



Bringing Up Great Kids
for
Aboriginal Families
FACILITATOR MANUAL

The Australian Childhood Foundation

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.

The Australian Childhood Foundation (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.

ACF developed the Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) program that is nationally recognised and evidence based. BUGK has a range of materials and resources to support the BUGK program. ACF support and resource the work of agencies across the country in both parenting and early years support for at risk and vulnerable families. BUGK for Aboriginal Families has been developed from the original BUGK template but has been informed by Aboriginal organisations, elders, professionals and parents.

For more information on ACF and its work www.childhood.org.au

For more information on BUGK www.bringingupgreatkids.org

Acknowledgements

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Finally, we would like to thank the parents who have been on the journey with us throughout the development of the original program and the more recently revised version. Their willingness 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 program.

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INTRODUCTION



Background

The Aboriginal Version of the 'Bringing Up Great Kids' parenting program is a group program developed by the Australian Childhood Foundation for Aboriginal parents across Australia including those who might be considered 'vulnerable' or 'at risk'.

The program recognises the many carers of children in Aboriginal community; the differing family compositions and the many and varied needs that Aboriginal families have across Australia.

This program began with a reference group formed by Aboriginal elders, professionals and parents from Congress in Alice Springs, they had attended the BUGK foundation training or a BUGK parent group and graciously gave their time and expertise to begin the thinking about how different BUGK for Aboriginal families might look. This reference group gave the "stories" their names and one activity for each of the stories.

ACF then spoke and consulted with Aboriginal professionals, elders and parents across Australia asking them to look at what had been developed so far and to add ideas, activities and thoughts. All those consulted are Aboriginal and knew BUGK and its concepts. ACF was not able to consult with any Torres Strait Islanders and so their stories are not part of this program.

Once an activity or idea began part of this manual, it was not changed by another opinion just added to what was there before. This process has enabled BUGK to become a national program with contributions from Aboriginal groups and mobs across Victoria, NSW, NT, SA, Tasmania Qld and WA. No voice was stronger or more dominant than another, all voices were heard and added to the manual enabling stories from across Australia to be included.

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

The program is written as six stories or 12 hours but may be delivered in whatever way works for you and your group less or more hours, less stories, more stories or stories in a different order.

Each story has been divided into 5 sections

1. Preparation and set up – containing all information to prepare for session
2. Introduction – check in
3. Small Yarn – Deep listening, Stop Pause Play and breathing exercises
4. Big Yarn – content/topic activities
5. Mindful Yarn – reflection, mindfulness and self care

BUGK for Aboriginal Families program and resources are underpinned by a philosophy of promoting and supporting respectful, caring and nurturing relationships between involved adults and their children. Parents and all other adults involved in the care of children, are encouraged to become more reflective and mindful in their parenting approach.

All BUGK programs and resources support parents to:

- learn more about the origins of their own parenting style and how it can be more effective;
- identify the important messages they want to convey to the children in their care and how to achieve this;
- learn more about brain development in children and its influence on their thoughts, feelings and behaviour;
- understand the meaning of children's behaviour;
- discover how to overcome some of the obstacles getting in the way of them being the kind of parents they would like to be; and,
- discover ways for parents to take care of themselves and to find support when they need it.

The BUGK for Aboriginal Families program aims to support parents to review and change their patterns of interacting with their children. BUGK for Aboriginal Families aims to identify and address the sources of unhelpful or hurtful attitudes held by parents. BUGK for Aboriginal Families also works to establish a new relationship context for children and their parents through facilitating opportunities for positive exchanges.

The program centres on the building of positive relationships and interactions between parents and children. It works from a child-centered perspective and aims to resource parents to:

- identify and evaluate the source of their parenting approach and philosophy;
- develop an increased understanding about the 'messages' that they communicate to their children through their behaviours, acts and attitudes;
- 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
- seek further professional assistance about their parenting if required.

The key themes of the approach are:

- all behaviour and interaction has meaning attached to it;
- the meaning parents attach to behaviours and interaction is determined by how they have come to see their world;
- these messages are conveyed via their content and manner of delivery; and
- to support both understand what drives the message given as well as what determines the meaning for the message receiver.

The theoretical underpinnings of the 'messages' approach derive from a child-centred perspective, neurobiology of trauma and attachment, narrative and solution focused therapy and a strengths perspective all within an Aboriginal cultural framework.

Program Resources

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

For ease of reproduction the following are contained as separate files.

Facilitator's Manual

This manual is for use by group facilitators and includes all the information required to prepare for and facilitate the 'BUGK for Aboriginal families program. It includes background information, session preparation and comprehensive outlines of each of the six 'stories' or sessions that comprise the program.

Handouts for Parents

Handouts for parents used in each story of the program are included as separate files.

Glossary

Story

The program uses the metaphor of 'story' 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 BUGK for Aboriginal Families 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 create the metaphorical space.

Deep Listening

BUGK uses the definition of Deep Listening as taken from Judy Atkinson (2017). **The Value of Deep Listening-The Aboriginal Gift to the Nation** "To listen in reciprocal relationships with no judgment, just to try to understand".

Parent

The program recognises that, today, a variety of adults can be involved in parenting 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.

Child/children

The term "child" and "children" are the terms used throughout the manual to signify children and young people. It is not to diminish the differential needs of adolescents. However "child" and "children" are preferred for ease of communication.

Participants

This is the term used for all who attend the BUGK for Aboriginal families parent group and who the activities are designed for.

He/she

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

Why use Bringing Up Great Kids with Aboriginal families?

BUGK was developed to promote positive and nurturing relationships between parents and children and support parents to reflect on the nature of their relationship with their children and

this is important and relevant for all families in all cultures across the planet. Aboriginal families have been showing the way for generations.

'BUGK for Aboriginal Families' also helps parents to appreciate their child's perspective or experience of the world. Parents are supported to understand children's brain development with a focus on their emotional development and reasoning abilities and reflect on how this understanding may influence their parenting approach.

Parents are encouraged to reflect upon and understand the meaning behind their child's behaviour. 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 respond with 'knee-jerk' reactions.

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 program:

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, 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 primary attachment relationship between parent and child builds a 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 practise new skills.

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 reflective capacity in parents and to promote positive, respectful parent/child relationships.

Group Facilitation

The program will be facilitated by professionals who have completed the one day 'BUGK' foundation training. Where possible the sessions would have two facilitators and ideally the facilitators will be Aboriginal and they will be working in their own communities. There are many benefits for parents when there are two facilitators including one facilitator tracking participation opportunities for parents, be able to give time to an individual parent, be able to pick up side conversation threads while the other facilitator stays with the main conversation.

Facilitators need to be:

- **Reflective**

Relationship and reflective practise are the heart of the program.

It is expected that facilitators of 'BUGK' will model this practise 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 parent begins with the engagement process, from the moment of first contact, through supporting parents to attend the program and then continues with each interaction with every parent 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.

- **Mindful**

Facilitator Practice - Pausing for Mindful Communication

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 or feel 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 with practice knowledge rather than skills/strategies. It is the practice that enables the facilitator or the parent to act mindfully. It is practice that builds a capacity that let parents to respond rather than react. We have learned that reading and memorising the material provided in BUGK does not make a real difference by itself, neither in facilitators nor in parents. Just like swimming: reading a handbook on swimming does not prevent you from drowning! It is a requirement for a reflective and transformative program like BUGK that facilitators practise the concepts introduced in the program in their real life. This enables them to share each concept from what they have lived. Providing first hand and fresh anecdotes gives facilitators a power to change lives.

The Importance of Group Safety Guidelines

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

Parents 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 parents 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

Program Stories

The main purpose of the program is to support families to have a respectful and reflective relationship with their children. Therefore whatever changes and adaptations that facilitators want to make to give the families they work with these opportunities are encouraged.

The program has been designed into 6 different stories. These stories can be used in any order with additional material or other content and topics can be added. You can take as long as you like with the material or as short as families need.

