Improve its effectiveness
- Create an opportunity to share information about what works and what doesn't

There are two main types of evaluations – formative evaluations and summative evaluations.

- Formative evaluations assess the program itself, including its implementation and delivery.
- Summative evaluations focus more on the outcomes of the program and ask questions such as, 'Did the program cause the observed impact and what is the trade-off between the costs and benefits of the program'?

### How Do We Conduct an Evaluation?



## PRACTICE GUIDE: CONDUCT AN EVALUATION

#### 01: Plan the evaluation

Develop an evaluation plan that includes:

- Goal
- Objective
- Strategy
- Data collection method

#### 02: Conduct the evaluation

Conduct an evaluation that includes:

- Process evaluation
- Outcome evaluation
- Learnings
- Sustainability

#### 03: Report on the evaluation

Collect and analyse the data and write the report



## 01: Plan the Evaluation

Develop an evaluation plan that states:

- The objectives of the evaluation
- The questions that will be answered
- The information that will be collected to answer the questions
- How and when collection of information will begin and end



### PRACTICE GUIDE: DEFINING THE OBJECTIVE, GOAL AND STRATEGY

#### Objective

What do you hope to bring about in the target group (e.g., parents/caregivers)?

#### Example

To increase parents' understanding of the key behaviours impacting on children's development in the early years.

#### Goal

What do you ultimately want to achieve by increasing parent understanding of the key behaviours impacting on children's development in the early years?

#### Example

To improve the quality of parenting in the early years.

#### Strategy

What did you implement to achieve your objective?

#### Example

Delivery of a parenting program to increase parents' knowledge of the key behaviours impacting on children's development in the early years.

## Data, Collection Sources and Methods

The method of data collection will depend on the type of information you are trying to collect. There are two main types of data collection methods – quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative methods usually involve collecting data as numbers; for example, counting participants attending, how many times a certain event occurred, or calculating percentages.

Qualitative methods involve more detailed written responses and asking people for their opinions on a topic.

The **sources** of information may vary depending on who was involved in the initiative. What stakeholders can help you make an informed judgement? For example, this may include:

- Participants in the initiative
- Team members

- Facilitators
- Contributing organisations

Once you have determined the sources of information, the next step is to identify what data collection methods will be used.

There are three main methods for collecting data – surveys, focus groups and the mixed-method approach.

Surveys can be used both before and after the parenting initiative to obtain information about changes in behaviours and attitudes. Surveys can be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative information.

One type of survey is a 'goal attainment survey', which asks participants to list their goals at the beginning of the parenting initiative, and why they wish to achieve them. At the end of the initiative, participants rate how well they achieved their goals.

Tips for a designing a survey include:

- Avoid loaded or leading questions
- Keep the survey short and focused
- Use a logical order; avoid questions placed out of order or out of context
- Keep rating scale questions consistent throughout the survey
- Keep language simple; avoid double negatives
- Include a 'Not applicable' and/or 'Don't know' option
- Ask personal questions at the end; people may be more comfortable providing this information once they have completed the rest of the questions
- Pilot test your survey to check that it will be understood
- Consider sending several reminders
- Consider offering an incentive for survey completion

In the focus group or interview, ask participants how much and in what ways the parenting initiative has impacted on them. Focus groups and interviews are primarily qualitative data collection methods.

In many cases, it is worthwhile using a mixed-method approach, which includes collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to give a more complete picture of how the program has been operating. For example, you may combine focus groups and a rating obtained from a survey.

## 02: Conduct the Evaluation

Conducting an evaluation involves:

- A: Process evaluation
- B: Outcome evaluation
- C: Learnings evaluation: barriers and enablers
- D: Value and worth evaluation: cost-effectiveness
- E: Sustainability evaluation: exportability, threats and opportunities

### A: Process Evaluation

The process evaluation measures how well the initiative was designed and implemented. This includes:



## PRACTICE GUIDE: PROCESS EVALUATION

### Possible Measures:

- Quality content
- Engaging delivery
- Target group
- Attendance
- Participation
- Length and duration of the initiative
- Method of delivery
- Qualifications of professionals/practitioners

### Ways to Identify:

- Focus groups
- In-depth interviews
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Observation
- Keeping an account of attendance

## A: Process Evaluation

The process evaluation measures how well the initiative was designed and implemented. This includes:

### Quality content

It is fundamentally important that every initiative, whether it is providing information or delivering a program, includes quality content. It is recommended to include, where possible, all of the **Child Development Statements** and **Parenting Behaviours** described in this guide.

