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The utility of a reflective parenting program for parents with complex needs: An evaluation of *Bringing Up Great Kids*

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Contents

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Abbreviations

AIFS Australian Institute of Family Studies

ACF Australian Childhood Foundation

BUGK Bringing Up Great Kids

C4C/CfC Communities for Children

Transcript notation

[ ] Brackets are used to indicate inclusions (e.g., of missing words), changes or notes made by the authors for clarity or for privacy reasons. For example, [her child]—the name of the child has been removed and replaced with "her child".

Executive summary

Introduction by the Australian Childhood Foundation

Parenting has been defined as the focused and differentiated relationship that children have with the adult or adults who are most emotionally invested in and consistently available to them (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Many parents lack confidence in their parenting, feel they could be better parents, and that spending time with their children gets lost in trying to balance work and other pressures (Tucci, Goddard, & Mitchell, 2004).

Parents report being under more public scrutiny and feeling under increasing pressure to be viewed as "good" parents. Tucci, Goddard, and Mitchell (2004) found that one-quarter of parents felt they would be negatively judged by others if they admitted to having problems with their parenting, and 22% of parents would not ask for help with their parenting for fear of being criticised.

It is not surprising then that many parents require support and information to become more actively engaged with their children (Tasmanian Early Years Foundation, 2009). Research has consistently supported the conclusion that inadequate parenting is open to change through education (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

There are a number of parenting programs that aim to support improvements in parental capacity to meet the needs of children. The programs with the highest profile have focused on building parenting skills, drawing from cognitive behavioural or social learning models, with particular emphasis on responding to and managing the behaviour of children. While a stated outcome in the majority of programs, a minority of programs actually explore and resource the extent to which relationships between parents and children are attuned, positive and nurturing (Staiger et al., 2006).

Almost all of the programs, as they are implemented in Australia, are tied into regimes of training, supervision and certification. While important, these elements of program delivery can also represent significant hurdles to widespread implementation in child and family welfare services, as they:

- are cost prohibitive;
- are not easily adapted or tailored to meet the specific needs of populations that are serviced by this sector;
- require levels of qualification and experience in facilitators not readily found in this sector;
- are based on adherence to philosophical parameters and strict adherence to a manualised approach, which does not necessarily meet the needs of the parents they seek to support (Staiger et al., 2006).

Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) was developed by the Australian Childhood Foundation to offer a unique alternative in the range of parenting programs currently offered in Australia. It draws from the evidence base about the importance of attachment narratives (Siegel, 2013) and the increasing recognition of the role of mindful practices in positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Using the analogy of "open source software"—where the code is made available to collaborators to study, change and share—BUGK provides its program resources free of charge to potential facilitators, who can adapt, tailor and collaborate with the Australian Childhood Foundation in their evolution and implementation. Quality assurance is achieved through regular low-cost training for facilitators, as well as online community forums to build knowledge, confidence and skills in the approach.

Over the past three years, the Australian Childhood Foundation has trained more than 2,200 professionals nationally as BUGK facilitators, who have in turn run more than 500 groups across the country involving more than 4,000 parents. The program material has also been used flexibly by child and family service providers in individual and family-based work. In particular, it has been delivered into services funded through Communities for Children partnerships, targeting parents considered "vulnerable" or "at risk".

BUGK supports parents to review and enhance patterns of communication with their children, to promote more respectful interactions and encourage the development of children's positive self-identity. It aims to identify and address the sources of unhelpful or hurtful attitudes held by parents. It also works to establish a new relationship context for children and their parents through facilitating opportunities for positive exchanges.

BUGK has been supported for more than a decade by the equivalent departments now referred to as the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS).

Aims

An earlier version of the program, Great Kids, was evaluated and found to be effective in increasing family cohesion and expressiveness and reducing family conflict. Participants also reported having more confidence in their parenting and being more hopeful that things in their families would improve. Participants in the evaluation could be considered the "worried well", that is, they were parents who were not necessarily facing complex issues or from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the recommendations was that the program be directed at and available to a wider range of people, such as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities and single-parent families (Staiger et al., 2006).

The program has since been significantly revised and renamed Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK). This evaluation aimed to evaluate the program in its current form as well as to expand on the previous evaluation by exploring BUGK relevancy for families from disadvantaged areas facing multiple and complex issues.

The six aims of the BUGK program are as follows:

1. Parents will learn more about the origins of their own parenting style and how it can be more effective.
2. Parents will identify the important messages they want to convey to their children and how to achieve this.
3. Parents will understand the messages that children communicate to their parents and how.
4. Parents will discover how to overcome some of the obstacles that are getting in the way of being the kind of parent they would like to be.
5. Parents will discover ways to take care of themselves and to find support when they need it.
6. Parents will develop strategies to manage their parenting approach despite the mounting pressures on their time and role.

The purpose of the current BUGK evaluation, therefore, was to explore:

1. whether the six stated aims of the program were met;
2. whether the program was suitable for parents from disadvantaged areas, facing multiple and complex issues; and
3. whether the program enhanced the reflective capabilities of these parents.

Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed-methods methodology involving a quantitative parent questionnaire designed to identify changes in parenting beliefs and practices across time, qualitative parent questions and qualitative facilitator reflections. Parents completed a

questionnaire containing both the quantitative and qualitative items at three time points—pre-program, post-program and six months after the completion of the program. Program facilitators' reflections were completed at the end of each session, at the end of the program and six months later.

Participants included parents from 16 Communities for Children (C4C) sites around Australia. The parents came from a range of diverse backgrounds and many were facing multiple and complex issues. Participants included foster carers, mothers of children with Autism Spectrum disorders, parents experiencing post-separation conflict, family violence, histories of trauma, substance misuse and a range of mental health issues, parents with removed children, Indigenous parents, teen mothers, and recently arrived humanitarian refugees.

Findings

The evidence collected in the evaluation provided support that:

- **BUGK largely achieved its stated aims.** Parents reported having a better understanding of how their upbringing influenced their parenting, how their responses and behaviours affected their children, and how their children's brain development affected their emotions and behaviours. Parents reported being more mindful, feeling calmer, and listening and responding more positively to their children.
- **BUGK enhanced the reflective capabilities of many parents who participated in the evaluation**. The majority of parents mentioned using mindfulness strategies in their daily lives both at the pre-program and the six-month follow-up. Enhanced reflective capabilities were also seen in parents' increased understanding of how the way they were parented may have influenced their parenting. Parents also gained enhanced understanding of how children's brain development may affect their child's emotions and behaviour.
- **The program was generally relevant to parents facing multiple and complex life stressors.** Parents also noted positive changes for themselves and their families as a result of attending the program. Many parents reported more positive interactions with their children, less conflict and greater calmness in their homes. The facilitators' reflections further supported the parental reports of change. In addition, facilitators noted that attendance at the program was higher than usual for several of the groups and that many of the parents had formed ongoing supportive relationships with other parents through their participation.
- **Certain aspects of the program appeared to resonate more strongly with parents.** Stop Pause Play (a mindfulness exercise that involves stopping and pausing before responding) was the most commonly mentioned aspect of BUGK. Learning about how the way they were parented may influence how they parent their own children and children's brain development were also features of the program, along with Stop Pause Play, that both parents and facilitators mentioned regularly and often in relation to positive changes they were experiencing within themselves and their families.

Cultural concerns were raised regarding the suitability of certain aspects of the program for Indigenous families and humanitarian refugees. The cultural appropriateness of aspects of BUGK; language barriers for those who spoke very little English; and having multiple interpreters were all raised as potential concerns.

The suitability of the timing and length of the program was raised as a concern for some parents. Several facilitators noted that dealing with many outside issues influenced some parents' ability to attend and actively participate in the program. This was particularly the case for the humanitarian refugees (they were in a state of transition having only recently arrived in Australia) and for some of the parents facing multiple and complex issues (e.g., incarcerated partners, domestic violence, housing issues). Parents could find these issues extremely distracting. Extending the program over a longer period could allow facilitators the time to connect parents with other services, if required, as well as give parents more time and space to practise what they were learning.

Limitations

- Although all of the groups were living in disadvantaged communities experiencing complex issues, they differed substantially in the types of issues they were facing. This diversity, along with small numbers of parents in each separate group, meant it was not possible to make comparisons *between* groups. The evaluation explored BUGK relevance for "vulnerable parents" in general, but future evaluations could focus in more detail on parents facing particular problems or from specific disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Parents' levels of literacy may have influenced their ability to understand and respond to some of the questions, although often these concerns were alleviated by facilitators reading and explaining questions or assisting parents to complete the forms.
- As many of the parents faced complex issues, including involvement with child protection services, they may have been reticent to respond honestly to some of the questionnaire items, particularly if they had concerns around confidentiality or further involvement with child protection services.

In conclusion, although some parents found aspects of the program challenging—and it may not be suitable for all—overall, BUGK appeared to offer parents facing complex issues a helpful approach to increasing their reflective capabilities, understanding their parenting and enhancing positive communication with their children.

Introduction by Australian Childhood Foundation

Parenting has been defined as the focused and differentiated relationship that children have with the adult or adults who are most emotionally invested in and consistently available to them (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

There is increasing agreement in the literature on those factors that constitute competent parenting. Parental warmth, sensitivity and acceptance of children's basic needs are core features associated with positive outcomes for children; just as harsh, coercive parenting is regarded as detrimental (Centre for Community Child Health, 2004, citing Teti & Candelaria, 2002). Evidence also suggests strong links between the quality of the parent–child relationship and children's wellbeing (O'Connor, 2002).

There is also increasing recognition that modern parenting is at a crossroads. Many parents lack confidence in their parenting, feel they could be better parents, and that spending time with their children gets lost in trying to balance work and other pressures (Tucci, Goddard, & Mitchell, 2004).

Parents report being under more public scrutiny and feeling under increasing pressure to be viewed as "good" parents. Tucci, Goddard, and Mitchell (2004) found that one-quarter of parents felt they would be negatively judged by others if they admitted to having problems with their parenting, and 22% would not ask for help with their parenting for fear of being criticised.

It is not surprising then that that many parents require support and information to become more actively engaged with their children (Tasmanian Early Years Foundation, 2009). Research has consistently supported the conclusion that inadequate parenting is open to change through education (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

There are a number of parenting programs that aim to support improvements in parental capacity to meet the needs of children. The programs with the highest profile have focused on building parenting skills, drawing from cognitive behavioural or social learning models, with particular emphasis on responding to and managing the behaviour of children. While a stated outcome in the majority of programs, a minority of the programs actually explore and resource the extent to which relationships between parents and children are attuned, positive and nurturing (Staiger et al., 2006).

Almost all of the programs, as they are implemented in Australia, are tied into regimes of training, supervision and certification. While important, these elements of program delivery can also represent significant hurdles to widespread implementation in child and family welfare services, as they:

- are cost prohibitive;
- are not easily adapted or tailored to meet the specific needs of populations that are serviced by this sector;
- require levels of qualification and experience in facilitators not readily found in this sector;
- are based on adherence to philosophical parameters and strict adherence to a manualised approach, which does not necessarily meet the needs of the parents they seek to support (Staiger et al., 2006).

Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) was developed by the Australian Childhood Foundation to offer a unique alternative in the range of parenting programs currently offered in Australia. It draws from the evidence base about the importance of attachment narratives (Siegel, 2013) and the increasing recognition of the role of mindful practices in positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes. The use of mindful practices by parents, for example, increases satisfaction with their parenting, encourages more social interactions with their children and lowers parenting stress. Furthermore, children in families where parents practise mindfulness show increased positive and decreased negative interactions with their siblings (Fonagy, Steele, Moran, Steele, & Higgit, 1991; Grienenberger, 2006; Grienenberger, Kelly, & Slade, 2005;

Grienenberger & Slade, 2002; Meins, Fernyhough, Fradley, & Tuckey, 2001; Slade, 2006; Slade, A., Grienenberger, J., Bernbach, E., Levy, D., & Locker, A., 2005a, Slade et al., 2005b). For parents, practising mindfulness can lead to improved relationships and better ways of communicating and connecting with their children (Fonagy et al.,1991; Grienenberger, 2006; Grienenberger et al., 2002, 2005; Meins et al., 2001; Singh, Singh, Lancioni, Singh, & Winton, 2010; Slade et al., 2005a, 2005b; Slade, 2006).

Significantly, the implementation method of BUGK encourages an "open source" approach to the use and distribution of its resources. Using the analogy of open source software—where the code is made available to collaborators to study, change and share—BUGK provides its program resources free of charge to potential facilitators, who can adapt, tailor and collaborate with the Australian Childhood Foundation in their evolution and implementation of the program. Quality assurance is achieved through regular low-cost training for facilitators, as well as online community forums to build knowledge, confidence and skills in the approach.

Over the past three years, the Australian Childhood Foundation has trained more than 2,200 professionals nationally as BUGK facilitators, who have in turn run more than 500 groups across the country involving more than 4,000 parents. The program material has also been used flexibly by child and family service providers in individual and family-based work. In particular, it has been delivered into services funded through Communities for Children partnerships, targeting parents considered "vulnerable" or "at risk".

BUGK supports parents to review and enhance patterns of communication with their children, to promote more respectful interactions and encourage the development of children's positive self-identity. It aims to identify and address the sources of unhelpful or hurtful attitudes held by parents. It also works to establish a new relationship context for children and their parents through facilitating opportunities for positive exchanges.

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Program logic

A flexibly delivered 12-hour program, BUGK enables parents to review and enhance their patterns of communication and parenting practices, and to appreciate their child's experience of the world. Parents are provided with an understanding of children's brain development, with a focus on their emotional development and reasoning abilities. They are encouraged to explore how such knowledge influences their parenting approach. Parents are assisted to interpret the meaning behind their child's behaviour, and to match their responses accordingly. Together with an awareness of the parent's own triggers, these insights aim to develop parental ability to contain strong emotions and deliver attuned responses to their child. In this way, parents are supported to build mutually satisfying, positive relationships with their child.

As part of the initial discussions regarding the evaluation of BUGK, a program logic model was created to highlight the aims and intended outcomes of the program. The program logic highlights the steps (a number of inputs and outputs) required to reach the desired outcomes. The program logic is outlined in Appendix A.

Evaluation aims

The purpose of BUGK evaluation was to investigate whether the six stated aims of the program were met; whether the program was suitable for parents from disadvantaged areas, facing multiple and complex issues; and, finally, whether the program enhanced the reflective capabilities of these parents.

An earlier version of the program, Great Kids, was evaluated by Deakin University in 2006. Thirty-nine parents participated in the evaluation. It was found that, on average, parents reported an increase in family cohesion and expressiveness at the end of the program and at the

two-month follow-up, although this was not statistically significant. Parents reported a significant reduction in family conflict both after the program and two months later and were also significantly more confident in their parenting after participating in the program. Parents were significantly more hopeful that things would improve, both at the end of the program and two months later, and the majority of parents reported high to very high levels of satisfaction with the Great Kids program (Staiger et al., 2006).

Participants in the Great Kids program could be considered to be the "worried well", that is, they were parents who were not necessarily facing complex issues or from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the recommendations of the evaluation of the Great Kids program was that it needed to be directed at and available to a wider range of people. It was thought people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities and single parent families could also benefit from the course (Staiger et al., 2006).

The program has since been significantly revised and renamed as the Bringing Up Great Kids program. The current evaluation was aimed at extending on the previous evaluation by including a larger sample size and by exploring BUGK's relevancy for families with multiple and complex needs.

