



Bringing up Great Kids
IN THE FIRST 1000 DAYS

Supporting Parents Program
Facilitator Manual



The Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) is a national not for profit organisation that works specifically to prevent the abuse, neglect and exploitation of children and young people and reduce the trauma it causes to children, families and the community.

Knowledge about the neurobiology of child development, trauma and attachment is invigorating the child protection and welfare field. It increasingly is underpinning fresh conceptual maps that better resource the care and protection of children and young people who have experienced abuse and relational disruption. ACF is at the forefront nationally of how this evidence base is translated into practical applications in the area of specialist therapeutic intervention for traumatised children and their families, therapeutic foster care and residential care programs, parenting education and support, and professional education initiatives.

The Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) parenting program is a nationally recognised and evidence-based program developed by ACF. We have developed a range of materials and resources to support the delivery of the program. ACF support and resource the work of agencies across the country in both parenting and early years practice for at risk and vulnerable families.

Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) in the First 1000 Days introduces the importance of the first thousand days in the life of a family. This is the time from conception to the time a child is 2 years old. This version of BUGK concentrates on this important time in the life of a family.

For more information about ACF and its work visit www.professionals.childhood.org.au

For more information on Bringing Up Great Kids visit www.bringingupgreatkids.org



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Acknowledgements



Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) in the First 1000 Days owes its completion to the passion and commitment of the leadership team and the Parenting and Early Years Team across the Australian Childhood Foundation.

In 2012, the Australian Institute of Family Studies undertook a national evaluation of the impact of BUGK on the lives of families in many different circumstances. The result of the evaluation has enabled BUGK to be recognised and considered as an evidence-based program.

We would like to thank the thousands of parents who have been on the journey with us throughout the development of the original program and the more recently revised version. The willingness of parents to share their stories of parenting and of being parented has been inspiring. Their feedback about the positive difference the program has made to their lives confirmed our belief in the value of the BUGK program and the contribution it makes to the lives of families. What they teach us about parenting helps us continually improve the programs.

Thank you to the Australian Government Department of Social Services for the opportunity to revise the program with a focus on the first thousand days. Finally, thank you to the Frameworks Institute for your valuable feedback as part of the revision process.

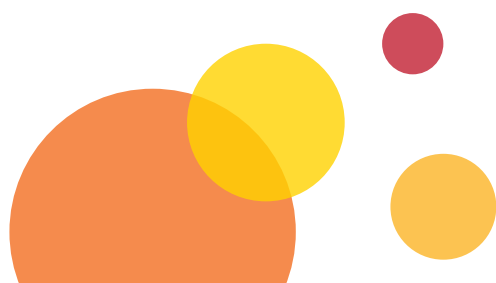




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INTRODUCTION



The first thousand days has been identified as beginning at conception and continuing until the child is two years old. Starting from conception, the baby is actively responding to changes in the environment, using cues provided by the mother's physical and mental state to 'predict' the kind of world they will be born into and altering their bodily structures accordingly. Research has identified that a positive start for all involved in the first thousand days has significant impacts across the lifespan of the child.

The approach to parenting in the first thousand days is critical to the relationship between parent and child and has an impact on the health and wellbeing outcomes for the child in later life. Research on the importance of the first thousand days identifies a warm, responsive, mindful, reflective and supportive parenting style as providing the best outcome of children's overall development and impacts positively on their later life skills and health.

The Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) in the First 1000 Days Parenting Program has been adapted from the original Bringing Up Great Kids Parenting Program. The original program addressed parenting of children from birth to eight years. This program has a more specific focus on the pre-natal period and first two years of life.

BUGK in the First 1000 Days is a mindful, respectful and reflective program that enables parents to go on their own parenting journey in a non-judgemental safe space. All materials and resources come from a strength-based philosophy that has all members of the family at its core.

BUGK in the First 1000 Days emphasises the importance of living in a nurturing and safe environment. It provides parents with knowledge about brain development and an understanding of how children grow and what they need, the centrality of family relationships and an opportunity for parents to reflect on their own childhood and how to connect to their children. It seeks to build parent confidence and promotes help seeking behaviour.

The program has been developed into an easy to use facilitator's package for use by professionals working with parents or supporting any other adults involved in parenting children in the first 1000 days of life. The program recognises that a variety of adults can be involved in parenting children.

The program is written as five chapters that can be flexibly delivered over ten hours in a format that best meets the needs of the parents. Each chapter has been divided into four sections:

- 1. Set up** - contains all the information the facilitator needs to prepare for the session
- 2. Introductory and Connecting activities**
- 3. Pre and Post Birth activities**
- 4. Mindful/Reflective activities and Self-care**



BUGK in the First 1000 Days materials and resources will support parents to:

- develop an understanding of the importance of the first thousand days and the needs of babies and young children during this period;
- learn more about brain development both during pregnancy and after in the context of the growth and development of children;
- understand the origins of parenting styles and recognising the importance of a positive start in the first thousand days;
- identify the importance of giving positive nurturing messages to babies and young children and how to achieve this;
- discover how to overcome some of the obstacles getting in the way of being the kind of parents they would like to be; and,
- explore ways for parents to take care of themselves and to find support when they need it.

The program focusses on building positive relationships and interactions between parents and their unborn babies as well as parents and their infants and young children. It works from a child-centred perspective and aims to resource parents to:

- identify and evaluate the source of their parenting approach and philosophy;
- understand their child's developing needs in early life and how to meet these;
- develop an increased understanding about their values, beliefs and attitudes and the 'messages' that they communicate to their child;
- increase their ability to understand and acknowledge the impact of these messages on their child;
- develop skills in identifying and managing their stress associated with parenting and develop wellbeing and self-care practices; and,
- to seek further professional assistance about their parenting if required.



This facilitator manual is part of the complete set of resources required to facilitate this program.

Facilitator's Manual

This manual is for use by group facilitators and includes all the information required to prepare for and facilitate the 'BUGK in the First 1000 Days' program. It includes background information, session preparation and comprehensive outlines of each of the 5 'chapters' or sessions that comprise the program.

Handouts for Parents

Handouts for participants used in each chapter of the program are included at the end of the manual.

'Babies' Video

Excerpts from this video can be shown each week as a 'connection' activity for parents post-birth, however, depending on the facilitator and the group, the video may be used in the pre-birth group. The facilitator can decide which parts of the video to show each week and The video can be rented or purchased for AUS\$15.00 from the following link. https://www.microsoft.com/en-au/p/babies/8d6kgwzl5rsx?cid=msft_web_search&activetab=pivot%3aoverviewtab





Glossary

Chapters

The program uses the metaphor of ‘chapters’ to refer to the session structure of the program on the basis that the parenting journey is conceptualised as an unfolding story.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be defined as ‘*consciously bringing awareness to your here-and-now experience with openness, interest and receptiveness*’ (Harris, 2008).

Throughout the program mindfulness is used to encourage adults to create a ‘metaphorical space’ between when the child’s behaviour occurs and when the adult responds.

For the purposes of clarity and succinctness, the term ‘mindfulness’ rather than ‘mindful awareness’ is used throughout this manual. The program uses ‘*Stop, Pause, Play*’ as a mindful practice to enable parents to create the metaphorical space needed to be able to ‘reflect and respond’ rather than ‘react’.

Deep Listening

BUGK in the First 1000 Days uses the definition of Deep Listening as taken from Judy Atkinson (2017) in her book **The Value of Deep Listening-The Aboriginal Gift to the Nation** where she describes deep listening as listening in reciprocal relationships without judgment, just to try to understand.

Parent

The program recognises that, today, a variety of adults can be involved in caring for children including biological parents, step-parents, adoptive parents, grandparents and foster carers.

For reasons of succinctness, the word parent is used throughout this manual. However, the program is relevant to all adults involved in parenting or caring for children.

Participants

This is the term used for all who attend BUGK in the First 1000 Days and for whom the activities are designed.

He/she

References to babies and young children throughout the program will be alternatively described as he or she to embrace all genders.





Setting the context of BUGK in the First 1000 Days

Parenthood has been described as ‘the last stand of the amateur’ where adults across the world take on the role of parenting without any qualifications, skills or training. There is a mythical belief that parents will instinctively know how to provide nurturing environment for their children where they can develop, feel loved, connected and flourish. Parents may have managed their parenting role in this way throughout previous generations because support, skills and training were available through their families with whom they lived.

The Frameworks Institute (2016) suggested that while parenting has the greatest impact on the long-term health and wellbeing of children it is a skill learnt ‘on the job’ rather than the widely held belief in the community that ‘parenting comes naturally’. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) and others have identified that parents can benefit from ‘education’ and support to build, change and modify their parenting approach.

Early definitions of parent education took the form of ‘instruction’ that was delivered to parents by ‘experts’. Parents were instructed on ways to ‘manage’ children’s behaviour according to the research and thinking of the day. Many of the most widely adopted parent support and education programs focus on how parent-child interactions can be managed to secure parental control over the child’s behaviour, particularly where matters of discipline are concerned (McGurk 1996). The focus of these programs tends to be equipping parents with a set of skills which can be applied to a range of child behaviours that are deemed problematic.

Over time parent ‘education’ turned into parent ‘support’ when writers such as Gottman (1997) identified the importance of supporting parents in their nurturing relationships with their children. Moqvist (2003) defines parenthood as

“a relationship, and the partners are the parent and the child. More importantly that the parent is not seen as supreme to the child other than in experience and wisdom, which puts a greater demand on the parent to be reasoning and patient” (p 123).

Parental warmth, sensitivity and acceptance 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 and Candelaria, 2002). Although there is apparently no grand unifying theory of effective parenting, different kinds of evidence suggest strong links between the quality of the parent-child relationship and children’s well-being (O’Connor, 2002).

Over recent years the parenting and early years field has begun to consider children’s rights as they relate to parent education and support. Moqvist (2003) in Bloch, Holmund, Moqvist and Popkewitz (2003) wrote of the emergence of “the child with human rights, internationally recognised and under protection of the United Nations, a complete human being” (p118). Moqvist then reminds us that this child is positioned differently in the community and society and therefore needs a different type of parenting experience and support.

The role of parents in modern society has changed as parents are more likely to be living in more isolated circumstances without support yet are under public scrutiny as the governments take on more responsibility in the welfare of children and feel under increasing pressure to be viewed as ‘good’ parents. BUGK in the First 1000 Days is designed to support parents on their parenting journey and thereby improving children’s outcomes.

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



Why Bringing Up Great Kids in the First 1000 Days?

Bringing Up Great Kids was designed to promote positive and nurturing relationships between parents and children and support parents to reflect on the nature of their relationship with their children.

BUGK in the First 1000 Days also focuses on promoting positive and nurturing relationships between parents and their baby in the first years of life. The program assists parents to understand and connect with their babies and young children, supporting them to appreciate and understand their child's perspective or experience of the world and relationships. Parents are supported to understand brain development in the first thousand days with a focus on emotional development and reasoning abilities. They are encouraged to reflect on how this understanding may influence their parenting approach.

When the baby is born parents are encouraged to reflect upon and understand what needs their baby is trying to communicate through crying and body movements. Together with an awareness of the parent's own triggers, this insight gives parents the ability to contain strong emotions and to think through their responses to the child, rather than react with 'knee-jerk' reactions.

The program is also built upon a belief that all parents and carers need good support and self-care to be the kind of parent they aspire to be for their children. Acknowledging the challenges faced by all parents, the notion of accessing support is normalised and encouraged throughout the program.

Why use the metaphor of 'messages'?

Using the metaphor of '*messages*' as a basis for building supportive parent/child relationships, parents are encouraged to explore and reflect upon messages they received from their own experiences of being parented.

The program offers an opportunity for parents to think about the messages they received about being a parent and to consider the ways in which these messages might be impacting on their own parenting style and the messages they, in turn, are sending their own children.

The concept of communication from parent to child is more complex than just the verbal and non-verbal forms of how we communicate. Communication is also about *what* parents communicate to their children and *why*. This is influenced by dominant messages arising from their own experiences and histories, the dominant parenting dialogues around them and the shared experiences of their relationship with their children. The program explores communication between parents and their unborn baby as well as after the baby is born.

These themes combine and translate meanings associated with parenting into resonant '*messages*' that communicate parental values, priorities, beliefs and attitudes. '*Messages*' are not only transmitted through what parents say, they are also communicated in parental behaviour, feelings and interactions. They form the basis through which babies and children come to understand the meaning, rules and expectations of relationships.

'*Messages*' can contain intentional and unintentional meaning. In this sense, parents may not always be aware of the '*messages*' they are communicating. They may also not recognise whether these '*messages*' are leading children to learn the life lessons that parents intend.

Throughout the program, the metaphor of '*messages*' is used to help parents reflect on where their beliefs, ideas and attitudes about parenting and children come from and how they influence their parenting approach and relationships with their own children. The meaning of '*messages*' can be a transformative metaphor for parents. It can help develop a framework for reviewing and evaluating the outcomes that parents want to achieve with their parenting and support their success.

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



Why use the metaphor of growing like a mushroom?

The first and best opportunity to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first thousand days. Throughout the program, the metaphor of 'growing like a mushroom' is used to help parents understand their developing child in utero.

The purpose is to support parents in their thinking about the size and what is going on for their growing baby.

Hence this activity is repeated each session and helps to represent the growth of the baby at different stages throughout the pregnancy. The **HANDOUT - Growing like a mushroom** is divided into first, second and third trimester pages so that parents can find the one that most closely matches the developmental stage of their own baby.

Building brains

Children's brain development is like building a house – it is built from the ground up. A sturdy foundation establishes a strong base for the skills and capacities that come later. The earliest stages of life – before birth to age three – are intense periods of construction. Parents are supported to understand how they can help build a healthy brain for their children.

The important role of mindfulness and reflection

There is a strong focus on personal reflection for parents throughout this program. The practice of mindfulness can support all family members in their efforts to develop contingent and thoughtful rather than reactive ways of responding to their children.

Practicing mindfulness can produce transformational change in parents that is reflected in improved relationships and better ways of communicating and connecting with their children (Slade et al, 2005a, 2005b; Grienberger, 2006; Slade, 2006; Singh et al, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013); Creswell J.D. (2017)).

Being mindful:

- helps parents be more aware of their own feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations;
- helps parents become more aware of their children's non-verbal and relationship needs;
- increases a parent's ability to stand back from situations without responding immediately or inappropriately;
- gives parents more choices in their behaviour; and,
- engages parents' thoughts and feelings (emotional and cognitive selves) in the choices that they make in responding to their children.

In this calmer state a parent is much more likely to make a more thoughtful reasoned decision on how to proceed and thus is much less likely to lash out reactively, reducing possible harm to the baby/child.

Throughout the program, parents are provided with a range of opportunities to practice mindfulness and develop their 'mindful strategies' toolbox. For example 'Stop..Pause..Play' and breathing exercises are practiced each week.

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



Reflections from facilitators

The 'Bringing Up Great Kids in the First 1000 Days' program is reflective in its very core. As such, we encourage both facilitators and participants to be reflective in their evaluation of the program.

Overwhelmingly facilitators comment on the reflective, *'thought provoking'* aspects of this program with comments such as:

'This program gets parents thinking about how they parent instead of just responding.'

'The focus on parents' childhood experience makes it easier for parents to put themselves in their children's shoes.'

'This gives parents back their own journey to reflect and have others walk together with them for the six weeks.'

A facilitator comment which perhaps best sums up the reflective responses:

'This course gives parents some space to step back and hold their journey and be held in a group-which is the beginnings of great community building - like going back to becoming a village raising our children.'

Most telling are the many comments made about the program offering opportunities for self-reflection for facilitators themselves:

'It made me think about my childhood.'

'This program resonated with me as it reinforced the importance of parents (me included) having their own journey with their children.'

'A lot has come together for me in terms of mainstream parenting courses and the emphasis on mindfulness, reflection and brain development.'

'This program connects the dots.'



Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



Managing vulnerability

Facilitators need to be aware that parents can bring with them experiences from their past. Some have had relationships that have been resourcing and affirming. Others have had relationships which have not been attuned to them, disruptive, full of stress and at times abusive. Facilitators support parents with difficult early experiences by validating and acknowledging the efforts they have made to survive and commit to develop positive and nurturing relationships with their children.

Facilitators should hold a non-judgemental and supportive orientation as part of the program. This can support parents to experience memories from their past and find ways to reconcile relational challenges for themselves.

The reflective nature of the program supports parents to review the messages from their past. Facilitators should be aware of the signs of distress that parents can demonstrate. Facilitators can offer parents support to engage with other services as needed. Debriefing should be offered to any parent who shows signs of distress or discomfort.

Father/male carer

Growing evidence supports the critical role of fathers/male caregivers in the life of the child and a child's development in the first thousand days, particularly in terms of facilitating play exploration which helps a child to develop emotional and behavioural self-regulation. By role modelling positive behaviours like being accessible, engaging and responsible, fathers are contributing to better psychosocial adjustment, better social competence and maturity for their children. These activities are designed for the male participants in the group to support and acknowledge the importance of the male parent in the lives of the baby and young child. The program is committed to ensuring that the important voice of the dad/father/male carer is heard.

Principles underpinning the program

There are several core principles which shaped the design and content of BUGK in the First 1000 Days:

The Rights of the Child

Underpinning the development of this program is a commitment to upholding all the articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The program particularly refers to Article 12, the child's right to be heard, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, and the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

The Centrality of Relationship

It is within the context of warm, loving relationships that children learn to trust, to feel safe to explore their world and to develop a sense of self-esteem and identity. The relationship between parent and child builds an important template for all future relationships in the child's life.

As with children, adults learn best within the safety of respectful, reciprocal relationships with others. These relationships, in turn, provide us with the opportunity to reflect upon our own beliefs, explore new ideas and practice new skills.

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



The Importance of Narrative

Self-narrative is the ability for parents to tell their own story, helping them to make meaning of their lives. How sense is made of childhood experiences has a profound effect on their parenting experience. When parents have a deeper understanding of themselves and their motivations, we can build a more nurturing and enjoyable parent-child relationship. Without this self-understanding negative patterns of interactions may be passed on through the generations.

Learning unfolds within a cultural context

We each come to the learning environment connected to their family and culture of origin. An understanding of the influence of culture and respect for cultural diversity are essential to effective group facilitation.

The Program

Program Objectives

The main objectives of this program are to increase understanding of the importance of the first 1000 days and how reflective capacity in parents can promote positive, nurturing and respectful relationships.

Group Facilitation

The group will be facilitated by professionals who have completed a one day training program in facilitation of the program. Where possible the sessions would have two facilitators. There are many benefits for parents when there are two facilitators including having one facilitator tracking opportunities for all participants to be involved in the session. The second facilitator has the capacity to give time to an individual participant or be alert to side conversation threads while the other facilitator stays with the main conversation.

Facilitators need to be:

- **Reflective**

Relationship and reflective practice are the heart of the program.

It is expected that facilitators of the program will model this practice in every interaction and create relationships with parents in the group that are built on trust, support and growth. The quality of these relationships will profoundly affect the quality of the program. The relationship between the facilitator and the participant begins with the engagement process, from the moment of first contact, through supporting participants to attend the program and then continues with each interaction with every participant throughout the program.

Reflective group facilitation is characterised by self-awareness, careful and continuous observation and respectful, flexible responses. Thus, the most important preparation for facilitation of the group is on-going self-reflection on the part of facilitator/s themselves.

To this end, an opportunity for facilitator reflection is provided at the end of the manual.

The most important consideration in a reflective group is to ensure that parents feel safe enough to share their thoughts and feelings and know confidentiality will be respected.

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



- **Mindful**

Whether we're speaking, texting, emailing, or just plain thinking, most of us communicate all day long. Learning ways to bring more mindfulness to our communication gives us more time to practice, provides a powerful way to learn about our minds, and can improve the quality of our personal and professional relationships.

One of the best ways to begin is to experiment by taking a short pause before speaking (or texting or emailing). In the space of that pause, take a breath and be aware of your body. Consider what you are about to say and where it's coming from. In this space of awareness, what other options arise for how to respond?

This program is intentionally designed in a way that enhances reflective, mindful parenting practice rather than focussed on skills or strategies. It is the practice that enables the facilitator or the parent to act mindfully. It is practice that builds a capacity that lets participants respond rather than react. We have learned that reading and memorising the material provided in the program does not make a real difference by itself, for neither facilitators nor participants. Just like swimming - reading a handbook on swimming does not prevent you from drowning! It is a requirement for a reflective and transformative program that facilitators practice the concepts introduced in the program in their own lives.

The Importance of Group Safety Guidelines

It is important to lead a group discussion in the first session regarding the establishment of group guidelines or rules.

Participants are involved in developing a set of guidelines that will suit the group for the duration of the group. These can be written up on butchers' paper and displayed every week or typed up and a copy given to each participant. Sometimes you may need to remind participants of these agreements in subsequent sessions.

Considerations might include:

- Confidentiality
- Starting and finishing time – expectations about punctuality
- Mobile phones – on/off/silent
- Being respectful of other people thoughts and opinions that may be different to your own
- Giving everyone an opportunity to participate
- All parents have a choice as to whether to participate in any activity
- Reminder to have fun

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



Program Chapters

The program is structured into five 'chapters' or sessions with each chapter focussing on a particular theme.

All chapters can be flexibly rearranged or blocked together in a way that works for you and your group.

Chapter 1 – Growth and Brain Development in the first 1000 days

Chapter 2 – A 1000 days of baby talk

Chapter 3 – Nurturing relationships 1000 days and beyond

Chapter 4 – 1000 recipes for the family soup

Chapter 5 – A 1000 year journey

Structure of each chapter

Each chapter has been divided into four parts:

The Preparation section includes:

- An outline of the chapter
- Key messages related to the theme of the chapter
- Pre-session reflective activity for facilitators
- Preparation and setup including required resources,
- A step-by-step guide to facilitation of the chapter

The rest of the chapter has been divided into three parts:

Part 1 Welcome and Feedback from the previous session

Part 2 Information and activities related the theme of the chapter under pre and post headings

Part 3 Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Throughout the program participants will be given opportunities to explore the content through a mix of:

- Experiential activities
- Small and whole-group discussions
- Self-reflection through:
 - o Mindfulness exercises
 - o Visualisations
 - o Self care activities
- Case studies
- Role plays



Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



Each chapter includes a range of activities to choose from to both:

- give the facilitator choice and variety; and,
- address the varying needs of parents.

Activities can be adapted and changed and can be facilitated separately or joined together into a bigger activity.

Acknowledgement of Country

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' is a way that all people can show awareness and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage and the ongoing relationship the traditional owners have with their land.

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can perform an 'Acknowledgement of Country'. It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the traditional custodians of the land (or sea) where the event, meeting, function or conference takes place. It can be formal or informal.

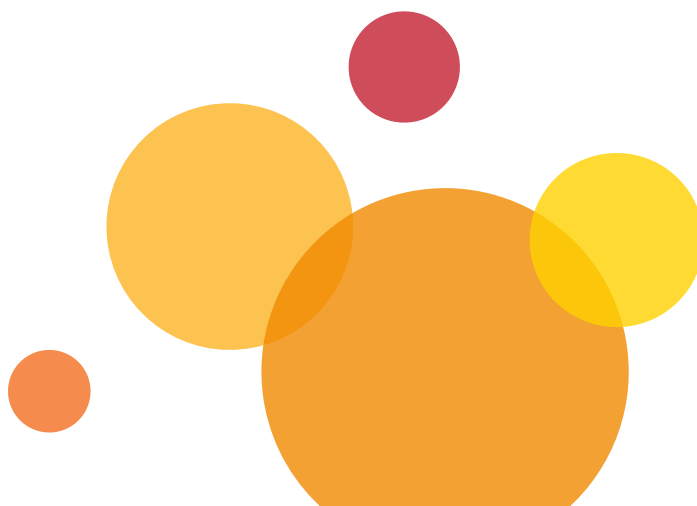
An acknowledgement of Country should be delivered at the commencement of each session.

In performing the Acknowledgement of Country, facilitators can use the following wording. If a facilitator is certain about the name of Traditional Owners of an area, the facilitator should say:

“Our training today is being held on the traditional lands [or country] of the [Traditional Owner group’s name] people and I wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Owners. I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today.”

Facilitators should make every effort to determine the Traditional Owners of the Country where they are delivering training. However, if they are uncertain about whom the Traditional Owners of an area, they should say:

“I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land [or country] on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today.”





Use of Icons in the manual

Icons are used throughout the manual to assist facilitators to deliver the program content.

The following icons have been used to aid navigation:

Facilitator Conversation



This icon indicates those parts of the session where the facilitator delivers content or information to the group as either context setting for the next part of the session or specific content learning for participants.

Activity



This icon indicates the work of the content and provides a variety of ways that the participants can explore the content such as: small group work, large group work, scenarios, roleplays, craft work and discussions

Father/male carer (MP)



This icon indicates those activities that specifically identify the male role in supporting the mother and parenting the baby and young child.

Repeated Activities



This icon indicates an activity that is repeated in each chapter.

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



Repeat Activities

This program uses a range of reflective and mindfulness exercises throughout each chapter.