### Engaging delivery

If parents are engaged and interested in the content, they will be more likely to pay attention and learn from it. To achieve this, it is recommended that:

- The tone and language of the content is appropriate for the audience
- Activities are engaging and interesting for people with different learning styles
- All activities and content are culturally appropriate
- Appropriate resources are made available

### Target group

For a parenting initiative to be successful, the content of the initiative should align with the needs of the target audience. The content should be appropriate for the age of the attendees' children and their family situations.

There are many different people who can perform a caregiving role in a child's life and who may want or need access to parenting initiatives. These include mothers, fathers, grandparents, carers, foster carers, relative carers and stepfamilies. Caregivers may also vary on a number of other levels, for example:

- Cultural background
- Understanding of English
- Socioeconomic status
- Age
- Age of their children
- Mental health
- Children with disabilities
- Whether they have custody of their children
- Whether they have been referred by a court

Parenting initiatives may be either universal, wide-ranging and aimed at every caregiver, or narrow and targeted at specific groups. The decision of whether to aim a parenting initiative universally or specifically is an important and difficult one. To assist with this decision-making, an understanding of 'proportionate universalism' is useful.

There is a social gradient in child development – children from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have poor developmental outcomes, while the reverse is true for children from the most advantaged backgrounds.

To reduce the steepness of the social gradient, actions taken to influence child development must be universal, but should be implemented with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage.

Taking socioeconomic status (SES) as an example, the majority of children are mid-range with fewer children at both the low and high SES extremes. It is true that the greatest **proportion** of vulnerable children are in the low range of SES, but it is important to note that there are vulnerable children at each SES level. In fact, the greatest **number** of vulnerable children are in the mid-range of SES (as it is in this range that there is the greatest number of children overall).

A parenting initiative that is targeted at those in the low SES range will be targeting the parents/caregivers of the most vulnerable children but will exclude the parents/caregivers of vulnerable children with a higher SES status.

Providing a universal initiative could improve outcomes for all children, but it is most likely that parents/caregivers in the high SES range will be the ones who attend. The key when creating a parenting initiative is not so much whether it is universal or targeted to a specific group, but rather that it reduces as many barriers to access as possible.

### Attendance

The levels of attendance and participation should also be evaluated. Attendance is important because even the best parenting initiatives will not have the desired educational effect if participants do not attend. Attendance can be measured in a number of ways:

- The take-up rate: how many people took up the initiative as a proportion of the total number of people who had access to the initiative?
- The drop-out rate: how many people began but did not complete the initiative?
- Number of sessions: for those who did attend, how many sessions did they attend?

### Participation

As well as attendance, participation in the parenting initiative should be evaluated. Participation is more than just attendance. It is active engagement with the content, which means that the messages are more likely to be remembered. Parents/caregivers should:

- Be active participants in the sessions
- Contribute ideas
- Ask questions
- Provide feedback to others

### Length or duration of the initiative

The length or duration of the initiative will vary with each parenting initiative. For all initiatives, it is important that they are long enough for parents to learn and understand the content but not so long that the material becomes repetitive or parents become disengaged.

For initiatives with multiple sessions, it is important to consider the length of the overall course as well as the length of individual sessions, and the time between sessions.

### Method of delivery

Face-to-face delivery, either one-on-one or in a group, is by far the most common method of delivery in Australia. Material is also commonly delivered in written form, the majority of which is provided at face-to-face meetings. It is essential to ensure that face-to-face meetings go beyond the reiteration of material already presented in written or visual form.

While face-to-face meetings may be an effective means of delivery, they are generally only appropriate for people living in populated areas. To include people living in remote areas, other forms of delivery are required, such as:

- DVDs
- Radio
- Telephone
- Internet
- Television
- Advertising campaigns
- Apps

At the end of the initiative, participants may be asked whether the content of a face-to-face course could have been covered equally well online or on paper, or whether content provided in written or DVD form would be better delivered in a face-to-face session.

### Qualifications of professionals and practitioners

It is important that the professionals and practitioners delivering the parenting initiative have appropriate qualifications. The definition of what is an appropriate qualification will depend on the nature or content of the parenting initiative being delivered.

Having qualifications means not only are professionals and practitioners informed about the content they are delivering, but parents are more open to trusting the information presented and see the professional or practitioner and the information as credible. In addition to qualifications, professionals and practitioners should also receive training on the specific parenting initiative they will be delivering. This will help ensure program fidelity so the initiative is consistently delivered in the way it was intended and originally designed.