The six main aims of the program are as follows:

1. Parents will learn more about the origins of their own parenting style and how it can be more effective.
2. Parents will identify the important messages they want to convey to their children and how to achieve this.
3. Parents will understand the messages that children communicate to their parents and how.
4. Parents will discover how to overcome some of the obstacles that are getting in the way of being the kind of parent they would like to be.
5. Parents will discover ways to take care of themselves and to find support when they need it.
6. Parents will develop strategies to manage their parenting approach despite the mounting pressures on their time and role.

Further to investigating if these aims were met, the evaluation also asked two questions specifically related to families with multiple and complex needs:

1. Did the program enhance the reflective capability of vulnerable parents?
2. Was the program relevant for parents facing disadvantage and complex issues?

These questions were designed to explore the relevancy of BUGK for these groups in particular.

Methodology

Evaluation design

The evaluation project was largely an impact evaluation but also encompassed aspects of a process evaluation. Aspects of the findings focus on the process and recommendations for potential changes to the program are made as part of the evaluation.

The evaluation design needed to be flexible as prior to the project commencing there was limited information available regarding the types of parents who would be involved in the evaluation. What was known about the parents was that they would be from disadvantaged areas and would be facing a range of complex issues. As has been found in previous research, collecting data from parents can be challenging regardless of socio-economic status but particularly so when working with groups from disadvantaged communities (McDonald & Rosier, 2011). As noted by McDonald and Rosier:

> Some of the challenges of collecting data from parents [from disadvantaged communities] that services may encounter include:
>
> - Parents may be reluctant to provide information because they have concerns about confidentiality and anonymity.
> - Parents who have poor English skills and/or literacy skills may have difficulty participating in surveys, interviews and other data collection processes (Larkey & Staten, 2007; Parker, 2007) and parents who have low levels of literacy may have difficulty responding to questionnaires or surveys (Donnelly, 2010).
> - Parents may have difficulties managing everyday stress that makes it difficult for them to prioritise a task such as completing a survey or taking part in an interview or focus group (Sullins, 2003). (p. 3)

With these challenges in mind, and in collaboration with the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF), a mixed-methods approach was considered the most suitable. Along with quantitative and qualitative (a small number of short-answer questions) parent data captured at three time points, extensive qualitative reflections from program facilitators were also collected. The facilitator reflections were designed to provide a more comprehensive picture of what was happening for the parents who participated and also to ensure that any change in parenting beliefs and behaviours was captured. Data were collected as follows:

- **Facilitator reflections:** All BUGK program sessions were co-facilitated by a member of the ACF Parenting Team and a trained community facilitator. Generally both co-facilitators provided feedback through the completion of the facilitator reflection sheet. The facilitator reflections were completed during or after each session (most of the programs were run over 4 x 3-hour weekly sessions), at the end of the program and six months after the program ended. The facilitators noted: the language parents used when talking about their children and how the parents were parented; what activities were completed and how the parents experienced these (e.g., what were they challenged by, what did they enjoy); what techniques parents mentioned trying at home and if there were positive outcomes of using these techniques; parents' wellbeing (e.g., what strategies for self-care had they tried, what had worked, what hadn't); and, any reported changes in relationships (with their children and families). The facilitators' reflection sheet can be found at Appendix B.
- **Parent questionnaire:** Parents completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the first session (pre-program), at the end of the last session (post-program) and six months after completing the program. The questionnaire included 23 statements that participants were asked if they "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neither agree nor disagree", "agree" or "strongly agree" with. The questionnaire was designed to identify changes in parenting beliefs and practices across time. Items were based on consultations with ACF staff and consideration of the program's stated aims.
- **Qualitative parent questions:** Along with the questionnaire, parents answered the question, "How hopeful are you that things in your family will improve?" as well as several short-answer qualitative questions. Participants were asked about changes they perceived in themselves and their family as a result of attending the program. In the six-month follow-up they were asked again about those changes, as well as if they believed the program was designed to meet their family's needs and if it could be improved to better suit the needs of their family. The qualitative questions encouraged the participants to explore their subjective experiences of the program and allowed them scope to express in their own words the perceived changes brought about by their participation in the program. Copies of the participant questionnaires can be found at Appendices C–E.

Participants

The program was run in 16 sites across all states and territories except the Australian Capital Territory. All sites were in Communities for Children (C4C) areas. C4C was an initiative funded by the Department of Social Services under the Family Support Program with the aim of

developing and delivering community approaches to enhancing early childhood development and wellbeing in 45 disadvantaged areas around Australia (Edwards et al., 2009). Data from each site has been de-identified to ensure anonymity for participants. Pre-program quantitative data was collected from 94 participants. Post-program quantitative data was collected from 68 participants across 14 sites and six-month follow-up quantitative data was collected from 16 participants across six sites. Qualitative data was collected from 16 sites across the three timeframes (pre-program $n = 72$; post-program $n = 86$; six-month follow-up $n = 23$).

One site comprised recently arrived humanitarian refugees who did not have the English literacy skills required to complete the questionnaires, so facilitators received data verbally and, where relevant, this has been included in the analyses. The numbers of participants attending at each site varied from four to 29 participants.

Although the participating parents were similar in that they all lived in disadvantaged areas and faced a range of complex life stressors, the parents were still extremely diverse and there was a wide degree of variability across the sites/groups in type and complexity of issues experienced. Participants included foster carers, mothers of children with Autism Spectrum disorders, parents experiencing post-separation conflict, family violence, histories of trauma, substance misuse and a range of mental health issues, parents with removed children, Indigenous parents, teen mothers, and recently arrived humanitarian refugees. Many parents were facing multiple issues (e.g., post-separation conflict, child removal *and* mental health issues). The majority of participants were mothers, although some fathers did participate.

Analysis

As noted previously, all BUGK program sessions were co-facilitated by a member of the ACF Parenting Team and a trained community facilitator. The questionnaires were provided to and collected from participants by the program co-facilitators as part of ACF's ongoing quality assurance process. Six-month follow-up data were collected from participants by ACF facilitators either in writing or via phone interview. AIFS was responsible for the analysis and interpretation of the data.

All three sources of data were analysed to answer each question posited in the evaluation. Participant quantitative data was entered into the statistical package SPSS Version 22 and analysed for changes in each participant's responses between pre- and post-program (see Appendix Table A.1 & A.2); and pre- and post six-month follow-up (see Appendix Table B.1). Due to the small sample sizes at each point in time, it was determined that reporting on changes in responses by participants over time would provide useful information but that the sample sizes were too small to report on the statistical significance of these changes. T-tests were performed and the results are provided in Appendix Table A.3 (for pre-post data) and Appendix Table B.2 (for pre-post-6-month data), but due to the small numbers of participants this data should be interpreted with caution. As there was found to be some redundancy between items, only the eight that were considered most closely aligned with the aims of the evaluation were included in the final analysis[1]. The findings of each of the eight questionnaire items are highlighted within the results of the appropriate aim. While the numbers of parents who participated in the six-month follow-up was low ($n = 16$) compared to the number of participants who completed the pre- and post-program questionnaires ($n = 68$), some results for the six-month follow-up have been included as they provided greater clarity and a longer-term view of the changes that occurred for some participants.

Qualitative data (participant responses and facilitator reflections) were transcribed and entered into Microsoft Excel. A thematic analysis was performed based on the predetermined evaluation

[1] Between pre- and post-program, there was a statistically significant change in six of the eight items and between pre-program and six-month follow-up, there was a statistically significant change in one of the eight items.

aims and questions. Quotes that related to each program aim or evaluation question were grouped together and then the data was analysed for themes, and commonalities and differences between participants (participant data) and groups (facilitator data). Facilitator reflections were also arranged by site so that change across sessions (1–4 sessions, whole program and six-month follow-up) could be identified.

Although the sample sizes were not large, having access to three sources of data from multiple points in time provided a rich and meaningful picture of the impacts of the program and the relevance of it for parents facing complex issues and disadvantage. Sample sizes such as this are relatively common when working with families and parents facing multiple and complex issues (e.g., Gibson & Parkinson, 2013; Staiger et al., 2006).

Findings

Were the aims of the program met?

1. Parents will learn more about the origins of their own parenting style and how it can be more effective.

Throughout the BUGK program, parents are encouraged to identify and address the sources of unhelpful and hurtful attitudes they may hold. One source of these attitudes can be parents' own experiences growing up. Using "messages" as a metaphor, parents are encouraged to explore and reflect on these experiences, how they may impact on their own parenting style, and what messages, in turn, they are sending their own children (ACF, 2011).

The section of the program called *Messages from the Past* is designed to encourage parents to be reflective about their own experiences growing up and how these messages from their own childhood impact on the parents they are today.

Strong personal responses to Messages from the Past

In the feedback provided by the course facilitators, it was clear that while some groups were able to find humour in some messages from the past, others experienced considerable emotion, and quite a number of parents found this topic challenging. For example:

> [This was a] very rich, meaningful session. Memories of the past evoked strong personal responses from quite a few parents. Stories were openly shared and at times I found it hard to transition to the next activity … (Facilitator, Site 14, session 1)

> One parent was very emotional when she realised that she was doing to her children exactly what she had hated her dad for doing to her. She got really angry and her voice was raised and her cheek[s] and neck went really blotchy and red. She was then really quiet for rest of session. (Facilitator, Site 3, session 2)

For some parents, memories of traumatic past experiences were still very much present in their lives, while for others, re-examining painful past memories had the potential for re-traumatisation, requiring course facilitators to respond appropriately and with sensitivity.

> [One] parent had shared some horrifying examples of what her father has said/done to her as a child. This is shared in a matter of a fact way without emotion. (Facilitator, Site 12, session 4)

> The mother who lacks insight into why she needs to make changes speaks in a monotone way, which suggests to me that she is emotionally detached due to trauma. (Facilitator, Site 12, session 4)

> One parent presented with a strong emotion of hurt, this parent was gently taken outside to be heard. There has been follow-up counselling by a family worker. (Facilitator, Site 16, session 1).

> Lots of reflection of the "good old days" although some carers emotional when reflecting on how the Stolen Generation years affected their sense of safety and increased their own parents vigilance. (Facilitator, Site11b, session 1)

Although the process of examining messages from the past was challenging for many, this was not the case for all parents, and a few described past experiences that were more positive.

> Very open and happy to speak about their reflective thoughts. Most … parents had very regular contact with their parents. Often they relied on their support for child care—many couldn't trust others with a child with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder]. (Facilitator, Site 3, session 3).

> Foster parents/carers … expressed desire to treat the children the same as their own. (Facilitator, Site 3, session 1)

> A lot of negative comments about the way they were parented but in a reflective way and choosing not to do the same thing with their own children. Did hear about appalling parenting towards the parents. The Messages from the Past activities brought up a lot of stuff for the parents and they coped really well with it. Some were quiet but you could tell they were thinking about it and taking it in. (Facilitator, Site 12, session 2)

Although there was limited demographic information available about each group of parents, what *was* known (and as would be expected) suggested that different childhood histories influenced parents' reactions to *Messages from the Past*. It is possible that parents of children experiencing Autism Spectrum disorders and foster carers would be less likely to report having experienced traumatic childhoods than those experiencing a range of other complex issues such as drug and alcohol misuse and therefore have a different reaction to the topic.

Journeying from painful emotion to greater understanding

Despite what was evidently a painful process, many parents began to identify the source of hurtful or unhelpful attitudes they may have developed. Some parents also began to recognise how they might be passing these same messages on to their own children. The ability to reflect over the course of the program took many parents on a journey from recognition of their own painful experiences to recognising the experiences their own children may be having, and determining a course to make a positive change whereby they did not have to continue parenting the same way in the future. For example, "[One] dad … talked a bit about how he was spoken to as a child (pretty nasty) and how he wants to do the opposite with his own son" (Facilitator, Site 1, session 3) and another facilitator noted, "As [the] group continued they were perhaps more accepting of their own parents' parenting and know they can parent differently if they want to (Facilitator, Site 13, program end). Several quotes from parents further highlight this:

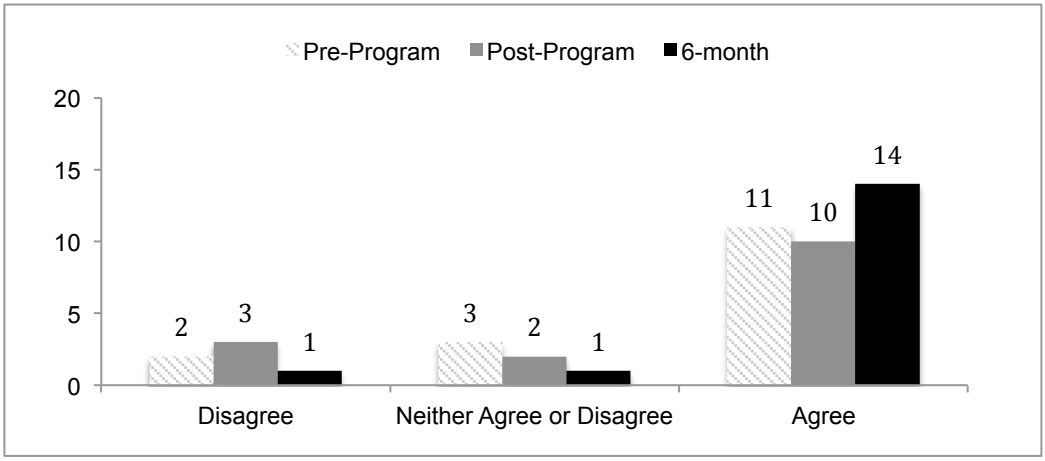
> The messages from the past made me feel not at all comfortable yet I shared openly and realised my childhood was shit and I need to see a councillor. I am more aware of my own childhood and how, for the safety of myself and my child, that I have nothing more to do with my family. [My child] is happier and calmer and more connected—I am happier and have her with me much more and it's not as stressful. (Participant 61, Site 9, post-program)

> First week was deep and emotional, but I do understand the need to look at the start of the problems. Go back to your roots. It was good to make us think back to our childhood. I don't need to parent how I was parented. I can be more positive and be a good listener and stop feeling guilty. (Anonymous participant, Site 9, post-program)

As highlighted above, this topic was difficult for many parents and so facilitators needed to approach the subject matter carefully and sensitively. However, regardless of personal history, it was evident that many parents found a way to identify unhelpful or hurtful messages from the past and come to the realisation that they could choose not to parent their own children the same way in the future.

Quantitative data

The parent questionnaire item that was related to this aim was "I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own children". As can be seen in Figure 1, 11 of the 16 parents who completed the questionnaire at all three time points, agreed to some extent with this statement prior to the program commencing. However, the number of parents who agreed with this statement at the 6-month follow-up period increased from 11 to 15, leaving only one parent who disagreed to some extent, and one parent who neither agreed or disagreed that they could see how the way they were brought up influences how they parent their own children.



Note: *n* = 16; missing responses = 1 post-program.

Figure 1: Extent of agreement with the statement "I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own children".

2. Parents will identify the important messages they want to convey to their children and how to achieve this.

Understanding how messages are passed on from parent to child, and what those messages convey, is a key learning component of the BUGK program. Parents are encouraged to explore how they respond to their children when they (the parents) are stressed or angry, the messages that this is sending to their children, and how they might incorporate more peaceful resolutions to stress, anger and conflict. Key messages conveyed to parents included: that a child learns to regulate his/her behaviour through early experience of being soothed by a regulated adult; that being aware of their (the parents) own reactions to strong emotions, and where that comes from, can help them to understand what "presses their buttons" when they are with their children; and, that understanding how children develop and change can equip them to more appropriately respond to them (ACF, 2011).