The 6 stories are:

Story One: The Message centre

Story Two: Messages past, present, future

Story Three: Giving & receiving Messages

Story Four: The messages of Behaviour

Story Five: Me & my messages

Story Six: Safety Net

Structure of each story

For each story the manual includes:

- Explaining the Story
- Preparation and setup including required resources and handouts

Each story has been divided into three parts:

Introduction, welcome/acknowledgment of country and check in

Part 1 Small yarn – mindful listening/stop, pause and play

Part 2 Big Yarn - Information and activities related the story

Part 3 Mindful Yarn -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 mindfulness exercises

Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country (whichever is relevant).

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 story. 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 parenting group 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.”

Repeated 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

The *Stop...Pause...Play* is a reflective tool that is practised 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 brain (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 the parent to talk and the other parent to listen however this may be decreased down to 30 seconds depending on the parent group and the parents' capacity to manage talk or listen for two minutes.
- Parents 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 parents to be able to talk out appropriate parenting issues.

Feedback from our evaluation of BUGK by the Australian Institute of Family Studies was that parents found this deep listening exercise very challenging initially but after a couple of weeks, parents reported that it was one of the most important elements of each session. Parents are challenged 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.

Parents are reminded that the Chinese symbol for listening is made up of 5 different parts. We listen with ears, eyes and heart, open mind, without judgement

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.

Capturing the journey:

Before starting the group facilitators will have thought about how their group participants may record their journey in the group

Some suggestions include the idea of using footprints or footsteps outline on which family/community can record thoughts and ideas they want to reflect on. These can be added to each time the group meets and at the final meeting can be painted on canvas or put together in some way as a record for the family of their experience in the group.

Families may want to record a significant message they have got out of each session/chapter/gathering that they want to keep and/or pass on to their children or a reflection of something that was important to them.

Yarning with each other and children

The creation and telling of stories and creating meaning through story are integral to the program. The program acknowledges the deeply embedded role “yarning” has in Aboriginal culture and the importance of passing on important ‘messages’ through the telling of these yarns to their children

Yarning can occur throughout the story but it can also be nice to finish the story of the day with a yarn.

There are many Aboriginal Stories, DVD's and other material available that could be used with this program such as:

- The Dreaming - a six series collection on DVD of 78 Aboriginal Nations animated short films of Dreaming stories, plus a comprehensive Teacher's Guide containing curriculum based activities for all school ages.
- Dreaming Stories - A Springboard for Learning A Research In Practice booklet, plus a DVD of thirteen Aboriginal Nations animated short films of Dreaming stories for carers and teachers working with three to five year old children.
- Dreamtime Kullilla-Art - <http://www.kullillaart.com.au/>

Evaluations

BUGK is an evidence-based program evaluated by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and is now deemed to have met the criteria and is listed as an evidence-based program (<https://apps.aifs.gov.au/cfca/guidebook/programs/bringing-up-great-kids>).

There are many types of evaluations around and often facilitators have to fill in particular templates for funding bodies and the like. BUGK sees a pre- group reflection for participants as a useful tool. This does not need to be formal and can just be a few questions.

Pre-group reflection

At the beginning of the first story or perhaps in a meeting with the family before the group starts some questions that may be useful to ask include:

- What do you think this group is about?
- Why did you decide to attend this group?
- What do you hope to gain from attending this group?

Post Group reflection

- What was the most in attending the group?
- What did you enjoy?
- What did you not like?
- What will you remember and become part of your way of parenting?



STORY ONE

THE MESSAGE CENTRE



Story Outline

This first story introduces the program and invites participants to get to know each other and express their parenting goals. Suggestions – please adapt to your community group i.e your families may all know each other so introductions might not be needed

This story explores normative brain development in children from birth to ten years of age with a major focus on the relationship between a child's stage of neurological development and his behaviour.

Key Messages

- Parents' relationships with their children are critical to children's brain development.
- An understanding of early brain development can help parents better understand and more appropriately respond to children's behaviour.

Pre- session reflective activity for facilitators

It is expected that the facilitator/s have already been in contact with the participants before the group begins. This may be via phone calls, text messages or incidental yarning in the street. This assists in starting to understand what the participant wants from the group, to determine if the group is right for the participant and to start building a respectful, mindful relationship.

1. Reflect on your role as facilitator in supporting and guiding the group. How will you:
 - Provide a safe, warm, respectful atmosphere in which to explore ideas, experiences and differences in an enjoyable way?
 - Provide inclusive and interactive experiences whilst acknowledging and accepting that for adult learners, participation in activities is optional?

Preparation and set-up

Depending on what activities you are choosing or whatever you need for your own activities:

Refreshments

Become familiar with Stop Pause Play routine

Prepare Acknowledgement of or welcome to Country

You will need - everything is only a suggestion

- Whiteboard & whiteboard markers
- Flipchart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Name tags
- Relaxing music of your choice (optional)
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pens and textas, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, scissors, etc.
- Packet of lollies (optional)
- Ball of thick, strong wool or string
- Optional: 3 brain models made from rice-filled plastic bags/stockings:
 - ✓ one weighing 400g Newborn
 - ✓ another weighing 1100g 3 year old
 - ✓ and a third weighing 1400g Adult (optional)
- Remote control squeezey for each participant

For each participant you will need:

- Folders for parents to store handouts
- Pictures/photos – feelings
- Bear cards or photolanguage (available from St Lukes's Innovative Resources www.innovativeresources.org)

HANDOUTS

- Stop Pause Play
- Connecting Brains
- Neuronal Connections
- Bottom-up Brain Development
- Parts of the brain
- Blank brain

Introduction

Introduction of facilitators and participants in the group relationship to children or other relevant introductory sentence from each person.

Parents are given an overview of the program – perhaps a bit of information on the content or an outline of the sections of the sessions.

Respect

This is a conversation about participants feeling respected and valued in the group and how this can occur.

Participants will come up with what is important to them which may include the following:

- Confidentiality – keeping whatever is said in the group
- Participants do not have to take part in the activities – can just listen etc
- Only sharing what they feel Ok to share

This list may also contain practicalities relevant to the group such as starting and finishing times, care of children attending etc.

Setting the Scene

A comfortable way to begin the group may be a casual discussion about their expectations from the group.

What do they want to get out of the group?

Or a general conversation about parenting.

Possible prompts could be one or two from list below or any other that participants may like to discuss.

This could be a whole group activity, small groups, or in pairs.

- Being a parent is different to how I imagined it.
- Parenting gets easier as the child gets older
- Finding time for myself is really tricky at the moment

Or a question from the list below can be used as a prompt.

What are your hopes and dreams for yourself as a parent?

Which values and beliefs are most important to you as a parent?

Where did these values and beliefs come from/

Think about instances where you can see these values reflected in your relationship with your children

If you had three wishes for your children 20 years from now what would they be?

(Any of the above can be used throughout the program where they fit)

Small Yarn – Mindful Listening

Deep Listening (an activity that is practiced each session of the parent group)

Deep listening in the context of BUGK is where one person talks about a parenting issue or concern 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.

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.

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 ie anything that is outside parenting conversations.

Suggestion 1

For this first attempt parents may need a concrete topic to talk about. Helpful to make it a general sort of topic

Options:

- What did it take you to get here today?
- What was your interest in attending the group?

Suggestion 2.

An idea for the first time with this activity might be to ask the person who is listening to jot down/draw/paint a summary or in point form what the talker is saying to help them concentrate on what the talker is saying. After the two minutes is up the listener gives the talker what they have noted. As the roles are reversed the listener now does the same for the talker. At the end of the activity all participants will have a copy of what they said, what they are worried about. This could be the beginning of their own journal or journey of their experience of the group.

Suggestion 3.

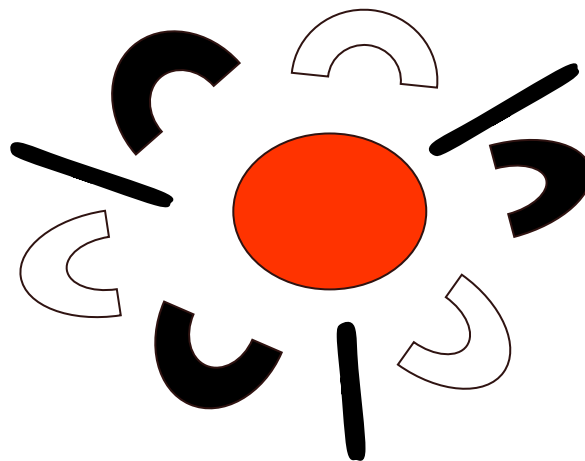
Use a photo or picture prompts to start a discussion. Ask parents to choose a card that represents how they feel about their parenting TODAY. Parents can use cards to talk to each other about how they were going and could feed back to the group if they wanted too.