### B: Outcome Evaluation

After running a parenting initiative, we want to know whether it has had its intended impact on the participants. This is an outcome evaluation. The specific outcomes you evaluate will depend upon the objectives of the parenting initiative that were outlined in the planning phase.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: OUTCOME EVALUATION

### Parents Expressed

- Levels of knowledge of the Child Development Statements and Parenting Behaviours
- Confidence to apply the behaviours
- Perceptions of usefulness
- Intention to take action

### Ways to Identify:

- Focus groups
- In-depth interviews
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Goal attainment surveys
- Observation

## C: Learnings Evaluation: barriers and enablers

Evaluating the barriers and enablers of a parenting initiative enables us to understand what contributed to successful or disappointing implementation and outcomes. Barriers and enablers may relate to the participants, the professional/practitioner, the organisation delivering the initiative, and/or the social context.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: LEARNINGS EVALUATION

#### Possible Barriers or Enablers

- Cost of initiative
- Location
- Time of sessions
- Number of sessions
- Childcare arrangements
- Transport
- Language and cultural issues
- Content of initiative

#### Ways to Identify:

- Focus groups
- In-depth interviews
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Observation

## D: Value and Worth Evaluation: Cost-effectiveness

The value or worth evaluates whether the parenting initiative was worth implementing, and whether it represents the best possible use of available resources. This should be assessed by comparing cost-effectiveness. For example, face-to-face delivery of a parenting initiative will be more costly than a pamphlet, but the message might be delivered equally well in a pamphlet. Costs include the time and money put into developing and delivering the parenting initiative.

Cost-effectiveness can be measured by how well the initiative has met the objectives set out at the planning stage. Preferably, the costs and effectiveness of the parenting initiative will be evaluated against other parenting initiatives that could have been used instead. You should be able to defend the costs of your parenting initiative against alternatives.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: VALUE AND WORTH EVALUATION

#### Costs (examples)

- Staffing
- Training
- Printing
- Room hire

#### Effectiveness (examples)

- Attendance rates
- Participation rates
- Increased parent understanding
- Change in parenting behaviours

## E: Sustainability Evaluation: exportability, threats and opportunities

A sustainability evaluation involves assessing the long-term viability of the initiative, its exportability, and any threats and opportunities.



### PRACTICE GUIDE: SUSTAINABILITY EVALUATION

#### Sustainability

- What aspects of an initiative worked well and should continue?
- Are any modifications required?

#### Exportability

- How easily can the initiative be adapted for use in other contexts such as in other communities, different age groups of children, for families from different cultural backgrounds, or for specific groups such as fathers or grandparents?

#### Threats and opportunities

- Can we do a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)?
- Can we identify factors within the service – strengths and weaknesses?
- Can we identify factors external to service – opportunities and threats?

## 03: Report on the Evaluation

Following the evaluation process, a report should be written that addresses the questions outlined in the evaluation plan.

### Have the Goals and Objectives Been Met?

Once data on the impact of the parenting initiative has been collected and analysed, it is time to reflect on the original objectives of the initiative and assess to what extent these objectives have been met. Any additional consequences (positive or negative) of the parenting initiative should also be considered.

### Whose Life Has Changed?

Ideally, participation in the parenting initiative and exposure to the key messages from the neuroscience evidence base will have an impact upon the lives of the parents/caregivers who engaged with the initiative, as well as the children they care for.

This evaluation report can be used to guide future management decisions by identifying areas for improvement, and advocating the initiative to potential funders and other agencies in the community. The report will also tell the story of:

- Implementing your parenting initiative
- The impact on participants

When writing the evaluation report it is important to keep in mind your audience, which may include:

- Management
- Current and potential funders
- Staff, administrators, participants and/or other agencies

Finally, it is important to remember that there is just as much to learn from unsuccessful initiatives or programs as there is from successful ones.

### Rating Scale for Professionals/Practitioners and Services

The following rating scale can be used by professionals/practitioners and services to reflect on the effectiveness of the parenting initiative. It covers questions for factors in the evaluation framework.