Containing strong emotions

Feedback from parents at the end of the program suggested that through the course of BUGK some had identified the importance of staying calmer and being less reactive when dealing with their children and their children's behaviour. For example, when asked what she had learnt about her children during the program, one parent identified, "That they [the children] need me to be calmer" (Anonymous, Site 3, post-program). Another stated, "I can see that taking a breath and calming is helping my kids calm quicker" (Anonymous, Site 9, post-program).

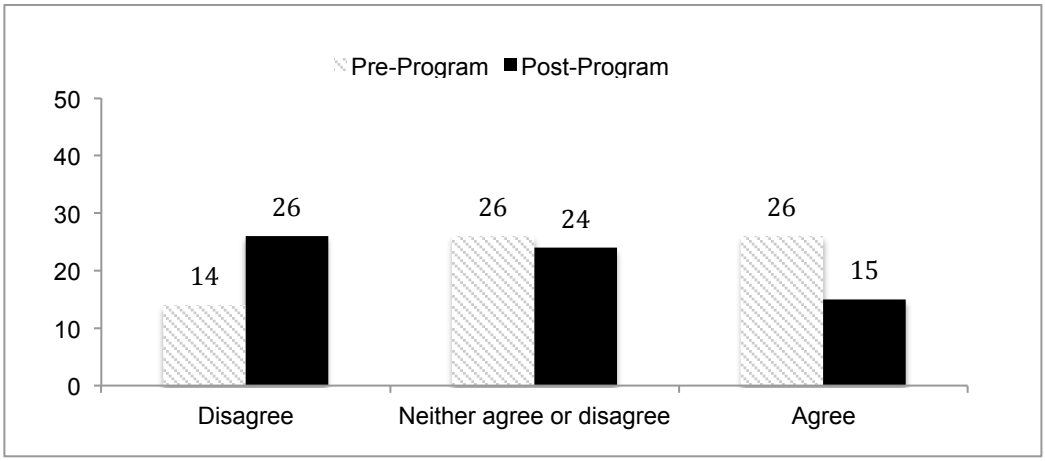
At the end of the program, parents were clearly implementing strategies to manage their emotional reactions and behaviour and this was having a positive effect on their families. One parent wrote that, "Bed times [are] happier ([we are] mending broken bad brain connections). Calmer" (Participant 11, Site 15, post-program). Another parent noted, "The kids are responding better when I deal with them calmly. Their tantrums do not last as long" (Participant 9, Site 15, post-program).

The increased capacity to manage their own emotional reactions gave parents the time and space to cope with their children's behaviour more effectively and proactively, and allowed them to model calm and thoughtful responses. As highlighted by one parent, " [Participating in the course] made me more positive about parenting and understanding more about teaching kids about feelings. Knowing how to talk about emotions … [the] kids are interest[ed] in know[ing] what mummy learned and using new tools that the whole family can use to be calmer. Also can be listened to on how they feel about things" (Participant 64, Site 9, post-program).

Quantitative data

The qualitative data were supported by answers to two of the items on the quantitative parent questionnaire. Both of the items related to parents' reactions.

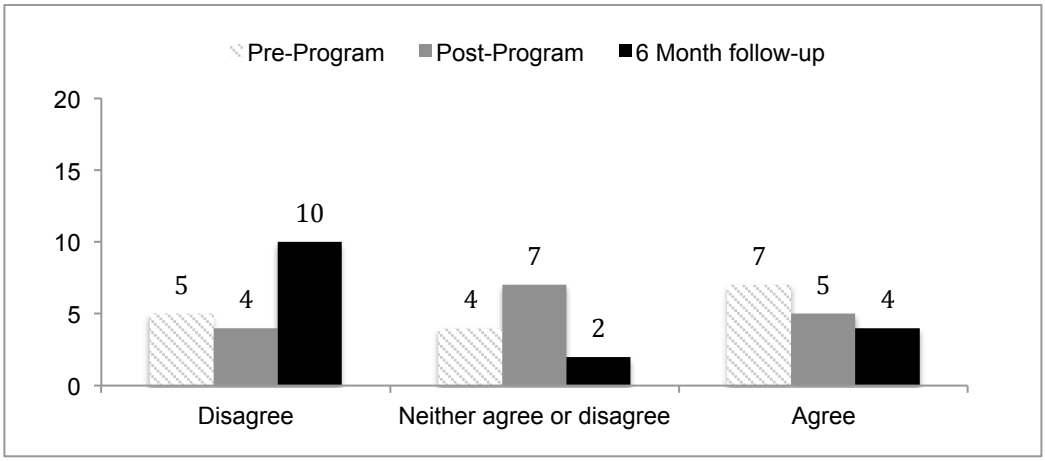
When parents were asked to consider the statement, "I tend to react too strongly to things", 26 agreed pre-program with this statement, but this number decreased to 15 after the program (see Figure 2). Along with this decrease, there was also an increase in the number of parents who now disagreed that they reacted too strongly (14 pre-program, 26 post-program).



Note: *n* = 68; missing responses = 2 pre-program.

Figure 2: Extent of agreement with the statement, "I tend to react too strongly to things".

The other item that related to this aim was "I tend to react to my children's behaviour without thinking". Before participating in the program, seven of the 16 parents who completed the questionnaire at all three time points believed that they tended to react to their children's behaviour without thinking. However, when parents were asked this question six months after the program had finished, this number had reduced to four, with 10 of the 16 parents indicating they disagreed with the statement and two parents indicating they neither agreed or disagreed with this statement (see Figure 3).



Note: *n* = 16

Figure 3: Extent of agreement with the statement, "I tend to react to my children's behaviour without thinking".

Positive changes in language

Throughout the course of the program, facilitators reflected and monitored the type of language that parents used when talking about or describing their children. Further to parents learning to contain their own strong emotions, there was also evidence that the language that they used when speaking about their children also changed. For example, when reflecting on evidence of changes in parents' relationships, one facilitator noted that there was "more positive communication with children" (Facilitator, Site 7, session 4).

In one group, where none of the parents participating had fulltime care of their children, facilitators noted a "change of mindset from one parent regarding access with [their] child. Language changed to 'parenting' my child, [and] language became very positive", and that although one parent was "still quite negative towards own childhood, but positive about not passing on these messages [to their children]" (Facilitators, Site 1, program end). Facilitators in this group found that parents exhibited a positive change of opinion regarding their children having been removed from their care and only seeing them for access. The facilitators felt that these changes occurred as parents were having the opportunity to positively parent their children and expand their knowledge and use new skills. There was a change of mindset regarding access to parenting, with a "different environment [with] different people challenging their views of their own parenting" and demonstrations of "less bravado and more trust and respect" (Facilitator, Site 1, program end).

Facilitators in this group had earlier noted that a particular parent who talked about his parenting in terms of "access" wanted to describe his interactions with his son as "fathering". In a later session the facilitator made the following note, "Dad spoke of 'fathering' his child in access—everyone cheered and clapped" (Facilitator, Site 1, session 3). It was evident that a bond had formed within this particular group, and that a "shift" was occurring in the mindset of many parents. This facilitator's thoughts as they observed these changes encapsulated the process of change and the shift in thinking that was observed by facilitators across many of the other groups who participated in the BUGK program. The positive changes in the language that parents were using about their children as the program continued, indicates that parents were becoming acutely aware of how their own actions, thoughts and words become the "messages" that children receive. One of the facilitators articulated the awareness that parents developed through the course of the program in the following reflection:

> One parent started the group by always referring to the child as doing this or that but now has changed and is able to reflect that it is her behaviour that influences the child's behaviour. Her language is now about herself. (Facilitator, Site 13, program end)

It appeared that through the course of the program many parents felt that they had learnt that containing their own strong emotions and therefore being calmer and less reactive helped them communicate with their children in a more positive manner. The quantitative data offered further support for these findings. Further to this, according to the facilitators, many parents' language about their children became more positive as the program progressed. These factors appeared to have follow-on effects with regards to positive changes in their families at both the post-program stage and at the six-month follow-up. Many parents reported that they found that if they were calmer and less reactive then their children tended to be calmer too.

3. Parents will understand the messages that children communicate to their parents and how

Continuing the theme of "messages", the BUGK program aims to help parents understand the messages their child communicates to them, that is to help them understand their child's perspective and experience of the world. The program provides parents with an understanding of children's brain development, focusing on their emotional development and reasoning abilities. Parents were asked to reflect on how this understanding may influence their parenting approach.

Understanding children's brain development and how it influences behaviour

The feedback from parents (post-program and six-month follow-up) and facilitators' reflections suggested that parents' understanding of their child's brain development grew through participating in the program. The program appeared to enhance many parents' understanding of their child's behaviour and what was realistic to expect from them. For example, when discussing what she had learnt about her children by participating in BUGK, one parent said, "… I was expecting too much from them when they were younger … they do things for a reason and [are] trying to tell me things" (Participant 60, Site 9, post-program). In answering the same question, another parent noted, "[I learnt] that tantrums are a normal part of child development; learning about brain development and getting a better understanding of baby/child development" (Participant 90, Site 1, post-program).

Parents' enhanced understanding of their child's behaviour was highlighted in feedback from many parents. For example, "[I learnt] that they [children] don't understand as much as I thought and need help to understand feelings" (Participant 77, Site 2, post-program). Another parent stated that they were, "More aware of the brain development cycle and how that manifests in different behaviours. [I learnt] some strategies for dealing with changes as they occur. [I learnt] more ideas for helping our kids' development" (Participant 13, Site 15, post-program).

In one particular group, the message regarding the effect of poor experiences on children's brains was particularly poignant. As one of the facilitators noted when working with a group of recently arrived humanitarian refugees:

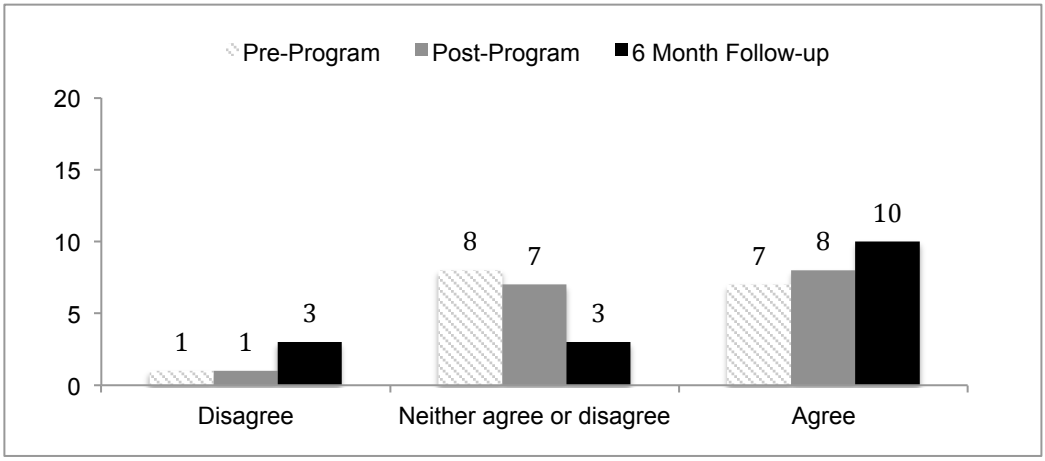
> Parents got very involved in the sessions, particularly enjoying the session on brain development—many [were] concerned that their children will be ok given the conditions that they have been exposed to early in life in refugee camps, etc. (Facilitator, Site 8, program end).

The understanding of brain development and children's behaviour was still evident in some parents at the six-month follow-up. For example, "I am able to understand why my child does things and how to deal with them better". (Participant 52, Site 11a, 6-month follow-up)

Quantitative data

It was expected that if the BUGK program was successful in enhancing parents' understanding of their children's behaviour then the numbers of parents agreeing with the statement, "I can usually figure out what my children's behaviour is trying to tell me" would increase from the beginning of the program to the post-program and six-month follow-up.

At the commencement of the program, seven of the 16 parents who completed the questionnaire at all three time points agreed to some extent that they could usually figure out what their children's behaviour was trying to tell them (see Figure 4). This increased to eight at the end of the program, and to 10 parents six months after the program had finished.



Note: *n* = 16

Figure 4: Extent of agreement with the statement, "I can usually figure out what my children's behaviour is trying to tell me".

Listening to and understanding children's emotions and feelings

Further to an enhanced understanding of their child's brain development, many participants also identified being able to listen to and understand their children better by being able to identify the underlying emotions behind their children's behaviour:

> I have learnt to listen better to my children's needs and to have a better understanding towards my children. (Participant 91, Site 1, post-program)

> [I have learnt to] listen more to her to understand her. (Participant 75, Site 2, post-program).

> [I have learnt] that their [my children's] emotions/reactions are so real to them and so important to recognise and understand. (Participant 63, Site 9, post-program)

> More mindful in dealing with children. More focused on their emotions and what is going on in their head. (Participant 9, Site 15, post-program)

> [I have learnt to] be more understanding of my child's feelings and emotions. (Participant 49, Site 11a, six-month follow-up).

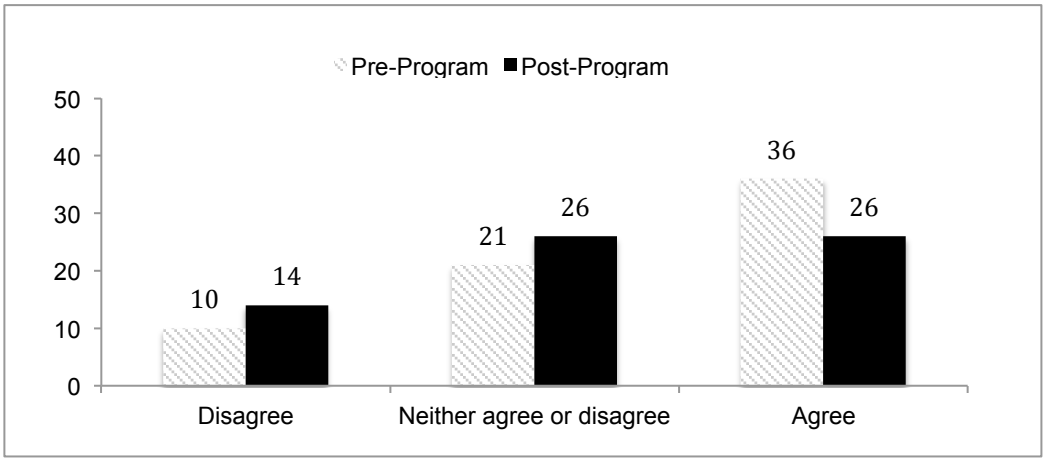
The program appeared to have enhanced these parents' beliefs in their skills in managing their children's behaviour, not through the use of traditional behaviour management techniques, but by giving parents the knowledge, skills and techniques to recognise and respond to their children's needs based on better active listening skills (they had learnt through the Burning

Issues[2] activity) and the knowledge they had acquired about the stages of children's brain development and its effects on children's emotions and behaviour.

Quantitative data

It was expected that if BUGK enhanced parents' understanding of their children's feelings then the number of parents agreeing with the item, "It is hard sometimes to understand what my children are feeling" would decrease from pre- to post-program.

As can be seen in Figure 5, when parents were surveyed prior to participating in the program, just over half (n = 36) agreed that they found it hard to sometimes understand what their children are feeling, and 10 parents disagreed with the statement. After completing the program, the number of parents who still reported that it was hard to sometimes understand what their children were feeling had reduced to 26.