Suggestion 4.

Asked parents to choose a card representing how they felt about being a parent BEFORE their child was born and another card representing how they felt NOW that they were parents

Suggestion 5.

As pairs and then a larger group brainstorm onto butcher paper:
What sort of adult do you want your kids to be? Values and life skills OR
What are your parenting challenges?
Might be useful to focus on the long term goals of parenting which could be referred back to each session and used in activities / discussion / role plays.



Big Yarn/Activities

Inside your head is your brain. Each person's brain is very different. The brain is like a control centre. The brain is where personality, our actions and emotions are controlled. The brain also controls our memory, our language and our creativity. The human brain takes time to develop. By birth, the brain has developed the main functions necessary for life – breathing, keeping a steady heartbeat, sucking and sleeping. The rest of the brain takes years to develop

By the time babies are born all parts of the body are fully formed except their brains. The human brain takes time to develop. By birth, the brain has developed the main functions necessary for life – breathing, keeping a steady heartbeat, sucking and sleeping. The rest of the brain takes years to develop.

To tell the complete story of the brain, its development and the relationship between brain development and children’s behaviour all three activities are useful

Activity 1: Growing Brains

The aim of this activity to illustrate the rapid growth of the brain in the first 3 years of life and the vital importance of nurturing respectful relationships to grow children’s brains.

Pass the brain models (balloons filled with rice) around the group one at a time beginning with the newborn brain, followed by the 3 year old brain and finally the adult brain. Ask parents to guess the weight of an average newborn’s brain first and discuss surprise at the weight, who guessed too much, who guessed too little and who was the closest to the correct weight. Use this same process for the brain of a 3 year old and then that of an adult. Tell parents the average weight of a newborn brain as they pass around each brain.

- Newborn brain = 400 grams
- 3 year old brain = 1100 grams
- Adult brain = 1400 grams

Discussion with participants about the weight of the baby brain and how it helps us understand why it is so important to always support the baby’s head and the damage that can be done if the baby is shaken.

Activity 2: Neuronal Connections – how to grow babies brain

HANDOUT: Neuronal Connections Connecting Brains

When parents cuddle, talk, sing, read and play with their child his brain is flooded with hormones that help grow the new connections in his brain that help him to grow and to develop healthy relationships with other people in his life.

Explain that at birth a baby has billions of brain cells but that they are not yet all connected. Genes and environment interact at every step of brain development but play very different roles. Genes are largely responsible for the ‘basic wiring plan’ of the brain. Experience is responsible for fine tuning and strengthening connections within the brain.

Brains are continually changing in response to our lived experience. Children’s brains are more impressionable or ‘plastic’ in the early years. However, the brain remains plastic throughout life, shaping and reshaping, as we continue to adapt to new experiences and learning.

The brain is made up of many parts that all do different things. Neurons are the ‘wires’ that connect the different areas of the brain. The number of connections and how they are organised influences how we make sense of our experiences, understand relationships, remember things and learn.

This activity is designed to illustrate neuronal connections

Ask family members to stand in a circle. Each person represents a neuron.

The facilitator holds a ball of wool/string 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 his brain eg smiling at her, talking with her, singing, reading a book together, cuddling, going fishing together, playing a game together. (perhaps make a list of cultural activities that families can do together)

The person who catches the ball of wool lets out a further length of yarn and, keeping hold of the wool at the point where he/she caught it, throws the ball to another person whilst calling out another activity which could grow healthy connections in their child's brain.

Continue in this way until each participant has had at least one turn and you have formed a neuronal network. The more turns a participant has to throw the wool/string to someone else, the more integrated and connected the neuronal network (ie the brain) becomes.

Depending on the group, facilitators may wish to brainstorm ideas with the group before starting this activity and make a list if needed as prompts for family member's .The suggestions need to be relevant and make sense to the group.

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.

OR

Use pictures of Indigenous parents interacting with their kids in different positive ways to give some ideas

Explain that with hundreds of repetitions of similar experiences, babies and young children develop strong templates or 'blueprints' in their brains (ie 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 gives him important messages that say '*I am a good person*', '*I am loved*', '*Relationships are fun and helpful*', '*The world is a good and safe place.*' Whilst saying this, encourage parents to pull on the wool network to form a strong 'template' for relationships.

Another suggestion:

An example to help explain the wool activity or use instead might be to talk about a family walking to the river each day with the children. On the first day there is no path and the family has to hack their way through the undergrowth to get to the river. On the way the family talks about the plants, birds and animals and their importance to life. The children

feel important and valued by these conversations and nice strong neural connections/pathways are made. Eventually the path is cleared and each day it becomes easier and easier to get to the river and each day as the family continue to discuss the plants, birds and animals the connections are stronger and the children continue to feel important, valued and loved.

A different family is also trying to get to the river and again the path is overgrown but this time the family do not work together to clear the path, there are no conversations with the children about the plants, birds and animals that enable the children to feel important, loved and nurtured. Instead the parent is cross with the children yelling and screaming at them and sometimes they got hit. The connections and neural pathways are still connecting but the children in this family do not feel important and valued instead they feel scared, sad and unsafe.

Then this family realised that this path to the river is not the one they want to take. This family wanted to make another path to the river to try and create strong safe connections/neural pathways with their children so their children would feel safe and secure. The family found this new path hard to clear and sometimes old “messages” of yelling and hitting the children still occurred. The family decided that this is very hard to do alone so they got support and with help they are able to clear that path together, talk about the birds, plants and animals and began to grow strong and safe connections. The previous unsafe connections started to fall away so only the safe and secure connections remain.

This could also be the story that is told at the end of the session if thought appropriate.

Using the analogy of tracks....so when first giving a positive pathway it might be like an ant trail, then it becomes like a wallaby trail, then like a camel trail, then like a 4WD track.

Activity 3: Understanding our brain

Handouts: bottom up brain Brain parts and explanation

Discussion first on bottom up brain – what babies are born with and then how the brain develops at different ages. Parents are invited to draw/write on this handout which part of the brain is developing in each of their children/grandchildren and anything else they would like to note.

Discussion on using this knowledge of the brain to assist understanding the behaviour of our children – which children are working on their motor development, emotional outburst etc why young children cannot share, think about others etc

THEN parents will have both of the **Aboriginal** brains in front of them and can draw on the blank brain the different parts while we keep discussing children’s development. Facilitators can provide cultural context for the discussion

Possible question while discussion is continuing: how do children become strong in the next part of the brain – what can families do?

Another Suggestion

Making a healthy brain poster - perhaps using the brain parts handout included in this session that shows where each different activity is controlled in the brain. As the healthy brain posters are being made discussions can occur about the role of the different parts of the brain such as:

The blue area is the control centre of the brain. This area controls the rest of the brain; it controls our thinking, our emotions and our actions. This is where stories are put together.

At the top of the brain the red area is sent FROM the body like how the body is moving or how it is feeling.

The yellow area sends messages TO the body telling it how and when to move.

The pink area is where memory is organised.

The green area in the middle of the brain is very important for family matters and emotions like worries, shame and happiness.

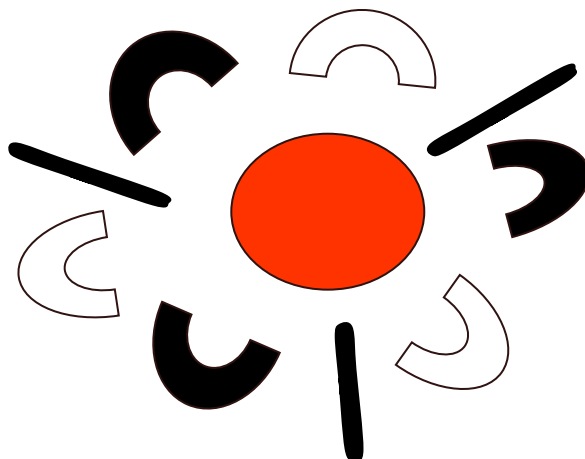
The orange area at the bottom of the brain balances our body both when it is moving and when it is still.