## PRACTICE GUIDE: RATING SCALE FOR PROFESSIONALS/PRACTITIONERS AND SERVICES

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>1. Process Evaluation</b>					
The initiative covered the <b>Child Development Statements</b>					
The initiative covered the <b>Parenting Behaviours</b>					
The content was engaging					
The target audience was clearly specified					
There were minimal, if any, barriers to access					
The content was clearly aligned with the needs of the audience					
The length and duration of content was appropriate for delivering the message					
There were high attendance rates					
There were high participation rates					
The method of delivery was appropriate					
Professionals/practitioners worked in partnership with parents					
Professionals/practitioners received appropriate training					
<b>2. Outcome Evaluation</b>					
All program objectives were met					
The parenting initiative was deemed by participants to be the cause of the outcome					
The lives of the parents and their children have improved because of the initiative					
There were no unanticipated negative consequences of the initiative					
<b>3. Learnings Evaluation</b>					
A systematic assessment of barriers and enablers was completed					
Barriers and enablers on many levels were considered					
Data about barriers and enablers was obtained by multiple means					
Minimal barriers were identified and most can be overcome					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>4. Value and Worth Evaluation</b>					
A thorough cost-effectiveness analysis was carried out					
The parenting initiative is extremely cost-effective					
The parenting initiative is more cost-effective than other similar alternatives (if applicable)					
<b>5. Sustainability Evaluation</b>					
The parenting initiative is sustainable					
Threats to the initiative are minimal and can be overcome					
There are opportunities for the initiative and they can be maximised					







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## Extra Resources for Parents

Families New South Wales (2011). *Love, Talk, Sing, Read, Play: the Early Social, Emotional and Intellectual Development of Children, Parent and Carer Handbook*, New South Wales Government, <<http://www.families.nsw.gov.au/resources/love-sing.htm>>.

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Raising Children Network, <<http://raisingchildren.net.au>>.

Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, *Healthy Minds: Nurturing your Child’s Healthy Development*, Zero to Three, Washington DC, <<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/brain-development/healthy-minds.html>>.

## Early Childhood

### My Child Website ([www.mychild.gov.au](http://www.mychild.gov.au))

Australia’s online childcare portal, including information and links to other useful websites about children’s health and wellbeing, parenting and family support services.

### Early Childhood Literacy and Numeracy Cards

Early Childhood Literacy and Numeracy Cards DVD, helping parents to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of early literacy and numeracy in the home setting.

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Resources/Pages/EarlyChildhoodLearning.aspx>  
<http://www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/OfficeOfEarlyChildhood/videos/EarlyChildhoodLiteracyandNumeracyCards/Pages/default.aspx>

### Home Interaction Program for Parenting and Young People

A two-year home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program targeting families with young children, HIPPY Australia website, <<http://www.hippyaustralia.org.au>>.

HIPPY factsheet, <<http://www.hippyaustralia.org.au/file/2050>>.

HIPPY brochure, <<http://www.hippyaustralia.org.au/file/111>>.

HIPPY newsletter, <<http://www.hippyaustralia.org.au/file/2399>>.

## Physical Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing

Provision of useful advice, tips and contacts for parents in managing children's behaviour. There are two publications, one for parents with children aged to four, and one for parents of children aged five to 11.

### Tips for Parents on Managing Behaviour 1–4

<[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/C7E33BF473454422CA257261001FA88B/\\$File/tips12.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/C7E33BF473454422CA257261001FA88B/$File/tips12.pdf)>.

### Tips for Parents on Managing Behaviour 5–11

<[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/9EA447B5BB1C4C92CA257261002233A0/\\$File/tips52.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/9EA447B5BB1C4C92CA257261002233A0/$File/tips52.pdf)>.

### Get Up and Grow: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood: Family Book

Aims to help parents and families work together with early childhood settings to promote healthy eating and physical activity behaviours <<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/gug-family-toc>>.

### Food for Health: Dietary Guidelines For Children and Adolescents

This brochure details food and nutrition guides for 4–7-, 8–11- and 12–18-year-old children and adolescents. (Note: these guidelines are currently being updated.), <[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)> or via a toll free number: 1800 020 103

### Get Set 4 Life: Habits for Healthy Kids

Resource for parents and carers of four year olds to set children up with healthy habits, including nutrition, sleep and wellbeing. This is included as part of the four-year-old health check, <[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/47B8A7F882590379CA25759B001EE259/\\$File/GetSet4LifeBrochure.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/47B8A7F882590379CA25759B001EE259/$File/GetSet4LifeBrochure.pdf)>.

### Get Moving Campaign: Just for Parents

'Just for Parents' website and resource provides tips and guides on making their children's physical activity a daily thing, <<http://www.healthysite.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/parents>>.