Note: *n* = 68; missing responses = 1

Figure 5: Extent of agreement with the statement, "It is hard sometimes to understand what my children are feeling".

It is clear from both the parent and facilitator feedback that parents' capacity to reflect on their children's needs and the "messages" they were communicating was enhanced. Many parents had developed a greater understanding of the stages of their children's brain development and ability to regulate emotions, and were proactively attempting to remain calm, actively listen and understand their children's behaviour better. The quantitative data adds further support for these findings.

4. Parents will discover how to overcome some of the obstacles that are getting in the way of being the kind of parent they would like to be

BUGK aims to assist parents to identify their emotional triggers, and through doing this enhance their ability to contain strong emotions and to think through their responses to their children, rather than responding reactively. From the feedback given by parents it appears that for many, their reactions in situations with their children that were perceived as stressful got in the way of their ability to parent in the way that they wished to. There was a lot of crossover between this aim and Aim 2, in which parents identified being calmer and less reactive in their interactions with their children as helping them in conveying more positive messages to their

[2] The Burning Issues activity gave participants the weekly opportunity to talk about their parenting concerns for two to three minutes without interruption, while the rest of the participants needed to withhold responding during this time, in order to enable parents to experience being heard, as well as experience active listening. Many of the parents found this activity challenging from both the listening and talking perspective.

children. It appears that high emotional reactivity was also an obstacle that stood in the way of many being the parent they would like to be.

Being calm and listening

Many described how learning to be in the moment, and responding in a calmer and less reactive way to their children appeared to help them to be the parents they wanted to be and also to promote more positive interactions with their children. For example, in the post-program questionnaire one parent noted, "I have definitely evaluated the way I parent and what my children need—I am calmer—and I think it's reminded me to go back to the basics of parenting—unconditional love!" (Participant 24, Site 14, post-program). Some parents identified that they still needed to work on being less reactive but their responses highlighted their enhanced understanding of this and how they were working to make changes. "[I need to] calm down. It's ok. I need to set more boundaries as a parent. I also need to calm down a little" (Anonymous, Site 3, post-program).

Some parents reported changes to their families based on an increased understanding of their own triggers and responding to their children in a less reactive manner: "I am more calm and listening better. The girls seem not to be fighting as much and I hope this will improve when I put in place more of the things I have learnt" (Anonymous, Site 9, post-program). Another parent noted, "I have learned to listen to my kids, knowing they have feelings and needs. To stop and pause when I feel stressed and busy … Kids are more relaxed and lots of smiling. We are having more play than we use[d] to." (Participant 25, Site 14, post-program).

From the respondents who participated in the six-month follow-up of the program, it appeared that they continued to utilise what they learnt in the program to remain calm and to react less. Other facets of the program, such as an enhanced understanding of children's behaviour and the importance of self-care, were also mentioned as helping their families. When talking about changes in themselves and their families, some responses included:

> … I am more patient and more understanding [of] my kids with their needs. (Participant 76, Site 2, six-month follow-up)

> [There is] less shouting. (Participant 9, Site 15, six-month follow-up)

> I don't snap as much (Unknown, six-month follow-up)

> Stop before you react to your child's behaviour, take a deep breath first. I'm better in my approach to the kid's behaviour and that seems to make a difference to the whole household. (Participant 33, Site 14, six-month follow-up)

> By doing a few little things for me I can be more calm and that impacts on family. (Participant 82, Site 3, six-month follow-up)

Facilitator feedback further supported the parents' reports of change and enhanced understanding of their own emotional triggers and responses. For example, a facilitator noted during the third session of the program, "As the parents feel calmer, themselves, they are giving themselves more space to respond more appropriately to their children" (Facilitator, Site 3, session 3). As with the parents' comments, most of the facilitators' reflections tended to highlight that participants were reporting being calmer and less reactive at home with their children. Similar to many others, one facilitator noted, "Parents' levels of anxiety has dropped; parents note that things are calmer at home and that they are generally having more fun with their kids" (Facilitator, Site 9, session 3). Another facilitator reported:

> Parents [are] reporting some changes in their relationship with their children during their contact time. They felt they could calm themselves down … [There is] increasing

> insight and awareness for some parents about how to communicate more effectively, and how to manage emotions. (Facilitator, Site 4, session 4)

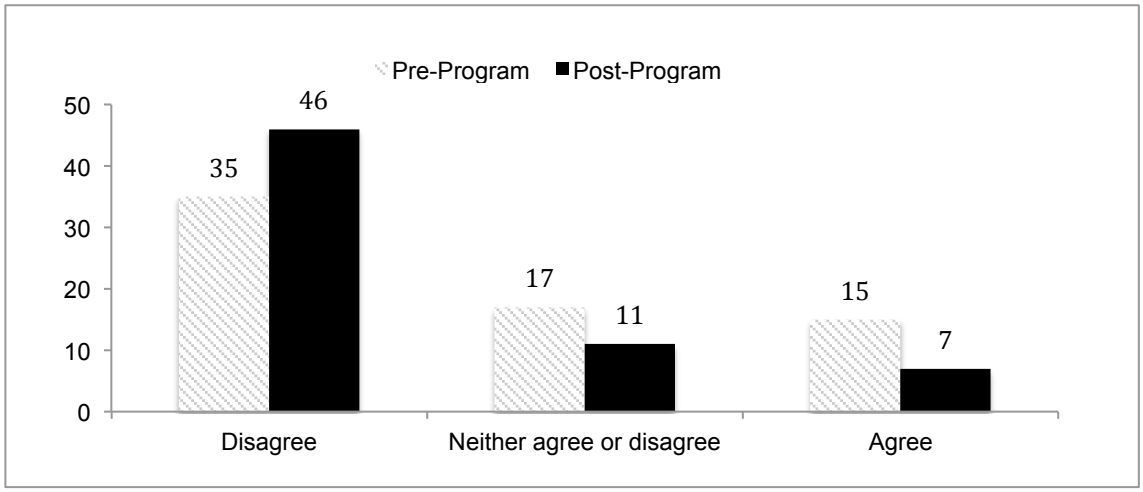
Another mentioned that "One parent had all her children sick and, as she said, parenting on her own, sick children was stressful but at least now she knew what the behaviour was about and this meant she could stay calmer longer" (Facilitator, Site 5, session 4). More broadly, gaining an understanding of their children's behaviour, as well as of their own triggers, appeared to help parents respond more positively to their children. One facilitator, when talking about the parents' language about their children, noted that:

> [There was an] absolute shift of thinking for most parents in this group … [They became] much more understanding of their children and their behaviour but also about what pushes their buttons and the importance of self-care. Parents language [when talking about their children became] much more inclusive and positive as the group went on. (Facilitator, Site 16, whole program)

As highlighted by the quotes above, emotional reactivity appeared to be an obstacle that many parents felt they needed to overcome to parent in the way they wanted to. Many parents mentioned becoming calmer and less reactive, which was then reported to have a positive effect on their interactions and relationships with their children and within their families.

Quantitative data

The quantitative item taken to highlight a potential obstacle to parenting the way they wanted to was, "I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent". When parents were asked at the commencement of the program, 35 disagreed, 17 neither agreed or disagreed and 15 agreed that they did not have a lot of confidence in themselves as a parent (see Figure 5). After the program, in support of the aim, the number of parents who agreed with this statement decreased to seven, and the number of parents who disagreed with the statement increased to 46. These results suggest that many parents experienced an increase in their confidence in themselves as parents.



Note: *n* = 68; missing responses = 1 pre-program and 4 post-program.

Figure 5: Extent of agreement with the statement, "I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent".

5. Parents will discover ways to take care of themselves and to find support when they need it

As it is widely acknowledged that parenting involves significant challenges, one of the aims of the BUGK program is to provide self-care strategies for parents. The program also aims to normalise and encourage parents to access support for themselves as needed. This is particularly

relevant for the diverse groups of vulnerable parents who participated in the evaluation. Many of these parents faced multiple and complex challenges and may have been hesitant to access support services for a range of reasons, such as stigma, feeling judged, having a distrust of formal services or fear of child protection services (The Royal Children's Hospital, Centre for Community Child Health & Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, 2010; Watson, 2005; Winkworth, McArthur, Layton, Thomson, & Wilson, 2010).

Support for this aim was mixed. While only a small minority of participants acknowledged the need for self-care or support in their post-program and six-month follow-up responses, many examples of self-care were highlighted in the facilitator feedback. It may have been that when completing the evaluation questionnaires, other aspects of the changes in themselves and their families brought about by participation in BUGK resonated more with these parents and so those aspects were mentioned, rather than self-care. The facilitators' reflections were much more extensive than the participants' responses and so may have captured a more detailed picture of the changes for parents.

The benefits of self-care and support

One of the parents who mentioned self-care noted that "I am [a] very overprotective and creative parent and give everything I have to [my child] and maybe I could step back a bit and give a little more time nurturing myself" (Participant 61, Site 9, post-program). Another stated that she found "Calming self-care [exercises most helpful] … It has assured me that I am on the right track … [I] need to self care more" (Participant 56, Site 10, post-program). Two participants who completed the six-month follow-up questionnaire noted the importance of self-care for their families as well as themselves. For example, "Great reminder that if we look after ourselves it impacts on family" (Participant 78, Site 3, six-month follow-up).

When discussing changes in themselves after doing the program, only two parents mentioned access to support. One parent noted, "… I am not alone. There is help out there" (Anonymous, Site 4, post-program) and another said, "[I've] been able to have help with things I need, for example childcare and mental health" (Participant 3, Site 16, post-program). Two facilitators mentioned their groups accessing support, with one suggesting that the women in her group supported themselves and each other:

> I got a sense that these women draw on each other (yarning and sharing stories with each other) and on their inner strengths/resources, like their sense of humour and determination, more than they access organisational help and support … although two of them had been accessing the social worker's practice and had been referred to her by the local Community Health Service. (Facilitator, Site 2, session 4).

Struggling with self-care

Several facilitators noted that the concept of self-care was difficult for many parents. As one facilitator stated, "The hardest thing many of the group struggled with was doing something for themselves" (Facilitator, Site 3, six-month follow-up). These parents may not have previously been exposed to the concept of self-care and, as noted by one facilitator, they may have limited understanding of how to practice self-care or access external support, "[They] said they did not have time, [they had] no idea what to do … Parents understanding or ability to access services for support regarding self-care is limited prior to [the] start of program" (Facilitator, Site 1, session 2).

It appeared external stressors, time constraints and a lack of family support contributed to this. The complexity of the issues that many of these parents were facing may have made it difficult for them to find time for themselves, even if they understood the importance of self-care for themselves and their families. The facilitator of the Site 12 group highlighted this:

> All parents are struggling with making time for themselves. Parenting alone does not leave time for self. Most talked about the difficulties of this, particularly being mostly single parents with little family support and difficulties with partners/ex partners. (Facilitator, Site 12, session 3)

> Parents struggle to find time to do something for self. One of the tasks was just to find 5 mins for self. Some were able to manage that. Parents are at least aware of the benefits of self-care and there were examples of "watching a movie" and "lying on couch covered in blankets so no one can find me." One parent did not appear to have made any progress—a very damaged person and hopefully this program is part of a long healing journey. I think the parents understand the need for healthy self-care but sadly don't get enough support outside of the group to implement it. Their self-care, I suspect after hearing them talk, would come when they are at crisis point and will withdraw into themselves (hide themselves under the doona) or self-medicate (alcohol/drugs), shutting their children out, which we know is not helpful. (Facilitator, Site 12, whole program)

Enhanced insight into the importance of self-care

Having noted the challenges that participants appeared to face when attending to self-care or accessing support, it is important to note that the majority of facilitators also highlighted examples of parents taking time for themselves, or at a minimum gaining insight into the benefits of self-care. Examples of self-care given by facilitators included parents going for a walk, having a coffee with a friend, taking a bath, "planning to go bush for self-care" (Facilitator, Site 5, session 4), and joining a neighbourhood house single-mothers group. One facilitator said, "One parent went for a walk and had coffee and then walked home—this is huge for this parent (Facilitator, Site 13, session 3). There were many other examples of parents taking time for themselves such as joining an exercise class or going to the pub for lunch with friends.

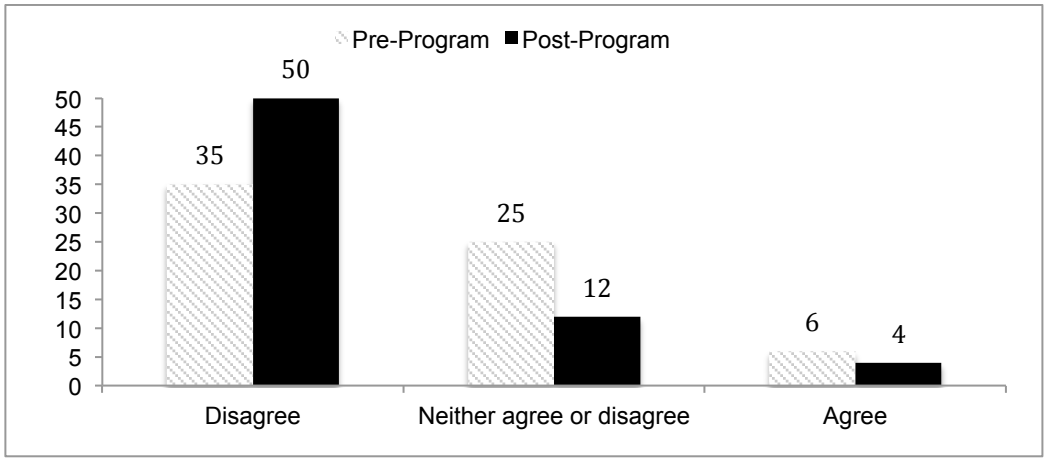
The facilitators reported that some parents were seeing the benefits of self-care for themselves and their families. For example, "One parent talked about her walk in the morning as being essential to managing her depression and ability to parent her five children" (Facilitator, Site 16, session 4). Another facilitator, who was running the program with parents and carers of children with additional needs, noted, "Carers [are] exploring ways to take care of themselves—looking at options; acknowledging that caring for children with additional needs requires a lot more energy and patience—which is sometimes hard to find!" (Facilitator, Site 11B, session 4).

According to several facilitators, for some parents, there was an increased awareness of the importance of self-care. Some parents did not initially appear to feel that they could take time for themselves. For example:

> The concept of self-care being a key part of facing challenges in parenting was readily received by this group. Generally they were concerned about getting things on track, wondering if they were getting things right, being engaged in their children's lives. Self-care seemed to be lost as a strategy they could select. This program gave them a right and permission to allow themselves to be looked after. (Facilitator, Site 14, session 3)

Quantitative data

An indicator of improvements in parents' ability to source support was the item, "I'm unsure how to find help with my parenting". At the commencement of the BUGK program, 35 parents disagreed with this statement. When the program had been completed, the number of parents who disagreed that they were unsure how to find help with their parenting increased to 50 (see Figure 6). Most of the change appears to be from those who neither agreed or disagreed with the statement at the commencement of the program.



Note: *n* = 68; missing responses = 2

Figure 6*:* Extent of agreement with the statement, "I'm unsure how to find help with my parenting".

There appeared to be a disconnect between parent and facilitator feedback in relation to this aim. Not many participants mentioned self-care or accessing support and several facilitators made note of parents who struggled with the concept of self-care. There were still many practical examples given by facilitators, however, of how participants were incorporating self-care into their lives. There was the acknowledgement, made by a small number of parents, of the benefits of self-care and accessing support for themselves and their families. Finally, the quantitative item appeared to offer support for parents' enhanced understanding of how to find help with their parenting.