The purple area is the “yippee” or “feel good” area of the brain.

The brown area connects the brain with the rest of the body. This part controls breathing and the heart. This part of the brain keeps us alive
These different areas are always working together and talking to each other.

The graphic of the bottom up brain, neuron connections and having the 3 models of the brain can enhance the discussion and understanding.

Possible questions: how do children become strong in the next part of the brain – what can families do?



Mindful yarn

The aim of this activity is to give parents a quiet space in which to reflect on the messages, thoughts and feelings arising from this gathering. We need to find time in each day to take care of ourselves.

As we start to think about heading home in a little while, let's pause for a moment and identify something we can do this week to take care of ourselves, to renew our spirits and give us the energy to continue in our parenting role..... ...a walk ... going through a book..... being one with spirit

In this first session the "Stop Pause Play" exercise can be the healing yarn.

Handout: Stop...Pause...Play

Give out remote

Introduce the *Stop...Pause...Play* as an exercise that we will be practicing at each gathering. It is an exercise that parents can use anytime they need a couple of minutes to take time out to calm down before responding to whatever is going on at home with children.

Practise the exercise together as a group using the handout as a guide.

Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding this exercise. It might be useful to talk with families about situations when using "Stop Pause Play" could be useful e.g. child/children making a lot of noise at the dinner table when you want them to be quiet. Children whingeing and not wanting to go to bed.

Children not getting up in the morning
times in the house when everyone needs to calm down.

Parents are then asked to try Stop Pause Play during the week.

Families could make a remote control by putting sand in a good quality balloon and the put into another balloon. Then carefully make three holes in second balloon to represent stop, pause and play.

Capturing the journey

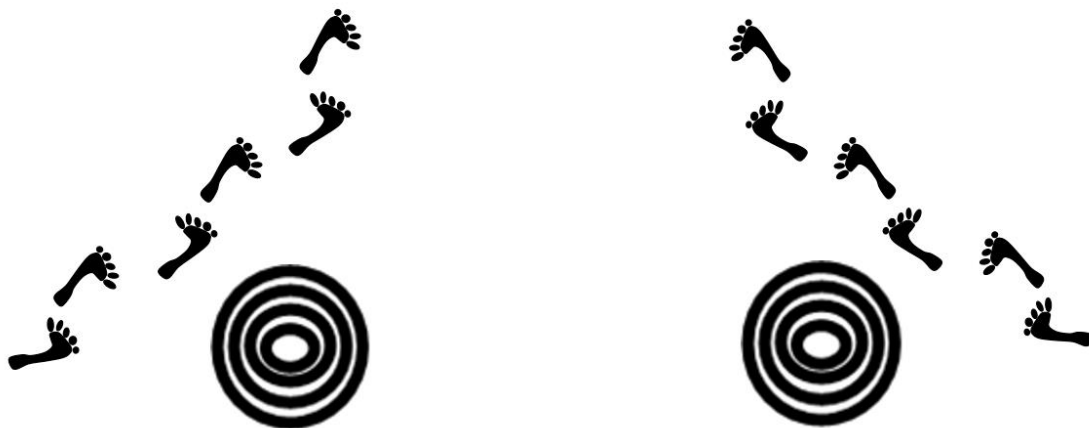
If participants are going to record their journey – this can begin here.

Yarning

Telling or reading a children's story to parents in a group situation can provide a pleasurable interaction between facilitators and parents.

Yarning could include a parent telling a story that has a meaning for children.

Close





STORY TWO MESSAGES PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



Story Outline

This story looks at the messages we have received from ancestors and family, that in turn impact on and influence our parenting.

Key messages

- There is no such thing as the perfect parent.
- How we parent is usually culturally and community determined
- Messages we received in childhood impact on our own parenting.

Note to facilitators:

The wonderful people who participated in the design and content of this program advise that this second story “Messages from the Past” can be uncomfortable and needs a skilled facilitator in healing to allow the discussion to occur and be contained and can use their own activities to facilitate this to occur.

Facilitators who are not so comfortable with the conversations that may occur from messages from the past can:

- a) change the order of the chapters
- b) Invite a mental health worker or counsellor to co facilitate
- c) Use the activities in chapter one which are designed to focus on the messages families want to give their children in the present and the future and not turning back.

Preparation and set-up

- Prepare refreshments
- Prepare “pass the parcel activity”
- Prepare Acknowledgement of/welcome to Country

You may need - all optional:

- Whiteboard & whiteboard markers
- Refreshments
- Flipchart / butcher’s paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Name tags
- Relaxing music of your choice (optional)
- ‘Useful Box’ containing e.g. pens and textas, small pieces of paper, coloured paper, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, scissors, etc.
- List of parents and children’s names from first week

- List of group safety guidelines from first week (optional)

Prepare learning materials:

- Small, soft ball or soft toy
- Parcel prepared for Pass the Parcel – lollies,
- Rubbish bin & re-useable supermarket/shopping bag
- Post it notes or small pieces of paper

HANDOUTS

- Breathing Relaxation Exercises
- Outline of Adult Hand
- Outline of Child Hands

Preparing “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*

Introduction

Think about last week:

What was a challenge for you?
What did you do well?

'Stop ... Pause...Play' exercise

Ask parents if anyone has practised this exercise during the week and share their experience if they want.

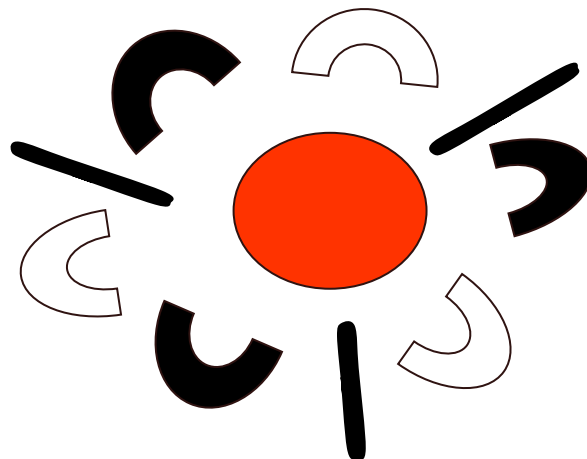
May need to have another practice

Small Yarn – Mindful Listening

Through this small yarn parents are offered an opportunity to tell someone about their issues, draw or paint issues or feelings about issues.

Each parent has a small amount of time to speak and a small amount of time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions

See chapter one for conversation suggestions.



Big Yarn/Activities

“Beliefs about conception and birth stress continuity rather than change. The new baby was already an old spirit child.... Just waiting for the right mother to come along. New babies are simply accepted as a segment in the immutable cycle of life, the human link between the present and the dreaming”. (SNAICC 2010)

Choose whichever activity suits the group or adapt your own or change the order of the activities. These are only suggestions

Suggestion 1

Pass the Parcel.

The game of “pass the parcel” can be a useful way to introduce the topic of “messages”. Just like the children’s game of Pass the Parcel you will need to prepare a parcel. For those unfamiliar with the pass the parcel game, the idea of the game is to pass around a parcel wrapped in many layers of paper that has a gift in the middle. For the purposes of this game, you will need chocolates or lollies (optional) and small pieces of paper with messages on them. Examples of messages are included below but it is important to design the messages that will be relevant for the parents in your group and their particular circumstances. You may choose messages that you want the group to explore and discuss.

To start place the box of chocolates etc in a layer of paper and wrap. On this layer of paper stick a short message and repeat this at each layer of the parcel. This way each time the parcel is passed a message is revealed to the group. Determine how many messages and thus layers to the parcel you require. This will in part be determined by group size.