### Breastfeeding

Resources on the benefits of breastfeeding, breastfeeding strategies and support services are available for parents on the Healthinsite website, <<http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Breastfeeding>>

### Go for 2 and 5

This campaign has now finished. However, the website provides useful information for parents to provide nutritional support to their children, <<http://www.gofor2and5.com.au/>>

## Mental Health

### Supporting Parents and Families: The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

Guide for parents and carers on strategies to help support their children experiencing mental health issues, <[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/7A706F61E5C97F57CA257261001EOE54/\\$File/support.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/7A706F61E5C97F57CA257261001EOE54/$File/support.pdf)>.

### Kidsmatter Early Childhood (Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative)

Kidsmatter Early Childhood is a resource developed for early childhood services aimed at making a positive contribution to children's mental health development. It involves parents, families and others who have a significant impact on children's lives, <<http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au>>

[http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ec/cms/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/KM-Overview-Book\\_screen\\_v21.pdf](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ec/cms/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/KM-Overview-Book_screen_v21.pdf)>.

<<http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ec/getting-help/>>.

### Family Relationships: Tips for Parents

Aims to provide help to families on relationships and outlines how children learn from parent's actions, <[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/AAA4C2DEC6563CC0CA2572680010A0F7/\\$File/tipsrelat2.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/AAA4C2DEC6563CC0CA2572680010A0F7/$File/tipsrelat2.pdf)>.

## Family Relationships

### Family Relationships Online

Family Relationships Online provides all families (whether together or separated) with access to information about family relationship issues, ranging from building better relationships to dispute resolution, <<http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>>

### Family Relationship Centres

Family Relationship Centres are a source of information and confidential assistance for families at all stages in their lives <<http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/Services/FRC/Pages/default.aspx>>

### Family and Children's Services

Communities for Children aim to deliver positive and sustainable outcomes for at-risk children and families in disadvantaged sites throughout Australia. Services are aimed at increasing child safety and wellbeing, especially where certain circumstances impact adversely on the parenting capacity.

## **Community Playgroups**

Provide opportunities for children from birth to five years of age to learn through play and develop their social, emotional and physical skills while parents and caregivers develop social and support networks. Activities are free or low cost and may include music and singing, imaginative outdoor play and free play, art and craft, outings and cultural activities,

<http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/Services/FamilyAndChildrensServices/Pages/default.aspx>

<<http://www.playgroupaustralia.com.au/>>.

## **Child Support Agency**

The Child Support Agency (CSA) is responsible for administering Australia's Child Support Scheme, supporting separated parents to transfer payments for the benefit of their children.

CSA produces resources; for example, 'A kids guide to changing families' for children affected by separation (5-7 years and up) and how parents can engage with their children on this,

[http://www.csa.gov.au/multimedia/products\\_for\\_children\\_affected\\_by\\_separation.php](http://www.csa.gov.au/multimedia/products_for_children_affected_by_separation.php)>.

# Appendix 1

## Background to the Project

The *Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story* is a Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood Development (SCSEEC) project. The project supports the reform priority under the *National Early Childhood Development Strategy: Investing in the Early Years* to engage parents and the community in understanding the importance of early childhood.

The *Engaging Families* project aims to achieve better outcomes for children by increasing parents', families' and the community's understanding of the latest neuroscience research on early childhood development.

### Stage 1

The first stage of the project involved an international review of the latest neuroscience evidence to determine which messages should be shared with parents. These messages were aimed at supporting parents and carers to maximise early childhood outcomes and reduce disadvantage, including later learning problems and developmental delays. Work during the first stage of the project also involved conducting surveys on parents' knowledge and understanding of brain development in the early years, and identifying gaps in parenting information.

The research with families from the first stage of the project discovered that there are many misconceptions amongst parents about how best to raise their children in the early years, and that inconsistent and confusing parenting information can undermine parents' confidence and capability. The final report from the first stage identified eleven *Child Development Statements* for a social marketing campaign to share the evidence with parents. The statements report the evidence from the neuroscience review and are outlined in this guide.

SCSEEC released four research reports from the first stage of the *Engaging Families* project.

- Neuroscience and Early Childhood Development: Summary of Selected Literature and Key Messages for Parenting
- A Summary Report Presenting Findings from an Analysis of Data on Parenting Initiatives in Australian States and Territories
- Research Findings from a Survey of Parents of Children from Birth to Age 8
- Final Project Report of Stage 1

These reports can be accessed on the SCSEEC website.