6. Parents will develop strategies to manage their parenting approach despite the mounting pressures on their time and role

Extending on from the previous aim of overcoming obstacles to parenting the way they wish to, the program aims to assist parents in developing strategies to manage their parenting approach, despite parenting's challenges. As BUGK is a reflective parenting program, when parents noted what had changed for them, it is unsurprising that Stop Pause Play (a mindful breathing exercise that is practiced weekly during the program), other breathing techniques and mindfulness more broadly, were overwhelmingly the strategies participants mentioned using. Parents also noted that mindfulness helped them to be a better listener and to understand their children's brain development and behaviour.

Stop Pause Play

In both the post-program and six-month follow-up responses, a majority of participants noted that they were using Stop Pause Play, other breathing techniques or simply being more mindful. For example, one parent said, "Stop pause play really works" (Participant 46, Site 12, post-program) and "I am more patient in my approach to parenting and more mindful" (Participant 35, Site 13, six-month follow-up). Another parent stated, "I have found myself being more mindful of what causes behaviour. Stop, pause, listen, rather than just reacting" (Anonymous, Site 9, post-program).

Parents felt that being mindful helped them with their children and other relationships. One parent noted that the rubber "remote control" that is given to parents as an aid in practising Stop Pause Play was useful for her family, "I've actually got a lot from that remote control!! It hangs on my fridge and we all know why it is there and use it when the need arises (which is often)" (Participant 12, Site 15, post-program). Another suggested that teaching her husband the techniques was helpful, "I have been more calm by training my husband. He is using this knowledge and he too is more calm" (Participant 55, Site 10, post-program). Many participants noted how being more mindful helped them remain calm and therefore enhanced their

confidence in their parenting and relationships with their children. As one parent noted, "It has helped me to pause and think about my kids' behaviours before reacting. It remind[s] me to pause and think, and also how important it is to self-care. It has assured me that I am on the right track. I can see that taking a breath and calming is helping my kids calm quicker" (Anonymous, Site 9, post-program).

The facilitator feedback also highlighted how Stop Pause Play was being successfully used by parents in their relationships with their children and others:

> [Parents were] challenged by the ideas around mindfulness. One parent encouraged her 9 year old to use the activity to calm himself down—it allowed some humour between them and the child did calm down and found what he was looking for. (Facilitator, Site 12, session 2)

> Positive feedback on the shift or change in self (parent) feeling calmer, slowing down, using mindful breathing techniques. A parent said, "I can't put my finger on what it is about this. It is so simple—I didn't believe it could be that simple—just stopping, listening, without words, has made a change in me and my son. (Facilitator, Site 14, whole of program)

> One parent told us she'd explained the concept of Stop Pause Play to her four children and shown them the remote as she put it on the fridge. One morning in the "getting-ready-for-school rush" she'd become agitated with the kids and her 6-year-old son went to the fridge and handed her the remote. (Facilitator, Site 15, session 4)

> Stop Pause Play. Parents have seemed amazed at how simple and helpful this strategy is. One father says that by using this strategy at work he has managed better problem solving with work colleagues. He states he is amazed at how it is helping his responses with his children on their visits to him. He has then expressed disappointment in not having used this strategy in his marriage before separation. The other single dad has expressed how this strategy is helping him to listen to his children's needs and realise the importance of this and how other things can wait. (Facilitator, Site 16, session 2)

In the six-month follow-up, Stop Pause Play was mentioned most frequently by participants as something they had learnt or something that had changed within themselves and their families. Other participants noted that they were more mindful, calmer and less reactive, "I am more patient in my approach to parenting and more mindful" (Participant 35, Site 13, six-month follow-up).

Facilitators noted throughout their feedback that Stop Pause Play appeared to be resonating with parents and was being used by many:

> Overwhelmingly the stop, pause, play activity was the one most used. "Stop Pause Play"—one parent went outside and did a big sigh rather than shout at her children. One parent used Stop Pause Play with their child. Talked about teaching children to use Stop Pause Play when they get angry, etc. (Facilitator, Site 13, session 3).

However, facilitators also noted that for a small number of parents, such as those who had had children removed, it was more difficult to practice strategies such as Stop Pause Play. "Without their children at home, they [the parents] were reflecting on the group content but were unable to put anything into practice. Stop, pause and play was used more/reflected [on] by the parents whom had more contact with their children (Facilitator, Site 1, session 2). A facilitator in another group felt that the two dads in her group struggled with mindfulness:

> Reflection suits a certain type of person. Mindfulness [was] difficult for two of the men in the group … It seemed the concept was lost on them. I think Stop Pause Play was most applied and easiest to remember. I got a lot of critical feedback from the men. I think being logical and practical, they found just reflecting and chatting not very useful. Whereas the women were more open and able to engage in the process of reflection a lot easier. (Facilitator, Site 15, six-month follow-up).

Remembering to use the strategy was also an issue for some, as highlighted by one facilitator: "All carers acknowledged that practising the Stop Pause Play helped but that they didn't do it often enough" (Facilitator, Site 11B, whole of program). Finally, one facilitator noted for her group of Indigenous parents, "Stop, Pause Play is the easiest [strategy to use]. However, when these parents have additional issues, these strategies go out the windows. Messages of the past take over" (Facilitator, Site 5, six-month follow-up).

Using the strategy may have been difficult for some parents but of those who weren't using Stop Pause Play, many were aware of it and considering using it:

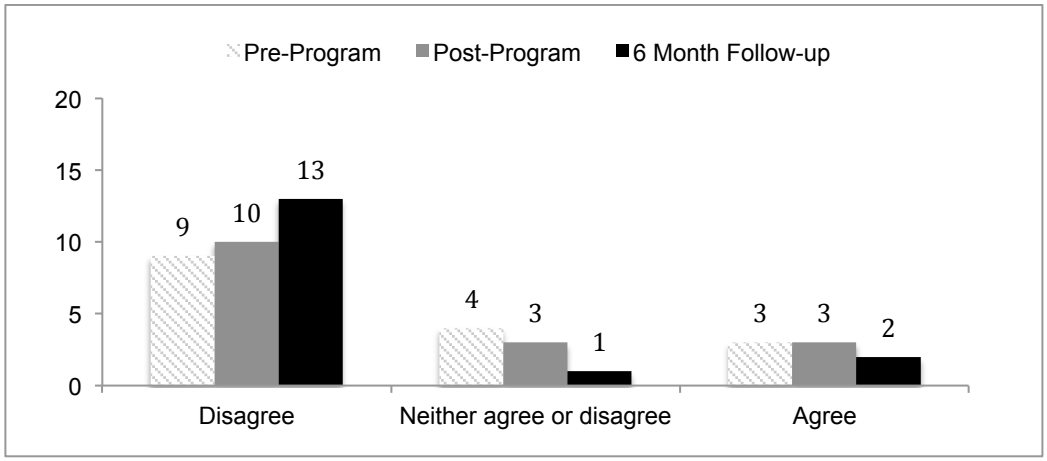
> About half the group was using Stop Pause Play by the end of the program, others were just thinking about it, which is still showing some mindfulness and awareness. Most parents were successful in applying techniques and strategies. The easiest to implement seems to be the Stop Pause Play. A lot of parents are using this technique well. (Facilitator, Site 13, six-month follow-up).

The majority of parents, both in the post-program and six-month follow-up groups, mentioned mindfulness, breathing techniques or Stop Pause Play, as something they had learnt from the program or something that had changed for them or their families as a result of BUGK. It appears that Stop Pause Play was a strategy that strongly resonated with the parents in these groups and one they appeared to incorporate into their lives, which assisted them to be calmer and less reactive and to be better listeners for their children.

Quantitative data

It was expected that if the program provided parents with strategies that they felt would help them manage their parenting then the numbers who disagreed with the statement, "I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting" should increase over time.

Among the small group of participants who participated in the survey responses across all three time points (n = 16), nine parents disagreed with the statement, "I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting" prior to commencing the program (See Figure 7). This number increased to 10 after completing the program and to 13 six months later.



Note: *n* = 16

Figure 7: Extent of agreement with the statement, "I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting".

Did the program enhance the reflective capability of vulnerable parents?

The evaluation found that there were aspects of the program that strongly resonated with many of the parents and that they appeared to put into practice in their daily lives, even six months after completing the program. Other aspects of the program also appeared successful in enhancing parents' reflective capabilities.

Messages from the Past

Messages from the Past (i.e., the information and activities aimed at raising awareness of how participants' parenting may have been influenced by the way they were parented) was a confronting and difficult section of the program for some participants. Even so, a number of parents appeared to experience changes in their understanding of how the way that they were parented may be affecting the way that they now parent. Many parents also appeared to have an enhanced understanding of which "messages from the past" they wanted to share with their children and which messages they wished to discard.

Mindfulness

As can be seen in previous sections, many parents showed enhanced awareness of the benefits of the Stop Pause Play tool. It appeared that many had taken on using the tool by the end of the program and, if not, were certainly thinking about using it. Many participants mentioned how it aided them in their relationships with their children. For example, "Stop, Pause, Play. If I am calm the kids are calm" (Participant 69, Site 6, post-program) and "Stop[ping] and pausing before reacting to a child's behaviour" (Participant 9, Site 15, six-month follow-up). This reflective tool appeared to be relatively easy for many parents to put into practice within their families. Several had also taught the technique to their children and partners.

Further to this, other parents also mentioned breathing techniques and mindfulness more broadly as strategies that they were using. For example, "Stopping and thinking more" (Participant 81, Site 3, six-month follow-up), being "more reflective and mindful" (Participant 81, Site 3, six-month follow-up) or "being able to take a step back to re-assess issues before reacting" (Participant 43, Site 12, six-month follow-up) were changes mentioned by participants in the six-month followup that suggested that parents continued to retain the reflective messages of the program.

Messages to and from children

Further to mindfulness and Stop Pause Play, it appears that the brain development information and activities also resonated with many of the parents. As noted above, a large number of parents noted an enhanced understanding of their child's brain development and how this related to their behaviour. Many parents also displayed an increased understanding of their children's needs and feelings with several parents noting that this understanding had influenced their expectations of their child's behaviour and their relationship in a positive manner.

Further to understanding their children's brain development and behaviour, many parents appeared to have learnt strategies (such as Stop Pause Play) that aided them in containing their own emotions, allowing them to be less reactive and calmer in their interactions with their children.

The evaluation involved 16 very diverse groups of parents and although it is not possible to say that the program enhanced the reflective capability of all parents who participated, particularly given the differences in groups and the group sizes, the retention in knowledge and apparent practical application of these ideas that many showed in relation to the above core components of the program (mindfulness and particularly Stop Pause Play; brain development and children's behaviour; managing their own strong emotions; and Messages from the Past) suggest that the program was effective in enhancing the reflective capacity of the majority of the parents who participated in the evaluation.

Was the program relevant for parents facing disadvantage and complex issues?

One of the major aims of the evaluation was to identify whether or not BUGK is relevant for parents facing multiple and complex issues. Sixteen very diverse groups of parents participated[3] and, as such, although the evaluation can provide insight into the general suitability of the program for vulnerable groups more broadly, it cannot provide information on its suitability for those facing specific problems and issues. The relatively low numbers of participants providing post-program and six-month follow-up data from each site make it difficult to make between-group comparisons. Where it is possible, issues for particular groups have been identified and considered. Otherwise the relevance of the program is viewed more broadly, across vulnerable groups. As can be seen in previous sections, the evaluation found that the six aims of the program were largely supported, with both qualitative and quantitative data providing support for this. Further to this, a majority of parents appeared to display enhanced reflective capabilities at post-program and six-month follow-up (as reported above). Finally, there were a range of other outcomes noted by parents and facilitators. These are discussed below, along with details of some of the challenges that parents faced in completing the program.

Positive changes for parents and families

The evaluation found that the majority of participants who completed the post-program evaluation questionnaire noted either a change in themselves, in their family or in both. The changes were often small such as "a little less conflict [in the family]" (Participant 58, Site 10, post-program) or "kids more settled" (Participant 45, Site 12, post-program).Others noted substantial changes in themselves such as "I have learned to listen to my kids knowing they have feelings and needs. To stop and pause when I feel stressed and busy" (Participant 25, Site 14, post-program) and "To try and stop and process what's going on before acting and in the process stop from exploding—have a bit more patience (Participant 47, Site 12, post-program). Changes to family included comments such as "Things are starting to settle down and my child

[3] As previously noted, the number of parents initially enrolled in the evaluation was 94 but this number varied across time points and data type.

is starting to listen to me 'cause I'm heaps calmer (Participant 37, Site 13, post-program) and "We are more proactive about getting jobs done to allow time for the 'good/fun' stuff so there is less stress and need to yell" (Participant 20, Site 14, post-program).

Further to this, changes to self and/or family were also noted by all but one of the participants who completed the six-month follow-up. For example, one parent noted, "I have learnt many different things about children and the brain … [Changes for family:] The way we act and having a stop pause play time" (Participant 51, Site 11a, six-month follow-up). Another parent said, "home is much calmer with no yelling and minimal tantrums" (Participant 43, Site 12, six-month follow-up). As noted in the previous section the majority of parents in the six-month follow-up said they were still using mindfulness techniques such as Stop Pause Play with some suggesting they were "more reflective and mindful" (Participant 82, Site 3, six-month follow-up).

The facilitator feedback provided further support for the changes reported by participants. As has been noted in the previous sections, over the course of running the program, facilitators reported changes in the language participants used when referring to their children and their behaviour. Many parents used more positive language and appeared to have gained a more realistic understanding of their children's behaviour. Facilitators also identified changes in the language participants used when discussing their families of origin and messages from the past. Further to this, facilitators reported that participants were discussing using the mindfulness techniques with positive results and, if they weren't using them, most were thinking about using them. Facilitators also noted examples of parents using self-care techniques.

Attendance as an outcome

Having parents attend most or all sessions of a program such as BUGK, in and of itself, can be seen as a sign that the program is relevant to those who are participating. Previous research suggests that families facing multiple and complex issues are less likely than other families to participate in these sorts of programs and, if they do participate, then there are often high rates of attrition (Watson, 2005). Several facilitators noted that participants were attending more sessions and there were fewer dropouts than they had experienced in other programs. For example, one facilitator noted of her group of parents involved with child protection services, all of whom did not have fulltime care of their children, that "This group of parents are known for attending one session of a program and then not returning. Their reaction to this program was very different … full attendance at each session … all came on time … some very early … bringing food to share" (Facilitator, Site 1, end of program). However, as this group did not have their children with them a lot of the time, they struggled with practising the skills they were being taught. The facilitator noted that although these parents continually struggled with their "life full of department appointments and expectations. [They were] emotionally exhausted!" they still "… exhibited a positive change of opinion re: their children be[ing] removed and only seeing them for access. This changed to they were having the opportunity to positively parent their children and expand their knowledge and use new skills" (Facilitator, Site 1, end of program).

In contrast, another group who were experiencing a diverse range of issues (parents in a post-separation co-operative parenting program; with a range of care arrangements; with mental health issues; or post-incarceration parents) had "haphazard" attendance at the four three-hour sessions. Circumstances changed for participants from week-to-week (e.g., two new parents who were in emergency housing were re-housed and, as such, were unable to continue attending; one participant brought her teenage daughter one week and then was absent the next) and this impacted attendance. Even so, the facilitator noted that by the third session the group was stable and "this group had better attendance than other groups run by the same organisation and good numbers!!" (Facilitator, Site 4, end of program).