It is important to appreciate that for some parents, mindful or reflective exercises may feel challenging or uncomfortable. It is therefore important to introduce the concepts of mindfulness and reflection, its purpose and application to parenting, before suggesting to parents that they participate in reflective activities. For similar reasons, it is recommended that the facilitator/s be available to debrief participants, where required and provide referral information to local support services if necessary.

Stop... Pause... Play

Stop..Pause..Play is a reflective tool that is practiced in each chapter to reinforce the importance of mindfulness. Parents are encouraged to include this in their daily life. Opportunities for parents to share their experience of using/thinking about using this practice are provided each session.

The role of the 'Deep Listening' Activity

The 'Deep Listening' exercise is a mindful listening practice that is repeated each week.

Current research tells us that when parents relate to their children with deep listening they activate a part of their brains (the medial prefrontal cortex) which allows their defensive system to slow down, putting them in a more relaxed state and allowing them to think and act more rationally and be more present to their children's needs.

How to facilitate the 'Deep Listening' activity.

The philosophy behind the Deep Listening activity came from: **"To listen in reciprocal relationships with no judgment, just to try to understand"** (Judy Atkinson).

Parents are invited to break into pairs and one parent is given the opportunity to talk about what's on their mind (in relation to their parenting). Then the activity is reversed so that both parents have the experience of talking and listening.

Adaptions to the 'Deep Listening' activity:

- Generally, 2 minutes is recommended for one participant to talk and the other to listen however this may be decreased down to 30 secs depending on the group and the participants capacity to manage to talk or listen for two minutes.
- Participants may need containment and support in understanding appropriate parenting topics to share throughout the manual there are prompts that facilitators may use to encourage the participants *to be able to talk about appropriate parenting issues*.

Initially participants can find this deep listening exercise very challenging, but after a couple of weeks, participants report that it is one of the most important elements of each session. We challenge parents to 'listen as if they were going to win an Academy Award for listening'.

In the first chapter time is spent exploring what it feels like when someone really listens to us? What are they "doing"? We conclude that listening is very much a "doing" word – it's not just the time where we wait for our turn to talk – it requires us to tune into what the other person is saying and create a listening space where they feel heard without judgement or 'fixing'/offering solutions.

Participants are reminded that the Chinese symbol for listening is made up of 5 different parts. We listen with three of these parts - ears, eyes and heart.

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver the Bringing Up Great Kids in First 1000 Days program



By bringing awareness to the way that we listen, we are able to stay open to what the other person is saying and recognise our own judgments and thoughts as they arise. Our intention in the deep listening activity is to pay careful attention to what the other person is saying without interruption, and without a need to always be right or make a point. Sometimes easier said than done!

This activity has proven effective in “holding” the parents’ concerns whilst opening up the reflective space in each session and will continue to be used in BUGK in the First 1000 days.

Check In

The check in is repeated each week – it is a way of supporting each participant to make sure they are OK.

Babe-ometer

This activity allows participants to bring their focused attention to their impending role as new parents and to wonder about the meaning of that experience for themselves. It is an opportunity to explore their feelings about becoming parents. Participants complete the activity up to where they are in their pregnancy. If you have couples in the group they could do this together and discuss their feelings about each statement.

This activity is revisited and referred to during each session as a way of participants focusing on their growing babies and on recording their own feelings/experiences and what they have learnt in the group as the pregnancy progresses.

Growing Like a Mushroom

The first and best opportunity to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first thousand days. Hence this activity is also repeated each session. The purpose is to support participants in their thinking about the size and what is going on for their growing baby in utero.

This activity helps to represent the growth of their baby at different stages throughout the pregnancy. The **HANDOUT - Growing like a mushroom** is divided into first, second and third trimester pages so that participants can find the one that most closely matches the developmental stage of their own baby.

Pause on the Positives

Participants’ positive feelings about themselves and connection to others amplify change in the direction of health and well-being. Warm, responsive and supportive parenting has been shown to promote the development of children’s emotion regulation and social skills.

Each chapter provides this opportunity to reflect on the positives in parenting journey during the last week through a series of prompts.

Using Children’s Storybooks

The reading and telling of stories and creating meaning through stories are integral to the program. The reading of children’s stories to parents re-engages parents with their childhood experiences of story time, the ‘messages’ inherent in the stories and the telling of them. Participants can then consider whether they want to pass these ‘messages’ on to their own children through the reading and telling of stories.

A facilitator may choose to open the chapter with a story, use it as one of the activities in the session, or close the session with a story. A selection of books has been suggested at the back of the manual.



Evaluation

Facilitators are encouraged to complete an evaluation of the utility and effectiveness of the program every time it is run.

The evaluation approach recommended includes three separate elements. Templates for each of the following forms can be found in the appendices.

Element 1. Facilitator Notes Form

At the end of each session, facilitators complete the Notes Form. It is a simple way for facilitators to keep a track of what has worked well and not worked well in achieving the learning outcomes and why.

Element 2. Participant Evaluation Tool

At the end of the program, facilitators hand out the Participant Evaluation Tool and ask participants to complete it. Facilitators should compile the results into one report and reflect with a colleague or supervisor about the outcomes of the program and how it can be improved when it is run again. Two formats are provided, facilitators can choose the one that best suits their participants

Element 3. Parent Confidence Tool

The Parent Confidence Tool has been adapted from the Parent empowerment and efficacy measure (PEEM). Participants complete it before the program starts and when it is finished. The responses at two points in time will show whether the program was effective in improving the capacity of parents to feel confident about their parenting.





Chapter 1

GROWTH AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIRST 1000 DAYS



Chapter outline

This first chapter introduces BUGK in the First 1000 Days and provides opportunities for group participants to get to know each other and the group facilitators.

The First 1000 Days have been defined as the period starting at conception and ending at a child's second birthday. A positive start in this period has significant consequences across the lifespan of the child.

Participants are given an overview of the program.

The notion of the importance of self-care for participants is introduced.

In the pre-birth part this chapter begins the process of offering opportunities for parents to focus their attention on their growing baby and on their feelings towards the baby and their pregnancy. Information is shared with parents about their babies' in utero brain and growth development.

In the post-birth part this chapter includes an exploration of normative brain development in children from birth to two years of age.

Participants are encouraged to reflect on the content of this chapter in relation to their own experience through a variety of activities and handouts.

Key Messages

- Pregnancy and parenting practices are culturally determined.
- The pregnancy and parenting journey is an individual experience for everyone involved. "We all need support to navigate our own parenting journey and to stay steady when things get rough."
- Children's brain development is like building a house – it's built from the ground up. A sturdy foundation establishes a strong base for the skills and capacities that come later. The earliest stages of life – before birth to age three – are intense periods of construction.
- Parents' relationships with their children are critical to children's brain development.
- Development is a dynamic process in which babies and children take an active role in their development, constantly informed by the experiences that they have and the places they have them.
- It is important for parents to be calm when responding to babies and young children.
- Self-care for parents is vital.



Pre-session Facilitator Reflection

Reflect on your role as facilitator in supporting and guiding the group. How will you provide:

- a safe, warm, respectful atmosphere to explore ideas, experiences and differences in an enjoyable way?
- support and care for the parents in the group, as well as suggestions on how to care for themselves outside the group?
- inclusive and interactive experiences whilst acknowledging and accepting that for adult learners, participation in activities is optional?
- debriefing or referral as required?
- open, non-judgmental listening to participants in your group?

For this session:

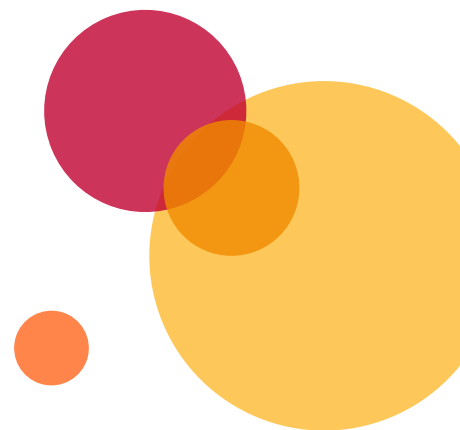
- What stories and messages have you received about pregnancy and parenting, from your own cultural background and family of origin?
- How might those messages and stories influence your perceptions of the parents and families you work with?
- How might you/your own parents have parented differently if they had known more about early brain development?

Preparation and set-up

- Prepare refreshments
- Warm or cool the room as appropriate
- Set out chairs in a half-circle configuration
- Have music playing for parents' arrival (optional)
- Become familiar with the Stop..Pause..Play routine
- Prepare your Acknowledgement of Country

You will need:

- Whiteboard and whiteboard markers
- Name tags
- Relaxing music to play
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pens and textas, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, scissors, etc.
- Flip chart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas



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- Storybook to read to parents
- Laptop, data projector and screen
- ‘Babies’ documentary - The video can be rented or purchased from the following link. https://www.microsoft.com/en-au/p/babies/8d6kgwzl5rsx?cid=msft_web_search&activetab=pivot%3aoverviewtab
- A selection of fruits/vegetables to represent the weights of a growing foetus as per the Growing like a Mushroom handout (optional)
- Tape measures or rulers
- Wool/cord/ribbon
- Ball of thick, strong wool or string
- 3 brain models made from rice-filled plastic bags/stockings:
 - o one weighing 400g (newborn)
 - o another weighing 1100g (3 year old)
 - o and a third weighing 1400g (Adult) (optional)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qU97IXT8MIs> (father reading to baby)
- Serve and Return video developed by Harvard Centre on the Developing Child available at <https://youtu.be/KNrnZag17Ek> You can also download the accompanying handout if required from https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/HCDC_ServeReturn_for_Parents_Caregivers_2019.pdf.

For each participant you will need:

- Folders for parents to store handouts
- A *Stop..Pause..Play* remote control (these can be purchased at <https://shop.childhood.org.au/pages/professional-resources>)

Handouts:

- Babe-ometer
- Growing like a Mushroom - Trimester One, Two or Three (whichever is relevant to your group)
- Pregnancy First Trimester
- Pregnancy Second Trimester
- Pregnancy Third Trimester
- Baby’s Brain Development
- Brainy Baby
- Parent’s Brain – Incomplete

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- Connecting brains
- Bottom up brain development (handout with or without milestones)
- Left and Right Brain
- 10 Breaths
- The mindful brain
- Stop...Pause...Play
- Have I told you lately that I love you
- Playtime Fun Grows Healthy Brains
- Brain Food Fun for Kids

Part 1: Introduction and warm-up

- Have relaxing music playing in the room as participants arrive (optional).
- Arrange chairs in a configuration that suits the space and encourages positive group interaction e.g. half-moon or circle.
- Offer participants refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute handout folder and name tags.

Facilitator Conversation - Welcome and Introductions



The welcome and introduction process sets the scene for the rest of the program. It is expected that the facilitators have already been in contact with the participants before the group and this respectful, mindful relationship now continues as the group begins.

Welcome participants to the group

- Perform an Acknowledgement of Country.
- Introduce facilitators.
- Outline housekeeping details relevant to the group such as WHS issues: emergency evacuation procedure and first aid, the location of toilets, parking and time and duration of breaks. An evening group may decide against a break and prefer tea/coffee on arrival and then go straight through.
- Remind participants to bring their handout folder each week as there will be new handouts to add and we will revisit previous handouts in later sessions.

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Facilitator Conversation – Connecting



Participants may be hesitant to initiate discussions about themselves and their babies. Watching together the first part of the “Babies” video can be a soft entry into the introduction discussion. This activity is an opportunity for the participants to introduce themselves and their foetus/baby. For many groups the participants will not know each other so introductions are a vital part of the process and should not be rushed.

It may be prudent for facilitators to take some time here to introduce themselves to get the group started and also comfortable enough to talk about themselves. The start of building a trusting and respectful relationship is important here for the participants to feel safe in the space and even safe enough to provide information about themselves.

Activity 1



Select one of the following activities that best matched the needs of the group.

Option 1: Babies video

Show the first part of ‘Babies’ video and then invite participants to introduce themselves to the group by sharing their names and introducing their baby. Facilitators can make a list and reflect back commonalities such as the same number of weeks pregnant, the number of boys or girls, the age of most of the children in the group or any other commonality that are shared.

In the pre-birth group this may include their baby’s age in weeks, what they have seen of their baby on a scan, any pet names they have been calling their baby, anything that they have learnt about their baby up to this point, or any hopes and dreams they might have for their baby.

In the post-birth group this may include the names and ages of their babies/children, anything they have learnt about their baby/child up to this point, or any hopes and dreams they might have for their baby/child.

Option 2: Name Games

The aim of this activity is to familiarise parents with each other’s names.

Ask participants to sit or stand in a circle with the facilitator/s. The facilitator holds a soft ball or toy.

Ask each person to say his or her name. As each name is spoken invite the group to think of a positive adjective beginning with the same letter or sound as the first letter of their name to describe him/herself (e.g. ‘Lovely Lynne’). Encourage playfulness with this. Others in the group might like to help with suggestions. All adjectives are to be positive, complimentary, flattering and fun, and the chosen adjective will only be used with the consent of the owner of the name.

The activity can end here or be extended via either of the following two options.

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Option 3: Ball Toss 1

Explain to participants that each person will now have an opportunity to call out another participant's name and to throw the ball/soft toy to that person. The participant who catches the ball then tells the group something that he/she enjoys doing to relax. The activity continues until every participant who wishes to participate has had a turn. The group can help with recall of names when needed.

Option 4: Ball Toss 2

Explain to participants that each person will now have an opportunity to call out another participant's name and to throw the ball to that person. The participant who catches the ball then shares where their name has come from, how they were named or anything about their name that they want to share. The activity continues until every participant who wishes to participate, has had a turn. The group can help with recall of names when needed.

OR (for a post birth group):

Invite participants to think about how they would complete the sentence 'When I was little I loved...' Continue the question with "What does your baby/child love"?

Invite participants to chat in the group, about how they would complete the sentence and whether there are similarities or differences between what they loved as a child and what their children love.

An alternate way to present this activity is:

Invite participants to write a word (or a few words) that complete the sentence, on their name tag (or give them a blank sticky label for this activity) and then to go and meet a few others in the group to share what each has written.

Facilitator Conversation - Program Overview



Explain to participants that the program is designed to provide some relaxed space in their busy lives, for them to focus on themselves and their growing babies/children. The program provides a positive start for all involved as we know that focussing on improving the environments and experiences in the earliest stages of development sets up positive health and wellbeing for current and future generations. Activities in the program are intended to be an enjoyable way for parents to connect with their baby/child's first thousand days.

This program is divided into five chapters which will be explored through the group sessions:

- Chapter 1:** Growth and brain development in the first 1000 days
- Chapter 2:** A 1000 days of baby talk
- Chapter 3:** Nurturing relationships 1000 days and beyond
- Chapter 4:** 1000 recipes for the family soup
- Chapter 5:** A 1000 year journey

This session will look at the brain development and the growing baby in the first 1000 days.

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Facilitator Conversation - Developing Group Guidelines



Participants are invited to contribute to the development of a set of agreed group guidelines that will be in place for the duration of the program. Use the following activity to develop the group guidelines.

Activity 2



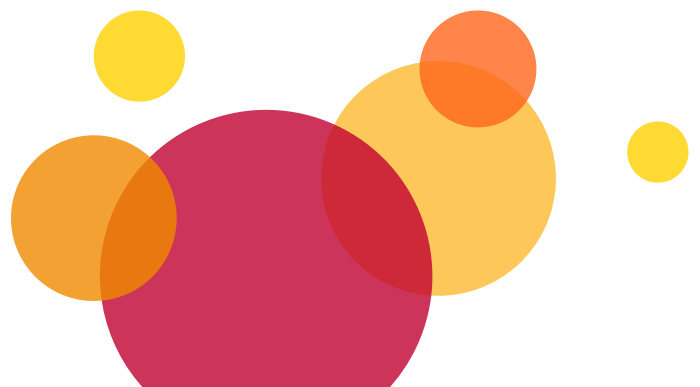
Ask participants to think about and identify what they need to feel safe and comfortable whenever they meet as a group. Considerations might include:

- confidentiality - it is always necessary to discuss the idea of confidentiality within the group. E.g. what is said in the group, stays in the group;
- starting and finishing time – expectations about punctuality;
- mobile phones – on /off/silent;
- being respectful of other people's thoughts and opinions that may be different from your own;
- giving everyone an opportunity to participate; and,
- a reminder to have fun.

These can be written up on a flipchart and displayed each week or typed up and a copy given to each participant.

Participants may need reminding of these agreements in subsequent sessions.

This is a good time to ensure that participants are aware that all activities offered in this program are optional. Participants always have the option to 'pass' whenever they are invited to participate in activities or discussions during the sessions.





Part 2 – Brain Development and Growth

Please Note: This chapter has been divided into pre and post birth activities so that you can tailor the session depending on the composition of your group. There are also activities that may be suitable for either pre or post birth so please feel free to choose the activities that suit your group.

Pre-birth

Facilitator Conversation - How are you feeling?



Starting from conception, the baby is actively responding to changes in the environment, using cues provided by the mother's physical and mental state to 'predict' the kind of world they will be born into and altering their bodily structures accordingly.

This activity allows participants to bring their focused attention to their impending role as new parents and to wonder about the meaning of that experience for themselves. It is an opportunity to explore their feelings about becoming parents.

This activity will be revisited and referred to during each session as a way of participants focusing on their growing babies and on recording their own feelings/experiences and what they have learnt in the group as the pregnancy progresses.

Activity 3



Becoming a Parent - Congratulate parents and wish them well on their upcoming adventure as parents.

Refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and ask participants to complete the activity up to where they are in their pregnancy. If you have couples in the group they could do this together and discuss their feelings about each statement.

Ask participants if they would like to share anything from this activity with the group.

Facilitator Conversation - Babe-ometer for fathers/male carers



If you have a lot of fathers/male carers in the group you may wish to use this version of the activity, designed specifically for them. The activity encourages fathers to focus their attention on their developing baby and on how they've been feeling about becoming a father.

Re-assure fathers that it is normal for their feelings to change over the duration of the pregnancy-or even to have daily changes of heart. It is also normal to have ambivalent feelings about having a baby.



Activity 4



Invite discussion about the feelings that prospective fathers might have towards their child. Ask how they felt about their baby:

- when they first discovered they were going to be a father
- when they first felt or saw their baby moving
- when they first saw their baby on an ultrasound scan
- when they found out the gender of their baby

Ask what sort of things might influence their changing feelings (e.g. unplanned pregnancy, age and life circumstances, anxiety around financial responsibilities, the length of time it has taken to fall pregnant, health concerns, other things).

Encourage reflection on the fact that it is possible that their partner's feelings might differ from their own, and the possible reasons for that difference.

Now refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and invite fathers to record some of their feelings discussed above.

Facilitator Conversation - Growing like a Mushroom



The early stages of development offer the best opportunity for optimal development.

It is important to note that if this window is missed, it does not mean that all opportunities for positive development are lost. Throughout the program there will be activities that allow participants to follow their baby's progress in both growth and brain development.

We know that in the early stages particularly, this is one thing most parents are most interested in. We can use this interest as a link to the other things we would like to draw participants' attention to, like communicating with their baby and building a relationship with their baby.

This activity helps to represent the growth of their baby at different stages throughout the pregnancy. You may wish to have a selection of the fruits and vegetables as per the **HANDOUT - Growing like a mushroom**. The information on First, Second or Third Trimester in this handout could be useful here so that participants can find the size that most closely matches the growth of their own baby. You could invite participants to bring along to the next session, a fruit or vegetable of appropriate weight, to represent the developmental stage of their growing baby at the next session.

The first and best opportunity to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first thousand days. Hence this activity is also repeated each session. The purpose is to support participants in their thinking about the size and what is going on for their growing baby.



Activity 5 – Your growing baby in utero



This activity will be repeated each session as a way of supporting parts to focus on their growing babies and the significance of the first thousand days. The first thousand days makes a big difference to the way that children will, in later life, deal with stress, learn, and relate to others. It is the basic foundation of everything that follows for the child and the adult they will grow to be.

Ask participants to reflect on what they know about the current size of their growing baby. Divide participants into groups of 3 and refer to the **HANDOUT - Growing like a Mushroom** and First, Second or Third Trimester pages as is relevant to your group. Using the handout, participants can check the current weight and length of their baby. Allow time for participants to compare and think about where their baby started and where their baby is at now.

Optional - Invite participants to select a fruit or vegetable that represents the weight of their baby at this stage of development.

Invite participants to use the tape measures or rulers to measure out the current length of their baby according to their **Growing like a Mushroom handout**. Participants may wish to cut a length of wool/cord/ribbon, the same length as their baby at this point, and tie it around their wrist as a reminder of their growing baby.

Bring the participants back to the big group and ask what the participants have learnt from this activity about the importance of the first thousand days and self-care.

Facilitator Conversation - Baby's brain development in utero



In utero is a critical time during which the effect of experience on brain development is remarkably profound and can strongly shape the neural circuits. The baby's brain grows at an outstanding rate from conception. As well as having a focus on the size of the growing baby, it is just as exciting to understand what is going on in a baby/child's brain.

Activity 6



Working in groups of 2 or 3 distribute **HANDOUT – Baby's brain development in utero** and ask participants to look at and discuss this. After a few minutes ask participants to turn over the handout to look at the parts of your baby's brain activity and ask participants to guess which part goes with which number on the handout.

Bring the participants back to the big group and discuss which part goes with which number in the activity. Distribute **HANDOUT – Brainy Baby** for participants to take home.

Chapter 1: Growth and brain development in the first 1000 days



Facilitator Conversation - Parent Brain



An understanding of how the developing brains grows will help participants' knowledge.

This activity allows participants to start to reflect about what is going on in their own brains during the pregnancy and what might happen to their brains when they become parents.

Activity 7



Using the **HANDOUT - Parent's Brain - Incomplete** give participants the opportunity to fill it out by suggesting what might be happening in their own brains during their pregnancy.

Examples might include: memory loss, lack of concentration, obsession with strange food.

Participants can share their ideas with each other in groups of 2 or 3 or you can do the activity in the large group.

Facilitator Conversation - In Utero Growth and Development



This activity gives participants the opportunity to learn more about in utero growth and how their baby has been developing over the last few months.

Activity 8



In groups of 3 or 4 ask participants to find out some information using the **HANDOUTS – Pregnancy week by week Trimester 1, 2 and 3.**

Each group will need to find the following information:

- **Group 1** - Find out all you can about the baby's developing circulatory system and heart.
- **Group 2** - Find out all you can about the baby's developing senses; hearing, touch, sight, smell and taste.
- **Group 3** - Find out all you can about the baby's developing movement; when does movement begin and what movements can your baby make throughout the growth periods?

Allow sufficient time for the participants to complete this activity before bringing the large group back together and asking each group what the most significant or most interesting thing they discovered was.

Optional: Depending on your group you could offer the following as an extension to the activity: Distribute large piece of paper per group and ask them to write or draw (or both) whatever they find relevant that they want to share with the group.



Post-birth

Facilitator Conversation - The Parent's Brain and the Child's Brain



Children's brain development is like building a house – it's built from the ground up. A sturdy foundation establishes a strong base for the skills and capacities that come later. The earliest stages of life to age three are intense periods of construction. In this part of the chapter we will focus on brain development post birth in babies and young children. Knowing more about a child's developing brain is a good way for parents to understand how babies and children think, feel and behave. This can help parents respond in a responsive and mindful way to their children.

We will look at brain development from various aspects including:

- Our own perceptions of the brain
- Brain physicality
- Neurobiology
- The hemispheres of the brain

Babies and young children have limited ability to think and be reasoned with – they can't link their feelings, thoughts and behaviour together. The sections of the brain responsible for these areas are not 'switched on' in early childhood.

Understanding how children's brains develop gives us insight into the questions parents often ask:

- Why do they do that?
- Why don't they listen?
- Why do I have to say the same thing over and over?

As well as understanding about children's brains, parents can begin to understand what is happening in their own brain and why they respond to children's behaviour in the way they do.

When a parent is tired, stressed or anxious the emotional centre of their brain can get in the way of thinking rationally. With this understanding, parents can make choices about changing their response to their child's behaviour. To respond respectfully and mindfully to their child, parents can learn to calm themselves down so they can reason and think clearly when responding to their children's behaviour.



Chapter 1: Growth and brain development in the first 1000 days



Activity 9 The parent brain



This activity is a fun activity focusing on the adult brain and reflecting on pre parenting brain compared with what our brain has turned into!

Distribute **HANDOUT - Parent brain - incomplete** – ask parents in small groups to think about what their brain was full of before they had their baby and fill this in on the incomplete brain.

Have parents reflect on what has changed - there may be some comments on when life was simpler/different.

Ask parents to now fill in another incomplete brain with what is going on in their brain now they have their baby – encourage light-hearted discussion.

The key message of the activity is that the adult brain changes with parenthood.

Facilitator Conversation – Building children’s brains



Brain and body development is shaped by genetics and in response to experiences and environments. Genes interact with experiences to shape development, setting the path for future growth and development.