### Stage 2

The second stage of the *Engaging Families* project aims to reduce the confusing and contradictory information parents receive by sharing information about child development, based on the neuroscience evidence, using a nationally consistent and universal approach. This will increase parents' understanding of behaviours they can adopt during the early years to enhance their child's brain development and overall life chances.

The second stage includes the development of a social marketing plan, and this guide.

The social marketing plan included extensive social research with families, and forms the foundation for a future social marketing campaign to share the neuroscience evidence with parents and the community.

The guide aligns with the *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*, and is consistent with the *National Early Childhood Development Strategy: Investing in the Early Years* vision that all children have the best start in life.

This guide aligns with the social marketing plan to increase awareness of the importance of the early years based on the neuroscience evidence. There is more information about the social research conducted with families in **Appendix 2**.

This guide was overseen by a National Steering Group consisting of representatives from the Early Childhood Development Working Group, Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Council, Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, and the Child Health and Wellbeing Subcommittee. The National Steering Group reported to the Early Childhood Development Working Group, which was responsible for the project.



## Appendix 2

### Social Marketing Plan

The social marketing plan for the *Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story* project details a strategy designed to improve long-term outcomes for Australia's children, through influencing a range of parental/carer behaviours that are known to be beneficial to early childhood development.

In order to develop the plan, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) partnered with TNS Social Research. The research was based on the knowledge and experience TNS have gained over the past few decades (both nationally and internationally) on the social research required to inform the development of effective behaviour change programs.

This section summarises the methodology that was used for the development of the social marketing plan, and is based on best practice in the development of social marketing campaigns, including:

1. Desk research and stakeholder consultation: identifying existing information on what shapes parenting behaviours as well as to identify effective and appropriate channels of communication to reach and influence parents/carers.
2. Developmental quantitative research: belief diagnosis, behavioural segmentation – exploring and enumerating variation in attitudes and behaviours using Sheth-Frazier attitude/behaviour segmentation for 1000 parents. This model is helpful in:

- > prioritising which behaviours to develop into messages;
- > determining target audiences, based on the size and profile of segments; and
- > providing a baseline to measure campaign effects through shifts in segment sizes.

3. Qualitative developmental research, including: 25 in-depth interviews; online discussion board with parents; and concept development and testing consisting of eight discussion groups.

4. Strategy development, including: a communications strategy (position, channels, language, etc.); identifying how to engage service and build coalition with other agencies; and identifying an evaluation strategy for the social marketing campaign.

### Stage 2 – Quantitative Omnibus

After the initial exploration stage, a quantitative survey of 1000 parents of children aged 0–8 years was undertaken via an omnibus survey of a population representative of the national population. Figure 1 provides a summary of the key demographic variables among the survey respondents.