Life gets in the way

Not only could the complex life issues that many of the participants were facing sometimes make it difficult for them to attend the course, on some occasions it was noted that pre-occupation with these issues led some parents to be distracted during the sessions. For example, one facilitator noted:

> Still some parents weighed down by other more pressing issues, e.g. housing, kids in care, etc. A couple of parents very tired and grumbly today—issues with partners in prison and dv [domestic violence] … very mixed group demographically … some parents very involved in program—lots of insights [while] others [are] distracted by more pressing concerns and seem to be attending to fulfill DHS obligation to attend parenting program [and] have needed to refer 3 parents to additional support—counselling, housing, dv [domestic violence] support (Facilitator, Site 6, session 3).

However, even having detailed the challenges these parents faced, the facilitator also noted that "attendance has been regular for all parents", highlighting again that although the parents were dealing with a range of complex issues, they still largely managed to attend. Two parents in this group even chose to take time in lieu from their workplaces to attend. It appears that the BUGK program suited or appealed to these parents, regardless of the issues they were facing.

Parents in another group similarly struggled some weeks with being able to put their personal issues aside in order to actively participate in certain aspects of the program. The facilitator in this group suggested that four weeks was not long enough for this group and that they may have needed longer for repetition and practice of the tools and strategies:

> Facilitators are looking at offering more sessions. There was limited success in the application of the strategies—but parents were able to practise these in the sessions. They were given a variety of mindful[ness] tools to use. Most of the parents seemed to understand and start practising the mindfulness exercises, in particular Stop Pause Play. With this particular group more time and repetition of activities is needed for it to be effective and the facilitators discussed perhaps offering more sessions or just meeting regularly for informal connection (Facilitator, Site 12, end of program).

The potential benefit of running the course over longer than four weeks was also noted by another facilitator, "I think our group could have benefited from the program running over 6 weeks rather than 4, comfort and trust within the group would have been better established". (Facilitator, Site 13, six-month follow-up). She noted that in future she would run a "'getting to know you" session before the program starts (coffee morning tea or something), maybe do a couple of ice-breaker activities and give an overview of the program, and introduce and distribute the journal before the first session" (Facilitator, Site 13, six-month follow-up).

Group cohesion and connection

Another additional benefit of attendance for some of the groups was the relationships they formed with other parents. Facilitators mentioned that five of the groups intended to continue meeting or were still connecting socially with one another after the program ended. For example, one facilitator noted of her group, "Highly cohesive and motivated group. Group very supportive of [other] parents. Parents keen to keep meeting and supporting each other and will meet monthly (Facilitator, Site 9, end of program). In the six-month follow-up feedback another facilitator highlighted that, "As the parents of this group are part of a wider community, i.e. school, I am aware that they continue to connect and meet socially. They felt a sense of connection" (Facilitator, Site 14, six-month follow-up). Another said, "They also bonded very well as a group despite their diversity and continued to care for each other outside the group (Facilitator, Site 7, six-month follow-up). It appears that attending the program provided a

connection to ongoing informal sources of support (i.e., other parents) for some of the groups of parents.

Challenges and change

In evaluating BUGK, and as has been discussed in previous sections, it was apparent that some participants found aspects of the program confronting (e.g., Messages from the Past) or difficult to implement (e.g., self-care and accessing support). But for every example of this struggle, there were others that suggested positive changes for families and self brought about by enhanced understanding and reflection upon the program topics. Many of those who found components of the program confronting still appeared to gain insight into facets of their parenting that they wanted to change or found strategies they could incorporate into their daily lives. For example, one facilitator noted, "Some women became more open about their difficult/traumatic childhood experiences and vocalised links between their poor past experiences and their desire to protect the children in their care to ensure they did not have similar experiences" (Facilitator, Site 2, end of program).

Cultural concerns

There were some situations where either the whole program or certain aspects of the program were potentially not suited to some groups. For example, the facilitator of the recently arrived humanitarian refugee group noted several concerns. Firstly, having recently arrived in Australia, the families were in a state of transition and it may not have been the best time to run the program as they had other concerns that they were dealing with. Secondly, it was noted that having multiple nationalities in the one group, along with multiple interpreters, meant that it "felt like there was lots of talking at the same time" (Facilitator, Site 8, end of program) and that handouts in multiple languages would have been helpful. It was also felt that "encouraging these families to openly reflect was quite difficult … as culturally, for many it was not an easy or acceptable [practice]. But certainly, questions throughout the program demonstrate reflection" (Facilitator, Site 8, end of program). These concerns suggest that there may need to be further consideration of cultural differences and practices when running the program with diverse cultural groups. The facilitator also noted that many of the parents in this group expressed concern, during the brain development session, whether their children would be ok considering the conditions they had been exposed to in the past (e.g., in refugee camps). Facilitators need to be sensitive to the histories of different cultural groups when presenting different parts of the program. Finally, it was felt that some of the questions in the evaluation may have been difficult for the participants to understand. For example, the facilitator noted, "[Participants were asked] 'Have there been any changes in your family since you started attending this program?' This question was not understood and given the state of transition most of these families were in, it probably made no sense" (Facilitator, Site 8, end of program). Participants in this group had very little English and so were unable to complete the evaluation. The facilitators asked the questions to the group verbally and provided one collated response.

Cultural concerns were also raised with one of the groups of Indigenous parents[4]. The facilitator felt that Messages from the Past may not have been appropriate for this group: "This [talking about how they were parented] is not a natural occurrence for Aboriginal families, they were not comfortable." At the six-month follow-up the facilitator noted that, "No, [the] program wasn't suitable for these families (Aboriginal) in its present format. However, program was adaptable to meet the needs of families … [we] left out [unsuitable] content" (Facilitator, Site 5, six-month follow-up). In contrast, and highlighting some of the complexity of working with families with complex issues, the facilitator still noted some changes for the families in the group:

[4] BUGK for Aboriginal families is currently being produced with input from Aboriginal elders, parents and workers around Australia.

> When parents are in a good space, strategies can be maintained and report family is getting along better … Stop Pause Play is the easiest [strategy to use]. However, when these parents have additional issues these strategies go out the windows. Message of the past take over (Facilitator, Site 5, six-month follow-up).

Another facilitator working with Indigenous parents suggested that a "culture handout" should be included when working with these parents. She said, "I think this [a culture handout] (or something like it) needs to be core to an Indigenous version of BUGK—changes might include using the word 'cultural' with beliefs and values, and better facilitation of conversations around passing on cultural practices and messages" (Facilitator, Site 2, session 4). The facilitator of this group felt that the program was flexible enough that it was still relevant for her group. She stated, "Yes, we made it [the program] relevant for our Indigenous parents by sharing information (co-facilitators), ideas and resources, used different wording, cards/resources, pre-planning in partnership". Her reflections were supported by post-program feedback from the parents in this group, with all noting something they had learnt or found helpful in completing the program.

Literacy

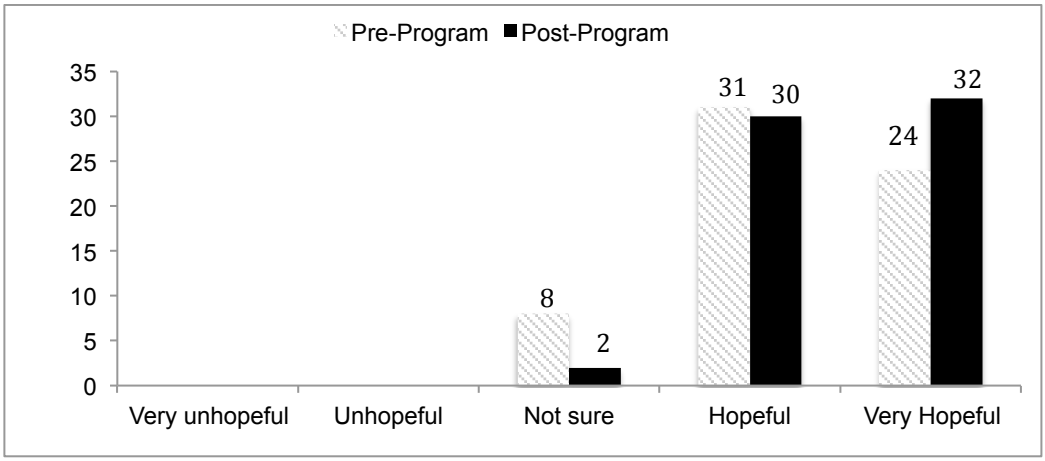
The same facilitator further noted some concerns regarding the written materials suitability for parents with low levels of literacy. She highlighted that the materials needed to match the literacy levels of participants, particularly when working with vulnerable groups:

> I feel that as we've been asked to work in areas covered by C4C [Communities for Children], where there are vulnerable families living with disadvantage, any reading we ask of them, needs to be written in language that could be read and understood by, e.g., an "average" 10–12 year old child (Facilitator, Site 2, session 1).

Within this group, two parents had trouble reading and answering the pre-program evaluation and the local facilitator needed to sit with one woman (who had been forced to leave school at age 13) and read each question aloud. Another mother in the group needed a word read and explained to her.

Quantitative data

One of the key performance indicators used in the evaluation of the earlier version of the program, Great Kids, was that parents would report a greater sense of hope that things will improve within their family (Staiger et al., 2006). This indicator was included in the current evaluation to provide some continuity with the previous evaluation. As can be seen in Figure 8, when parents were asked at the beginning of the program how hopeful they were that things would improve for their family, a majority (n = 55) were either hopeful or very hopeful, while a small number were not sure (n = 8). After participating in the program, the number of participants who were very hopeful increased from 24 to 32. None of the participants reported being unhopeful or very unhopeful when asked at either the pre- or post-program period.



Note: *n* = 68; Missing responses = 5 pre-program and 4 post-program.

Figure 8: Participant responses to the question, "How hopeful are you things will improve for your family?".

Although there were some concerns with certain groups and aspects of the program, overall it appeared that the program was generally relevant and valuable for the vulnerable parents who participated in the evaluation. The post-program and six-month follow-up data from parents indicated that most reported positive changes for themselves and their families as a result of participating in the program. The facilitator feedback also noted these changes in behaviour, language and family relationships, providing further support for the relevancy and value of BUGK for parents facing disadvantage and complex issues.

Limitations

The evaluation involved 16 groups of parents from C4C sites all around Australia. Although all of the groups were living in disadvantaged communities experiencing complex issues, they differed substantially in the types of issues they were facing. The participants included mothers of children with Autism Spectrum disorders, parents experiencing post-separation conflict, family violence, histories of trauma, substance misuse and a range of mental health issues, parents with removed children, Indigenous parents, teen mothers, and recently arrived humanitarian refugees. This diversity, along with small numbers of participants in each separate group, meant it was not possible to make comparisons *between* groups. It was not possible to investigate the suitability of the program for parents facing particular issues in any depth. For example, when exploring the way that participants were parented (Messages from the Past) it was found that some parents found the topic confronting while others did not. Differences in the backgrounds of the parents and the current issues they were facing were likely to have accounted for this (e.g., parents of children experiencing Autism Spectrum disorders, parents experiencing alcohol and other drug issues; parents from traumatic or non-traumatic childhoods) but without larger sample sizes and more detailed background information, those connections could not be made. The evaluation explored BUGK relevance for "vulnerable parents" in general but future evaluations of the program could focus, in more detail, on parents facing particular problems or from specific disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., humanitarian refugees or parents facing substance-use problems).

As is common with many evaluations, there was a drop-off in the number of parents who participated in the post-program questionnaire compared to the pre-program evaluation, and then a substantial drop-off between post-program and the six-month follow-up due to difficulties in contacting parents for a range of reasons (e.g., they were no longer involved with the service who ran the program or their contact details had changed). Ninety-four parents participated in the pre-program component of the evaluation, 86 in the post-program and 23 in the six-month follow-up. As noted previously, not all participants completed both quantitative and qualitative items. Numbers of parents, if any, who left the program prior to completion were

not available. Further to this, no information was available on parents who participated in BUGK but chose not to participate in the evaluation. These parents may have differed substantially from the parents who did participate.

There were also some concerns raised with the evaluation format itself. Low levels of literacy are common among families from disadvantaged backgrounds and may have impacted parents' ability to understand and respond to the questions. Although, having noted this, often concerns with parental levels of literacy were alleviated by having the facilitators read the questions and explain them to parents or assist parents with completing the forms.

Finally, many of these parents were facing complex issues and the groups included parents who had had children removed or who were involved in the child protection system, and as a result they may have been reticent to respond honestly to some of the questionnaire items, particularly if they had concerns around confidentiality, anonymity, or further involvement with child protection services.

Conclusion

The evidence collected in the evaluation generally provided support that the Bringing up Great Kids program achieved its stated aims, enhanced the reflective capacity of many of the parents who participated in the evaluation, and was relevant for parents facing multiple and complex issues. Almost all parents who participated in the program noted positive changes for themselves and their families as a result of attending. In particular, parents reported having a better understanding of how their upbringing influenced their parenting, how their responses and behaviours affected their children, and how their children's brain development affected their emotions and behaviours. Parents reported being more mindful, feeling calmer, and listening and responding more positively to their children. Further to this, many parents reported that there was less conflict and their homes were calmer. Facilitators also noted that attendance rates for the program were higher than usual for several of the groups and that many of the parents had formed ongoing supportive relationships with other parents because of participation.

There were certain aspects of the program that appeared to resonate more strongly with parents than others. Stop Pause Play (a mindfulness exercise that involves stopping and pausing before responding) was the most commonly mentioned aspect of BUGK. Many parents reported using this strategy to positive effect in their relationships with their children. Learning about their children's brain development was another aspect of the program that was commonly mentioned by parents and was reported as helping them to have more realistic expectations of their children's emotions and behaviours. This understanding, along with the mindfulness exercises they learned, helped many parents to contain their own strong emotions and respond more calmly to their children. Messages from the Past also resonated strongly with parents. Although a number of parents and facilitators reported that it was a challenging topic, it seemed that over the course of the program, parents gained an enhanced understanding of the importance of how they were parented on their current parenting practices and which messages from the past, if any, they wanted to pass on to their children.

Along with elements of the program that resonated strongly with parents, there were also concerns raised regarding aspects of the program and their suitability for certain groups. Several concerns were also raised about the program more broadly. Some facilitators felt that certain aspects of the program, particularly Messages from the Past, may not be culturally appropriate for Indigenous groups. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities have different cultures and histories and may have different needs that should be taken into consideration when working with ATSI parents and families (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc., 2010). Facilitators did suggest that a cultural handout may be useful for these groups and that other aspects of the program might be changed to improve its relevance for Indigenous parents. In future iterations of the program, an Indigenous BUGK could be developed that is adaptable to local cultural considerations. The facilitators of the humanitarian

refugee group also raised concerns about the cultural appropriateness of aspects of BUGK, with some concepts potentially considered unacceptable to certain groups.

Considering the program more generally, the facilitators felt that having parents from multiple nationalities (with little spoken English) in the same program was problematic as it meant there were multiple interpreters, often all speaking at once. They felt that having the handouts in multiple languages might have helped. Further to this, the facilitators of the humanitarian refugee group suggested that the timing of the program could be an important factor. Having recently arrived in Australia, these parents were in a state of transition and it may have been more appropriate to wait until other aspects of their lives were more settled before running a reflective parenting program with them. Women who have survived violence, torture or trauma, as these recently arrived refugees may have, can be restricted in their ability to deal with the everyday challenges of life (i.e., housing, settlement, education), let alone access therapeutic help (Allimant & Ostapiej-Piatkowski, 2011).