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

The group is then invited to discuss their thoughts about the 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. This activity also introduces the idea that we have all grown up with many messages and mythical stories. Parents can decide which ones are still useful to pass onto their children and which ones no longer make sense. The stories shared about the myths can be part of the healing process.

Suggested messages above but add the ones that will be useful for discussion with your families.

Suggestion 2

Draw outline of hand or use **Handout: Outline of adult hand**

Possible questions to ask: 5 things that were important to you when you were growing up

5 things that kept you safe and strong.

On each finger draw or write your thoughts.

A second hand outline could be introduced with possible questions such as:

How does that work for you with your own children?

What are you good at?

What are your children good at?

What are some important things you want for your children – from these possible questions will come the understanding of what is important for families now.

Suggestion 3

Draw outline of hand or use **Handout: Outline of adult hand**

On the hand write/draw 5 good strong messages you received when you were growing up from a trusted a loved member of your family/community.

Draw another outline of the hand or both hands on other side of the paper.

On this hand/s draw/paint/write which of these messages you are passing onto your children.

What other messages do you want to pass onto your children?

Suggestion 4

Draw outline of hand or use **Handout: Outline of adult hand**

On the hand write/draw 5 things that are strong in your parenting

Turn the paper over

Draw another hand

On this hand write/draw 5 things you would like to do better

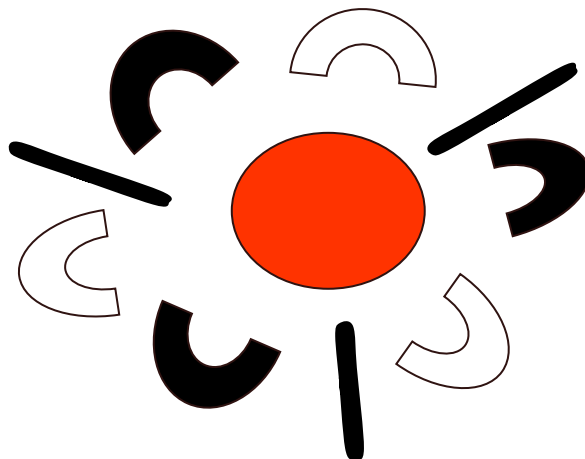
Suggestion 5

Handout: Outline of child's hands

Outline of adult hands x 2

Hand drawing with crayons – one hand identify adult strengths – one hand their supports.

Draw or trace around their children's/babies hands (or use handout of children's hands) and write their wishes for that child on the little hands



Mindful Yarn

The aim of this activity is to give parents a quiet space in which to reflect on the messages, thoughts and feelings arising from this gathering. We need to find time in each day to take care of ourselves.

As we start to think about heading home in a little while, let's pause for a moment and identify something we can do this week to take care of ourselves, to renew our spirits and give us the energy to continue in our parenting role..... ...a walk ... going through a book..... being one with spirit

Suggestion:

Handout: Relaxation Breathing Exercises

Explain that this is an exercise that parents may also wish to use with their children. These exercises help us to practise calming down by slowing down our breathing.

Reinforce the importance of self-care and calming strategies in helping us access the rational part of our brain so that we can be the kind of parent we'd like to be.

Encourage parents to practise a mindful exercise at home during the week

Capturing the journey

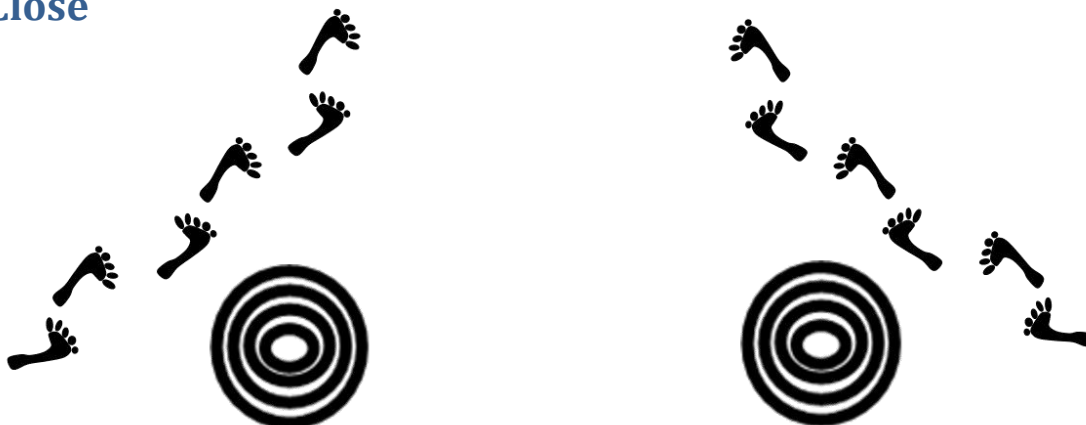
If participants are recording their journey of the group – this can continue here

Yarning

Telling or reading a children's story to parents in a group situation can provide a pleasurable interaction between facilitators and parents.

Yarning could include a parent telling a story that has a meaning for children.

Close





STORY THREE

GIVING AND RECEIVING MESSAGES



Story Outline

This story focuses on how we listen and speak to each other. There is time to reflect on the deep listening activity that is done each week and the power of non-verbal communication.

There will be some scenarios and role plays in this story.

Key Messages

- non-verbal messages are very powerful in our communication with children.
- messages we received from our childhood can create barriers to effective communication with our children.
- a calm state is crucial to effective communication.

Preparation and set-up

- Prepare refreshments
- Prepare Acknowledgement of or Welcome to Country

You may need – all optional

- Whiteboard & whiteboard markers
- Flipchart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Name tags
- Relaxing music of your choice (optional)
- Pens and textas
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pen's, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, textas, scissors, post-it notes
- List of group safety guidelines from first week

Prepare learning materials:

- Natural materials - sand and earth for tracing figures

HANDOUTS

- Barriers to Communication
- Are we missing anything?
- Adult body outline
- Child body outline

Introduction

Think about last week:

What was a challenge for you?
What did you do well?

'Stop ... Pause...Play' exercise

Ask parents if anyone has practised this exercise during the week and share their experience if they want.

Small Yarn – Mindful Listening

Story one provides prompts and questions that may be useful to encourage this listening and talking exercise.

Through this small yarn parents are offered an opportunity to tell someone about their issues, draw or paint issues or feelings about issues.

Each parent has a small amount of time to speak and a small amount of time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.

After this session it is a good opportunity to reflect on how these sessions are going. Do we increase the time for each parent to talk and listen. Time can be increased up to 4-5 minutes if parents are really engaged. The time and topics of conversation will be different in each group.



Big Yarn/Activities

(Choose suggestions and number of suggestions that suit group or adapt to group's needs)

Suggestion 1

Part a)

**Handout: Outline of adult body
Outline of child body**

Draw outline of body on paper or in sand or earth- either stick figure or use handout provided. If drawing a body is not OK then use an outline of a teddy bear or other animal of similar shape.

Using different colours draw/paint on the outline where you feel different feelings such as anger, tiredness, happy etc

Use words for feelings in language to be able to support children to express their feelings.

Possible discussion/ suggested questions:

Is there a place on the outline that all feelings are felt?

Are happy feelings felt on one part of the body and sad/angry feelings somewhere else?

Part b)

Draw outline of body on paper or in sand or earth- either stick figure or use handout provided. If drawing a body is not OK then use an outline of a teddy bear or other animal of similar shape. (the shape can be drawn on the other side of the paper. One side parent's feelings – other side children)

Suggested questions:

Where, on the body, do you think your children feel sadness? Anger? Happiness?

What colours are these feelings? Draw on body

How are messages passed on? Who passes on messages to children in the family?

Communicating happy and sad messages in language:

How do children tell us how they feel?

'Do you ever hear yourself saying to your children exactly the same words you heard from a parent/carer as a child? The very words you said you'd never use with your own children?'

To support talking to children about feelings – feeling charts/feeling word cards/ faces charts may be helpful.

Suggestion 2

Role Play – only suggestions

Scenarios can be changed to be relevant for the group of parents/carers in the group.