The brain is a message centre. It receives sensory signals about our experiences. It interprets the intensity and content of the signals as the meaning of the message. It stores these messages and their relevance, as memories that can be retrieved and used later. It helps us know that a dog is a dog, that lemons are sour, that chocolate is sweet.

Messages are important because they shape our perception of our experience in the future. They influence the way we see relationships and each other. They organise our behaviour and impact on our emotional responses to events. Messages establish patterns of neuronal connections that fire whenever they are repeated and triggered again. The reactions we have to the messages from our past, continue in the present. Sometimes we are not even aware of how those messages affect us.

Activity 10



The aim of this activity is to illustrate the rapid growth of the brain in the first 2 years of life post birth and the vital importance of nurturing, safe and predictable relationships to grow children’s brains.

Pass the newborn brain model around the group so that each participant can feel the weight of the ‘brain’. Ask participants to guess what age child this brain belongs to and what they think the weight is. Once everyone has felt and guessed, tell them it is the newborn brain and what the weight is.

Then do the same for the 3 year old brain model and then the adult. Allow participants to compare the difference sizes and weights of the brains.

Newborn brain = 400 grams

3 year old brain =1100 grams

Adult brain = 1300 grams

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Facilitator Conversation - Parents Help to Build their Child's Brain



Young brains are very sensitive to experience. Early experiences and the environments in which babies and young children live, have a strong influence on the development of their brains. This plays a critical role in helping to shape the structure of children's brains.

Supportive, caring and consistent relationships between babies, young children and their parents are the key to healthy brain development. The human brain can only develop in relationship with other human brains: it is a social organ. Interactions between parents and their young child, literally grow and scaffold their brain. Healthy brains grow when children are interacting with people who love them.

Activity 11



Ask participants to brainstorm what they think babies and young children need for their bodies and brains to develop. These could be written up on a whiteboard. Possible responses might include: stimulation, experiences, nurturing and healthy food.

Sometimes the metaphor of two buckets is helpful.

In one bucket put all things baby needs to meet physical needs

- Providing food, drink, bath, changing, safe place to sleep, etc.

In other bucket put all things baby needs to meet emotional needs.

- Comfort, holding, hugging, talking, singing, smiling, reading, touch, massage

Use the **HANDOUT - Connecting Brains** to illustrate this point.

Facilitator Conversation - Building Your Baby/Child's Brain



This activity provides the opportunity to understand the importance of nurturing connections between babies, young children and the adults around them.

This activity is also a great opportunity to talk with participants about the importance of repetition. Babies and young children need interactions repeated many, many times to strengthen the connections between the neurons in their brains. Sometimes the repetition desired by infants and young children can be annoying to their parents such as when the baby continues to throw the spoon onto the floor from the highchair, the baby throws the toy out of the cot and preschool children want the same book read to them over and over again. Parents can be reminded that this behaviour is not 'naughty' behaviour but children 'growing their brains' and parents have an important role in providing opportunities for repetition.

Chapter 1: Growth and brain development in the first 1000 days



Activity 12



This activity is designed to illustrate how human connection grows neuronal connections.

Ask participants to stand in a circle. Each person is representing a neuron. The facilitator holds a ball of wool and lets out a length of yarn while still holding on to the ball.

Explain that you are going to keep hold of the end of the yarn and throw the ball to another person in the circle while you call out an experience you could have with a child which would grow a healthy connection in their brain. Responses can come from the previous activity.

Continue in this way until each participant has had at least one turn and you have formed a neuronal network. Suggest that the repetition of these experiences will grow and strengthen positive healthy connections in the brain.

Alternatively, when outlining the activity to parents, explain that when each new person catches the wool, it is the job of the whole group to come up with a suggested parent/child interaction to grow healthy neuronal connections.

Explain that with hundreds of repetitions of similar experiences, babies and young children develop strong templates or 'blueprints' in their brains (i.e. the different areas of the brain are strongly connected/integrated). For example, through repeated positive experiences of relationships, templates about the child, relationships and the world are formed. These templates give them important messages that say 'I am a good person', 'I am loved', 'Relationships are fun and necessary', 'The world is a good and safe place'.

Whilst saying this, encourage participants to pull on the wool network to form a strong 'template' for positive, healthy relationships.

Facilitator Conversation - Hand Model of Brain



The following activity can be used here and/or in any other session throughout the program, or it may be useful in the last session as a way of explaining what part of the brain is firing when parent gets angry.

Activity 13



Demonstrate the hand model of the brain, encouraging parents to use their own hand to follow the instructions:

HAND MODEL OF THE BRAIN

- If you put your thumb in the middle of your palm and then curl your fingers over the top, you'll have a pretty handy model of the brain.
- The face of the person is in front of the knuckles, the back of the head toward the back of your hand.
- Your wrist represents the spinal cord upon which the brain sits.

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- If you lift up your fingers and raise your thumb, you will see the inner brainstem represented in your palm.
- Place your thumb back down and you will see the approximate location of the limbic area (ideally we'd have two thumbs, left and right, to make this a symmetric model).
- Now curl your fingers back over the top and your cortex is in place.

Discuss the usefulness of the activity as a reminder to replace the cortex to return to rational, logical self when limbic system is activated.

Facilitator Conversation - Bottom Up Brain Development



Bottom up brain development shows the brain developing from the brain stem which is developed before birth, followed by the other sections of the brain. There are two handouts here one with the ages of the child and one without. The description of the parts of the brain is written on the back of the handouts.

NB: The brain of a child affected by relational trauma will experience brain development at a different rate from that of a child in a nurturing environment. Choose the handout that will be most appropriate for the families you are sharing this information with.

Through these handouts parents will develop a new language and understanding about children's behaviour (this will be the only area we really discuss behaviour in this program).

For example, as you explain the work of the cerebellum you can add that when this part of the brain is "firing" the child needs to move. The nurturing parent will recognise this need in their child and provide them with a safe place to move and not be cross or punish them for moving.

The same applies to the limbic system: This is the emotional centre of the brain and for most of their early years children only see the world through this lens. Young children have BIG feelings and limited logical rational brain development, for example when the emotional part of the child's brain is "firing" the nurturing parent will acknowledge the child's feeling as just that... a feeling – NOT a negative behaviour. Historically these BIG feelings have been misinterpreted as bad behaviour such as "temper tantrums". This behaviour would have resulted in a punishment. The new brain research shows us that the limbic system (feelings) develops BEFORE the cortex (thinking and reasoning). Encourage parents to consider "temper tantrums" as BIG feelings and for parents to acknowledge and support (regulate) the child while having a BIG feeling. When the child's cortex has developed, they will be better able to "self-regulate" their "big feelings" if they have been acknowledged and supported by nurturing adults as their cortex developed.

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Activity 14



Using the **HANDOUT – Bottom up brain development (with or without ages)** talk through with participants how each section of the brain fires and what it means for children's behaviour.

The brain is comprised of different structures that grow and develop at different rates and different times. The following is the script used to explain the handout. This can be simplified to suit facilitator and audience.

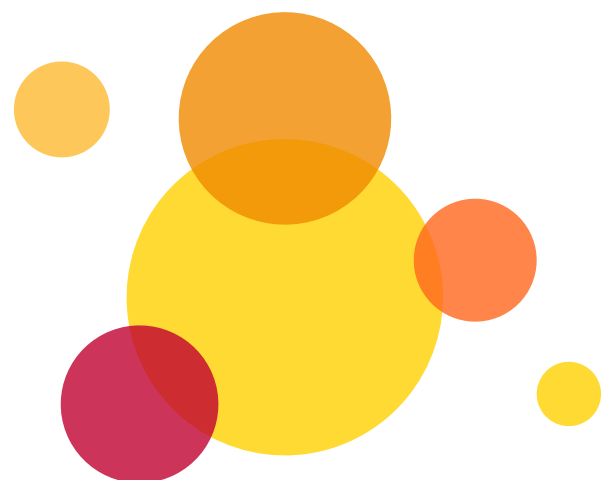
The brain stem area of the brain develops first and is responsible for basic functions that keep us alive such as heart rate, breathing and regulating our body temperature. The brain stem is fully developed at birth. It is the part of the brain that is 'hard wired' and least susceptible to change.

Connected to the brain stem is the cerebellum or motor centre of the brain. This area is responsible for movement and develops over the first 1000 days. Development in this area is seen in babies gaining head control, sitting, crawling and walking. In the next few years, children will gain greater co-ordination, learn to skip, kick a ball, ride a bicycle, cut, draw and eat with cutlery.

The limbic system is the emotional centre of the brain and rules the lives of young children up to around four years. During the toddler years, the limbic system goes through a period of rapid development. This helps explain their bursts of irrational behaviour and tantrums. Toddlers need our help to manage their strong feelings. Young children feel then act, they can't think then act. This is due to the emotional centre of their brain developing before the cortex, or the thinking part of their brain. Young children basically view the world through an emotional lens.

The cortex, or thinking part of the brain, is the last part to develop. This is the part of the brain responsible for reasoning, planning and problem solving. This is the part of the brain that enables humans to think before they act. As children grow and develop, the cortex is gradually able to help us to pause when we are flooded by strong emotions, thus allowing us to feel, think, then act.

Unlike the brain stem, the limbic system and cortex are highly susceptible to change due to experience and the environment in which the child lives.



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Facilitator Conversation - Left/Right Brain Integration Fun



The brain has two hemispheres – left and right. At the same time as bottom-up development is occurring, there is also lateral brain development occurring across the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Each hemisphere is responsible for different aspects of information processing.

The right hemisphere processes the emotional, non-verbal content of experiences while the left processes the more logical, language-based elements.

The development of the left and right hemispheres occurs at different times over the child's development from birth to 10 years.

Distribute **HANDOUT – Left and Right Brain**. Ask participants to think about each of their children: their current age and stage of brain development and ask if an understanding of their brain development might help make sense of their behaviour.

Activity 15



Physical activities which incorporate crossing limbs over the midline of the body, support integration of the left/right brain hemispheres.

Have fun practising with participants, a selection of the following brain integration exercises:

- Action songs and rhymes such as Waddley Archer, Dive Goes One Fish, A Ram Sam Sam...
- Partner clapping games such as Mary Mac or Pat-a-cake
- Dancing – line dancing/Bollywood dancing/circle dances like Zorba the Greek
- Cat's Cradle exercises with wool
- Pat your head while rubbing your tummy
- Draw a clockwise circle in the air while using your foot to draw a number 6 on the floor
- Do a cross-crawling activity. Eg. whilst standing, lift your left knee and touch it with your right elbow. Then repeat, using the opposite knee and elbow.



Part 3 – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation - Introduction to Mindfulness



So far in this chapter we've had a look at what's happening for children as their brains grow and develop.

Next, we will look at the importance of the parents recognising what is happening in their own brains. When parents are stressed, tired, worried or emotionally upset, it is not easy to be attuned to the needs of their children. Under stress, the rational part of our brain, are blocked, so parents are more likely to act without thinking and to do and say things that they will later regret.

It is helpful for parents to have ways of destressing, calming themselves, regulating their emotions so they can be their best selves, stay in charge, and be bigger, stronger, wiser and kinder. Being more mindful is a helpful way of doing this.

Activity 16



Distribute **HANDOUT – The mindful brain.**

Ask participants if they are familiar with the term 'Mindfulness' and/or if they can define the term. Accept all responses.

There are so many definitions of the word mindfulness. Remind participants that we all have our subjective experiences of mindfulness. Ask them about their experiences in life of either being mindful or not being mindful. Listen to, and acknowledge participants' experiences, then suggest that a useful definition of mindfulness might be 'bringing the mind to where the body is'.

Mindfulness can help us to put a metaphorical space between what happens and how we respond to it. In each session participants will engage in an exercise which will help them to practice mindfulness.

This activity gives participants an experience of mindfulness practice and models its use as a calming strategy for themselves. This particular mindfulness exercise encourages participants to focus their attention on their developing baby in line with a key objective of this program.... keeping the baby in mind.

Create a calm space and enable participants to find a comfortable position in which to sit, explaining that they will be in that position for the next 10 minutes or so.

- A. Invite parents to connect with their babies by placing their hands on their bellies... closing their eyes if they feel comfortable to do so and bringing to mind a picture of their babies.

Invite them to focus on their breath as it naturally comes in and goes out ...to be really aware of the in-coming and out-going breath.

Provide a script to help participants focus on their babies:

'Breathing in, I imagine my baby.'

'Breathing out, I smile to my baby.'

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Repeat the script a couple of times, then invite participants to continue the practice in their own timing for about 5 more breaths.

- B.** If participants have infants or young children, distribute a copy of the **HANDOUT - '10 Breaths'** to each participant.

Explain that the 10 breaths mindful activity is something that people can practice any time that they come across something that makes them smile or touches them in a special way...a piece of music, something in nature, a special moment with someone...In this instance, we are going to focus on their growing baby.

Once participants are comfortable, invite them to close their eyes as you slowly read aloud, from the handout, the steps of the 10 breaths practice.

Facilitator Conversation - Stop..Pause..Play



Explain to participants how practising mindfulness (taking some calming breaths and focusing on what's happening in the present moment), on a regular basis, can be a great way to manage challenging feelings and help us calm down. Discuss how practising mindful awareness creates a 'space' between what is happening and how we respond. When we create a 'space' where we can consider our response (even if only for a few seconds) we are much less likely to respond in a way that meets the child's needs.

Please note that if as the facilitator you have not previously been exposed to *Stop..Pause..Play* it is essential that you experience this practice a few times prior to running the session. This helps you to have your own lived experience about this mindful practice to share with participants.

When parents can relate to their babies and young children with mindfulness they activate a part of the brain (the medial pre-frontal cortex) which allows their defensive systems to switch off. This enables parents to relax. Parents can then think and act more rationally and step outside what is happening for them to be more present and responsive to the needs of their children. Practicing mindfulness means being less reactive and gives parents the space to explore other alternative ways to respond to children's behaviour.

It is often easier to understand mindfulness by experiencing it rather than thinking about it.

The activity below is repeated each week.

Activity 17



Distribute the **HANDOUT – Stop..Pause..Play** and a remote controls to each participant.

Introduce and talk participants through the concept of *Stop..Pause..Play* using the handout and remote control. This is a mindful exercise that participants will be practicing every session. It is an exercise that participants can use anytime they need a couple of minutes to take time out to calm down.

Encourage participants to set aside a few minutes each day to practice the exercise, and to also practice it whenever any stressful moments arise during their week.

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Give an example from everyday life, e.g. feeling frustrated at work, or with your partner, etc.

Practice the exercise together as a group using the handout as a guide. Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.

Facilitator Conversation - Introduction to self-care



Self-care is important in helping parents' physical, emotional and mental well-being. Self-care is any activity we do voluntarily which helps us maintain our physical, mental or emotional health. It can help us to feel healthy, relaxed and ready to take on our responsibilities. As parents, when we look after ourselves, we are better able to look after and nurture our children.

Activity 18



Distribute the **HANDOUT - Have I Told You Lately That I Love You?**

Languages of Love: Explain that the table on the handout shows that we each have different preferences in relation to how we like to give and receive affection/care/appreciation. Read aloud each of the 'languages of love' and ask participants to think about their own personal preferences. Participants may wish to write, draw or number their preferences on the handout.

If partners are present, this would be a good opportunity for couples to share with each other, their feelings and wishes about how they prefer to give and receive love. You might like to challenge one partner of each couple to guess how his/her partner would rate each of the languages of love and then to check with their partner to see how accurate they were.

Invite participants to wonder about the future preferences of their baby/child e.g. will he/she be a cuddly child, or maybe someone who prefers I spend lots of special time with him/her?... and to think about what they can do (before and after their baby is born) to give their child the message 'I am loved.'

Facilitator Conversation - The Importance of Play - Serve and Return



Relationships that are responsive and attentive—with lots of back and forth interactions—build a strong foundation in a child's brain for all future learning and development. This is called "serve and return," and it takes two to play! (Harvard Centre on the Developing Child).

In normative development, with hundreds of repetitions of enjoyable interactions with parents, babies come to associate connecting with others with pleasure. The developing child forms a template for healthy relationships, which helps him to believe that he is loved and loveable and that relationships are enjoyable and nurturing.

For parents who have not experienced consistent, nurturing attachments in their own lives may find it difficult to offer these relationships and the normal frustrations and annoyances of parenting may be magnified.

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Play the Serve and Return video developed by Harvard Centre on the Developing Child available at <https://youtu.be/KNrnZag17Ekworking> through the 5 step process outlined. You can also download the accompanying handout and discuss with the group from https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/HCDC_ServeReturn_for_Parents_Caregivers_2019.pdf.

Activity 19



Distribute **HANDOUT - Playtime Fun Grows Healthy Brains**. The purpose of these activities is to reinforce the message that pleasurable interactions and fun in relationships grow healthy brains.

Practice some songs and rhymes with parents. For parents of babies, you might like to demonstrate some of the action rhymes using a doll.

Some examples:

- This little piggy
- Row, row, row your boat

Ask parents if they can add any that they remember from their own childhoods.

Facilitator Conversation - The Importance of Play - Serve and Return



Storytime is included in each chapter of this program as a nurturing activity for participants and as a way of modelling an enjoyable way for parents to connect with their babies. It is a special way that fathers can connect with their babies before and after birth, is for them to read or tell stories to their babies.

Telling or reading a children's story to parents in a group situation can provide a pleasurable interaction between facilitators and parents. The reading of children's stories to parents re-engages parents with their childhood experiences of having stories read or told to them and the 'messages' inherent in them. Parents can then consider whether they want to pass these 'messages' on to their own children through the reading and telling of stories.

Activity 20



Choose a picture book story to read to the group (see Appendix for storybook suggestions).



Activity 21 (Optional)



If you have a lot of fathers in the group invite them to share with the group their own favourite stories from childhood.

Choose one or both options below.

Option 1:

Show a video clip of a father reading a storybook to his baby e.g.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qU97IXT8MIs>

Option 2:

Give each father-to-be, a gift of a book suitable for reading to young babies.

Conclude the session by reading aloud a children's storybook which might appeal to fathers in particular (e.g. *Where the wild dad's went* by Katie Blackburn and Sholto Walker).

Session Wrap Up

Ask participants 'what message/s are you taking away from this session'?

Participants can share these with the group or reflect on them for themselves.

Remind participants as they leave to:

- take care of themselves and their babies/children until the next session
- take time to focus on their baby/child and to practice 'keeping the baby in mind' in whatever they are doing
- bring their handouts with them to the next session
- take time to practice mindfulness during the week

Take Home Activity

Distribute **HANDOUT - Brain Food Fun for Kids**. Encourage participants to play these games with their babies/children.





Chapter 2
1000 DAYS OF
BABY TALK



Chapter outline

Communication with babies and young children throughout pregnancy and through their early years is so important for the development of attuned, responsive relationships.

In the pre-birth section of this second chapter, we will consider the communication capabilities of unborn babies and will reflect on similarities and differences among participants in connecting to the baby. Ongoing communication will be examined and the many different ways this may occur.

In the post-birth part, this chapter will focus on an exploration of elements of communication using a series of activities which involve reflection and role-play. Specifically, the chapter will consider active listening and the power of non-verbal communication. Participants are also encouraged to reflect upon any messages from their past which might be impacting on their current communication with their children.

The latter part of the session will offer experiential opportunities to reinforce the importance of self-care including the deep listening activity as a mindful practice.

Key Messages

- Parent-child communication starts from conception.
- Babies can hear before they are born - your baby will know your voice at birth.
- Babies are able to get the feeling from the environment even before birth.
- Non-verbal messages are very powerful in our communication with babies and young children.
- Messages we received from our childhood can shape how we communicate with our children.
- A calm state is crucial to effective communication.
- Children who don't feel heard, can't hear you.

Pre-session Facilitator Reflection

Reflect on your role as facilitator in supporting and guiding the group. How will you provide:

- a safe, warm, respectful atmosphere to explore ideas, experiences and differences in an enjoyable way?
- support and care for the parents in the group, as well as suggestions on how to care for themselves outside the group?
- inclusive and interactive experiences whilst acknowledging and accepting that for adult learners, participation in activities is optional?
- debriefing or referral as required?
- open, non-judgmental listening to participants in your group



For this session:

- Have you ever wondered about pre-birth sending and receiving of messages between parent and baby?
- Think about the ways that parents and babies can communicate before birth
- How accepting will you be of views expressed by parents which are at odds with your own?
- Did you feel listened to as a child?
- What do you think might have informed your parents' approach to communicating with you?

Preparation and set-up

You will need

- Refreshments
- Whiteboard and whiteboard markers
- Name tags
- Relaxing music to play
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pens and textas, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, scissors, etc.
- Flip chart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Storybook to read to parents
- Laptop, data projector and screen 'Babies' video

Prepare learning materials

- A selection of fruits/vegetables to represent the weights of a growing foetus as per the *Growing like a Mushroom* handout (optional)
- Tape measures or rulers
- Wool/cord/ribbon
- A4 blank paper – several sheets
- Cards for scenarios
- Selection of photos/pictures of babies – especially faces.
- Cultural lullabies to play
- (Iranian/Persian lullaby) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAGHQMMGGQw>
- (Greek lullaby) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWY_wapzhrc

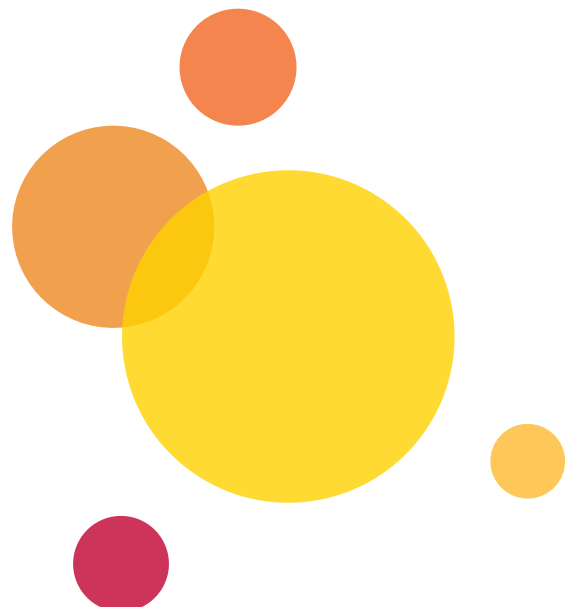


- (African lullaby) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBYFgOv_3nY
- Baby Cues: a child's first language cards <https://shop.acer.edu.au/baby-cues-cards-2nd-edition>
- Small gift
- YouTube clip of parents reading with babies' e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcR15DTDCsM>
- Piece of music which has variations in speed/volume/instruments and which lasts for around 4 or 5 minutes e.g. 'Going Home' by Dire Straits
- Singing bowl or bell
- Booklet: I need you – A-Z (these can be purchased at <https://shop.childhood.org.au/pages/professional-resources>)

For each participant you will need:

Handouts:

- Check In
- Are we missing anything
- Chinese symbol for listening
- UN Rights of the Child
- Pause on positives





Part 1: Introduction and warm-up

- Have relaxing music playing in the room as parents arrive (optional).
- Arrange chairs in a configuration that suits the space and encourages positive group interaction e.g. half-moon or circle.
- Offer participants refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags

Perform an Acknowledgement of Country. Welcome participants back to the group.

Invite participants to share any feedback they might have about the group last week. Invite any questions, concerns or thoughts that participants may have.

In the previous session participants developed understanding about how children’s brains develop before and after birth.

This session will look at communication on different levels. Communicating to unborn babies, babies communicating with their parents and parents communicating with their babies. The group will explore how and why parents communicate with their unborn babies, babies and young children in the way they do and how that might be experienced. We will particularly explore some of the non-verbal messages parents give unborn babies and children through their body language and tone of voice. Even when we use words to express ourselves we continue to use non-verbal signals to communicate.

Activity 1: Reconnecting



Option 1

Show the ‘Babies’ video part 2 and facilitate a discussion among participants.

Option 2

This activity is based on the “Simon Says” activity. Introduce the activity by suggesting that participants listen to what you say and then say:

“Simon says” put your hands on your head – you demonstrate putting hands on head.

Then “Simon says” put your hands on your shoulder – you demonstrate putting hands on your shoulders.

Then “Simon says” put your hands on your knees – you demonstrate putting your hands on your knees.

Then “Simon says” put your hands on your chin – you demonstrate by putting your hand on your cheek.

Look around but say nothing. After a few seconds a few in the group will likely realise their mistake, laugh and move their hand to their chin.

Your point can be verbally reinforced - that actions speak louder than words. This is an opportunity to talk about the fact that young children focus much more on what we DO than on what we SAY in our communication with them.



Option 3 (option for re connecting fathers/male carers)

- Invite fathers to gather at a table where you have set out enough sheets of A4 paper for the men to make a few paper planes each.
- Set the fathers a challenge to make a paper plane which flies the longest distance, explaining that there will be a 'fly off' once everyone has made their best plane.
- Encourage discussion around the table about who taught them how to make a paper plane, their childhood memories of games and toys and what they are looking forward to playing with their own children.
- Conduct a fly-off competition once all planes are constructed. Award a small prize to the winner.