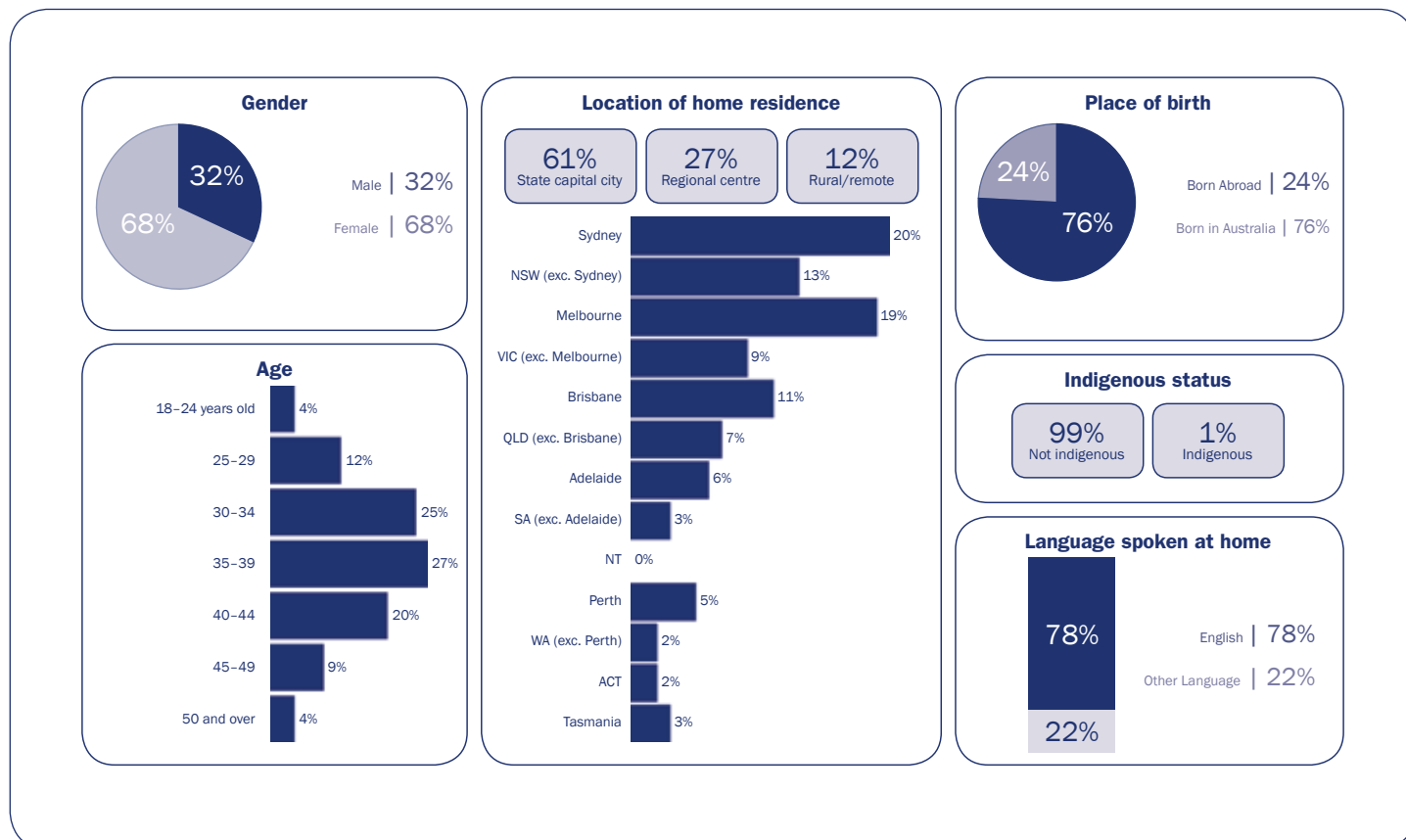


Figure 1: Summary of demographics of survey respondents

In order to understand this audience, a segmentation model applying attitudinal variables was used (Sheth-Frazier model). As can be seen in Figure 2, this model is helpful in:

- prioritising which behaviours to develop into messages;
- determining target audiences, based on the size and profile of segments; and
- providing a baseline to measure campaign effects through shifts in segment sizes.

		BEHAVIOUR			
ATTITUDE	High	Medium	Low		
Very positive	1	2	3	Segments that show least compliant behaviour, but favourable attitudes	
Positive	4	5	6		
Not positive	7	8	9		
		Segments that show least compliant behaviour and attitudes			

Figure 2: Sheth-Frazier segmentation model

### Stage 3 Qualitative Developmental Research

The eleven **Child Development Statements** were presented to parents and explored in a qualitative environment. The sample was designed to include a wide range of family types and socioeconomic backgrounds, and utilised both in-depth interviewing and an online discussion board:

- 25 in-depth interviews with parents lasting 1–1.5 hours conducted in respondents' homes, with parenting diary pre-task.
  - > Mix of one-to-one interviews (8), couple interviews (11) and friendship pairs (6).
  - > Interviews undertaken during April in regional Western Australia, Sydney and Brisbane.
- Online discussion board running over four days involving 14 respondents, with respondents drawn from rural and remote locations across Australia (WA, NT, NSW, QLD and SA).
  - > Total of 56 respondents:
    - Mix of mothers (70%) and fathers (30%).
    - All respondents had at least one child aged under 9 years living at home.
    - Spread of children in the following age bands: 0–18 months, 18+ months to 5 years, and 5–8 years.

During the research, parents were presented with the **Child Development Statements** and these were explored using the TNS Behaviour Web (see Figure 4), which provides a structured and systematic way of capturing the factors influencing parents' responses.

At analysis stage this behaviour web was used as a means of identifying the key drivers of parents' responses to the behaviours, and clarifying the barriers and potential enablers to behaviour change.