Scenario 1:

'Parent' standing with arms crossed and feet planted firmly apart, scowls, looks down at the 'child' who is sitting on the floor and uses a loud, gruff tone to say *'It's time to pack up your toys now!'*

This can be done with a sense of humour. It does not have to be too serious to still deliver the message.

Ask parents:

- How might the child feel?
- What message did the child get?
- How might the child respond?
- Did the body language match the words?

Scenario 2:

Repeat above role play, changing only the non-verbal communication. 'The 'parent' gets down to the 'child's' level on the floor, smiles, makes eye contact with the 'child' and uses a soft voice and neutral tone to say *'It's time to pack up your toys now.'*

Ask parents:

- How might the child feel?
- What message did the child get?
- Did the body language match the words?
- In which case is the child more likely to pack up his toys?

Might need to talk about names for feelingsin language, in Aboriginal English etc...To then know what labels to use when talking to kids about feelings...feelings charts / cards, faces

OR

Role Play

Scenario 1:

The facilitator (taking the part of the parent) models non-verbal language which is not 'in sync' with the words spoken to another facilitator or volunteer from the group (taking the part of the child).

"Child" is watching favourite TV show "parent" shouts from the other room "Tea is ready"

Child does not respond. "Parent" shouts louder "Your tea is ready, turn that TV off and come and have your tea" Child still does not respond. "Parent" goes into room and turns TV off and drags screaming child into have tea.

This can be done with a sense of humour. It does not have to be too serious to still deliver the message.

Ask parents:

- How might the child feel?
- What message did the child get?
- How might the child respond?
- Did the body language match the words?

Scenario 2:

"Parent" goes into child watching favourite TV show. "When does your show finish?" Child does not respond.

"Parent" when your show finishes can you turn off the TV and come and have your tea please? Child. "Sure" or child may not respond but does turn TV off at end of show

Ask parents:

- How might the child feel?
- What message did the child get?
- Did the body language match the words?
- In which case is the child more likely to come and have tea?

OR

Any other scenario that would be relevant to group

OR

Handout: Are we missing anything?

Discuss word qualities – what are they?

- Shouting
- Screaming
- Whispering
- High voice
- Low voice
- Singing voice
- Reading voice

When do we shout and scream?

When do we whisper?

When do we sing? - what sort of voice do we use?

How do children feel when we scream and shout?

How do children feel when we sing and whisper?

Suggestion 3

My Space

The objective of this activity is to give parents an experience which allows them to feel their own level of comfort with personal space, and to reflect on how that might impact on the way they relate to their children.

Invite parents to form pairs and to find a space in the room where they can face each other with a large distance between them.

Explain that while one person remains still, the other is to walk slowly towards his/her partner. The stationary partner is to call out "Stop!" when he/she begins to feel uncomfortable. Parents are free to ask their partner to move back or forwards until they feel comfortable. Encourage parents to talk to each other during the activity as they find their own level of comfort.

During this activity ask parents to be aware of their body responses as their partner moves towards them.

Change roles so that each parent has a chance to experience their responses.

Questions to reflect on after the activity:

- How did it feel as your partner came closer towards you?
- What was happening in your body?
- What was challenging about this activity?
- How does your need for personal space compare with that of your partner?

Suggestion 4

What messages are we communicating?

HANDOUT: Barriers to communication

General conversation about what can get in the way of talking to our kids the way **we** would like and listening to our children the way **they** would like.

Try to read the handout and discuss situations where there has been miscommunication between adults and children. Or adults and adults!

OR

Ask families to think of a time when they shared an experience with their child where each of them had a different reaction to the same thing. Example:

Your child has just arrived home from playing a soccer game and comes running into the house still wearing his muddy, wet shoes and clothes. He rushes towards you and excitedly says, 'Mum! Mum! We won! We're in the finals!'

You respond by saying, 'I've just washed the floor and you're making muddy footprints all over it! Go and take off your muddy gear!'

(use a scenario that is relevant for the group)

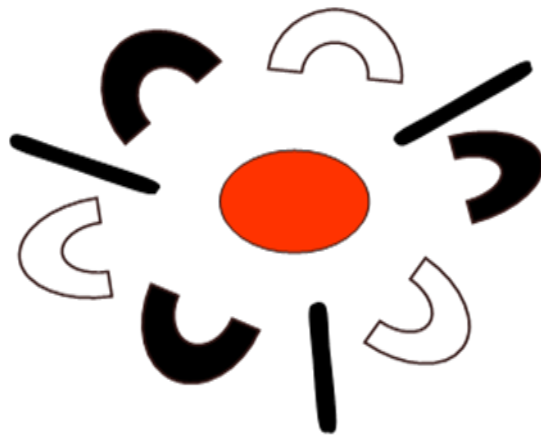
Suggested questions: (adapt to suit the group)

- How might the child feel when he gets that response?
- What messages might he be getting from his family member?
- What might the child do next?

When a child doesn't feel understood little things can become big issues.

Ask parents to reflect on their own example from their own experience and to try to see the situation from their child's point of view.

Then ask them to consider how their child might react if they went back to him/her now and told the child that they can now understand what that experience was like for him/her.



Mindful Yarn

The aim of this activity is to give parents a quiet space in which to reflect on the messages, thoughts and feelings arising from this gathering. We need to find time in each day to take care of ourselves.

As we start to think about heading home in a little while, let's pause for a moment and identify something we can do this week to take care of ourselves, to renew our spirits and give us the energy to continue in our parenting role..... ...a walk ... going through a book..... being one with spirit

Suggestion 1

Discussion about how people look after themselves, take time for themselves etc

Suggestion 2

Facilitator could recite the following: (adapt to community needs)

Let's just take a minute to reflect on everything we have done here today. It's been hard work!

If you feel comfortable you can close your eyes and relax.... (pause)

Just for a few moments I would like you to focus on your breath – bringing your awareness to your breatha the air moving in and out of your body.

We are going to pay attention to our breath as we breathe in 3 times and breathe out 3 times

As you breathe in say to yourself – breathing in

As you breathe out say to yourself - breathing out

Three times

Take your mind back to all that we have reflected on and talked about tonight/today

Messages that we have brought from our own childhoods

Messages we have received about parenting

Reflections on our own beliefs and values.

We have invited you to consider the sorts of messages you would like to pass on to your children..... and those messages from the past that you are happy to leave behind.

Capturing the journey

If participants are recording their journey of the group – this can continue here

Yarning

Telling or reading a children's story to parents in a group situation can provide a pleasurable interaction between facilitators and parents.

Yarning could include a parent telling a story that has a meaning for children.

Close





STORY FOUR

MESSAGES OF BEHAVIOUR



Story Outline

Understanding that children show how they feel through their behaviour. Often parents react to the behaviour rather than trying to understand their child's feelings and needs.

This story supports parents to understand their reactions to children's behaviour and where these reactions have come from. This knowledge can assist in understanding how children's behaviour can 'press our buttons' and help us to respond more mindfully.

Key Messages

- All behaviour has meaning.
- For children, their behaviour is their language – it lets us know how they are feeling and what they are needing
- When we understand our children's needs we can respond appropriately to them
- A child learns to manage his behaviour through the experience of being soothed by a calm adult

Preparation and set-up

Refreshments, tea/coffee etc
Acknowledgement of or welcome to country

You may need- all optional

- Whiteboard & whiteboard markers
- Flipchart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Name tags
- Relaxing music of your choice (optional)
- Pens and textas
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pen's, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, textas, scissors, Post-It notes
- List of group safety guidelines from first week

Prepare learning materials:

- Behaviour Buster Cards- (these can be purchased at

<https://shop.childhood.org.au/pages/professional-resources>)

- Copies of blank anthill pages to use with Behaviour Buster cards
- Prepare Feelings and Needs – cards from Feelings and Needs handout
- Strengths cards

HANDOUTS

- Behaviour Anthill
- Partially Completed Anthill scenarios
- Anthill scenarios
- Repairing relationships
- Blank Anthill sheets from Behaviour Buster card set
- Feelings and Needs

Introduction

Think about last week:

What was a challenge for you?
What did you do well?

Stop... Pause...Play' exercise

Ask parents if anyone has practised this exercise during the week and share their experience if they want.