Facilitator Conversation – Check In



This activity is repeated each week as a way of checking in with each participant. Depending on the group this check in could occur individually (especially the question about being worried) or as part of the group conversation. The facilitator may print and distribute the **HANDOUT – Check In** each week and read the extra question of the week to participants to write down and answer on their handout.

Activity 2



Ask the whole group to reflect on the following questions and to share their responses with the group if they wish:

- 'What has your baby/child told you about her/himself since we last met?'
- 'Has your baby/child changed in any way that you can tell?'
- 'Have there been any times when you have felt worried about your baby/child?'
- 'Have there been any times that you have felt really close to your baby/child?'

Extra question for this week:

- Have you been talking to your bump/baby this week?

ICON Facilitator Conversation – Stop..Pause..Play



Refer to the **Stop..Pause..Play** discussion in part 3, Chapter 1.



Activity 3



Distribute the **HANDOUT – Stop..Pause..Play** and remote controls - one per person.

Review the concept of Stop..Pause..Play using the handout and remote. Encourage participants to set aside a few minutes each day to practice the exercise, and to also practice it whenever any stressful moments arise during their week.

Ask the group for examples of how they have used the strategy in the last week.

Practice the exercise together as a group using the handout as a guide. Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.

Part 2: Communication

Please Note: This chapter has been divided into pre and post birth activities but there are activities that may be suitable for either pre or post birth so please feel free to choose the activities that suit your group.

Pre-birth

Facilitator Conversation - How are you feeling?



Starting from conception, the baby is actively responding to changes in the environment, using cues provided by the mother's physical and mental state to 'predict' the kind of world they will be born into and altering their bodily structures accordingly.

This activity allows participants to bring their focused attention to their impending role as new parents and to wonder about the meaning of that experience for themselves. It is an opportunity to explore their feelings about becoming parents.

This activity will be revisited and referred to during each session as a way of participants focusing on their growing babies and on recording their own feelings/experiences and what they have learnt in the group as the pregnancy progresses.

Depending on the composition of your group use Activity 4 or Activity 5.

Activity 4



Refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and ask participants to complete the activity up to where they are in their pregnancy. If you have couples in the group they could do this together and discuss their feelings about each statement.

Ask participants if they would like to share anything from this activity with the group.



Activity 5



Invite discussion about the feelings that prospective fathers/male carers might have towards their child. Ask how they felt about their baby:

- when they first discovered they were going to be a father
- when they first felt or saw their baby moving
- when they first saw their baby on an ultrasound scan
- when they found out the gender of their baby

Ask what sort of things might influence their changing feelings (e.g. unplanned pregnancy, age and life circumstances, anxiety around financial responsibilities, the length of time it has taken to fall pregnant, health concerns, other things).

Encourage reflection on the fact that it is likely that their partner's feelings might differ from their own, and the possible reasons for that difference.

Now refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and invite fathers to record some of their feelings discussed above.

Facilitator Conversation - Growing like a Mushroom



The early stages of development offer the best opportunity for optimal development.

It is important to note that if this window is missed, it does not mean that all opportunities for positive development are lost. Throughout the program we will have activities that allow participants to follow their baby's progress in both growth and brain development.

We know that in the early stages particularly, this is one thing most parents are most interested in. We can use this interest as a link to the other things we would like to draw participants' attention to, like communicating with their baby and building a relationship with their baby.

This activity helps to represent the growth of their baby at different stages throughout the pregnancy. You may wish to have a selection of the fruits and vegetables as per the **HANDOUT - Growing like a Mushroom**. The information on First, Second or Third Trimester in this handout could be useful here so that participants can find the size that most closely matches the growth of their own baby. You could invite participants to bring along to the next session, a fruit or vegetable of appropriate weight, to represent the developmental stage of their growing baby at the next session.

The first and best opportunity to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first thousand days. Hence this activity is also repeated each session. The purpose is to support participants in their thinking about the size and what is going on for their growing baby.



Activity 6 – Your growing baby



This activity will be repeated each session as a way of supporting parts to focus on their growing babies and the significance of the first thousand days. The first thousand days makes a big difference to the way that children will, in later life, deal with stress, learn, and relate to others. It is the basic foundation of everything that follows for the child and the adult they will grow to be.

Ask participants to reflect on what they know about the current size of their growing baby. Divide participants into groups of 3 and refer to the **HANDOUT - Growing like a Mushroom** and First, Second or Third Trimester pages as is relevant to your group. Using the handout, participants can check the current weight and length of their baby. Allow time for participants to compare and think about where their baby started and where their baby is at now.

Optional - Invite participants to select a fruit or vegetable that represents the weight of their baby at this stage of development.

Invite participants to use the tape measures or rulers to measure out the current length of their baby according to their Growing like a Mushroom handout. Participants may wish to cut a length of wool/cord/ribbon, the same length as their baby at this point, and tie it around their wrist as a reminder of their growing baby.

Bring the participants back to the big group and ask what the participants have learnt from this activity about the importance of the first thousand days and self-care.

Facilitator Conversation - Sound of music



The sound of the mother's voice reaches the foetus in utero.

- At 25 weeks gestation a baby may startle at a loud sound.
- At 28 weeks a baby might blink in response to an external clicking sound.
- Newborns prefer the sound of the human voice to any other sound.
- Newborns prefer the sound of their mother's voice, to that of other people.
- If a parent plays/sings the same piece of music often during pregnancy, she might find that baby will find it calming once he's born.

Participants may have heard that babies prefer classical music by one particular composer, but any music which the mother enjoys, will trigger the release of 'feel good' hormones in the mother. Those hormones are then transferred to the foetus and an association is formed between the music and feeling good in both mother and baby.



Activity 7



Ask participants:

- Does your baby react differently to different types of music or sounds?
- What music/sounds do you feel they like?

Ask participants to make a note as these will be the calming sounds and the music they respond to after they are born.

Discuss with the group that talking, singing and listening to babies are some of the best ways to connect with your baby and to make the most of the critical brain-building early years of a child's life.

Facilitator Conversation - Singing to Babies



Nursery rhymes, lullabies or songs have been universal means for parents to pass on cultural messages to the next generations. They contain words of wisdom, stories, language, values and beliefs and cultural context. It is interesting to know that nursery rhymes and lullabies can be relaxing both for the parent and the baby and the context of a quality time in their communication. This activity will try to highlight the significance of nursery rhymes, lullabies or songs for participants and will try to support them to start singing for their babies even before birth.

Activity 8



Invite participants to recall a nursery rhyme, lullaby or song that they remember from childhood. If there are participants who don't remember being sung to, ask them to imagine which songs they would have liked to hear as a baby.

Invite participants to share the names of their 'signature songs' with the group and, depending on your comfort level and that of the group, as each one is mentioned, ask the group to join with you in singing the song to all of the babies in the group.

Alternatively, you may choose to play one of the lullabies suggested in the resource section at the start of this chapter. These lullabies are chosen from three different cultures (i.e. Persian, Greek, African). Ask participants to relax and feel like the lullaby is being sung especially for them to feel safe and nurtured.

Facilitator Conversation – Feelings in utero



Early experience of stress and other adversity can have long lasting effects on children as they grow. We know that children need to feel calm, safe and protected in order to learn otherwise their brain places an emphasis on developing pathways that are associated with survival, before those that are essential to future learning and growth.

Evidence shows strongly that babies in utero are affected by stress and it is important for parents need to feel safe throughout the pregnancy and of course after the baby is born.



Activity 9



The purpose of this activity is to help participants to have a better understanding that even before birth babies might be affected by negative and positive feelings of parents.

This activity requires two volunteers to go out of the room (ideally both facilitators or one facilitator and one participant.)

Before facilitators leave the room, they ask the rest of the participants to remain in the room and to imagine that each of them is an unborn baby listening to its parents speaking in the outside world. The people who leave the room will be the baby's 'parents in the outside world.'

Once outside the room, the two volunteers start to talk to each other using a variety of tones, volumes, pitch, some soft and nurturing conversations and others angry and loud.

Bring the group back together and invite discussion about how this 'felt' for the participants in the room and then imagine what it might be like for the baby in utero.

Facilitator Conversation – Fathers/Male Carers



Often fathers expect too much from themselves when thinking about becoming a father. They might have an idealistic picture of a superhuman father in mind which leaves them feeling overwhelmed and frustrated about their future role.

The next activity is designed to give future fathers the knowledge that all children expect from their fathers is an adult who is present to their needs and feelings. Also a father who is aware of his own needs and feelings. This can bring fathers calmness about the baby they are expecting and confidence in future parenting.

Activity 10



In relation to the question '*What sort of dad do you think your kids would like you to be?*' invite participants to share their thoughts about what children might say if they were asked what was most important to them in a father. Accept all responses, listing them on a whiteboard.

Once participants' responses have been exhausted, tell them about the study in Scotland called 'Cool Dads' which asked children aged 4-17 years about their perceptions of their fathers.

The children and young people in that study all agreed that the sort of dad they wanted would:

- would be a positive role model - a dad who sets an example and who is visibly active at home.
- provide quality time - a dad who does things together with them and who talks and listens to them.
- offer support, stability and guidance - a dad to respect and who respects you.



- love them - a dad who shows concern and affection, generosity and truthfulness.

Invite a conversation about the qualities the Scottish children shared and what the participants identified.

Facilitator Conversation - Hiccups in utero



The baby is “trying out” all the new things she can do. Sleeping, practising breathing, swallowing and sucking thumbs. When baby hiccups in the womb, several developmental milestones are occurring—indications that she’s on track to make her grand entrance into the world in just a few short months. If hiccups are felt at all it is usually in the third trimester.

Activity 11



Ask participants if they have heard/felt their baby with the hiccups and consider what they might be communicating.

Once participants have discussed what hiccups might mean, facilitators can discuss the following:

Foetal hiccups can be good news in three different developmental areas:

- As a sign of good development of baby’s respiratory system.
- It might be a sign that baby is becoming neurologically developed enough to survive outside the womb.
- Babies may also practice suckling, thumb-sucking and yawning which can result in hiccups.

Post-birth

Facilitator Conversation – I Need You A-Z



This little booklet contains messages from the baby and young child to the adults in their lives about how to understand what they feel and need and how they communicate these. The following activity supports participants to be attuned to their babies’ feelings and needs.

Activity 12



Distribute booklet **I need you. A-Z** and invite participants to have a look at the booklet and reflect on any of the communication messages that the baby is sharing.

Invite participants to share any of their reflections.

Alternatively, the facilitator could choose a few of the messages and support a discussion on how the participants’ babies communicates the same message.



Facilitator Conversation - Baby Cues



The baby is “trying out” all the new things she can do. Sleeping, practising breathing, swallowing and sucking thumbs. When baby hiccups in the womb, several developmental milestones are occurring—indications that she’s on track to make her grand entrance into the world in just a few short months. If hiccups are felt at all it is usually in the third trimester.

Activity 13



How do babies let us know what they need? This activity reminds us how communication is more than words and starts between babies and adults long before birth and after birth long before verbal language.

Option 1

Using the Ideas for Using your Baby Cue Cards leaflet choose any of the exercises suggested.

Option 2

Pass around a selection of photos of baby faces/bodies asking participants;

- What do they know about the baby from what we are looking at?
- What do we know about how the baby might feel from what we see?
- Ask what are the cues that enabled you to make the decisions you did about the baby.

Facilitator Conversation - How much we know



During this activity invite participants to share what they know of their own baby/child’s non-verbal language/cues. Examples that they might share include: changes in breathing rate, skin colour and tone, smooth/jerky movements, eye contact, tone of cry, and facial expressions. Encourage parents to share what they think their babies/children are ‘saying’ with each of the cues.

Activity 14



Ask participants how their baby/child tells them that they are upset other than crying. You might list all answers on whiteboard. Then ask participants ‘What clues does he give you that he’s becoming upset, just before he cries? Possible responses might include, squirming, making a cross face etc. Write their response just to the left of the word ‘cries’ on the board.

Then ask ‘How does he show you that he’s about to become upset, even before he starts squirming etc? Possible responses may include looking away/jerky movements/droopy eyes/pale face/rapid breathing. Continue in this way until the participants can’t think of any more cues. Congratulate participants on what they know about their babies/children.



Suggest that if we can observe our baby/child's non-verbal language closely we come to recognize what his/her earliest, subtle cues that are telling us, 'I need a break.' 'I'm getting tired now.' 'I need something different now.' Then if we respond at that early stage, rather than waiting until the baby/child has to cry out loud to get our attention, it will usually be easier to settle the baby/child.

Encourage participants to set aside time to do some serious baby/child watching so that they can get to know their baby/child's early subtle cues.

Facilitator Conversation: Non-verbal Communication



Research tells us the impact of the body language is 55% of communication while voice and tone has only 37% and the words as little as 7%.

HANDOUT: "Are we missing anything?". Can be used to start a discussion on the power of non-verbal communication.

Parents/carers of babies and young children learn to read the body language as well as listening and understand their verbal communication. The skill is learned to see and read his facial expressions, gestures, movements, posture and positioning.

Likewise, when we are communicating with babies and young children we need to be aware of not only the words we say but the tone and intensity of voice we use, our facial expressions, the way we move and hold our bodies, and the distance between us and the child. Refer back to serve and return video.

During those years when children are going through a stage of right brain development, they are likely to be especially sensitive to our non-verbal communications with them. The words we say to children have less impact than the way we say them and they are more likely to copy what we do and not listen to anything we say.

Activity 15



Generate a group discussion on the nonverbal communication we grew up with. This could include finger wagging, head shaking, the look (scowling/frowning) thumbs up, waving, patting on head, shoulder, eyebrows raised etc).

Reflect on the power of the nonverbal communication - it sometimes more effective than verbal communication.

Option 1

In pairs one person is given a card with a scenario on it and tries to tell the other person something without using words. Was the other person able to work out what their partner was trying to communicate?

Swap roles the communicator has a different scenario to communicate. Was the other person able to work out what their partner was trying to communicate?



Suggested scenarios:

“I want a cup of tea with milk and sugar”.

“Where is the bathroom”?

“It is a lovely day today”.

“I am feeling very sad today”.

Option 2 - The Tourist

Babies/young children aren't able to communicate using words instead they use body language to communicate what they are thinking and feeling.

Ask participants if they have ever had the experience of trying to communicate with someone who does not speak the same language as them. Explain that the following activity will give them a chance to experience what that might feel like.

Ask participants to imagine they are a tourist in a country where the locals speak a language they don't understand.

Divide participants into groups of 3: One is the tourist, one the local, and the third, the observer.

The 'tourists' are each given cue card with a message which they try to convey to their 'local' partner without using words.

Examples include:

“How do I get to the train station?”

“Where is the toilet?”

“Where can I get a cup of tea?”

“I am lost?”

They may use movement, sounds and facial expressions, but no words. The locals call out their guesses of the message as in 'charades'.

Observers feedback what they noticed as the couple attempt to communicate. Ask people to note body language, facial expressions, gestures, body positioning etc.

Swap roles until each person has experienced each role.





Ask:

- *“What did you notice?”*
- *“How did it feel when you were trying to get your message across, and your partner couldn’t understand you?”*
- *“How did it feel when you were trying so hard to work out what your partner was saying, and you couldn’t understand him/her?”*

Relate the role play back to trying to understand a baby or young child. The range of feelings experienced when we do not feel understood or understand someone else’s feelings can be the same.

Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation - Deep Listening



The ‘Deep Listening’ exercise is a mindful listening practice that is repeated each week.

Current research tells us that when parents relate to their children with deep listening they activate a part of their brains’ (the medial prefrontal cortex) which allows their defensive system to slow down, putting them in a more relaxed state and allowing them to think and act more rationally and be more present to their children’s needs.

Deep listening in the context of BUGK in the First 1000 Days is where one person talks and the other person actively listens by nodding, patting, sharing eye contact but refrains for speaking. The belief is when a person is listened to without judgement and interruption they can, by talking an issue through, often work out for themselves the solution or at least the next step towards solving their problem.

Discuss the ripple down effect of participants being listened to being able to better listen to their children.

The group may need help with the content that is appropriate to talk about in this activity and may need some prompts (see below). The group may need to be told what topics are not appropriate to discuss in the context of this activity i.e. anything that is outside parenting conversations.

Activity 16



There are many variations of this activity that may need to be considered. Participants might find it difficult to talk on their own and to listen without interrupting! Some groups start with 30 secs to a minute for one participant to talk and then other to listen. Then the participants swap roles for another 30 secs to a minute. Over the time of the group this time may increase to 2-3 mins.



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement or solutions. After a suitable amount of time ask each pair to swap roles and repeat the process. You may find you need to prompt participants with a topic to talk about. Below are some possible topic ideas for this first session:

- What did you have to organize to get here today?
- What were you thinking about on your way here today?

Once each participant has had their time to speak and to listen, draw the group back together and ask participants how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions in much the same way as we would hope they listened to the needs of their children.

Facilitator Conversation - Feeling Heard



An important aspect of communication is ‘listening’. We have two ears and one mouth suggesting that twice as much listening than talking is important.

This activity reminds participants of the importance of being heard and being a good listener for other.

Activity 17



Option 1

Brainstorm with participants “How do we know when someone is really listening to us?”

Ask parents to think of a time when they felt ‘heard’ by someone – when someone really listened to you and understood what you were trying to say. What was it about that situation that worked well for you? How did it make you feel?

Brainstorm with parents the notion of what they think good listening might look like.

For example, body language, positioning, mirroring, not interrupting or offering solutions, reflecting back, being empathic, acknowledgment and acceptance of feelings.

Use this question to explore the idea of listening as an active rather than passive activity. (I.e. doing listening”)

Distribute the **HANDOUT – Chinese Symbol for Listening** which depicts a Chinese symbol for active listening. Discuss this handout. This activity reminds participants of the importance of being heard and being a good listener for other. Remind participants of the “Chinese symbol of listening” and all the elements needed to listen. Ask participants to consider how it might feel to have someone really listen to them not only with their ears, eyes, heart, mind and full attention.



Option 2

Write the following sentence on the whiteboard/butcher paper or share it with the group:

'Whether our voices are big or small, whether we whisper, shout or sign it – listen to us and hear what we say.'

(Text adapted by Castle, C (2001). *For Every Child, The UN rights of the child in words and pictures*, Red Fox).

Generate discussion on the child's right to be heard, when do you start listening to them? Why this time? When do you take action on what you have heard from your child?

Invite parents to consider what their own children might say if they were asked how they felt about the ways their parents talk to and listen to them.

Ask parents to reflect on the communication style used in their family when they were a child.

Distribute the **HANDOUT – UN Rights of the Child** to participants. Discuss if you have time.

Facilitator Conversation - Self-care



All parents want the best for their children. We can do the best job of caring for our children if we feel well supported and nurtured ourselves.

During pregnancy, fathers/partners may be feeling that it is only the mother who can care for their baby. Suggest that one important way that fathers can care for their developing baby is to care for and support, their partners. Mothers are able to do the best job of caring for their babies, when they are well supported themselves.

Invite fathers/partners to share ways in which they are supporting and caring for, their pregnant partners.

Outline research findings which show that:

- birthing women who feel well supported during labour, are facilitated in their labouing
- support is crucial to breastfeeding mothers
- social support is a key factor in prevention of post-natal depression.

In the following activities, there is an opportunity for the fathers/partners to feel nurtured and supported so that they in turn can nurture and support their pregnant partner.



Activity 18 *Pizza Massage* (for partners)



This activity is designed to be fun and to model enjoyable, nurturing ways that fathers might connect physically with their children.

Invite the group to participate in a fun, clothed massage in pairs where one partner sits sideways on a chair (or stands) with his back to his partner who will give the massage. Facilitators may wish to demonstrate the massage as others follow, talking participants through the suggested (but optional) actions.

Give the script as a story, inviting participants to make suggestions and to feel free to make up their own moves. Anything that is in line with the permission of the receiver of the massage is acceptable.

A suggested script might begin by asking, 'What is the first thing we do when making a pizza? (e.g. making the dough) The person performing the massage story then makes dough-making movements on his partner's back. Continue like this until the 'pizza' has been cooked and eaten.

At the conclusion of the activity, suggest that their partners and children might enjoy receiving a massage and that this can be a good way to literally stay connected as a couple and as a family. With their partner's permission, they might like to gently massage her pregnant belly and (depending on the developmental stage of the foetus) get a response from their baby.

Facilitator Conversation - Bedtime Stories



Suggest to participants that predictability can help growing babies/children to feel safe and that the predictable rhyme, rhythm and repetition of some picture storybooks, may help to soothe babies/children as they transition into sleep. Suggest also, that the routine of bedtime rituals (including reading stories) can be reassuring for the baby/child.

Participants can be reassured that if they read aloud, or tell, the same story often during pregnancy, they might find that after their baby is born, he will respond to it as if he knows it well.

You could make a general statement that it is not the words that are important to babies, but the sound and tone of the parent's voice. (there may be illiterate participants in the group who may feel this is something they cannot do for their babies) Babies love it when parents simply talk about the pictures and make the noises of animals depicted in books.



Activity 19



Ask participants to recall any favourite bedtime stories that they remember from their own childhood.

Invite participants to talk about some of their memories of being told or read stories when they were little. You might ask...

- *Who read to you?*
- *Were there books/newspapers/magazines in your home?*
- *Did your parents like reading themselves? Did you belong to a library?*
- *If reading was not something that was shared with children in your family, what would you like for your own children?*
- *What was your favorite story as a child?*
- *Does that story still resonate with you at this stage of your life?*

You may wish to show parents a YouTube clip of parents reading with babies eg: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcR15DTDCsM>

Facilitator Conversation - Quiet Reflection



This section provides an opportunity for the participants to be mindful and be able to reflect on the session and be able to return home calm and confident in their relationship with their children.

Activity 20



Choose one from the following options.

Option 1

Invite participants to make themselves comfortable as they prepare to focus all of their attention on listening to something specific. ...lying on the floor, closing eyes, feet flat on the floor...

Play a piece of music which has variations in speed/volume/instruments and which lasts for around 4 or 5 minutes e.g. 'Going Home' by Dire Straits.

Invite participants to notice any changes in their minds and body as they listen mindfully to the music.

Option 2

Strike a singing bowl or bell which resonates for some time, inviting parents to listen until they can no longer hear the sound. Participants may like to close their eyes before you strike the bell and open them when they can no longer hear the sound.



Facilitator Conversation - Pause on positives



Participants' positive feelings about themselves and connection to others amplify change in the direction of health and well-being. Warm, responsive and supportive parenting has been shown to promote the development of children's emotion regulation and social skills.

Each chapter provides this opportunity to reflect on the positives in parenting journey during the last week. The facilitator may print and distribute the **HANDOUT – Pause on Positives** each week and ask participants to answer on their handout.

Activity 21



Invite participants to sit comfortably for some closing reflective moments. They may wish to close their eyes, as you encourage them to reflect on positive aspects of their parenting while you read aloud the following, allowing plenty of time between each reflection:

1. My favourite moment with my baby/child this week was...
 2. One way that I stayed in touch with friends this week was...
 3. One way I was kind to myself this week was...
 4. One person who supported me this week that I feel grateful for is...
 5. One way I could connect more with my baby/child next week is...
 6. A simple pleasure I could treat myself to next week is...
-

Facilitator Conversation - Storytime



It is a lovely for babies to be read or told/sung read stories from conception. For those participants who were not read to as children, your enjoyment of being read to in the group may be a particularly important reparative introduction to the joys of shared stories, and an important opportunity for role modelling reading with baby when born.

Activity 22



Read aloud (or invite one of the participants to read) a children's storybook to the group. Select a book which includes distinctive rhyme, rhythm and repetition

Suggest to participants that they might wish to find a copy of their favourite childhood story book (or even the original copy that belonged to them as a child) and then read it aloud to their baby in utero or to tell their baby a favourite story.

Encourage participant to imagine what it might be like for the baby during story time, and to notice any changes in their baby's activity in utero while the story is being read...particularly when this becomes a regular practice.



Homework Task - Guess who??

Ask participants to find a baby photo of themselves that they could share with the group next session. Ask that they give their photo to one of the facilitators at the beginning of the next session so that it can be used in a 'guess who' game for the group.