These concerns also applied to some of the groups facing multiple life stressors (e.g., child removal, incarcerated partners, domestic violence). These stressors appeared to somewhat inhibit parents' ability to attend or actively participate in the course. External problems may need to be attended to before parents are able to focus on reflective parenting. As noted by two facilitators, running the program over a longer period may give parents the time and space to practise the strategies they are learning and allow facilitators more time to connect parents with other services, if required. It would also have the added advantage of allowing parents to build trust with the facilitators and, as was found in the current evaluation, potentially build supportive relationships with other parents.

In conclusion, although some parents found aspects of the program challenging and it may not be suitable for every parent, overall BUGK did appear to offer parents from disadvantaged backgrounds a helpful approach to enhancing their reflective capabilities, understanding their parenting and enhancing positive communication with their children.

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Appendix A: Program Logic Model for the Bringing Up Great Kids Program

Aims

Parents will learn more about the origins of their own parenting style and how it can be more effective

Parents will identify the important messages they want to convey to their children and how to achieve this

Parents will understand the messages that children communicate to them and how

Parents will discover how to overcome some of the obstacles that are getting in the way of being the kind of parent they would like to be

Parents will discover ways to take care of themselves and to find support when they need it

Parents will develop strategies to manage their parenting approach despite the mounting pressures on their time and role

Parents will become more hopeful

Inputs

Parents experiencing difficulties with their children

Parents preparing for potential difficulties with their children

Parents wanting to examine and improve their parenting style

Parents wanting to enhance their parenting capacity

Parents register to participate in Bringing Up Great Kids program

Facilitator training

Community education, recruitment, promotion

Client registration

Provide client with information on registration

Decide on program intensity (# sessions, duration, etc.)

Decide on program content

Decide on program activities/exercises, etc. (e.g., breathing techniques; Stop Pause Play)

Decide on perception of goal achievement/outcomes

Plan to maintain client contact post-program

Generate program materials (handouts, journals, etc.)

Facilitator teamwork

Support process in case of distress

Sharing of own experiences

BUGK PROGRAM COMMENCES

Outputs

Parents feel supported about their parenting concerns

Parents feel less isolated

Parents explore Family of Origin in a supported, safe environment

Parents make new social connections

Parents build knowledge of child brain development

Parents have opportunities to talk about experiences in positive, supportive environment

Parents have opportunities to practise techniques (e.g., mindfulness)

Parents gain insight into their parenting influences

Parents feel respected by facilitators & other agency staff

Outputs

Parents parent mindfully

Parent–child relationships are positive and calm,

Parent–child communication is respectful

Parents report fewer episodes/incidents involving conflict or that conflict is less intense

Parents adapt their parenting to child's developmental stage

Parents monitor and contain their emotions when dealing with their child

Parents feel comfortable about seeking help/advice/support when needed

Parents feel more confident about their parenting

Parents feel a greater "connection" to their children

Parents feel more like the parent they want to be

Outcomes

Families experience less conflict

Families are able to function well

Families require less assistance from community service organisations

Fewer notifications are made to child protection services

Children are less at risk of abuse or neglect

Appendix B: Faciliator observations

DAY/SESSION (IF COMPLETING THIS FORM AFTER EACH): (e.g., first of 4 sessions; 2nd of 2 sessions, etc.)

PLEASE RECORD HERE WHICH OF THE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES WERE USED IN THIS/THESE SESSIONS

FACILITATOR COMMENTS --- WHILE SESSIONS ARE IN PROGRESS:

LANGUAGE How do parents talk about **their child(ren)** or problems with their child(ren) (e.g., words or expressions used, body language, tone, emotional content, emotionality, etc.)	
LANGUAGE How do parents express themselves when talking about how **they were parented** (words/expressions used, body language, tone, emotional content, emotionality, etc.)	
REACTIONS Note topics/issues that seem to provoke or elicit strong reactions (e.g., interest, insight, excitement, anger, changes in perspective)—or little or no reaction	
ACTIVITIES Which activities do parents seem, for example, to enjoy, be challenged by, frustrated by; which seem to raise the level/volume or change the tone of the discussion?	

PARENTS' REFLECTIONS ON PREVIOUS SESSIONS

TECHNIQUES & STRATEGIES Which ones were tried at home? How many parents reported that they tried new things at home, tried to apply new insights or information to their parenting? (Ask for show of hands—not necessary to get an accurate count, indicative numbers are okay). Were there positive outcomes, were children/family receptive to changes? Did any particular strategy appear to be successful/unsuccessful?	
PARENTS' WELLBEING What self-care strategies were tried, what worked for them, what didn't work; whether they needed assistance and subsequently sought it, successfully?	
CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS Did parents report changes to their relationships with their child(ren)? What sorts of things did they talk about: ▪ Communication—positive or negative exchanges, etc. ▪ Respect—given and received ▪ Child's sense of self ▪ New insights into/understanding of their own or their child's behaviour ▪ Having fun with their child(ren)	

END OF PROGRAM — FACILITATORS' REFLECTIONS:

LOOKING BACK OVER THE WHOLE PROGRAM, OVERALL:

LANGUAGE Did you observe changes (positive or negative) in parents' language when talking about their kids, or problems with their kids? What key differences did you observe? (e.g., words/expressions used, body language, tone, emotional content, etc.) Did changes seem to reflect parents starting to use/model/display mindful concepts?	
LANGUAGE Did you observe changes in how parents talked about how **they were parented**? What seemed to change? (words/expressions used, body language, tone, emotional content, etc.)	
REACTIONS Which topics/issues seemed to provoke or elicit strong reactions (e.g., interest, insight, excitement, anger, changes in perspective)—or little or no reaction?	
ACTIVITIES Which do parents seem, for example, to enjoy, be challenged by, frustrated by; which seem to raise the level/volume or change the tone of the discussion?	

PARENTS' OVERALL REFLECTIONS

TECHNIQUES & STRATEGIES How successful do you think parents were in applying some of the program's techniques and strategies at home? Which seem to have been the easiest/most difficult for them to implement? Could the program be changed to better help parents put their learning into action?	
PARENTS' WELLBEING What sense did you get about parents attempts to apply self-care strategies? What sorts of changes did you see in the parents themselves? Do they talk about feeling better about themselves as parents? Do they seem to acknowledge that it's okay to ask for help? Do some parents seem NOT to have benefited from the program? What might the reasons be for this?	
CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS Have parents reported any changes? Do they report that the family is getting along better/worse/no change? Do they refer to: ▪ Communication—positive or negative exchanges, etc. ▪ Respect—given and received ▪ Child's sense of self ▪ New insights into/understanding of their own or their child's behaviour ▪ Feeling more hopeful about their family than before	

Appendix C: Bringing Up Great Kids pre-program survey

Your name _____

It is important to us that we know whether our program makes a difference to families. To help us find out, we ask you to complete the following survey at the start of the first session, and then again at the end of the program. We might also ask you to complete it one last time a few months down the track. This will show us whether things have changed for you and your family. And just as importantly, it will show us where we haven't helped you as well as we could. We'll use this information to improve the *Bringing Up Great Kids* program, and also to work out what other support or services might be provided to help other parents and their children.

Please answer the following questions:

What do you hope to get out of this program:

- For yourself?

_____

_____

_____

_____

- For your family?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How hopeful are you that things in your family will improve? (Circle your answer)

1 Not at all hopeful

2 Not very hopeful

3 Not sure

4 Hopeful

5 Very hopeful

Please turn over

The survey involves a series of statements about being a parent. Simply circle the number that matches your response, using the following scale:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I think I connect well with my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I think I'm doing okay as a parent	1	2	3	4	5
I find it hard to understand my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I seem to have to nag or yell at my child(ren) a lot	1	2	3	4	5
When my child(ren) and I are together everyone gets along well	1	2	3	4	5
I have a good idea what my job as a parent is about	1	2	3	4	5
It is sometimes hard to understand what my child(ren) is/are feeling	1	2	3	4	5
I'm unsure how to best listen to my child(ren) when they seem concerned or worried about something	1	2	3	4	5
My child(ren) and I seem to talk on a different wavelength	1	2	3	4	5
I sometimes worry that I am too hard on my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
An important part of parenting is to help my child(ren) feel good about themselves	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to react to my child(ren)'s behaviour without thinking	1	2	3	4	5
I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I can usually figure out what my child(ren)'s behaviour is trying to tell me	1	2	3	4	5
I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent	1	2	3	4	5
I'm a fairly calm parent	1	2	3	4	5
I always put my children's needs before my own	1	2	3	4	5
I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I'm quite consistent in my parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I'm unsure how to find help about parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to react too strongly to things	1	2	3	4	5
The stress of parenting sometimes overwhelms me	1	2	3	4	5
I often try to build my child(ren)'s confidence	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D: Bringing Up Great Kids post-program survey

Your name _____

It is important to us that we know whether our program makes a difference to families. To help us find out, we ask you to complete the following survey at the start of the first session, and then again at the end of the program. We might also ask you to complete it one last time a few months down the track. This will show us whether things have changed for you and your family. And just as importantly, it will show us where we haven't helped you as well as we could. We'll use this information to improve the *Bringing Up Great Kids* program, and also to work out what other support or services might be provided to help other parents and their children.

Please answer the following questions:

What has changed for you by attending the program?

_____

_____

_____

What has changed for your family by you attending the program?

_____

_____

_____

How hopeful are you that things in your family will improve? (Circle your answer)

1 Not at all hopeful

2 Not very hopeful

3 Not sure

4 Hopeful

5 Very hopeful

Please turn over

The survey involves a series of statements about being a parent. Simply circle the number that matches your response, using the following scale:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I think I connect well with my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I think I'm doing okay as a parent	1	2	3	4	5
I find it hard to understand my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I seem to have to nag or yell at my child(ren) a lot	1	2	3	4	5
When my child(ren) and I are together everyone gets along well	1	2	3	4	5
I have a good idea what my job as a parent is about	1	2	3	4	5
It is sometimes hard to understand what my child(ren) is/are feeling	1	2	3	4	5
I'm unsure how to best listen to my child(ren) when they seem concerned or worried about something	1	2	3	4	5
My child(ren) and I seem to talk on a different wavelength	1	2	3	4	5
I sometimes worry that I am too hard on my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
An important part of parenting is to help my child(ren) feel good about themselves	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to react to my child(ren)'s behaviour without thinking	1	2	3	4	5
I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I can usually figure out what my child(ren)'s behaviour is trying to tell me	1	2	3	4	5
I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent	1	2	3	4	5
I'm a fairly calm parent	1	2	3	4	5
I always put my children's needs before my own	1	2	3	4	5
I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I'm quite consistent in my parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I'm unsure how to find help about parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to react too strongly to things	1	2	3	4	5
The stress of parenting sometimes overwhelms me	1	2	3	4	5
I often try to build my child(ren)'s confidence	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix E: Bringing Up Great Kids six-month follow-up survey

Your name _____

It has now been a few months since you completed the *Bringing Up Great Kids* program. We're interested to hear what ongoing effects the program has had on your life (if any). We'll use this information to improve the program, and also to work out what other support or services might be provided to help other parents and their children.

Please answer following questions:

What changes in yourself are you still aware of since attending the program?

_____

_____

What changes are still occurring in your family as a result of the program?

_____

_____

Do you feel that the program was designed to meet your family's needs?

_____

Are there any ways the program could be improved to better suit your family?

_____

How hopeful are you that things in your family will improve? (Circle your answer)

1 Not at all hopeful

2 Not very hopeful

3 Not sure

4 Hopeful

5 Very hopeful

Please turn over

The survey involves a series of statements about being a parent. Simply circle the number that matches your response, using the following scale:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I think I connect well with my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I think I'm doing okay as a parent	1	2	3	4	5
I find it hard to understand my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I seem to have to nag or yell at my child(ren) a lot	1	2	3	4	5
When my child(ren) and I are together everyone gets along well	1	2	3	4	5
I have a good idea what my job as a parent is about	1	2	3	4	5
It is sometimes hard to understand what my child(ren) is/are feeling	1	2	3	4	5
I'm unsure how to best listen to my child(ren) when they seem concerned or worried about something	1	2	3	4	5
My child(ren) and I seem to talk on a different wavelength	1	2	3	4	5
I sometimes worry that I am too hard on my child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
An important part of parenting is to help my child(ren) feel good about themselves	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to react to my child(ren)'s behaviour without thinking	1	2	3	4	5
I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own child(ren)	1	2	3	4	5
I can usually figure out what my child(ren)'s behaviour is trying to tell me	1	2	3	4	5
I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent	1	2	3	4	5
I'm a fairly calm parent	1	2	3	4	5
I always put my children's needs before my own	1	2	3	4	5
I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I'm quite consistent in my parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I'm unsure how to find help about parenting	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to react too strongly to things	1	2	3	4	5
The stress of parenting sometimes overwhelms me	1	2	3	4	5
I often try to build my child(ren)'s confidence	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix table A.1

Item frequency data for pre-program and post-program respondents

Statement	Time		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing	Totals
I find it hard to understand my children	Pre Program	*n*	5	19	29	8	3	4	68
		%	7%	28%	43%	12%	4%	6%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	5	31	20	8	-	4	68
		%	7%	46%	29%	12%	-	6%	100%
I seem to have to nag or yell at my children a lot	Pre Program	*n*	9	14	10	27	5	3	68
		%	13%	21%	15%	40%	7%	4%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	8	18	22	16	3	1	68
		%	12%	26%	32%	24%	4%	2%	100%
It is sometimes hard to understand what my child(ren) is/are feeling	Pre Program	*n*	1	9	21	33	3	1	68
		%	1%	13%	31%	49%	4%	2%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	3	11	26	25	1	2	68
		%	4%	16%	38%	37%	1%	3%	100%
I'm unsure how to best listen to my children when they seem worried or concerned	Pre Program	*n*	6	26	16	17	2	1	68
		%	9%	38%	24%	25%	3%	2%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	7	33	18	7	1	2	68
		%	10%	49%	26%	10%	2%	3%	100%
I tend to react too strongly to things	Pre Program	*n*	3	11	26	24	2	2	68
		%	4%	16%	38%	35%	3%	3%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	4	22	24	14	1	3	68
		%	6%	32%	35%	21%	1%	4%	100%
I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own children	Pre Program	*n*	1	6	17	29	13	2	68
		%	1%	9%	25%	43%	19%	3%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	2	10	10	30	11	5	68
		%	3%	15%	15%	44%	16%	7%	100%
I can usually figure out what my children's behaviour is trying to tell me	Pre Program	*n*	-	4	20	38	5	1	68
		%	-	6%	29%	56%	7%	2%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	1	18	41	5	2	68
		%	1%	2%	27%	60%	7%	3%	100%
I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent	Pre Program	*n*	9	26	17	12	3	1	68
		%	13%	38%	25%	18%	4%	2%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	13	33	11	6	1	4	68
		%	19%	49%	16%	9%	1%	6%	100%
I'm a fairly calm person	Pre Program	*n*	3	14	22	25	3	1	68
		%	4%	21%	32%	37%	4%	2%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	8	18	35	5	2	68
		%	-	12%	26%	51%	7%	3%	100%
I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting	Pre Program	*n*	9	36	14	5	2	2	68
		%	13%	53%	21%	7%	3%	3%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	12	35	13	4	2	2	68
		%	18%	51%	19%	6%	3%	3%	100%
I'm unsure how to find help about parenting	Pre Program	*n*	9	26	25	5	1	2	68
		%	13%	38%	37%	7%	1%	3%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	17	33	12	4	-	2	68
		%	25%	49%	18%	6%	-	3%	100%
The stress of parenting sometimes overwhelms me	Pre Program	*n*	2	13	19	25	8	1	68
		%	3%	19%	28%	37%	12%	2%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	4	11	24	21	4	4	68
		%	6%	16%	35%	31%	6%	6%	100%