OR

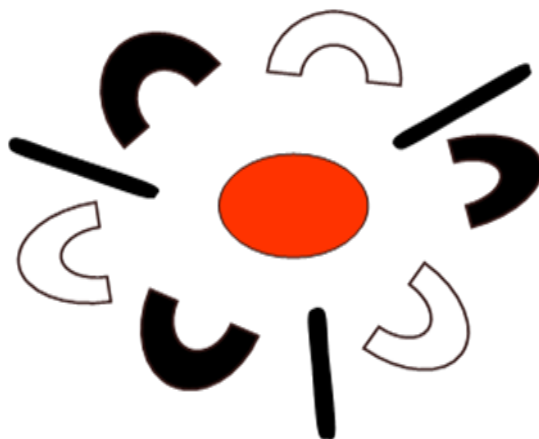
Practice a breathing activity from **Breathing Relaxation Exercises** handout from last week

Small Yarn – Mindful Listening

Story one provides prompts and questions that may be useful to encourage this listening and talking exercise.

Through this small yarn parents are offered an opportunity to tell someone about their issues, draw or paint issues or feelings about issues.

Each parent has a small amount of time to speak and a small amount of time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.



Big Yarn/Activities

Messages of behaviour

'All behaviour has meaning. The behaviour we see is just the tip of the anthill;' Children act out their feelings and needs through their behaviour. Often it is the behaviour that is responded to rather than the child's needs and feelings.

Ask parents: 'How do children show us what they feel and need?'

Handout: Anthill behaviour

Discuss the behaviour on top of anthill then second handout shows larger area of the anthill will be revealed labelled with the words 'Feelings and Needs'.

Discussion about the behaviours common to the children of families in the group and what feelings and needs they may be experiencing.

Suggestion 1

Introduce Behaviour Buster cards
Prepared feelings and needs cards
Blank anthill sheets

Parents to look at the parent cards and find a child's behaviour that they recognise from their own child/ren. Discuss in pairs the feelings and needs identified on the cards and add their own. The feelings and needs cards may assist with description words.

THEN

On the blank anthill sheets parents can identify a child's behaviour at the top of anthill and think about their feelings and needs when that behaviour is occurring. These can be taken home.

Suggestion 2

Handout: Anthill scenarios

Use handout of anthill scenarios. Ask parents to find one scenario that fits with the age of one of their children/grandchildren.

Discuss in pairs the feelings and needs of themselves and then to think about how the child may be feeling when they behave like this and what might they need from us.

Suggestion 3

Handout: Anthill scenarios

Using anthill scenarios handout. As a group choose one anthill scenario and the whole group thinks about how:

- They would be feeling (feelings and needs card could be helpful here)
- How do they think the child might be feeling and what they might need

Suggestion 4

Participants to share stories (e.g. when kids didn't get out of bed). Then role play the scenario as it happened (tantrum in supermarket, getting ready for school....). Looked at kid's feelings & needs / parent's feelings and needs and brainstormed solutions in small groups then in the larger group. Role played one of the solutions. A bit like iceberg scenarios handout – but personal stories and they got to see it play out!

Suggestion 5

Using either the anthill sheets from the Behaviour Buster pack or black anthill scenarios parents can fill them in as they please. They may want to focus on their own feelings and needs when their child behaves in a certain way or explore how they think their child may feel and what they may need.

Children's feelings

Use handout Repairing Relationships:

Divide parents into small groups and allocate some scenarios from the handout. Each group can consider the scenarios and discuss what is going on. What is the behaviour and what are the feelings/needs?

For example: In the scenario of the 18 month old who takes off in the car park while his mum is putting the baby in the capsule, the behaviour is running off but the need is to explore and be free. We know the 18 month old is full of curiosity and emotion so this behaviour is not misbehaviour but rather developmentally normal. Once parents can see the developmental needs then their response can be appropriate for the situation such as putting toddler in car first as it is known he will run off.

For each scenario ask the group to consider:

- What is the child feeling?
- What does s/he need?
- What is the parent feeling?
- What does s/he need?

Parents could be invited to share their responses with the larger group and brainstorm an outcome that takes into account the needs of the parent and the child.

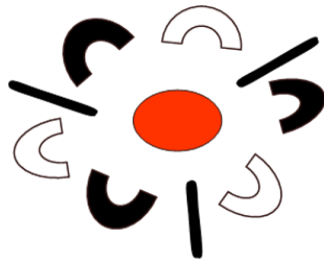
Activity to end this section: 'Strength cards'

Ask participants to reach under their chair and retrieve the “Strengths cards” stuck to the underside of the seat. In pairs, parents are invited to relate their ‘Strengths cards’ to themselves in their parenting role.

Encourage parents to celebrate what they are doing well in their parenting role.

OR

Turn cards upside down and ask participants to choose 2 and then discuss their relevance to them in their parenting role.



Mindful Yarn

The aim of this activity is to give parents a quiet space in which to reflect on the messages, thoughts and feelings arising from this gathering. We need to find time in each day to take care of ourselves.

As we start to think about heading home in a little while, lets pause for a moment and identify something we can do this week to take care of ourselves, to renew our spirits and give us a the energy to continue in our parenting role..... ...a walk ... going through a book..... being one with spirit

Suggestion:

Mindful Massage

Provide some talc, hand cream or massage oil and invite parents to use this to massage it into their own hands. Ask parents to massage it slowly, being aware of all their senses - the scent of the cream, the feeling in their hands, the quietness of their breath. Instruct parents to focus on being present, paying attention with flexibility, openness and curiosity to what they are doing and the feeling it invokes in their body

OR

Continue discussion on mindful opportunities for families during the next week – how to make quiet time etc

Capturing the journey

If participants are recording their journey of the group – this can continue here

Yarning

Telling or reading a children's story to parents in a group situation can provide a pleasurable interaction between facilitators and parents.

Yarning could include a parent telling a story that has a meaning for children.

Suggestion

Story: - the galah and the boobunge (from Looking Through Young Black Eyes) – about a grandfather being too harsh to his grandson with his punishment....

Close





STORY FIVE

ME AND MY MESSAGES



Story Outline

This story provides opportunities to explore the special place children have within the family and community.

Key Messages

- Family and community is important
- Everyone needs to connect and be connected.
- Each person has a place in family and community.

Preparation and set-up

Refreshments coffee/tea
Acknowledgement of or Welcome to Country

You may need- all optional

- Whiteboard & whiteboard markers
- Flipchart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Name tags (optional)
- Relaxing music of your choice (optional)
- Pens and textas
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pen's, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, textas, scissors, Post-It notes
- Painting/ materials
- Circle diagram
- List of group safety guidelines from first week

HANDOUTS

- Helping Children to Manage Strong Feelings
- Mindful Walking

Introduction

Think about last week:

What was a challenge for you?
What did you do well?

'Stop ... Pause... Play' exercise

Ask parents if anyone has practised this exercise during the week. Invite parents to share their experiences if they want.

HANDOUT: 10 breaths

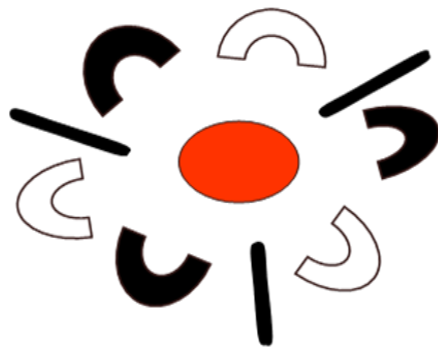
Facilitator to take parents through activity or one similar and relevant to the group and give handout to take home

Small Yarn – Mindful Listening

Story one provides prompts and questions that may be useful to encourage this listening and talking exercise.

Through this small yarn parents are offered an opportunity to tell someone about their issues, draw or paint issues or feelings about issues.

Each parent has a small amount of time to speak and a small amount of time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.



Big Yarn/Activities

“From the time children are born they are being told who their kin are: “There is your uncle”, Here comes your cousin”, or “Say mama” and so on. The person pointed out will, if within hearing, always stop and talk to the child and use the reciprocal kin term”. (SNAICC, 2010)

Suggestion 1

Diagram of circle in middle of page which is the child and then lines and circles all around the child – families will fill these in with drawing or writing about who or what is around the child and why that is important and how these things/people keep children strong and safe.