Session Wrap Up

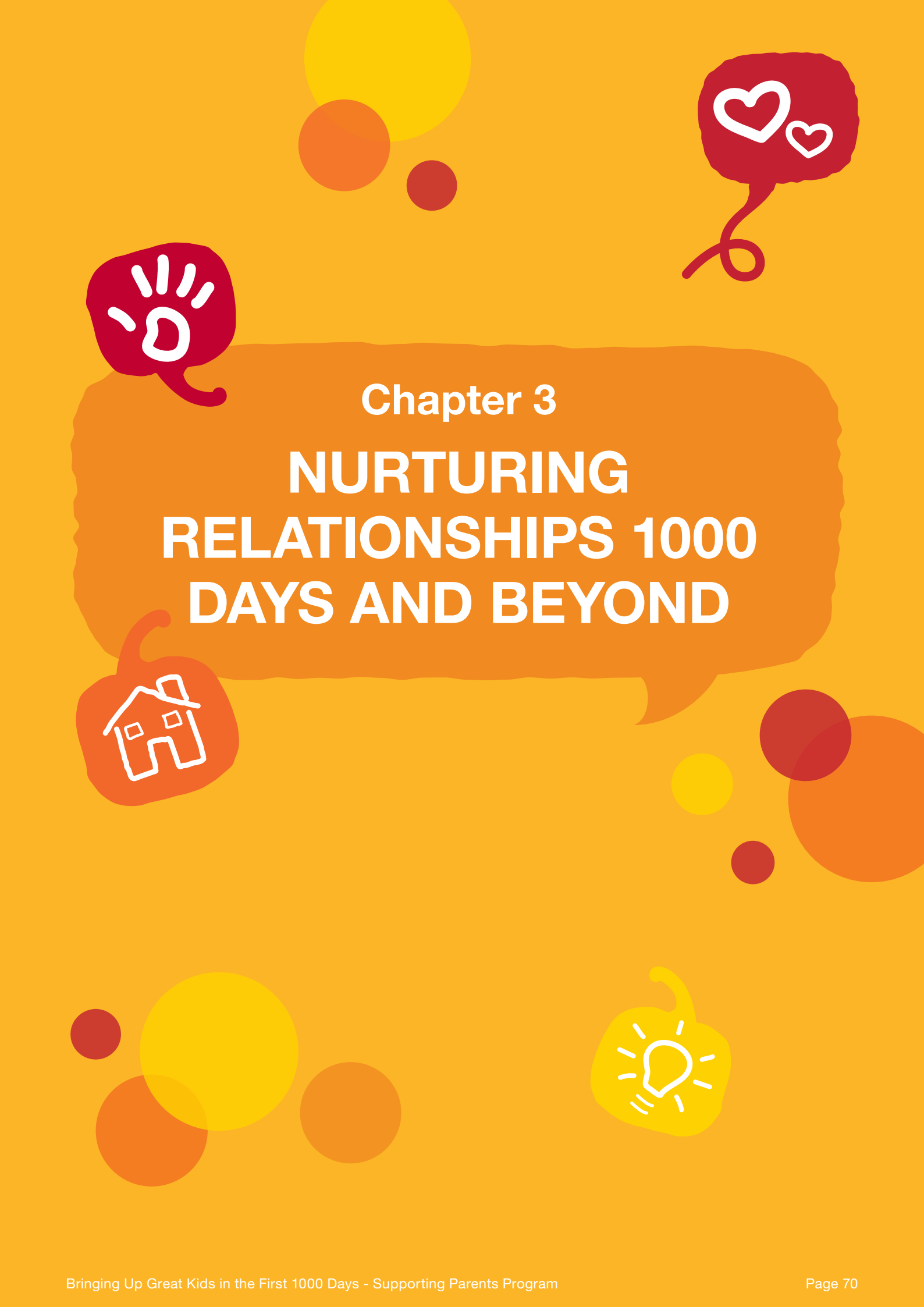
Ask participants 'what message/s are you taking away from this session?'

Participants can share these with the group or reflect on them for themselves.

Remind participants as they leave to:

- take care of themselves and their babies until the next session.
- take time to focus on their baby and to practice 'keeping the baby in mind' in whatever they are doing.
- bring their handouts with them to the next session.
- take time to practice mindfulness during the week.





Chapter 3

**NURTURING
RELATIONSHIPS 1000
DAYS AND BEYOND**



Chapter outline

This chapter offers opportunities for participants to think about the relationships in their lives, starting with their relationship with themselves and what they know about themselves. Then the relationship between the adults and the growing baby and the relationships between all the adults involved with this baby.

In the pre-birth part this chapter offer opportunities for participants to wonder about their baby's world in utero and by imagining what it might be like for their developing baby a relationship is forming.

In the post-birth part this chapter explores how babies and young children develop and change over time and the impact of parental responses on their developmental progress. You can refer back to the serve and return video if helpful.

This chapter will also provide opportunities for participants to understand individual differences in personality and gender and the significance of position in family.

Key Messages

- Relationships with baby begin before birth.
- Many elements of foetal development prepare babies for interaction with their parents.
- Parents need to care for themselves so they can care for their baby.
- Understanding how children develop and change can build on parent's knowledge to enable more mindful responses to them.
- The birth of a new baby can change the dynamics in a family.
- Embracing differences in our children can lead to increased feelings of self-worth.

Pre-session Facilitator Reflection

Reflect on your role as facilitator in supporting and guiding the group. How will you provide:

- a safe, warm, respectful atmosphere to explore ideas, experiences and differences in an enjoyable way?
- support and care for the parents in the group, as well as suggestions on how to care for themselves outside the group?
- inclusive and interactive experiences whilst acknowledging and accepting that for adult learners, participation in activities is optional?
- debriefing or referral as required?
- open, non-judgmental listening to participants in your group

Chapter 3. Nurturing relationships 1000 days and beyond



For this session:

- Think about your own relationships with partners, children, parents, etc.
- What is your relationship style?
- Reflect about your own ways of caring for yourself.
- What are the stories your family tell about you as a child?
- What are the messages you've taken with you from your childhood about your position in your family, your gender and unique personality?

Preparation and set-up

You will need:

- Refreshments
- Whiteboard and whiteboard markers
- Name tags
- Relaxing music to play
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pens and textas, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, scissors, etc.
- Flip chart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Storybook to read to parents
- Hand cream
- Large floor cushions, bean bags or comfortable chairs- one per participant
- Laptop, data projector and screen 'Babies' video
- A selection of fruits/vegetables to represent the weights of a growing foetus, as per the Growing like a Mushroom handout (optional)
- Tape measures or rulers
- Wool/cord/ribbon
- Numbers on card for baby photos
- A set of participants' names on cards for each participant
- Small prize (optional)
- Note paper to write letters to baby

Chapter 3. Nurturing relationships 1000 days and beyond



- Outline of bare tree or leafless branch in a tub
- Paper leaves
- Craft supplies, blu tack, post it notes, paper, cards, wrapping paper, etc.
- A set of Mix and Match cards – you will require one set between 2 parents. Copy and laminate the Mix and Match Cards. Cut along the lines to make separate cards.
- Mini packets of sultanas or Smarties for Mindfulness exercise (1 packet per person)

For each participant, you will need

Handouts:

- Daddy Cool
- Connecting with your unborn baby
- Template for the Mix and Match cards
- Timeline of What I Can Do
- Every Child is Unique
- Personality/Temperament
- Reflections on culture
- Mindful Walking





Part 1: Introduction and warm-up

- Have relaxing music playing in the room as parents arrive (optional).
- Arrange chairs in a configuration that suits the space and encourages positive group interaction e.g. half-moon or circle.
- Offer participants refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags (optional – may not be necessary now)

In the last two sessions, participants have:

- developed an understanding about how the brain develops before and after birth; and,
- considered the role of and need to listen to both verbal and non-verbal communication in relationships with babies and young children.

Perform an Acknowledgement of Country.

Ask participants if they have any questions or thoughts they've been wondering about in relation to the previous session.

Collect from participants their baby photos for the "Have a Guess" activity later.

Activity 1: Reconnections



Option 1

Show the 'Babies' video part 3 and facilitate a discussion among participants.

Option 2: Favourite Games

Invite participants to think about how they would complete the sentence:

'When I was a kid, my favourite game was.....'

Once they have thought of their response, invite participants to move around the space to find two other people with whom to share their responses.

Facilitator Conversation – Check In



This activity is repeated each week as a way of checking in with each participant. Depending on the group this check in could occur individually (especially the question about being worried) or as part of the group conversation. The facilitator may print and distribute the Handout – Check In each week and read the extra question of the week to participants to write down and answer on their handout.

Chapter 3. Nurturing relationships 1000 days and beyond



Activity 2



Ask the whole group to reflect on the following questions and to share their responses with the group if they wish:

- ‘What has your baby/child told you about her/himself since we last met?’
- ‘Has your baby/child changed in any way that you can tell?’
- ‘Have there been any times when you have felt worried about your baby/child?’
- ‘Have there been any times that you have felt really close to your baby/child?’
- Have you been talking to your bump/baby this week?

Extra question for this week:

- What has happened during the week? DRs visits, ultrasounds etc.

Facilitator Conversation – Stop..Pause..Play



Refer to the **Stop..Pause..Play** discussion in part 3, Chapter 1.

Activity 3



Distribute the **HANDOUT – Stop..Pause..Play** and remote controls - one per person.

Review the concept of *Stop..Pause..Play* using the handout and remote. Encourage participants to set aside a few minutes each day to practice the exercise, and to also practice it whenever any stressful moments arise during their week.

Ask the group for examples of how they have used the strategy in the last week.

Practice the exercise together as a group using the handout as a guide. Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.





Part 2: Relationships

Please Note: This chapter has been divided into pre and post birth activities but there are activities that may be suitable for either pre or post birth so please feel free to choose the activities that suit your group.

Pre-birth

Facilitator Conversation - How are you feeling?



Starting from conception, the baby is actively responding to changes in the environment, using cues provided by the mother's physical and mental state to 'predict' the kind of world they will be born into and altering their bodily structures accordingly.

This activity allows participants to bring their focused attention to their impending role as new parents and to wonder about the meaning of that experience for themselves. It is an opportunity to explore their feelings about becoming parents.

This activity will be revisited and referred to during each session as a way of participants focusing on their growing babies and on recording their own feelings/experiences and what they have learnt in the group as the pregnancy progresses.

Depending on the composition of your group use Activity 4 or Activity 5.

Activity 4



Refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and ask participants to complete the activity up to where they are in their pregnancy. If you have couples in the group they could do this together and discuss their feelings about each statement.

Ask participants if they would like to share anything from this activity with the group.

Continue to work on **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** .

Activity 5



Invite discussion about the feelings that prospective fathers might have towards their child. Ask how they felt about their baby:

- when they first discovered they were going to be a father
- when they first felt or saw their baby moving
- when they first saw their baby on an ultrasound scan
- when they found out the gender of their baby

Ask what sort of things might influence their changing feelings (e.g. unplanned pregnancy, age and life circumstances, anxiety around financial responsibilities, the length of time it has taken to fall pregnant, health concerns, other things).

Chapter 3. Nurturing relationships

1000 days and beyond



Encourage reflection on the fact that it is likely that their partner's feelings might differ from their own, and the possible reasons for that difference.

Now refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and invite fathers to record some of their feelings discussed above.

Facilitator Conversation - 'Daddy Cool'



Whilst group discussion invites each participant to share their thoughts, not every individual will feel comfortable doing that. Written responses allow participants to reflect upon and record their unique and private thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values without needing to air those in public. Stress that participation is optional - participants are free to leave any question they don't want to answer.

Activity 5



Discussion could occur first about the fathers that participants look to as role models for their fathering role. What do you look for in a role model? What are the qualities of your particular role model?

Distribute **HANDOUT - 'Daddy Cool'** which is a set of questions. This may be an activity that is done as part of the session or participants could take home to think about.

Facilitator Conversation - Growing like a Mushroom



The early stages of development offer the best opportunity for optimal development.

It is important to note that if this window is missed, it does not mean that all opportunities for positive development are lost. Throughout the program we will have activities that allow participants to follow their baby's progress in both growth and brain development.

We know that in the early stages particularly, this is one thing most parents are most interested in. We can use this interest as a link to the other things we would like to draw participants' attention to, like communicating with their baby and building a relationship with their baby.

This activity helps to represent the growth of their baby at different stages throughout the pregnancy. You may wish to have a selection of the fruits and vegetables as per the **HANDOUT - Growing like a Mushroom**. The information on First, Second or Third Trimester in this handout could be useful here so that participants can find the size that most closely matches the growth of their own baby. You could invite participants to bring along to the next session, a fruit or vegetable of appropriate weight, to represent the developmental stage of their growing baby at the next session.

The first and best opportunity to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first thousand days. Hence this activity is also repeated each session. The purpose is to support participants in their thinking about the size and what is going on for their growing baby.

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Activity 5 – Your growing baby



This activity will be repeated each session as a way of supporting parts to focus on their growing babies and the significance of the first thousand days. The first thousand days makes a big difference to the way that children will, in later life, deal with stress, learn, and relate to others. It is the basic foundation of everything that follows for the child and the adult they will grow to be.

Ask participants to reflect on what they know about the current size of their growing baby. Divide participants into groups of 3 and refer to the **HANDOUT – Growing like a Mushroom** and First, Second or Third Trimester pages as is relevant to your group. Using the handout, participants can check the current weight and length of their baby. Allow time for participants to compare and think about where their baby started and where their baby is at now.

Optional - Invite participants to select a fruit or vegetable that represents the weight of their baby at this stage of development.

Invite participants to use the tape measures or rulers to measure out the current length of their baby according to their **Growing like a Mushroom handout**. Participants may wish to cut a length of wool/cord/ribbon, the same length as their baby at this point, and tie it around their wrist as a reminder of their growing baby.

Bring the participants back to the big group and ask what the participants have learnt from this activity about the importance of the first thousand days and self-care.

Continue to work on **HANDOUT – Growing like a Mushroom**.

Facilitator Conversation - Baby Names



The activity provides an opportunity for participants to connect with their babies through talking to their babies using their names or pet names and recognising that this is the beginning of their relationship.

Participants are not expected to disclose the name they have chosen for their baby if they don't wish to. They can still participate in the discussion by responding to the questions they are comfortable with.

Activity 7



Think about any names you might be considering for your baby and what you are calling the growing baby?

- What are the name/s?
- Is there a family expectation of the name you will give your baby?
- What was the attraction to the name?
- Do you talk to your baby using the name?
- Are you using a nickname?

This is the beginning of your relationship with your growing baby.

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Facilitator Conversation - Have a Guess



This activity is designed to support the participants to reconnect with themselves as a baby to remember and enjoy that connection. Photos of participants as babies can be displayed around the room with a number beside each photo. Names of participants are written/printed on a card for each participant.

Activity 8



Participants are invited to walk around the room with all the participants' names on a card in their hands and attach the name of the participants that they think matches each photo by number.

Once everyone has matched the photos to the participants enjoy a discussion about the accurate and inaccurate guesses. Perhaps there could be a small gift for the participant who guessed the most correctly.

Discussion:

- Who do you want your baby to look like?
- Whose temperament/personality?
- Are there aspects of yourself that you hope your baby won't have?
E.g. big ears, quick temper

Facilitator Conversation – Forming relationships



Forming a relationship with the growing baby

By reflecting on their own feelings and how this might affect their baby, the following activity provides participants with an opportunity to connect to their baby.

Activity 9



Think about the kind of day you've had today - what you've been doing, the people you've met and related to, how you've been feeling at different times of the day.

Wonder about what that might have meant for your baby.

How might it have felt for your baby when you were:

- in a hurry?
- angry or frustrated about something?
- tired?
- sad?
- laughing?
- worried?
- dancing?
- excited?
- relaxed?
- happy?

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Facilitator Conversation: Fathers/male carers connecting with their baby



Unlike the mother, who has an intimate physical and hormonal connection with the developing baby, some fathers might feel less connected to the baby, or even jealous of the baby (or the mother). The following two discussions are designed to help prospective fathers understand their crucial role in the pre and post birth family.

Distribute **HANDOUT - Connecting with your unborn baby** and lead a discussion as per activity 10.

Activity 10



Part A - Dads connecting with babies

Invite discussion about fathers' connection with babies before they're born, including challenges, differences between the experience of the mother and the father, and possibilities in connecting to the baby. Explore and accept all feelings that fathers are willing to share.

Part B - Dad's Role

Following on from the above discussion, encourage fathers to share with the group, how they see or define their role with their baby and with their partner. Discuss with them that it is important that they think about their role. While they are now aware of different aspect of this role this is an opportunity for them create this role the way they think best fits their family and answers needs and characteristics of relationships in their young family.

Facilitator Conversation - Baby's World



This activity encourages participants to reflect on their baby's experience of living in the 'inner world' of the uterus.

Activity 11



You might wish to have the room lighting dimmed and some soothing music playing quietly in the background. Invite participants to find a comfortable seated position where they can quietly focus on their baby for some minutes. Participants may wish to close their eyes or to look at the floor or have a soft focus. If partners are included in this activity, they might wish to sit near their partners and place a hand on their partner's belly.

When all participants seem to be settled, one facilitator could read the following, allowing quiet space for reflection, between each point:

- Imagine how it might feel for your baby to be surrounded by warm fluid which is always the same temperature - never too hot, never too cold
- Imagine the sounds your baby hears - your heartbeat, digestive sounds, the sound of your voice...
- How might it feel for your baby to have that same, constant heartbeat as the soundtrack of his/her days and nights?

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- Imagine any sensations your baby might feel on his/her skin
- Imagine how it might feel for your baby as he/she moves around. Wonder about the amount of room for movement your baby has at this time
- Imagine any tastes or smells your baby might be experiencing
- Imagine how light or dark it might seem for your baby in utero - and any colors that baby might be able to see

Facilitator Conversation - Relationships



The first relationship is the one with yourself and this activity supports the participants to think about themselves as babies. The knowledge the participants have about themselves and the stories they know about themselves provides them with their sense of who they are and their place and sense of belonging within the family.

Be aware that some participants might not know much about their family stories. If you know your participants well you might direct them to just respond to the third question.

Activity 12



In small groups or pairs discuss:

- What do you know about yourself as a baby? (prompts – were you a quiet baby, a colicky baby, settled, unsettled, etc.)
- What stories does your family tell about you as a baby?
- What do you know about your baby? (prompts from previous verses)

Facilitator Conversation - Your relationship style



This activity is looking at the relationship between the parent and their developing baby. Participants can focus on the ongoing relationship they are wanting to have with their baby. Remind participants that the relationship with their baby has already begun. Participants will obviously reflect on their own relationship with their parents. Usually participants will identify that they want to continue everything as their own parents did or want to do things differently or a bit of both.

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Activity 13



In pairs, participants are invited to focus on the relationship they are wanting to continue to have with their baby after their baby is born.

Prompts might include:

- Soothing style
- Communication style
- Physical care – how/when to bath etc.

Facilitator Conversation - Message to my Baby



These three activities provide an opportunity for the prospective parents to show that they are keeping 'their baby in mind'.

Each of the following three activities is a different expression of keeping baby in mind. Facilitators can do one, two or all the activities depending on the group and time constraints. In the first two activities participants with low literacy skills can leave a voice message on their phones or a drawn message expressing their hopes, dreams or wishes.

Activity 14



Option 1

Provide paper and pens and invite parents to write, draw or voice a letter to their baby.

Possible content for the letter could include.

- Welcome baby into the world
- Describe who is in the baby's family?
- Describe how baby fits into family – i.e. first grandchild etc.
- Outline hopes and dreams for baby

Option 2

This activity provides another opportunity of keeping the baby in mind.

Invite participants to imagine they could make 3 wishes for their babies - what would they be?

Display a large leafless branch, standing upright in a suitable container, in the centre of the space.

Offer each participant some paper 'leaves' and a pen, so that they can write each of their wishes for their babies on a separate 'leaf'. Provide Blu tac so that participants can attach their leaves to the 'tree'.

Participants may wish to share with the group, some of their wishes for their babies.

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Option 3

Thinking about what your baby might enjoy, and how you could provide that, is another way that prospective parents can show that they are keeping their baby in mind. Suggest that participants might like to make a small gift for their baby using the craft materials you are able to provide.

Place all craft materials on a table around which participants can sit and chat as they make (or begin to make) small gifts for their babies.

Post-birth

Facilitator Conversation - Have a Guess



This activity is designed to support the participants to reconnect with themselves as a baby to remember and enjoy that connection. Photos of participants as babies can be displayed around the room with a number beside each photo. Names of participants are written/printed on a card for each participant.

Activity 15



Participants are invited to walk around the room with all the participants' names on a card in their hands and attach the name of the participants that they think matches each photo by number.

Once everyone has matched the photos to the participants enjoy a discussion about the accurate and inaccurate guesses. Perhaps there could be a small gift for the participant who guessed the most correctly.

Discussion:

- Who do you want your baby to look like?
- Whose temperament/personality?
- Are there aspects of yourself that you hope your baby won't have?
E.g. big ears, quick temper

Facilitator Conversation – Forming relationships



By reflecting on their own feelings and how this might affect their baby, the following activity provides participants with an opportunity to connect to their baby.



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Activity 16



Think about the kind of day you've had today - what you've been doing, the people you've met and related to, how you've been feeling at different times of the day.

Wonder about what that might have meant for your baby/child.

How might it have felt for your baby/child when you were:

- in a hurry?
- tired?
- laughing?
- dancing?
- relaxed?
- angry or frustrated about something?
- sad?
- worried?
- excited?
- happy?

Facilitator Conversation: Fathers/male carers connecting with their baby



Some fathers might feel less connected to the baby than the mother, or even jealous of the baby (or the mother). The following two discussions are designed to help fathers understand their crucial role in the family.

Activity 17



Part A - Dads connecting with babies

Invite discussion about fathers' connection with babies, including challenges, differences between the experience of the mother and the father, and possibilities in connecting to the baby. Explore and accept all feelings that fathers are willing to share.

Part B - Dad's Role

Following on from the above discussion, encourage fathers to share with the group, how they see or define their role with their baby and with their partner. Discuss with them that it is important that they think about their role. While they are now aware of different aspect of this role this is an opportunity for them create this role the way they think best fits their family and answers needs and characteristics of relationships in their young family.

Facilitator Conversation - Relationships



The first relationship is the one with yourself and this activity supports the participants to think about themselves as babies/young children. The knowledge the participants have about themselves and the stories they know about themselves provides them with their sense of who they are and their place and sense of belonging within the family.

Be aware that some participants might not know much about their family stories. If you know your participants well you might direct them to just respond to the third question.

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Activity 18



In small groups or pairs discuss:

- What do you know about yourself as a baby/young child? (prompts – were you a quiet baby, a colicky baby, settled, unsettled, etc.)
- What stories does your family tell about you as a baby/young child?
- What do you know about your baby/young child?

Facilitator conversation - Your relationship style



This activity is looking at the relationship between the parent and their baby/child. Participants can focus on the ongoing relationship they are wanting to have with their baby/child. Participants will obviously reflect on their own relationship with their parents. Usually participants will identify that they want to continue everything as their own parents did or want to do things differently or a bit of both.

Activity 19



In pairs, participants are invited to focus on the relationship they are wanting to continue to have with their baby/young child.

Prompts might include:

- Soothing style
- Communication style
- Experiences they want to share.

Facilitator Conversation - Message to my Baby



These three activities provide an opportunity for parents to show that they are keeping ‘their baby/child in mind’.

Each of the following three activities is a different expression of keeping baby/child in mind. Facilitators can do one, two or all the activities depending on the group and time constraints. In the first two activities participants with low literacy skills can leave a voice message on their phones or a drawn message expressing their hopes, dreams or wishes.





Activity 20



Option 1

Provide paper and pens and invite parents to write, draw or voice a letter to their baby/child.

Possible content for the letter could include.

- Describe who is in the baby/child's family?
- Describe how baby/child fits into family – i.e. first grandchild etc.
- Outline hopes and dreams for baby/child

Option 2

This activity provides another opportunity of keeping the baby/child in mind.

Invite participants to imagine they could make 3 wishes for their baby/child - what would they be?

Display a large leafless branch, standing upright in a suitable container, in the centre of the space.

Offer each participant some paper 'leaves' and a pen, so that they can write each of their wishes for their babies on a separate 'leaf'. Provide Blu tac so that participants can attach their leaves to the 'tree'.

Participants may wish to share with the group, some of their wishes for their babies/children.

Option 3

Thinking about what your baby/child might enjoy, and how you could provide that, is another way that parents can show that they are keeping their baby/child in mind. Suggest that participants might like to make a small gift for their baby/child using the craft materials you are able to provide.

Place all craft materials on a table around which participants can sit and chat as they make (or begin to make) small gifts for their babies/children.

Facilitator Conversation - Gender and Position in the Family



Gender, position in the family, personality, temperament and culture

The following activity is designed to help parents reflect on their place in their family of origin and recognise its impact on their parenting story and the ways in which they relate to their own children. They will look at the other factors like temperament and culture that also influence their relationships with their children. We must also consider the cultural background and expectations of the family when we look at influencing factors.



Activity 21



Invite participants to place themselves in small groups according to their position in their family of origin.

- Eldest children in one group, middle children in another, youngest children in another and only children in another.
- Parents who were the 'middle' children from large families may align themselves with whichever group they feel relates to them

In their small groups ask participants to discuss 'As a child, what did it feel like being in that position in the family?'

- What were the positives?
- What did you not enjoy about this position in the family?
- Was there a difference if you were the first boy or girl in your family?
- Were they in a unique position, e.g. the first girl born after 3 or 4 boys?

Bring the participants back to the large group and invite a light discussion/feedback from each group. Usually there is some lighthearted banter between the groups, e.g. members of the eldest child group accusing members of the youngest child group of not having to abide by the same rules as they had to. A member of the youngest child group may mention being annoyed about always getting the 'hand me down' clothes.