<b>Family size</b>	16 x 1 child	9 x 2 child	14 x 3+ child	
<b>Family type</b>	20 x couple families	5 x single parent families	5 x blended families	
<b>Household employment status</b>	12 x both parents working full-time	20 x one working full-time and the other part-time/not working	4 x one parent working part-time	3 x jobless households

Figure 3: Sample structure

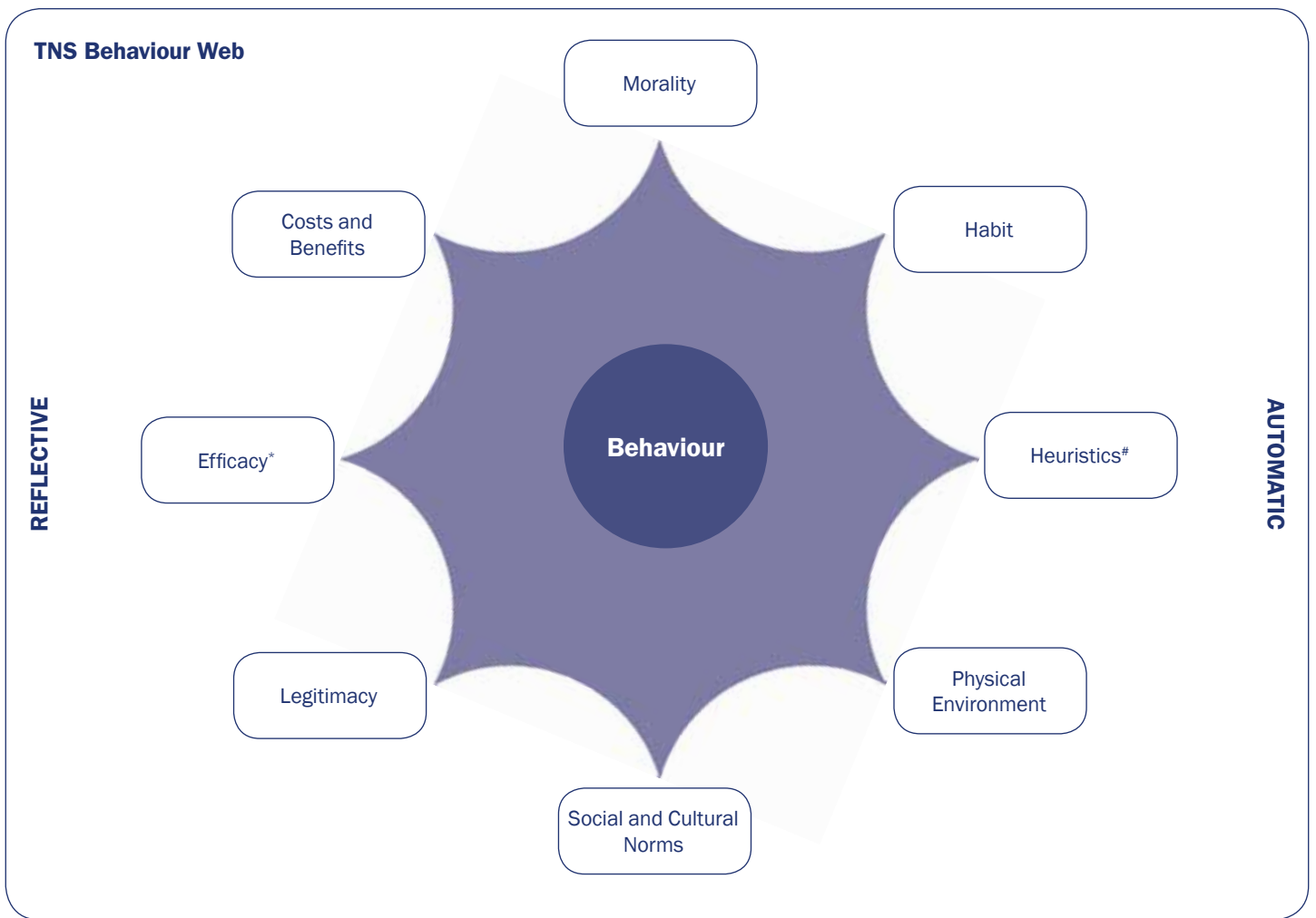


Figure 4: TNS Behaviour Web \* Response efficacy – Do I believe that the suggested behaviour/skill/action actually works? \* Self-efficacy – Am I capable of (or can I be capable of) performing the desired behaviour? # Heuristics – mental shortcuts or decision defaults, usually used unconsciously or in an unplanned way

Using the knowledge about how parents responded to the *Child Development Statements*, the eleven statements were converted

into ten *Parenting Behaviours* and one overarching statement, and then grouped under four loose headings (*Play, Talk, Learn, Care*).