Possible questions: What is your dreaming place, grandmother or grandfather’s place?
Who looks after the child?
What do they do?
Who are you connected to?
What is important for this child?
What do you want for this child?

Suggestion 2

Think about yourself as a child as you reflect on these questions:

How were you spoken to?
Did you feel listened to?
How did your parents react when you were angry? Happy?
When you cried as a child, what would happen?

What messages do you think you got from their responses?
What do you think might have been some of the things which influenced your parents’ approach to communicating with you as a child?

OR

How do you respond to your children when they cry?
When they are angry?
Would your children say you listened to them?

Suggestion 3

Go through handout: Helping Children to Manage Strong Feelings

- How useful to parents to use these prompts?
- Do they have other ways to support their children when distressed and upset

A good place to remind parents about using “Stop Pause Play” and to teach their children how to use “Stop Pause Play”



Mindful Yarn

Handout: Mindful Walking

Mindful walking is another brief mindful awareness exercise that, like the *Stop...Pause...Play* exercise, 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 eg before your shower, to start the day in a mindful way, or anytime of the day when you need to create peace in yourself

Quiet place

The aim of this activity is to give parents a quiet space in which to reflect on the messages, thoughts and feelings arising from this gathering. We need to find time in each day to take care of ourselves.

As we start to think about heading home in a little while, lets pause for a moment and identify something we can do this week to take care of ourselves, to renew our spirits and give us a the energy to continue in our parenting role..... ...a walk ... going through a book..... being one with spirit

Capturing the journey

If participants are recording their journey of the group – this can continue here

Yarning

Telling or reading a children's story to parents in a group situation can provide a pleasurable interaction between facilitators and parents.

Yarning could include a parent telling a story that has a meaning for children.

Close





STORY SIX

SAFETY NET



Story Outline

This story is about the ongoing challenges of parenting and how to manage worrying situations and when and where to seek support.

Main message is that the feeling of anger is OK – it can be the expression of anger that can be the problem.

This is the last story so a celebration for parents to end time together

Key Messages

- We need to be in a calm state before we can act rationally.
- Looking after ourselves includes asking for help when we need it.
- All parents need help and support at some time.
- When parents are reflective of their parenting they are more likely to have happy and positive relationships with their children

Preparation and set-up

- Celebratory food
- Acknowledgement of or welcome to country

You may need- all optional

- Whiteboard & whiteboard markers
- Sandtray
- Computer and internet connection if showing Hand Model of Brain clip
- Flipchart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas
- Name tags (optional)
- Relaxing music of your choice (optional)
- 'Useful Box' containing e.g. pen's, coloured papers, stickers, blue tac, glue stick, textas, scissors, Post-It notes
- Painting materials
- List of group safety guidelines from first week
- Be familiar with the Hand Model of the Brain (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>)

HANDOUTS

- De-stress Cue Card
- Outline of thermometer
- Outline of teddybear
- Life Tree

Introduction

Think about last week:

What was a challenge for you?
What did you do well?

'Stop ... Pause...Play' exercise

Ask parents if anyone has practised this exercise during the week and share their experience if they want.

Handout: De Stress Cue Card

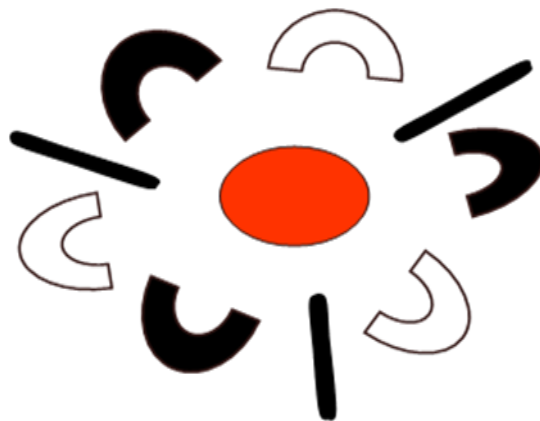
Take participants through the exercise on the card.

Small Yarn – Mindful Listening

Story one provides prompts and questions that may be useful to encourage this listening and talking exercise.

Through this small yarn parents are offered an opportunity to tell someone about their issues, draw or paint issues or feelings about issues.

Each parent has a small amount of time to speak and a small amount of time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.



Big yarn/Activities

Suggestion 1

Name/draw the parts of your body that stress affects?

Suggested answers could include:

- raised hear rate
- red rash on neck
- jelly legs
- clenched fists
- tight jaw
- headache

How does stress affect your feelings, thinking and behaviour?

Suggested answers could include:

- short tempered
- less patience
- unable to think clearly
- unable to be rational

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

Suggestion 2

The families in the gathering are invited to draw on paper or in sand/earth or paint .

1. An outline of the body – either stick or use handout of body from previous session or if it is not OK to outline the body then use a teddy bear shape.
2. Thermometer – anger monitor

On the barometer colour in the section and the colour that identifies when you are feeling a bit angry.

- Where is this on the barometer?
- Where is this level of anger on the body?
- Do you seek support? What support do you seek?

Suggested questions for parents:

When anger increases

- Where is this on the barometer and what colour?
- Where is this level of anger on the body?
- What support do you need to seek?
- Is the support you seek safe?
- What would safe support look like?
- Are your children safe in your house?
- What would a safe house look like?

Ask parents to reflect on the following questions:

- When do you know it's time to get help?
- Where would you go for this?
- Who would be your preferred type of contact?

Suggestion 3

HAND MODEL OF THE BRAIN (show video clip or explain)

If you put your thumb in the middle of your palm and 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 is towards the back of your hand.

Your wrist represents the spinal cord upon which the brain sits.

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

Now curl your fingers back over the top and your cortex is in place

When the cortex is in place then we are responding to our children with our "thinking part of the brain" so we are in control of what we say.

When our fingers are lifted it is the "emotional part of our brain" that we are using when we are responding to our children. And we are not in control of what we say.

When we are emotional we want to calm down (Stop, pause and play) and make sure our fingers have closed over our emotional brain and that we are responding with the thinking part of the brain

Example: *Children will not go to bed when asked.*

Response when using emotional part of brain Screaming "you will get into bed when I say" (Hand is open).

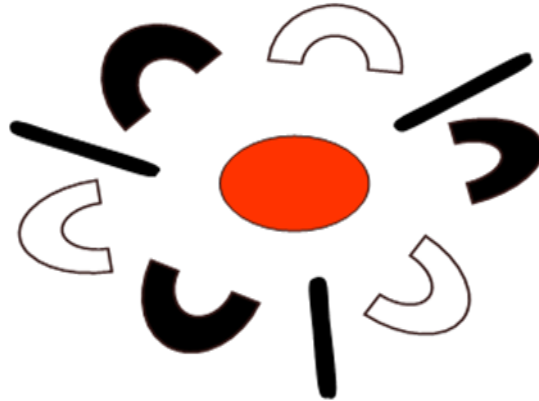
Response when calm and using "thinking part of brain" Lets have a story together (calming children down) and then it is time for bed. (hand is shut)

Suggestion 4

Passing on Messages

Thinking about “what sort of adult do you want your child to be”

Tree activity: Side one of paper is empty tree on other side are prompts for parents to read and answer on the tree. This can be taken home.



Mindful Yarn

The aim of this activity is to give parents a quiet space in which to reflect on the messages, thoughts and feelings arising from this gathering. We need to find time in each day to take care of ourselves.

As we start to think about heading home in a little while, lets pause for a moment and identify something we can do this week to take care of ourselves, to renew our spirits and give us a the energy to continue in our parenting role..... ...a walk ... going through a book..... being one with spirit

Capturing the journey

If participants are recording their journey of the group – this can continue here

Yarning

Telling or reading a children’s story to parents in a group situation can provide a pleasurable interaction between facilitators and parents.

Yarning could include a parent telling a story that has a meaning for children.

Celebration/certificate (whatever is appropriate end to group)

Close





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**Australian
Childhood
Foundation**