Facilitator Conversation - Emotional Development Mix and Match



Research shows us that parents often underestimate young infants' emotional sensitivity and overestimated toddlers' capacities for self-regulation (Hart Research Associates, 2009).

With a more realistic understanding of the emotional lives of infants and toddlers, and the ways that caregivers' emotions affect children's development, it is hoped that parents will be in a position to more mindfully attend to their important roles of tuning in to their baby/child's internal experience, and of co-regulating emotional states in babies and young children.

Even young children are affected by what goes on around them and can express feelings about their environment. This next activity is a mix and match game where parents are supported to think about what children are able to do and feel at what age.

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Activity 22



Part 1

Divide participants into pairs or small groups. Give each group a set of the Mix and Match cards made as shown at the beginning of this Chapter. Mix up the cards and invite parents to match each ability with the approximate age they believe children can achieve this.

Discussion about how the choices were made.

OR

As a large group activity where the “age” cards are placed on a table and the “experience” cards spread out – participants can choose an “experience” card and match with “age” card.

Part 2

Distribute **HANDOUT – Timeline of what I can do** showing early emotional development. Using the handout, ask the groups to make any changes to their mix and match selections so that their cards match the timeline.

Facilitator Conversation - Every child is unique



The aim of this activity is to help parents reflect on the unique qualities of their babies/children and be able to love and respect these qualities.

Activity 23



Distribute **HANDOUT – Every Child Is Unique**.

Depending on the group, facilitators can decide whether to present this activity as an individual writing or drawing exercise, or as a small group discussion. The activity highlights how different and unique both adults and children are with different temperaments and personalities.

Facilitator Conversation - Personality/Temperament



The following activities look at various influences on families and children. These activities will assist participants to think about these influences in relation their own family and children. It is interesting to note that sometimes the child who perhaps “presses your buttons” may in fact be the child who is most like you in personality and temperament and that they remind you of what you don’t like in yourselves.

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Activity 24



Begin the discussion by asking parents to form small group of first-born children, middle children, youngest and an only child. In small groups of each group ask two questions:

“What did you like about being eldest, middle youngest or only child? and “What did you not like?”

Whole group can then discuss their likes and dislikes. This then leads onto the next part where parents are asked to reflect on where their children fit in each family and what they may feel about this.

Facilitators can decide whether to present this activity as an individual exercise or as a small group discussion.

Distribute **HANDOUT – Personality/Temperament**

Parents complete one sheet per child. Give parents two pens/textas of different colours so that they can track separately, the personality/temperament of their children and themselves.

Facilitator Conversation - Culture and Families



Amongst all other factors like gender, position in family, personality and temperament, the culture of a family has a crucial role in shaping relationships, parenting styles and the way a family functions. This activity provides the opportunity to explore culture further.

Activity 25



HANDOUT - Reflections on Culture is an opportunity for parents to reflect on their cultural background and to be more mindful about its effect on their parenting. Facilitators can decide whether to present this activity as an individual exercise or as a small group discussion.





Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation - How are you feeling?



Refer to **Facilitator conversation on Deep Listening** in Chapter 2.

Activity 26



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement, solutions or their point of view. After a suitable amount of time ask each pair to swap roles and repeat the process. You may find you need to prompt participants with a topic to talk about. Below are some possible topic ideas:

- What are you hoping will be discussed in this group?
- One thing my children would say about me as a parent is.....

Once each participant has had their time to speak and to listen, draw the group back together and ask participants how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions being given or opinions shared. This is a great life skill that can be used within the couple and with each member of the growing family.

Facilitator Conversation - Mindfulness



The activities in this section provide the opportunity for the participants to enjoy a time of reflection and self-care that enables them to return home feeling confident in who they are and their relationship with their children.

Activity 27



Choose one of the following two options.

Option 1: Mindful Walking

Distribute **HANDOUT - Mindful Walking**. Mindful walking is another brief mindfulness exercise that, like Stop...Pause...Play, can be used anytime you feel like you need to anchor yourself in the present in order to respond in a calm and appropriate way with your children.

This is a practice that can be incorporated into your morning e.g. before your shower to start the day in a mindful way, or anytime of the day when you need to create peace in yourself.

Option 2: Sultana/Smarties Exercise

Note: When reading the following script, there is at least a 10 second pause between phrases. The instructions should be delivered in a matter-of-fact way at a slow but deliberate pace. This takes participants on a in depth mindful experience

Tell the participants: I'm going to go around and give you each a packet of objects (offer around the sultanas/Smarties - do not use the word 'Smartie' or 'sultana').

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When everyone is holding a box read the following:

Now what I would like you to do is take out one object from the box and focus on this object and just imagine that you have never seen anything like it before (pause)

Imagine you have just dropped in from Mars this moment and this is the first thing you have picked up (pause)

Take one of these objects and hold it in the palm of your hand or between your finger and thumb (pause)

Paying attention to seeing it (pause)

Look at it carefully (pause)

Turning it over between your fingers (pause)

Explore its texture between your fingers (pause)

Examine the highlights where the light shines ... the darker hollows and folds (pause)

Let your eyes explore every part of it, (pause)

And if, while you are doing this, any thoughts come to mind about 'what a strange thing we are doing' or 'what is the point of this' or 'I don't like these', then just noting them as thoughts and bringing your awareness back to the object (pause)

And now smell the object, taking it and holding it beneath your nose, and with each breath in carefully noticing the smell of it (pause)

And now take another look at it (pause)

And now slowly take the object to your mouth, maybe notice how your hand and arm know exactly where to put it, perhaps noticing your mouth watering as it comes up (pause)

And then gently place the object in the mouth, noticing how it is 'received' without biting it, just exploring the sensations of having it in your mouth (pause)

And when you are ready, very consciously taking a bite into it and noticing the taste it releases (pause)

Slowly chew it ... noticing the saliva in the mouth ... the change in consistency of the object (pause)

Then, when you feel ready to swallow, see if you can first detect the intention to swallow as it comes up, so that even this is experienced consciously before you actually swallow it (pause)

Finally, see if you can follow the sensations of swallowing it, sensing it moving down to your stomach and also realising that your body is now exactly one sultana/Smartie heavier.

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Facilitator Conversation: Nurturing Parents and Self-care



Discuss the notion that each of us is in the best position to care for others (including our children), when we feel well cared-for ourselves.

Perhaps you could open the discussion by asking why participants think that airline emergency procedures instruct adults to fit their own oxygen mask first, before helping any children in their care.

Discussion might include commonly-held feelings that parenting can be joyous, heart-warming, fun and exciting, but that it can also be challenging, exhausting, and frustrating. Hence the importance of asking for and accepting help and of taking good care of ourselves as parents.

Activity 28



Option 1

Offer participants the opportunity to receive a simple massage or nurturing touch. Any participants who say they are not comfortable with massage, might enjoy the experience of sitting in a chair while another person stands behind them and firmly places their hands on their shoulders and just maintains that hold for some time. Another alternative is for a non-participant to simply sit and watch the others as they share massage.

For those participants willing to experience the massage, invite them to find a massage partner they feel comfortable with. Suggest that they might like to share a seated hand massage or shoulder massage.

Distribute hand cream for those wanting to share hand massage. Encourage participants to practice the same principles of respectful touch, as we would encourage parents practicing massage with their babies and children:

- ask permission of their partner before touching
- share with their partners, just whatever touch and movement feels comfortable for both
- keep checking in with the recipient to ensure that pressure is still comfortable. Stop when the recipient has had enough.

Suggest that at home, partners might try gently massaging the mother's pregnant belly, as they imagine stroking and massaging their baby.

Introduce baby massage as a wonderful way to connect with babies once they are born.

Offer local contact details or brochures of practitioners conducting infant massage classes (or invite an infant massage instructor to visit the group),

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Option 2

Ask participants to close their eyes and imagine themselves sitting alone in a cottage in the middle of a natural environment. Ask them to imagine they are hearing sounds in the following circumstances outside and monitor how their feelings change:

- Heavy wind and rain shower
- Sunny weather, water splash, children laughing
- Quiet, dogs barking
- Dark, windy, owl “hoo-hoo”ing
- Light rain, birds singing

Facilitator Conversation - Pause on positives



Participants’ positive feelings about themselves and connection to others amplify change in the direction of health and well-being. Warm, responsive and supportive parenting has been shown to promote the development of children’s emotion regulation and social skills.

Each chapter provides this opportunity to reflect on the positives in parenting journey during the last week. The facilitator may print and distribute the **HANDOUT – Pause on Positives** each week and ask participants to answer on their handout.

Activity 29



Invite participants to sit comfortably for some closing reflective moments. They may wish to close their eyes, as you encourage them to reflect on positive aspects of their parenting while you read aloud the following, allowing plenty of time between each reflection:

1. My favourite moment with my baby/child this week was...
2. One way that I stayed in touch with friends this week was...
3. One way I was kind to myself this week was...
4. One person who supported me this week that I feel grateful for is...
5. One way I could connect more with my baby/child next week is...
6. A simple pleasure I could treat myself to next week is...

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Facilitator Conversation: Storytime



It is a lovely for babies to be read or told/sung read stories to from conception. For those parents who were not read to as children, your enjoyment of being read to in the group may be a particularly important reparative introduction to the joys of shared stories, and an important opportunity for role modelling reading with baby when born.

Activity 30



Read a children's story book to the group. (see Appendix for storybook suggestions)

Session Wrap Up

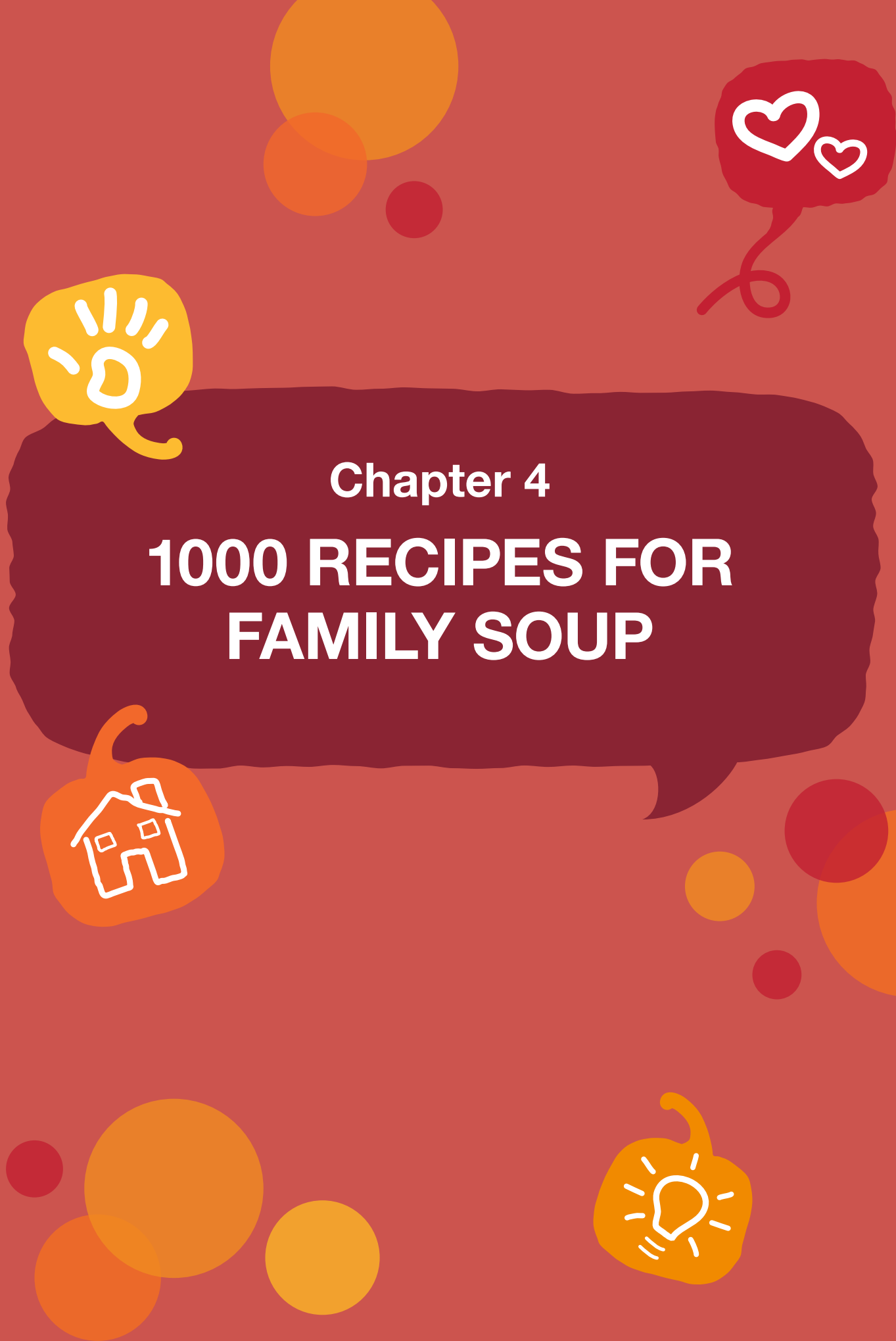
Ask participants 'What message/s are your taking away from this session?'

Participants can share these with the group or reflect on them for themselves.

Remind participants as they leave to:

- take care of themselves and their babies until the next session
- take time to focus on their baby and to practice 'keeping the baby in mind' in whatever they are doing
- bring their handouts with them to the next session
- take time to practice mindfulness during the week





Chapter 4

1000 RECIPES FOR FAMILY SOUP



Chapter outline

This chapter looks at the messages we have received from our past, that in turn impact on and influence our parenting. Beliefs and values about parenting are explored together with the factors that impact on how we parent. The underlying philosophy that parents and parents of young children need support and care is continued. The use of the metaphor of 'Family Soup' comes from a participant in a BUGK parent group who described creating a family – adding adults and then a child as creating a new family soup. Each adult has lived, as a child, in their family (soup) in which there were values, rituals, beliefs, messages, behaviours (ingredients) and then when they get together as a new family particularly with the addition of a baby the adults have to rethink their family (soup) - what ingredients will they bring to their new family soup - time together, being kind to each other - and what ingredients will they leave behind. This gives the family a choice to leave behind messages they don't want to bring into their new family (soup) that are unhelpful or unsupportive and to keep messages that were helpful and supportive for the new family soup.

Key Messages

Key messages explored through this chapter are:

- Messages we received in childhood from our parents/caregivers, impact on our own parenting.
- Myths about parenting can influence the way we parent our children.
- Children thrive with 'good enough' parents.
- Building relationships with our baby and young child is essential.
- Self-care for parents is vital.

Pre-session Facilitator Reflection

Reflect on your role as facilitator in supporting and guiding the group. How will you provide:

- a safe, warm, respectful atmosphere to explore ideas, experiences and differences in an enjoyable way?
- support and care for the parents in the group, as well as suggestions on how to care for themselves outside the group?
- inclusive and interactive experiences whilst acknowledging and accepting that for adult learners, participation in activities is optional?
- debriefing or referral as required?



For this session:

- What do you know about the style of parenting which was in vogue during the years of your childhood?
- How might that have influenced your experience of growing up?
- What are some of the messages, both spoken and implied, that you received from your parents?
- How might those messages have impacted on your own parenting style, and impact on your facilitation style and relationships with parents in the group?

Preparation and set-up

Depending on what activities you choose you will need:

- Refreshments
- Whiteboard and whiteboard markers
- Name tags
- Relaxing music to play
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pens and textas, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, scissors, etc.
- Flip chart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Storybook to read to parents
- A selection of fruits/vegetables to represent the weights of a growing foetus, as per the Growing like a Mushroom handout (optional)
- Tape measures or rulers
- Post it notes
- Wool/cord/ribbon
- Small soft ball or soft toy to throw around the group
- A set of photos from one of the many photo/picture/card resources available such as 'Picture This', a set of 75 colour photographs or 'Photolanguage' a set of black and white photos for conversation and reflection (available from www.innovativeresources.org).
- A parcel with something in the middle and layers of paper with post it note messages.
- Lollies for parcel, messages on each layer as per instructions in activities.
- Maybe a small lolly to put with the post it note on each layer of parcel.



For each participant you will need:

Handouts:

- Six Theories
- Parenting Rainbow
- My Favourite Things

Part 1: Introduction and warm-up

- Have relaxing music playing in the room as participants arrive (optional).
- Arrange chairs in a configuration that suits the space and encourages positive group interaction e.g. half-moon or circle.
- Offer participants refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags (optional – may not be necessary now)

Perform an Acknowledgement of Country.

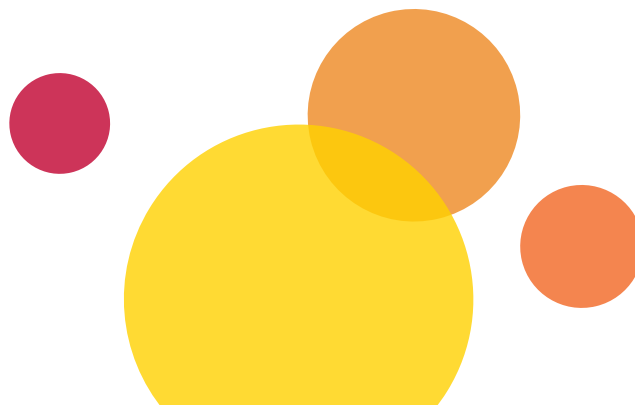
Welcome participants back to the group.

Invite participants to share any feedback they might have about the group last week. Invite any questions, concerns or thoughts that participants may have.

Over previous sessions participants have:

- developed understanding about how the brain develops before and after birth;
- considered the role of communication in relationships and that communication includes listening and nonverbal language with babies and young children
- The role of relationships between adults, adults and the growing baby and the young child.

This session will look at what influences parenting and the myths we hear.





Activity 1: Reconnecting



Option 1

Show the 'Babies' video part 4 and facilitate a discussion among participants.

Option 2

Ask participants to place themselves on an imaginary line across the room (or you could use a rope if you prefer) One end of the 'line' is 'I totally agree' and the other end is 'I totally disagree'.

Read out each of the following statements or facilitators could create their own statements depending on the group, giving participants time to talk to people near them after they have chosen a position on the line:

1. Being a parent/pregnant is different from how I imagined it
2. It gets easier as our children get older/pregnancy progresses
3. Finding time for me is really tricky at the moment
4. I was really looking forward to coming to the group today/tonight

This is a fun exercise and participants should not feel that they are being singled out or have given the 'wrong' answer.

Facilitator Conversation – Check In



This activity is repeated each week as a way of checking in with each participant. Depending on the group this check in could occur individually (especially the question about being worried) or as part of the group conversation. The facilitator may print and distribute the **HANDOUT – Check In** each week and read the extra question of the week to participants to write down and answer on their handout.

Activity 2



Ask the whole group to reflect on the following questions and to share their responses with the group if they wish:

- 'What has your baby/child told you about her/himself since we last met?'
- 'Has your baby/child changed in any way that you can tell?'
- 'Have there been any times when you have felt worried about your baby/child?'
- 'Have there been any times that you have felt really close to your baby/child?'
- Have you been talking to your bump/baby this week?

Extra question for this week:

- What has happened during the week? medical visits, ultrasounds etc.



Facilitator Conversation – Stop..Pause..Play



Refer to the **Stop..Pause..Play** discussion in part 3, Chapter 1.

Activity 3



Distribute the **HANDOUT – Stop..Pause..Play** and remote controls - one per person.

Review the concept of Stop..Pause..Play using the handout and remote. Encourage participants to set aside a few minutes each day to practice the exercise, and to also practice it whenever any stressful moments arise during their week.

Ask the group for examples of how they have used the strategy in the last week.

Practice the exercise together as a group using the handout as a guide. Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.

Part 2: Family Soup

Please Note: This chapter has been divided into pre and post birth activities but there are activities that may be suitable for either pre or post birth so please feel free to choose the activities that suit your group.

Pre-birth

Facilitator Conversation - How are you feeling?



Starting from conception, the baby is actively responding to changes in the environment, using cues provided by the mother's physical and mental state to 'predict' the kind of world they will be born into and altering their bodily structures accordingly.

This activity allows participants to bring their focused attention to their impending role as new parents and to wonder about the meaning of that experience for themselves. It is an opportunity to explore their feelings about becoming parents.

This activity will be revisited and referred to during each session as a way of participants focusing on their growing babies and on recording their own feelings/experiences and what they have learnt in the group as the pregnancy progresses.

Depending on the composition of your group use Activity 4 or Activity 5.

Activity 4



Refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and ask participants to complete the activity up to where they are in their pregnancy. If you have couples in the group they could do this together and discuss their feelings about each statement.

Ask participants if they would like to share anything from this activity with the group.

Continue to work on **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer**.



Activity 5



Invite discussion about the feelings that prospective fathers might have towards their child. Ask how they felt about their baby:

- when they first discovered they were going to be a father
- when they first felt or saw their baby moving
- when they first saw their baby on an ultrasound scan
- when they found out the gender of their baby

Ask what sort of things might influence their changing feelings (e.g. unplanned pregnancy, age and life circumstances, anxiety around financial responsibilities, the length of time it has taken to fall pregnant, health concerns, other things).

Encourage reflection on the fact that it is likely that their partner's feelings might differ from their own, and the possible reasons for that difference.

Now refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and invite fathers to record some of their feelings discussed above.

Facilitator Conversation - Growing like a Mushroom



The early stages of development offer the best opportunity for optimal development.

It is important to note that if this window is missed, it does not mean that all opportunities for positive development are lost. Throughout the program we will have activities that allow participants to follow their baby's progress in both growth and brain development.

We know that in the early stages particularly, this is one thing most parents are most interested in. We can use this interest as a link to the other things we would like to draw participants' attention to, like communicating with their baby and building a relationship with their baby.

This activity helps to represent the growth of their baby at different stages throughout the pregnancy. You may wish to have a selection of the fruits and vegetables as per the **HANDOUT - Growing like a Mushroom**. The information on First, Second or Third Trimester in this handout could be useful here so that participants can find the size that most closely matches the growth of their own baby. You could invite participants to bring along to the next session, a fruit or vegetable of appropriate weight, to represent the developmental stage of their growing baby at the next session.

The first and best opportunity to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first thousand days. Hence this activity is also repeated each session. The purpose is to support participants in their thinking about the size and what is going on for their growing baby.



Activity 5 – Your growing baby



This activity will be repeated each session as a way of supporting parts to focus on their growing babies and the significance of the first thousand days. The first thousand days makes a big difference to the way that children will, in later life, deal with stress, learn, and relate to others. It is the basic foundation of everything that follows for the child and the adult they will grow to be.

Ask participants to reflect on what they know about the current size of their growing baby. Divide participants into groups of 3 and refer to the **HANDOUT - Growing like a Mushroom** and First, Second or Third Trimester pages as is relevant to your group. Using the handout, participants can check the current weight and length of their baby. Allow time for participants to compare and think about where their baby started and where their baby is at now.

Optional - Invite participants to select a fruit or vegetable that represents the weight of their baby at this stage of development.

Invite participants to use the tape measures or rulers to measure out the current length of their baby according to their Growing like a Mushroom handout. Participants may wish to cut a length of wool/cord/ribbon, the same length as their baby at this point, and tie it around their wrist as a reminder of their growing baby.

Bring the participants back to the big group and ask what the participants have learnt from this activity about the importance of the first thousand days and self-care.

Continue to work on **HANDOUT - Growing like a Mushroom**.

Facilitator Conversation - ‘Six Theories’



It is not always clear what parents think about their future role. They might have different theories in mind. These theories might have come from their own parents’ parenting as we explored in the last two activities, or may come from other sources of influence like books, media, workshops, etc. This activity prompts parents to consolidate their thoughts about what is important to them in their upcoming role.

Activity 6



Write the following quote on a whiteboard, or read it aloud to the group:

“Before I got married I had six theories about raising children; now, I have six children and no theories.” (John Wilmot)

Invite participants to think about their own theories about raising children and to share them with the group if they wish. While they are exchanging ideas distribute the **HANDOUT - ‘Six Theories’** and ask them to record their own six theories about raising children so that they can look back on them in years to come.

Once they have documented all their theories ask them to draw a picture or cartoon of themselves as a parent.



Facilitator Conversation - Influences from the Past



As soon as you announce that you are pregnant there is plenty of advice being handed out, especially from family and friends. This next activity provides the opportunity to reflect on these messages and whether or not they have had an influence on you as an adult and the chances of these messages influencing you throughout your pregnancy.

Activity 7



The aim of this activity is to have participants begin to consider the influences from their past and the impact on their state as parents. Below are two options from which to choose for this activity. If time permits, you may choose to do more than one activity.

Option 1: Photo Language/Picture This

With participants seated in a circle, spread the set of 'Photo Language' or 'Picture This' images that could be representative of parenting out on the floor in the centre of the circle. Ask participants to choose a picture that symbolises the messages they've received about being a parent or something that reminds them of themselves as parents. If the parents feel comfortable to do so, invite them to share why they chose the image they did with the group.

Discuss the idea that there are also a range of other influences other than our own parents which have shaped the way that we parent – e.g. extended family, the media, culture, geography, education, religion and gender roles.