I tend to react to my children's behaviour w/o thinking	Pre Program	*n*	3	12	21	25	5	2	68
		%	4%	18%	31%	37%	7%	3%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	2	17	29	14	3	3	68
		%	3%	25%	43%	21%	4%	4%	100%
I sometimes worry that I am too hard on my children	Pre Program	*n*	1	20	16	25	4	2	68
		%	1%	29%	24%	37%	6%	3%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	5	17	18	22	5	1	68
		%	7%	25%	26%	32%	7%	2%	100%
I think I connect well with my children	Pre Program	*n*	-	2	5	38	22	1	68
		%	-	3%	7%	56%	32%	1%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	2	4	38	23	1	68
		%	-	3%	6%	56%	34%	2%	100%
I think I'm doing okay as a parent	Pre Program	*n*	-	1	11	44	10	2	68
		%	-	2%	16%	65%	15%	3%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	3	5	51	7	2	68
		%	-	4%	7%	75%	10%	3%	100%
My children and I seem to talk on a different wavelength	Pre Program	*n*	1	25	28	10	1	3	68
		%	1%	37%	41%	15%	1%	4%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	3	25	28	10	-	2	68
		%	4%	37%	41%	15%	-	3%	100%
I'm quite consistent in my parenting	Pre Program	*n*	-	6	21	31	7	3	68
		%	-	9%	31%	46%	10%	4%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	6	22	31	6	3	68
		%	-	9%	32%	46%	9%	4%	100%
I always put my children's needs before my own	Pre Program	*n*	2	4	12	18	31	1	68
		%	3%	6%	18%	26%	46%	2%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	5	9	22	30	2	68
		%	-	7%	13%	32%	44%	3%	100%
I have a good idea what my job as a parent is about	Pre Program	*n*	1	3	5	41	14	4	68
		%	1%	4%	7%	60%	21%	6%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	3	6	38	19	1	68
		%	1%	4%	9%	56%	28%	2%	100%

Note: Due to rounding not all percentages will add up to exactly 100%.

Appendix table A.2

Frequency data for how hopeful are you things in your family will improve?

Statement / Question			Very unhopeful	Unhopeful	Not Sure	Hopeful	Very hopeful	Missing	Totals
How hopeful are you things in your family will improve?	Pre Program	*n*	-	-	8	31	24	5	68
		%	-	-	12	46	35	8	100
	Post Program	*n*	-	-	2	30	32	4	68
		%	-	-	3	44	47	6	100

Note: *n* = 68.

Appendix table A.3

Means, standard deviations and T tests for pre-program and post-program items

Question/Statement		Pre		Post	
	t	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
How hopeful are you things in your family will improve?	2.96**	4.25	0.67	4.49	0.60
I find it hard to understand my children	2.06*	2.74	0.91	2.44	0.80
I seem to have to nag and yell at my children a lot	1.83	3.08	1.23	2.82	1.11
It is sometimes hard to understand what my children are feeling	2.12*	3.44	0.83	3.15	0.90
I'm unsure how best to listen to my children when they are worried or concerned	1.88	2.71	1.00	2.42	0.90
I tend to react too strongly to things	3.00**	3.16	0.91	2.78	0.90
I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own children	0.49	3.68	0.94	3.61	1.10
I can usually figure out what my children's behaviour is trying to tell me	0.61	3.67	0.71	3.72	0.70
I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent	3.40**	2.58	1.07	2.20	0.90
I'm a fairly calm person	3.68***	3.18	0.96	3.56	0.80
The stress of parenting sometimes overwhelms me	1.28	3.34	1.01	3.16	1.00
I'm unsure best how to find help with my parenting	4.05***	2.45	0.88	2.03	0.80
I tend to react to my children's behaviour without thinking	1.51	3.25	1.00	3.03	1.00
I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting	0.27**	2.31	0.94	2.22	0.90
I sometimes worry that I'm too hard on my children	0.75	3.17	0.99	3.08	1.10
I think I am doing ok as a parent	0.19	3.97	0.61	3.95	0.60
I think I connect well with my children	0.39	4.19	0.70	4.22	0.69
I have a good idea what my job as a parent is about	0.63	4.00	0.80	4.08	0.84
I always put my children's needs before my own	0.93	4.06	1.08	4.17	0.94
I'm quite consistent with my parenting	0.00	3.60	0.81	3.60	0.77
My children and I tend to talk on a different wavelength	0.86	2.77	0.79	2.67	0.80
When my children and I are together, everyone gets along well	-1.16	3.66	0.99	3.78	0.90
An important part of parenting is helping children feel good about themselves	0.00	4.63	0.58	4.63	0.54
I often try to build my children's confidence	-1.53	4.20	0.69	4.33	0.62

Note: $n = 68$ * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Appendix Table B.1

Item frequency data for pre-program, post-program and six-month respondents

Statement / Question	Time		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing	Totals
I find it hard to understand my children	Pre Program	*n*	1	2	5	7	1	-	16
		%	6%	13%	31%	44%	6%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	-	2	8	6	-	16
		%	0%	0%	13%	50%	38%	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	1	1	9	5	-	16
		%	-	6%	6%	56%	31%	-	100%
I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent	Pre Program	*n*	1	3	8	3	1	-	16
		%	6%	19%	50%	19%	6%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	2	7	4	2	1	-	16
		%	13%	44%	25%	13%	6%	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	2	7	1	3	3	-	16
		%	13%	44%	6%	19%	19%	-	100%
I can usually figure out what my children's behaviour is trying to tell me	Pre Program	*n*	-	1	8	6	1	-	16
		%	-	6%	50%	38%	6%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	-	7	7	1	-	16
		%	6%	-	44%	44%	6%	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	3	3	7	3	-	16
		%	-	19%	19%	44%	19%	-	100%
The stress of parenting sometimes overwhelms me	Pre Program	*n*	-	3	2	5	6	-	16
		%	-	19%	13%	31%	37%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	-	4	7	3	1	16
		%	6%	-	25%	44%	19%	6%	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	3	4	6	3	-	16
		%	-	19%	25%	38%	19%	-	100%
I sometimes worry that I'm too hard on my children	Pre Program	*n*	6	2	6	2	-	-	16
		%	38%	13%	38%	13%	-	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	6	4	3	2	-	16
		%	6%	38%	25%	19%	13%	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	1	8	-	6	1	-	16
		%	6%	50%	-	38%	6%	-	100%
I tend to react to strongly to things	Pre Program	*n*	1	3	4	6	2	-	16
		%	6%	19%	25%	38%	13%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	5	4	5	-	1	16
		%	6%	31%	25%	31%	-	6%	100%
	6 month	*n*	9	2	4	1	-	-	16
		%	56%	13%	25%	6%	-	-	100%
I tend to react to my children's behaviour without thinking	Pre Program	*n*	1	4	4	5	2	-	16
		%	6%	25%	25%	31%	13%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	4	7	5	-	-	16
		%	-	25%	44%	31%	-	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	2	8	2	4	-	-	16
		%	13%	50%	13%	25%	-	-	100%
I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own children	Pre Program	*n*	-	2	3	7	4	-	16
		%	-	13%	19%	44%	25%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	2	2	8	2	1	16
		%	6%	13%	13%	50%	13%	6%	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	1	1	6	8	-	16
		%	-	6%	6%	38%	50%	-	100%
I don't feel at all	Pre Program	*n*	2	7	4	2	1	-	16

Statement / Question	Time		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing	Totals
well prepared for parenting		%	13%	44%	25%	13%	6%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	2	8	3	3	-	-	16
		%	13%	50%	19%	19%	-	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	6	7	1	1	1	-	16
		%	38%	44%	6%	6%	6%	-	100%
I seem to have to nag and yell at my children a lot	Pre Program	*n*	2	3	1	8	1	1	16
		%	13%	19%	6%	50%	6%	6%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	4	5	6	-	-	16
		%	6%	25%	31%	38%	0%	0%	100%
	6 month	*n*	3	4	4	4	1	-	16
		%	19%	25%	25%	25%	6%	-	100%
I'm a fairly calm person	Pre Program	*n*	1	3	7	4	1	-	16
		%	6%	19%	44%	25%	6%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	3	2	11	-	-	16
		%	-	19%	13%	69%	-	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	1	1	-	11	3	-	16
		%	6%	6%	-	69%	19%	-	100%
I'm unsure how best to listen to my children when they are worried or concerned	Pre Program	*n*	-	5	7	4	-	-	16
		%	-	31%	44%	25%	-	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	2	6	4	4	-	-	16
		%	13%	38%	25%	25%	-	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	4	7	3	2	-	-	16
		%	25%	44%	19%	13%	-	-	100%
I'm unsure best how to find help with my parenting	Pre Program	*n*	4	2	8	2	-	-	16
		%	25%	13%	50%	13%	-	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	5	6	5	-	-	-	16
		%	31%	38%	31%	-	-	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	9	2	4	1	-	16
		%	-	56%	13%	25%	6%	-	100%
An important part of parenting is helping children feel good about themselves	Pre Program	*n*	-	-	1	-	6	9	16
		%	-	-	6%	-	38%	56%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	-	1	1	7	7	16
		%	-	-	6%	6%	44%	44%	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	-	-	5	11	-	16
		%	-	-	-	31%	69%	-	100%
I always put my children's needs before my own	Pre Program	*n*	2	1	3	2	8	-	16
		%	13%	6%	19%	13%	50%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	-	3	4	9	-	16
		%	-	-	19%	25%	56%	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	2	-	5	9	-	16
		%	-	13%	-	31%	56%	-	100%
I find it hard to understand my children	Pre Program	*n*	2	2	9	2	1	-	16
		%	13%	13%	56%	13%	6%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	7	5	1	-	2	16
		%	6%	44%	31%	6%	-	13%	100%
	6 month	*n*	1	8	2	3	1	1	16
		%	6%	50%	13%	19%	6%	6%	100%
I have a good idea what my job as a parent is about	Pre Program	*n*	-	2	1	9	3	1	16
		%	-	13%	6%	56%	19%	6%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	1	2	9	4	-	16
		%	-	6%	13%	56%	25%	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	1	1	2	12	-	16
		%	-	6%	6%	13%	75%	-	100%
I often try to build my children's confidence	Pre Program	*n*	-	-	1	4	2	9	16
		%	-	-	6%	25%	13%	56%	100%
	Post	*n*	-	-	1	5	3	7	16

Statement / Question	Time		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing	Totals
	Program	%	-	-	6%	31%	19%	44%	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	-	1	7	8	-	16
		%	-	-	6%	44%	50%	-	100%
I think I am doing ok as a parent	Pre Program	*n*	-	-	4	9	2	1	16
		%	-	-	25%	56%	13%	6%	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	-	1	2	10	3	16
		%	-	-	6%	13%	63%	19%	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	-	2	3	9	2	16
		%	-	-	13%	19%	56%	13%	100.00%
I think I connect well with my children	Pre Program	*n*	-	-	3	8	5	-	16
		%	-	-	19%	50%	31%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	-	2	8	6	-	16
		%	-	-	13%	50%	38%	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	-	1	1	9	5	-	16
		%	-	6%	6%	56%	31%	-	100%
I'm quite consistent with my parenting	Pre Program	*n*	-	5	3	6	2	-	16
		%	-	31%	19%	38%	13%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	-	3	4	7	1	1	16
		%	-	19%	25%	44%	6%	6%	100%
	6 month	*n*	1	2	-	10	3	-	16
		%	6%	13%	-	63%	19%	-	100%
My children and I tend to talk on a different wavelength	Pre Program	*n*	-	6	8	2	-	-	16
		%	-	38%	50%	13%	-	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	6	5	4	-	-	16
		%	6%	38%	31%	25%	-	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	4	8	1	3	-	-	16
		%	25%	50%	6%	19%	-	-	100%
When my children and I are together, everyone gets along well	Pre Program	*n*	2	3	4	4	3	-	16
		%	13%	19%	25%	25%	19%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	3	7	2	4	-	-	16
		%	19%	44%	13%	25%	-	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	2	1	9	4	-	-	16
		%	13%	6%	56%	25%	-	-	100%
It's sometimes hard to understand what my children are feeling	Pre Program	*n*	*1*	2	5	7	1	-	16
		%	6%	13%	31%	44%	6%	-	100%
	Post Program	*n*	1	-	5	10	-	-	16
		%	6%	-	31%	63%	-	-	100%
	6 month	*n*	3	2	1	10	-	-	16
		%	19%	13%	6%	63%	-	-	100%

Note: Due to rounding not all percentages will add up to exactly 100%.

Appendix table B.2

Means, standard deviations and T tests for pre-program and six-month follow-up items

Question/Statement		Pre		6 month	
	t	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
I find it hard to understand my children	0.40	2.87	2.67	2.67	1.11
I don't have a lot of confidence in myself as a parent	0.18	3.00	1.00	2.93	1.44
It is sometimes hard to understand what my children are feeling	0.48	3.31	1.01	3.13	1.26
I can usually figure out what my children's behaviour is trying to tell me	0.61	3.44	1.01	3.63	0.90
The stress of parenting sometimes overwhelms me	1.10	3.88	1.15	3.56	1.03
I sometimes worry that I'm too hard on my children	1.38	3.25	1.12	2.88	1.20
I tend to react to strongly to things	1.46	3.31	1.14	2.81	1.05
I tend to react to my children's behaviour without thinking	1.79	3.19	1.17	2.50	1.03
I can see how the way I was brought up influences how I parent my own children	1.83	3.80	0.59	4.33	0.88
I don't feel at all well prepared for parenting	2.18*	2.56	1.09	2.00	1.15
I seem to have to nag and yell at my children a lot	2.35**	3.20	1.26	2.60	3.20
I'm a fairly calm person	2.38*	3.00	1.00	3.87	1.06
I'm unsure how best to listen to my children when they are worried or concerned	2.53**	2.94	0.77	2.19	0.98
I'm unsure best how to find help with my parenting	4.00***	2.47	1.06	1.67	0.62
An important part of parenting is helping children feel good about themselves	-0.42	4.71	0.76	4.86	0.38
I always put my children's needs before my own	-1.37	3.81	1.47	4.31	1.014
I find it hard to understand my children	0.40	2.87	1.06	2.67	1.11
I have a good idea what my job as a parent is about	-0.286*	3.87	0.91	4.67	0.82
I often try to build my children's confidence	-0.55	4.14	0.69	4.29	0.49
I think I am doing ok as a parent	0.32	3.87	0.64	3.80	.77
I think I connect well with my children	0.00	4.13	0.72	4.13	0.81
I'm quite consistent with my parenting	-1.28	3.31	1.08	3.75	1.13
My children and I tend to talk on a different wavelength	1.59	2.75	0.68	2.19	1.05
When my children and I are together, everyone gets along well	-2.32*	3.19	1.33	3.94	0.93

Note: n = 16 * = *p*<. 05, ** = *p*<. 01, *** = *p*<. 001