Option 2: Mapping Parenting Influences

The aim of this activity is for participants to map and become aware of what influences the way they parent.

As in option 2, discuss the idea that there are a range of influences other than our own parents, which have shaped the way that we parent – e.g. extended family, the media, culture, geography, education, government policy, religion and gender roles.

Distribute copies of **HANDOUT - Parenting Rainbow** and ask participants to write the relevant influences that have shaped the way they parent, around the rainbow.

Facilitator Conversation - Parenting Myths



This activity continues the story about messages from the past, now concentrating more on parenting myths and allowing the conversation to continue about whether participants agree or disagree with the messages in the parcel.

The aim of this activity is to generate discussion about commonly held myths or statements about parenting. These myths often come from a truth that has become distorted usually over time.



Activity 8



Participants are seated in a circle. The facilitator/s play music or clap as the parcel is passed around from one participant to the next. Stop the music/clapping at random moments, at which time, the person holding the parcel opens one layer of wrapping and reads out the message found in that layer to the group.

The group is invited to discuss their thoughts about each statement. All comments and views are accepted as this is a discussion about the complexity of parenting and recognising that there will be different views and ideas.

If you are concerned about the literacy of the participants, the facilitator/s may need to read the myth/statement for the participants.

This is a great activity to encourage discussion and appreciate and accept there are different views about all things parenting.

Making the Pass the Parcel

Choose a suitable prize for the winner. This could be some lollies or chocolates or something that can be shared with whole group.

Wrap gift in layers of paper with a statement (and a small lolly - optional) taped to each layer. Messages on the parcel might include:

- Expectant mothers should wear flat shoes
- When you are pregnant you can eat for two
- Pregnancy is a female business
- All pregnant women crave
- Unborn babies are affected by the environment
- No sex while pregnant
- Sex in late pregnancy induces labour
- There exist people who can predict the gender of the baby
- Babies can't hear until their born
- A pregnant stomach is public property
- Connecting to the baby starts before birth
- It is natural to feel a bit worried about the labour and birth of your baby
- The more family support you can get in preparation for the birth the better
- Babies start crying even before their born



Post-birth

Facilitator Conversation - Where do we get our beliefs?



Messages from the past influence how parents react and respond to their children. We will explore these messages, what they are, where they come from and what we might keep and what we might throw away. We will start to look at how we can respond to children in a thoughtful way rather than reacting to their behaviour.

Activity 9



A useful first activity to introduce the next section is to ask participants to think about the stories they grew up with about all aspects of life. Examples include:

- “eating carrots so you can see in the dark”
- “eating crusts gives curly hair”
- “swallowing chewing gum resulted in all sorts of horrors”,

you might want to include some superstitions such as:

- “not walking on cracks on path”,
- “not putting umbrella up inside”,
- “shoes on the table bring bad luck as does a cracked mirror”.

This discussion can be fun and gives participants the opportunity to question as to whether these myths are still relevant or no longer relevant.

Facilitator Conversation - Influences from the Past



Continuing the story about messages – the above activity looked at general myths and messages. This next activity focuses the messages in more closely on messages that can be related to parenting styles and beliefs.

Activity 10



The aim of this activity is to have participants begin to consider the influences from their past and the impact on the parents they are today.

Generate a group discussion, offering an opportunity to reflect on where their ideas about parenting originate, the messages participants received in their childhood about children and parenting and to begin to consider the influence these messages play on their own parenting role.

Facilitators can introduce this activity by relating a message they remember being told as a child. Examples of these are: *‘Only speak when you are spoken to’*, *‘Big boys don’t cry’*, *‘If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything’*, and *‘Children should be seen and not heard.’*



Ask participants if they can remember any such messages and invite participants to spend a few minutes reflecting on messages from their childhood.

Participant's responses can then be shared with the group and could be noted on the whiteboard.

When participants have added all they need to say, facilitators might like to reflect on the themes that emerged during this activity highlighting that we are not always the parent we had hoped we would be and that we are often triggered into repeating our own experiences for better or worse. When we are highly stressed, we tend to 'go to what we know'.

In summarising the activity, facilitators should remind participants that this program will support them to review the impact of their pasts on who they are today and how these experiences impact on their parenting. Throughout the program participants will be offered opportunities to interrupt the patterns of relating to their children that they find unhelpful and open up new possibilities for them and their children.

Facilitator Conversation - Parenting Myths



This activity continues the story about messages from the past, now concentrating more on parenting myths and allowing the conversation to continue about whether participants agree or disagree with the messages in the parcel.

The aim of this activity is to generate discussion about commonly held myths or statements about parenting. These myths often come from a truth that has become distorted usually over time.

Activity 11



Refer to the 'beginning of this chapter for instructions on making this parcel.

Participants are seated in a circle. The facilitator/s play music or clap as the parcel is passed around from one participant to the next. Stop the music/clapping at random moments, at which time, the person holding the parcel opens one layer of wrapping and reads out the message found in that layer to the group.

The group is invited to discuss their thoughts about each statement. All comments and views are accepted as this is a discussion about the complexity of parenting and recognising that there will be different views and ideas.

If you are concerned about the literacy of the participants, the facilitator/s may need to read the myth/statement for the participants.

Making the Pass the Parcel

Choose a suitable prize for the winner. This could be some lollies or chocolates or something that can be shared with whole group.



Wrap gift in layers of paper with a statement (and a small lolly - optional) taped to each layer. Messages on the parcel might include:

- Parents are supposed to be perfect
- Every child needs 2 parents
- It takes a village to raise a child
- Children are the property of their parents
- Parenting comes naturally
- Parents have all the resources they need
- Parents should be in control at all times
- Parents should focus all their attention on their children
- All parents are role models for their children
- The best way to contribute to a child's happiness is to focus all of your attention on making your child happy.
- Parents are humans who make mistakes and learn from their mistakes
- I can't do anything that makes my child feel sad, angry, or fearful, or they won't love me

Facilitator Conversation - Hand-Pass the Parcel game for fathers/male carers



The aim of this activity is to provide an opportunity for fathers to have fun and connect with other dads in the group, while they reflect upon the kind of father they want to be for their children and to clarify what is important to them in this regard.

This game is based on the party game 'Pass the Parcel', but in this version, the 'prize' is a baby toy football which fathers can pass from one participant to another using a football hand-pass.

As you wrap each layer of paper around the toy football, attach a small piece of paper or a post-it note, with a message about fathering written on it.

Suggested messages might include:

- *'Of all the names I've been called, I like Dad the best'*
- *'I don't mind if you date my daughter - I don't mind going back to prison either!'*
- *You don't mess with a Dad with daughters!*
- *Be the kind of man you'd want your daughter to be with.*
- *Dads: It's time to show our sons how to properly treat a woman. It's time to show our daughters how a girl should expect to be treated.*



- *“Saturday mornings I’ve learned, are a great opportunity for kids to sneak into your bed, fall back asleep, and kick you in the face.” - Dan Pearce, Single Dad Laughing*
- *“A father has to be a provider, a teacher, a role model, but most importantly, a distant authority figure who can never be pleased.”- Stephen Colbert, I Am America*
- *A father’s goal is to make his children better than he is. Being their friend is a distant second to this.*
- *“The nature of impending fatherhood is that you are doing something that you’re unqualified to do and then you become qualified while doing it.” - John Green*
- *“Do I want to be a hero to my son? No. I would like to be a very real human being. That’s hard enough.” - Robert Downey Junior*
- *“The best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.” - John Wooden*
- *“I want my son to wear a helmet 24 hours a day.” - Will Arnett*

Activity 12



Invite participants to stand in a circle.

Explain that participants are invited to hand pass the wrapped footy to one another while the music plays and that when the music stops, the person holding the footy can remove one layer of wrapping paper and read out the message revealed on the next layer.

Play some music as the participant’s hand-pass the footy parcel from one person to the next. Passes will need to be made across the centre of the circle. Encourage the men to call out the name (or at least to make eye contact with) the person they are passing to.

Have someone stop the music at short intervals.

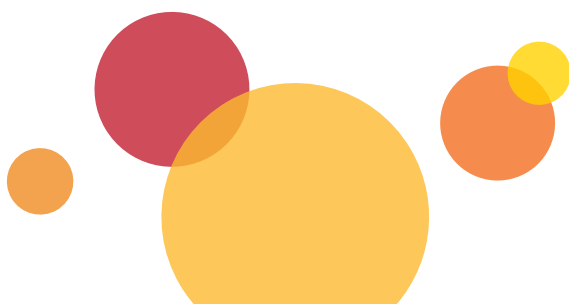
When the music stops, whoever is holding the parcel at the time, removes one layer of paper and reads the message which is attached to the next layer of paper.

Invite the group to share their thoughts about the message.

Start the music once again and invite the group to continue to hand-pass the parcel until the music stops once more.

The game ends when the last wrapping paper is removed to reveal the football.

You might choose to give the football as a prize to the person who unwraps the final layer.





Facilitator Conversation - Rubbish, Recycle or Reframe



The aim of this activity is to assist participants to identify the messages they have received about parenting and make decisions about the ongoing influence of these messages on their own parenting.

It is important that participants know that they do not, at any stage, have to share their messages. It may be necessary to say that these messages can be either positive and helpful or negative and unhelpful.

It is also important to talk about not apportioning blame to whoever/whatever was responsible for the negative or unhelpful messages. Instead believing that everyone was giving the best message they thought would help the child/parent but times change and the previously thought helpful message may, on reflection, by the parent receiving the message, see it now as unhelpful/negative.

Activity 13



Invite participants to:

- reflect the messages they have received as children from teachers, family, extended family that have influenced the way they parent.
- write/draw one message they received per “post it note” or small pieces of paper. Parents can write/draw as many messages as they want to as long as it is one message per post it note of small piece of paper.
- stand in a circle around the rubbish bin and recycle bin. A discussion occurs about the messages parents have written/drawn.
- think about the messages and ask themselves about each message “was this a useful message for me?” and “do I want to pass this message onto my children?”.
 - o (Rubbish) If the answer is no then the message goes into the rubbish bin.
 - o (Recycle) If the answer is yes then they will keep the message with them to be passed on.
 - o (Reframe) Sometimes participant either don’t like the message or the way it was delivered to them. Reframe allows them to separate message from delivery, keep part of the message, revisit the unwanted part, turn it into a more useful message, and take away for themselves and pass it on.

Some facilitators feel it is appropriate to share the messages parents have chosen to keep to pass on to their children so participants can see what others are keeping. This may be helpful but there is the question to think about if a participant wants to keep a message that is not good for children such as “hitting children is good for them”, how will this message be handled.



Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation: Deep Listening



Refer to Facilitator conversation on Deep Listening in Chapter 2.

Activity 14



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement, solutions or their point of view. After a suitable amount of time ask each pair to swap roles and repeat the process. You may find you need to prompt participants with a topic to talk about. Below are some possible topic ideas for this first session:

- What would your children say in telling the story of their childhood so far? ...
- Something I find difficult as a parent is ...

Once each participant has had their time to speak and to listen, draw the group back together and ask participants how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions being given or opinions shared. This is a great life skill that can be used within the couple and with each member of the growing family.

Facilitators Conversation - Self-care



This activity offers an opportunity for participants to think about taking care of themselves in a fun way. It is hoped that participants will make self-care a priority in their lives.

Activity 15:



Distribute the **HANDOUT – ‘My Favourite Things’** and invite participants to complete the activity.

Have a brief discussion about the activities they may choose to focus on this week.

Facilitator Conversation - Pause on Positives



Participants’ positive feelings about themselves and connection to others amplify change in the direction of health and well-being. Warm, responsive and supportive parenting has been shown to promote the development of children’s emotion regulation and social skills.

Each chapter provides this opportunity to reflect on the positives in parenting journey during the last week. The facilitator may print and distribute the **HANDOUT – Pause on Positives** each week and ask participants to answer on their handout.



Activity 16



Invite participants to sit comfortably for some closing reflective moments. They may wish to close their eyes, as you encourage them to reflect on positive aspects of their parenting while you read aloud the following, allowing plenty of time between each reflection:

1. My favourite moment with my baby/child this week was...
2. One way that I stayed in touch with friends this week was...
3. One way I was kind to myself this week was...
4. One person who supported me this week that I feel grateful for is...
5. One way I could connect more with my baby/child next week is...
6. A simple pleasure I could treat myself to next week is...

Facilitator Conversation - Storytime



It is a lovely for babies to be read or told/sung read stories to from conception. For those parents who were not read to as children, your enjoyment of being read to in the group may be a particularly important reparative introduction to the joys of shared stories, and an important opportunity for role modelling reading with baby when born.

Activity 13:



Option 1 – The Roast Story

The story can be changed to a young couple rather than friends etc. – just needs the outcome to be 3 generations of cooking the roast the same – first generation holds the reason, the other just follow.

A young woman is preparing a roast while her friend looks on. She cuts off both ends of the roast, prepares it with spices and puts it in the oven. “Why do you cut off the ends?” her friend asks. “I don’t know”, she replies. “My mother always did it that way and I learned how to cook from her.”

Her friend’s question made her curious about her roast preparation. During her next visit home, she asked her mother, “How do you cook a roast?” Her mother proceeded to explain and added, “You cut off both ends, prepare it with spices and put it in the pan and then in the oven”. “Why do you cut off the ends?” the daughter asked. Baffled, the mother offered, “That’s how my mother did it and I learnt it from her!”

Her daughter’s inquiry made the mother think more about the roast preparation. When she next visited her mother, she asked, “Mum, how did you used to cook a roast?” The mother slowly answered, “Well, you prepare it with spices, cut off both ends and put it in the oven. The mother asked, “But why do you cut off the ends?” The grandmother’s eyes sparkled as she remembered. “Well the roasts were always bigger than the oven that we had back then. I had to cut off the ends to fit it into the oven”



Option 2

Choose a picture book story to read to the group (see Appendix for storybook suggestions).

Session Wrap Up

Ask participants ‘what message/s are you taking away from this session’?

Participants can share these with the group or reflect on them for themselves.

Remind participants as they leave to:

- take care of themselves and their babies until the next session
- take time to focus on their baby and to practice ‘keeping the baby in mind’ in whatever they are doing
- bring their handouts with them to the next session





Chapter 5

A 1000 YEARS JOURNEY



Chapter outline

This chapter will look at the wellbeing of the growing baby/child, the adults supporting the growing baby/child and their family.

“Wellbeing” is the happiness and satisfaction we feel about our lives. Good wellbeing can include feeling able to cope with the daily stressors of life, having supportive social relationships, feeling connected to community and generally enjoying life.

Wellbeing will look different for different people.

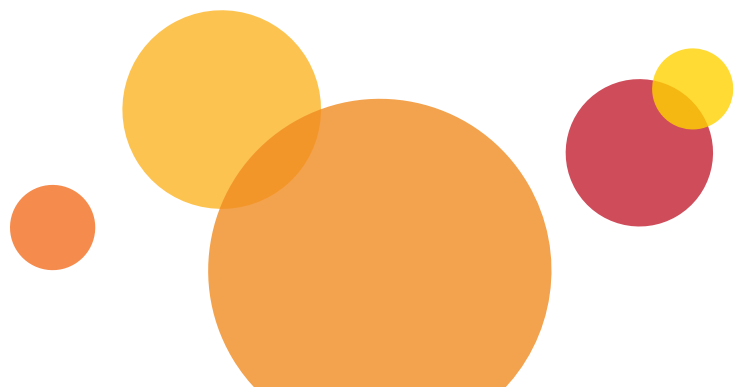
The purpose of this chapter is to continue the story of wellbeing and nurturing that has been present in all the chapters. For some participants, the emphasis on continual self-care and wellbeing may be a new concept. The belief is that only when adults take care of themselves can they properly care for their children. Practicing self-care during pregnancy will make continuing self-care easier after the baby is born.

This chapter also focuses on an exploration of parents’ responses to the on-going challenges of parenting. Recognising that stress/anger/anxiety effect wellbeing and the importance of reducing stress and ideas of how to do this. Participants will be encouraged to identify accessible sources of support when parenting becomes difficult.

The session will include a celebration to acknowledge parents’ participation and to mark the conclusion of the program.

Key Messages

- Care of self is a lifelong skill.
- Participants need to care for themselves so they can care for their growing baby.
- A growing baby thrives when those around are rested, healthy and happy.
- Looking after ourselves includes asking for help when we need it.
- When parents are reflective of their parenting they are more likely to have safe and positive relationships with their children.
- We need to be in a calm state before we can act rationally.
- All parents need help and support at some time.





Pre-session Facilitator Reflection

Reflect on your role as facilitator in supporting and guiding the group. How will you provide:

- a safe, warm, respectful atmosphere to explore ideas, experiences and differences in an enjoyable way?
- support and care for the parents in the group, as well as suggestions on how to care for themselves outside the group?
- inclusive and interactive experiences whilst acknowledging and accepting that for adult learners, participation in activities is optional?
- debriefing or referral as required?
- open, non-judgmental listening to participants in your group

For this session:

- How do you care for yourself as a practitioner?
- How did your parents look after themselves?
- How will you be able to support the parents in this group?
- Are you generally a ‘bottler’ of your emotions? Do you ‘explode’ easily?

Preparation and set-up

Depending on which activities you choose you will need:

- Refreshments
- Whiteboard and whiteboard markers
- Name tags
- Relaxing music to play
- ‘Useful Box’ containing e.g. pens and textas, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, scissors, etc.
- Flip chart / butcher’s paper / large Post-It notes
- Storybook to read to parents
- Laptop, data projector and screen “Babies” Video
- A selection of fruits/vegetables to represent the weights of a growing foetus, as per the Growing like a Mushroom handout (optional)
- Tape measures or rulers
- Wool/cord/ribbon

Chapter 5. A 1000 Years Journey



- Glue/hammers/handsaws/nails/drills/paint and paintbrushes/balsa wood/old CD's/fishing line, etc.
- Epigenetic YouTube clip - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYOY5D63rtk>
- Dad's story reading YouTube clip - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qU97IXT8MIs>
- Innovative Resources - Bear Cards
- Picture book 'When Lester Lost his Cool'
- Book "Fill a Bucket" Carol McCloud and Katherine Martin
- Book "Where the wild dads went" Katie Blackburn and Sholto Walker
- A small shiny stone for each parent
- Posca pens or permanent markers
- Celebratory refreshments (parents may have chosen to bring food to share)

For each participant you will need:

Handouts:

- Picture of Figure
- Repairing relationships
- Outline of T shirt
- Wellbeing plate
- Self Care prescription
- Asking for help
- Daddy's little baby
- Floral frame





Part 1: Introduction and warm-up

- Have relaxing music playing in the room as participants arrive (optional).
- Arrange chairs in a configuration that suits the space and encourages positive group interaction e.g. half-moon or circle.
- Offer participants refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags (optional – may not be necessary now)

Perform an Acknowledgement of Country.

Welcome participants back to the group.

Invite participants to share any feedback they might have about the group last week. Invite any questions, concerns or thoughts that participants may have.

Over previous sessions participants have:

- developed understanding about how the brain develops before and after birth;
- considered the role of communication in relationships and that communication includes listening and nonverbal language;
- The role of relationships between adults, adults and the growing baby and the young child
- Being able to recognise where their parenting messages come from and the impact these may have had on their growing babies and young children;

This session will look at wellbeing which can include feeling able to cope with the daily stressors of life, having supportive social relationships, feeling connected to community and generally enjoying life.

Activity 1: Reconnecting



Option 1

Show the last section of the “Babies” video and facilitate a discussion among participants.

Option 2

‘When I was a child my favorite person was....’

Ask parents to think about someone who was a favorite person when they were a child.

On a piece of paper draw that person. Talk to the person next you about the qualities that your favorite person had.

Gather the group back together and ask parents to identify the qualities they discussed and write a list of these on the whiteboard or butchers’ paper (these can be referred to during this session on qualities participants like to pass on to their children).



Facilitator Conversation – Check In



This activity is repeated each week as a way of checking in with each participant. Depending on the group this check in could occur individually (especially the question about being worried) or as part of the group conversation. The facilitator may print and distribute the **HANDOUT – Check In** each week and read the extra question of the week to participants to write down and answer on their handout.

Activity 2



Ask the whole group to reflect on the following questions and to share their responses with the group if they wish:

- ‘What has your baby/child told you about her/himself since we last met?’
- ‘Has your baby/child changed in any way that you can tell?’
- ‘Have there been any times when you have felt worried about your baby/child?’
- ‘Have there been any times that you have felt really close to your baby/child?’
- Have you been talking to your bump/baby this week?

Extra question for this week:

- What have you been dreaming this week about your baby/child?

Facilitator Conversation – Stop..Pause..Play



Refer to the **Stop..Pause..Play** discussion in part 3, Chapter 1.

Activity 3



Distribute the **HANDOUT – Stop..Pause..Play** and remote controls - one per person.

Review the concept of Stop..Pause..Play using the handout and remote. Encourage participants to set aside a few minutes each day to practice the exercise, and to also practice it whenever any stressful moments arise during their week.

Ask the group for examples of how they have used the strategy in the last week.

Practice the exercise together as a group using the handout as a guide. Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.



Part 2: Wellbeing in focus

Please Note: This chapter has been divided into pre and post birth activities but there are activities that may be suitable for either pre or post birth so please feel free to choose the activities that suit your group.

Pre-birth

Facilitator Conversation - How are you feeling?



Starting from conception, the baby is actively responding to changes in the environment, using cues provided by the mother's physical and mental state to 'predict' the kind of world they will be born into and altering their bodily structures accordingly.

This activity allows participants to bring their focused attention to their impending role as new parents and to wonder about the meaning of that experience for themselves. It is an opportunity to explore their feelings about becoming parents.

This activity will be revisited and referred to during each session as a way of participants focusing on their growing babies and on recording their own feelings/experiences and what they have learnt in the group as the pregnancy progresses.

Depending on the composition of your group use Activity 4 or Activity 5.

Activity 4



Refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and ask participants to complete the activity up to where they are in their pregnancy. If you have couples in the group they could do this together and discuss their feelings about each statement.

Ask participants if they would like to share anything from this activity with the group.

Continue to work on **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer**.

Activity 5



Invite discussion about the feelings that prospective fathers might have towards their child. Ask how they felt about their baby:

- when they first discovered they were going to be a father
- when they first felt or saw their baby moving
- when they first saw their baby on an ultrasound scan
- when they found out the gender of their baby

Ask what sort of things might influence their changing feelings (e.g. unplanned pregnancy, age and life circumstances, anxiety around financial responsibilities, the length of time it has taken to fall pregnant, health concerns, other things).



Encourage reflection on the fact that it is likely that their partner's feelings might differ from their own, and the possible reasons for that difference.

Now refer to the **HANDOUT – Babe-ometer** and invite fathers to record some of their feelings discussed above.

Facilitator Conversation - Growing like a Mushroom



The early stages of development offer the best opportunity for optimal development.

It is important to note that if this window is missed, it does not mean that all opportunities for positive development are lost. Throughout the program we will have activities that allow participants to follow their baby's progress in both growth and brain development.

We know that in the early stages particularly, this is one thing most parents are most interested in. We can use this interest as a link to the other things we would like to draw participants' attention to, like communicating with their baby and building a relationship with their baby.

This activity helps to represent the growth of their baby at different stages throughout the pregnancy. You may wish to have a selection of the fruits and vegetables as per the **HANDOUT - Growing like a mushroom**. The information on First, Second or Third Trimester in this handout could be useful here so that participants can find the size that most closely matches the growth of their own baby. You could invite participants to bring along to the next session, a fruit or vegetable of appropriate weight, to represent the developmental stage of their growing baby at the next session.

The first and best opportunity to build strong foundations for optimal development is during the first thousand days. Hence this activity is also repeated each session. The purpose is to support participants in their thinking about the size and what is going on for their growing baby.

Activity 6 – Your growing baby



This activity will be repeated each session as a way of supporting parts to focus on their growing babies and the significance of the first thousand days. The first thousand days makes a big difference to the way that children will, in later life, deal with stress, learn, and relate to others. It is the basic foundation of everything that follows for the child and the adult they will grow to be.

Ask participants to reflect on what they know about the current size of their growing baby. Divide participants into groups of 3 and refer to the **HANDOUT - Growing like a mushroom** and First, Second or Third Trimester pages as is relevant to your group. Using the handout, participants can check the current weight and length of their baby. Allow time for participants to compare and think about where their baby started and where their baby is at now.

Optional - Invite participants to select a fruit or vegetable that represents the weight of their baby at this stage of development.



Invite participants to use the tape measures or rulers to measure out the current length of their baby according to their **Growing like a Mushroom** handout. Participants may wish to cut a length of wool/cord/ribbon, the same length as their baby at this point, and tie it around their wrist as a reminder of their growing baby.

Bring the participants back to the big group and ask what the participants have learnt from this activity about the importance of the first thousand days and self-care.

Continue to work on **HANDOUT - Growing like a mushroom**.

Facilitator Conversation: Nurturing Parents



This activity is aimed to assist participants to rethink preconceived ideas about support, reinforcing the message that all parents need support at different times for different reasons.

Activity 7



Open a discussion about the need for participants to access help and support in the physically and emotionally challenging job of parenting.

Ask what participants think of the adage, *'It takes a village (or community) to raise a child.'*

Other discussion openers might include:

- Do you have supportive relationships within your family?
- Who is your greatest source of help?
- What sort of help would you like as a parent?
- How do you feel about asking for help?
- Where do you think your feelings about asking for help come from?

Facilitator Conversation: Generational wellbeing



Epigenetics research has brought to our attention the importance of the wellbeing of the pregnant adult to ensure a healthy baby. This activity provides an opportunity to understand the importance of wellbeing prior to conception and how it continues throughout life. Epigenetics confirm that our part of our wellbeing, lifestyle and habits are inherited from previous generations. But that's not the end of the story. Evidence tells us that we are able to alter and change our genetic structure and build a healthier life for ourselves and our children.

Facilitators would need to watch this entire YouTube video to understand how epigenetics is a key to better health and wellbeing. Facilitators may choose which part of the clip to show to participants, in particular the second half about changing the genetic structure through healthy lifestyle.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYOY5D63rtk>



Activity 8



Show participants the part of the YouTube video you have selected and facilitate a conversation about this.

Facilitator Conversation: Wellbeing in focus



This activity supports participants to think about how to keep all elements of their “Wellbeing plate” in focus.

Activity 9



Thinking about the wellbeing plate – how do participants keep all elements in focus?

What can get in the way of a well-maintained plate? E.g. negative thoughts, worry, family issues and ill health.

Discuss: strategies found to be useful to keep the platter well maintained and balanced.

Perhaps read story “Fill a Bucket” by Carol McCloud and Katherine Martin.

Post-birth

Facilitator Conversation – Emotions and wellbeing



As discussed in previous chapters, children need the adults in their lives to be calm and supportive. These activities help participants reflect on how their emotions were considered when they were children. This provides an opportunity to reflect on whether these patterns have continued into reactions to their own children’s emotions and behaviour. These activities can be done separately or together.

Activity 10



In the large group, ask participants to reflect on their childhood memories of their own parents’ responses to them when they were angry, fearful or sad. Ask participants to think about how well (or otherwise) they felt understood by their parents when they responded like that.

Invite participants to draw, in the centre of a blank page, a human figure representing themselves as a child or distribute **HANDOUT - Picture of figure**.

On the whiteboard, list some strong feelings e.g.: sadness, anger, curious, happy, fear.

Invite participants to choose one of those emotions and to think about how they felt responded to as a child when they expressed that emotion.



Each participant should then write the word for that emotion in a space on the page, according to how well they felt understood/accepted/heard when feeling that particular emotion. Eg. If the emotion is anger and the participant didn't feel that it was acceptable in her family to express anger, then she would write the word 'anger' right away from the drawn figure. On the other hand, if she felt well understood and accepted when she was angry as a child, then she would write the word 'anger' inside, or close to, the drawn figure.

Invite participants to now reflect on their responses to their own children when they are experiencing strong emotions.

Generate discussion by asking parents:

"As a child what messages did you take away from those encounters?"

"How do you now respond to your children when they display anger, fear or sadness?"

Encourage participants to reflect on whether there are times when they feel stressed with their children, that they find themselves reacting to their children in ways that they are not really happy with.

Remind parents that these are *Stop...Pause...Play* opportunities.

OR

Display the Innovative Resources 'Bear Cards', (these cards show pictures of bears that display anger in its many different forms). Ask each parent to choose a bear card that represents them when they are angry. Parents may choose different bears for different situations.

Discuss the cards that were chosen. Some will have chosen a big bear with a frown or with their back showing or looking more frustrated or frightened than angry. Others may have chosen a bear that is small and shaking or small with head bowed.

The aim of this activity is to highlight that anger can be represented in many different ways. Sometimes when we think we are angry we are actually scared, frustrated, overtired, stressed or another feeling altogether. When we are angry we are not at our best and this feeling can prevent us from responding to our children in the most positive nurturing and mindful way.

Facilitator Conversation - Parenting Stress- '*Pressing our Buttons*'



There are levels of stress in everyday life, especially when there are children in the family. There is so much to balance, work, time, money. It is easy to get upset and often children are the brunt of adult anger. To keep the parent/child relationship healthy it is the responsibility of the adults to keep calm. The following activities provide opportunities to support managing of anger and stress and follow on from previous activity



Activity 11



This activity is divided into three parts.

Part 1:

Whole Group Discussion – part one may not be needed depending on discussions in previous activity – may be appropriate to go straight onto part 2.

Stress challenges our ability to cope. In a large group, ask parents to share some of their parenting experiences which they would describe as stressful situations or where their children ‘press their buttons.’

Part 2:

This can be facilitated as a large group activity going through the three parts altogether or small groups as below:

Small groups - Divide parents into 3 small groups giving each group the following questions to prompt discussion. Write the following questions on the whiteboard (could refer to bear cards chosen).

Group 1 discusses:

“What happens in your body when you are stressed?”

Suggested answers could include:

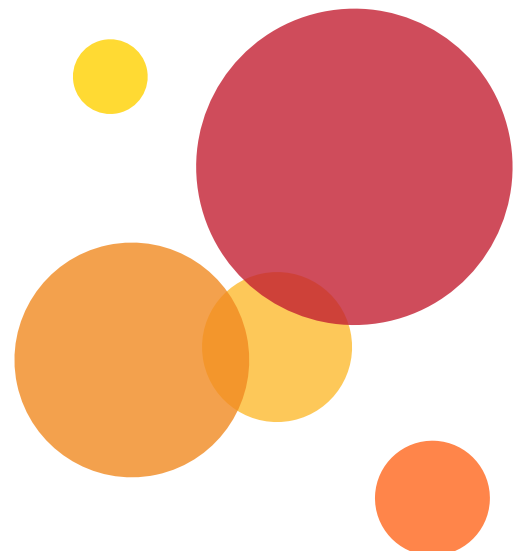
- Elevated heart rate
- Red rash on neck
- Jelly legs
- Clenched fists
- Tight jaw
- Headache

Group 2 discusses:

“How does stress affect you?”

Suggested answers could include:

- Short tempered
- Less patience
- Unable to think clearly
- Unable to be rational





Group 3 discusses:

“When you are stressed what sorts of things do you do to release this stress?”

Suggested answers could include:

- Take a walk
- Garden
- Read a book
- Listen to music
- Take a relaxing bath
- Breathing exercises
- Mindful practices
- STOP PAUSE PLAY!!

Part 3

Whole Group Discussion

After allowing enough time for discussion, ask each group to feedback to the large group. Everyone can add suggestions to any of the questions.

A general conversation about managing stress could follow. Perhaps put a list together of different stress release ideas. One way of doing this activity is to write each letter of the alphabet on the whiteboard and ask participants to think about a stress release/relaxation activity to go against each letter of the alphabet.

Facilitator Conversation



Even before birth babies can experience stress. They can sense whether their parents are angry or sad and can be affected by their parents' moods. How babies and children respond will be determined by their unique personality, age and stage of development.

Being around situations like family violence can affect babies' development and future responses to stress. Chronic, high levels of stress hormones in pregnant mothers, can alter the way that the developing baby's genes involved in the stress response will function.



Activity 12



Ask participants:

“What sorts of situations might stress a baby?” or “What situations have you noticed stress your baby”

Suggestions include: loud noises, scary faces, rough handling, etc.

Ask participants how their babies tell them they are stressed.

Ask participants how they soothe their babies when they are stressed.

Then suggest the best way to soothe the baby is to manage your own stress and be calm yourselves. Everyone’s wellbeing benefits when the parent knows when they are stressed and takes steps to reduce that stress and look after themselves.

Only a parent who looks after themselves can be the parent they want to be for their children.

Facilitator Conversation



Facilitators can talk about co-regulation – e.g. preparing babies or young children for sleep may include parents engaging in soothing activities with their babies or young children in order to calm them and to teach them how to eventually soothe themselves e.g. singing with them, reading stories together, patting them, etc.

Activity 13



Choose one from the following two options.

Option 1

Read to the group the children’s story *When Lester Lost his Cool*. Generate discussion about strategies for children to deal with anger, e.g. Yell your anger down a plughole then rinse the words down the drain.

Option 2

Refer back to the **HANDOUT - Repairing Relationships** and talk through the steps to repairing relationships again. Encourage a discussion on adults needing to cool down so children can be calm as well. Ask participants if they have used these steps and whether they found them helpful.





Facilitator Conversation - Connecting Activity to Help Relax Young Children



The next activities offer opportunities to support children to reduce their stress levels and relax. The most important way that participants can support children to relax is to be calm and relaxed themselves.

Activity 14



Option 1

Ask participants to get into pairs and to sit or stand one behind the other, so that the person who is the 'parent' is able to comfortably reach and stroke the back of the person who is the 'child'.

Encourage the 'parents' to ask the 'children' the following.

"What's the first thing we do when we make a pizza?"

Suggest that the participants 'knead the dough' by massaging the 'child's' shoulders/back or make flour-sprinkling and dough-mixing movements on the 'child's' back with your fingertips.

Ask *"What do we do next?"*

Encourage creative answers and free movements as participants 'make a pizza' on the back of their partners, e.g. spreading movements using forearms, for rolling out the dough; short downward strokes with fingers spread wide for grating cheese; wide spreading sweeps with palms of the hands for spreading tomato paste; chopping movements around the shoulders using the sides of the hands for chopping up vegetables.

Encourage the 'parents' to ask their 'child' partners what they want on their pizza and to add ingredients as they suggest them.

Encourage participants to try this exercise at home with their children, following the child's lead and suggestions.

Option 2 - Group Discussion

Play, relaxation and fun with family are protective factors for children who are stressed.

In a large group, brainstorm and whiteboard parents' suggestions for restful, enjoyable activities which they can share with their children. The list might include such things as:

- listening to music
- deep breathing
- massage
- hugs
- taking a nap
- singing
- reading a book together
- playing with pets



- drawing
- imaginative visualization
- dancing
- brushing hair

Facilitator Conversation - Child-Centred Craft Activity



As this is the last session it might be nice to spend some time either doing something to take home to their child/ren or to make something for themselves to remind themselves to stay calm.

Activity 15



Choose one from the following options (or another appropriate activity of your choosing).

Option 1

Invite participants to use the craft materials provided, to make something to take home as a gift for their child/children - something which includes some messages they would like to pass on to their children. Parents may also wish to incorporate into their craftwork, a photo of their child, if they have brought one along with them.

Option 2

Invite each person to choose a smooth stone as something to hold on to at times when they need to remind themselves to stay calm. Provide permanent markers which will write on the stone (eg Posca Pens) and suggest that participants may wish to write a word, or draw an image or symbol on their stone - something that is significant to them.

Facilitator Conversation: T Shirt



The following activities provide further opportunities for participants to reflect upon and summarise their thoughts about what is important to them in their role as dads.

Activity 16



Option 1:

Invite participants to think about then write or draw a dad slogan for themselves.

Ask: 'If you were to come up with a slogan or title to have printed on a tee shirt: something that represents yourself as a parent, what would it be?'

Invite participants to share their ideas with the group. You may invite participants to draw/write their individual slogan on the **HANDOUT - T Shirt outline**.

Option 2:

Provide a cotton T-shirt for each of the participants and provide fabric markers for them to write/draw their slogan on their actual T-shirt.



Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

As this is the last session there is a focus on self-care that includes feeling OK about seeking support along the parenting journey and extending self-care to self-compassion. There is a handout of all the mindful activities.

Facilitator Conversation: Self-care and Wellbeing



In a society that often fosters ‘soldiering on’ over self-care, it is a good time to look at long term wellbeing and self-care. This chapter is focusing on what self-care might look like for each of us now and into the future with firstly a baby, then young children, adolescents and adult children. Looking after yourself is important all through life.

Activity 17



All through these chapters there has been time set aside for us to think about caring for ourselves as a lifelong project.

Distribute the **HANDOUT - The Wellbeing Plate**. This plate helps us think about all the aspects of our lives that together are necessary for a full healthy life.

Provide participants with handouts, pen, scissors and sticky tape/glue and ask them to design their own wellbeing plates by using different ingredients provided in the second page or adding their own ideas/shapes/pictures, etc.

Once wellbeing plates are all designed discuss in small group or pairs:

- What does each of the aspect of the plate mean to each participant?
 - Sleep time?
 - Play time?
 - Relationship time?
 - Physical time?
 - Down time?
 - Nurturing time?
 - Nature time?
 - Healthy food time?
- Ask about other ingredients participants may have added.
- How well are participants going to keep all aspects of the plate active?
- What does each of the aspects look like in their lives?
- Are their aspects that need more attention?



Facilitator Conversation: Self-compassion



We know that it's easier for us to nurture our children when we feel nurtured ourselves, and that's why it's important for us as parents to take time out to do the things that make us feel good...walking, reading, massage, meeting friends, sport, knitting...

But there's another aspect of self-care that's vitally important: the practice of self-compassion. It's like taking care of ourselves from the inside. Self-compassion is particularly about looking after ourselves when we feel like we haven't been good enough.

There are many good reasons for practising self-compassion:

- It expands parts of the brain which are key to empathy and which enable us to respond to children's distress
- It has a calming effect, soothing us when distressed, until we can sort out our problems ourselves
- It helps us to accept ourselves while we're in pain
- It supports our courage to face life's difficulties
- Highly self-compassionate people are less likely to suffer burn-out and more likely to experience satisfaction and optimism
- Self-compassion is strongly related to better mental health and relationships

Self-compassion can be practiced by following a 3-step process whenever you feel that you are suffering, that you've have made a mistake or that you are unworthy as demonstrated in the activity below.

Activity 18



Invite participants to sit comfortably and to either close their eyes or to fix their gaze on the floor or their lap.

Ask them to bring to mind, a situation with their children that they find difficult, where they feel like they are not skilled, or where they feel like they made a mistake.

Then talk them through the following practice, allowing plenty of time between steps:

1. Become aware of how you are feeling as you re-live that experience with your child. Notice what is happening in your body and in your thoughts. Just notice. Don't judge.
2. Connect your experience to that of all parents everywhere who have been in that situation with their children. (Eg. all parents struggle in this situation with children at this stage)
3. Be kind to yourself. Do and say the same things that you would do and say to a good friend going through a similar experience.



Facilitator Conversation: Deep Listening



Refer to **Facilitator conversation on Deep Listening** in Chapter 2.

Activity 19



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement, solutions or their point of view. After a suitable amount of time ask each pair to swap roles and repeat the process. You may find you need to prompt participants with a topic to talk about. Below are some possible topic ideas for this first session:

- How do you show your child that you are listening and understand?
- The things that are most important to me being a parent are.....

Once each participant has had their time to speak and to listen, draw the group back together and ask participants how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions being given or opinions shared. This is a great life skill that can be used within the couple and with each member of the growing family.

Facilitator Conversation: Self-Care



As this is the final session a revisit of self-care activities undertaken in the previous sessions.

Activity 20



Distribute several of the **HANDOUT - Self-care Prescription** to each participant.

Each participant is to work on their own prescriptions

- Firstly, for now
- Then when you have your new baby/young child
- As your child grows

Discussion: Do the activities and priorities change as life's journey continues?



Activity 21



Option 1: Social connectedness

An effective way to feel supported in your role; is to connect with other people who are having a similar experience to your own.

Ask prospective parents if they have friends, work mates or relatives, who have recently become parents or who are expecting. Do they have opportunities to meet and to share their experiences with other men/women?

Explore first mother's groups and playgroups as sources of support.

Introduce the concept of Dads Group Inc. which was founded by a new dad. Information about how to become involved, can be found at <http://www.dadsgroup.org/>

Offer parents the opportunity to share their contact details with each other. Perhaps one of the group could collect mobile numbers/email/Facebook contact details and distribute those to the whole group.

Offer parents the opportunity of attending a reunion at a date which will occur after the last birth in the group.

Option 2: A-Z of self-care

In order for parents to be in a position to support their each other and their children, they in turn, need to feel nurtured and supported. Invite participants to share the various activities they enjoy which help them to relax or to feel good about themselves.

List the letters of the alphabet vertically on a whiteboard or butchers' paper, with space beside each letter to write at least one word.

Act as scribe yourself or invite a volunteer from the group to do this. Invite the group to call out self-care activities that they enjoy- each beginning with a different letter of the alphabet, until you have listed 26 different suggestions.

Highlight to the group that some people feel calmed or revitalized by quiet, solitary pursuits, while others prefer more energetic, social activities.

Encourage participants to choose, and make a commitment to practice, one self-care activity soon after this session (ask them to tell the person next to them, what that will be); to commit to practising another during this week, and another which they will need to plan for (eg. holiday or group activity with friends).

Activity 22



This activity enables the participants to make their own resource booklet of self-care options that suit them now during pregnancy and into the future with a young baby/child. This activity will need the resources as listed at beginning of session – all the handouts about self-care and other thoughts and ideas.

Invite participants to put together a useful resource of self-care activities, etc. to take home.



Activity 23



This activity provides the opportunity for participants to make something craft to take home that is a self-care activity.

Distribute to participants **HANDOUT - floral frame** and offer a selection of stickers, glitter, and other self-sticking colourful bits, textas and pens.

Participants are invited to write themselves a self-care message and decorate their frame.

Facilitator Conversation - Pause on Positives



Participants' positive feelings about themselves and connection to others amplify change in the direction of health and well-being. Warm, responsive and supportive parenting has been shown to promote the development of children's emotion regulation and social skills.

Each chapter provides this opportunity to reflect on the positives in parenting journey during the last week. The facilitator may print and distribute the **HANDOUT – Pause on Positives** each week and ask participants to answer on their handout.

Activity 24



Invite participants to sit comfortably for some closing reflective moments. They may wish to close their eyes, as you encourage them to reflect on positive aspects of their parenting while you read aloud the following, allowing plenty of time between each reflection:

1. My favourite moment with my baby/child this week was...
2. One way that I stayed in touch with friends this week was...
3. One way I was kind to myself this week was...
4. One person who supported me this week that I feel grateful for is...
5. One way I could connect more with my baby/child next week is...
6. A simple pleasure I could treat myself to next week is...

Facilitator Conversation



All parents deserve support as they embark on their parenting journey but some parents find support difficult to access for a variety of reasons. It is important for parents to know that it is OK to seek the support you need to enhance your parenting experience.





Activity 25



Note: You may prefer to do this as an individual written activity.

Ask parents to reflect on the following questions:

“When do you know it’s time to get help?”

“Where would you go for help and support?”

“Who would you prefer to contact?”

Reaffirm that seeking support and assistance can take courage however it is a sign of strength, not failure. Seeking support and assistance reflects:

- your love for your child
- your ability to appreciate there is a problem
- your desire for things to be different for your family
- your commitment to working towards changing things for the better.

To conclude, distribute **HANDOUT - Asking for Help** and encourage parents to access the relevant support they need from the web using their smart phones in the session and share the information that they find with the group. Keywords for search might include:

- Braxton Hicks or real labour
- Hospital birth – what do I need to know?
- The baby who doesn’t eat
- The baby who does not settle easily

Activity 26: Take home activity (fathers/male carers)



This activity offers suggestions for ways that fathers can connect with their babies.

Invite fathers to complete the Handout - Daddy’s little baby and practice suggestions in their spare times at home.

Facilitator Conversation: Evaluation



Encourage participants to share what they enjoyed about the group. You might ask the participants to share their thoughts in response to the following question:

Over our time together what have been the strongest messages you have received?

Parents can choose to share or not.



Facilitator Conversation: Storytime



It is a lovely for babies to be read or told/sung read stories to from conception. For those parents who were not read to as children, your enjoyment of being read to in the group may be a particularly important reparative introduction to the joys of shared stories, and an important opportunity for role modelling reading with baby when born.

Activity 27



Option 1

Read the story of 'Ubuntu' (Refer Appendix 1).

Option 2

Choose a picture book story to read to the group.

Closing: Celebration and Connection

Share a celebratory supper/meal/snack/picnic.

If parents have elected to share their contact details with each other, distribute the contact list.

Remind participants as they leave to:

- take care of themselves and their babies
- take time to focus on their baby and to practice 'keeping the baby in mind' in whatever they are doing
- add to their wellbeing plate.

Farewell

Wish the participants well in their parenting journey.

The background is a solid dark red color. It is decorated with several overlapping circles in shades of yellow, orange, and red. There are four hand-drawn style icons: a yellow handprint in a speech bubble at the top left, a red speech bubble with two white hearts at the top right, an orange house icon at the bottom left, and a yellow lightbulb icon at the bottom right. A large, light red speech bubble with a white border is centered on the page, containing the word 'APPENDIX' in white, bold, uppercase letters.

APPENDIX



Atkinson, J. (2002) **Trauma Trails – Recreating Songlines: The transgenerational effects of Trauma in Indigenous**, Australia, Spinifex Pres.

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Appendix 1. Ubuntu



There was great excitement at the zoo, because Elli the elephant was going to have a baby!

This would be Elli's first baby, and the first time a baby elephant had been born at the zoo.

The zookeepers moved Elli to a quiet enclosure away from all the crowds. Every day, Zoe the elephant keeper, checked to see if the baby had been born. Every night, before she went home, Zoe would check on Elli one last time.

On Tuesday night there was a storm that rattled the windows and shook the house. The noise woke Zoe and she sat up in bed worrying about Elli. Although it was still dark, Zoe was wide awake. She decided to get up and go to the zoo to make sure that Elli was alright.

All was quiet as she approached the elephant enclosure and she thought that Elli must be sleeping, but when she peeped through the door, she could see Elli standing in a corner of her enclosure rocking from side to side. She opened the door and called softly to the elephant as she walked towards her. In the dim light, it took her a while to notice a large bundle on the floor of the enclosure. At first she thought it must be a pile of straw...but then the bundle moved! Elli's baby had been born!

Zoe watched in wonder as the baby tried to stand up, first on one wobbly leg, then another. But that's as far as she got, because no sooner was the baby up on her front feet, than Elli suddenly rushed towards her baby, stopping just before she trampled on the little one. The mother elephant made huffing sounds as she swished her trunk and stamped her big heavy feet on the ground.

Zoe jumped back in fright. Elli was usually such a calm elephant, but tonight she seemed restless and confused and frightened. Zoe tried to calm her, talking to her softly and putting out her hand to reassure the new mother. But Elli rolled her eyes and raised her trunk with a loud trumpeting roar whenever Zoe tried to come closer. Finally, the new mother walked slowly away from her baby-back to the corner of the enclosure, where once again she began rocking back and forth, back and forth.

Zoe stayed with Elli until the sun came up, all the time talking to her softly and trying to calm her, but anytime the baby elephant tried to stand up, Elli would rush towards it, and Zoe began to worry that Elli would hurt her new baby. She called the other keepers and they talked for a long time about the best thing to do. Elli wouldn't eat any of the food that Zoe brought for her, and though Zoe spoke to her softly, Elli's eyes remained wild and frightened. Her ears drooped and she just seemed very tired. The baby elephant needed to be safe, and needed to be fed. But Elli didn't seem to know how to look after her baby.

Finally they called Dr Ubuntu the famous elephant expert in Africa, to get his advice. 'Ah the solution is simple', he said. 'Elli has lived her whole life in the zoo and she's all alone with her baby. Here in Africa, when a mother elephant has a baby, all the aunty elephants help the new mother. What Elli needs is an Aunty!'

So Zoe rang another zoo nearby, and arranged to have one of their old lady elephants brought over to be with Elli. When Mali arrived in a big truck, all the keepers crossed their fingers and wondered how this old elephant could possibly help. She looked so wrinkly and saggy and she had ragged ears from her time on the plains in Africa when she was young.



When the old aunty elephant lumbered into the enclosure, she sniffed Elli's baby sleeping in the straw pile. Then she looked at Elli who was still swaying back and forth, back and forth in the corner. The keepers watched in awe as she walked slowly to the mother elephant's side and began swaying with her. Together, they slowly rocked- back and forth, back and forth. Gradually Elli's swaying became slower and slower...until finally she stopped altogether. Then, with one enormous sigh, Elli lay down to rest.

While Elli rested, Mali used her trunk to bring Elli food. She gathered straw to make her a soft bed. She sprayed her with cool water when the day was too hot. She made rumbling humming sounds as she watched over her, flapping her ears and wrapping her trunk over Elli's back. And she played with the baby elephant, throwing straw in the air and covering her with it until she looked like a lumpy haystack.

While Zoe watched the baby elephant play, she saw that it was a girl. She decided to call her Ubuntu.

After only a few days, Elli began to eat every bit of the food that Zoe brought for her. The next day Zoe noticed that her eyes looked bright again... and the day after that, she started to flap her ears once more. On Saturday, she stayed awake all day and she let her baby drink her warm milk for the very first time.

From then on, she just seemed to know how to look after her baby: she brought her food, she gathered straw to make her a soft bed, she sprayed cool water over her when the day was too hot, and she played with her baby, throwing straw in the air and covering her with it until she looked like a lumpy haystack.



Appendix 2. Books to Share Together



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