



BRINGING UP GREAT KIDS

Parenting 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.

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 practice for at risk and vulnerable families.

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

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



Acknowledgements



This updated version of Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) owes its completion to the passion and commitment of the Parenting and Early Years team at the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF).

Thanks go to the many dedicated facilitators around Australia and overseas who have been using the materials and resources with families in group work, counselling and conversations with families and their children. They continue to believe in the program and its positive influence on the relationships between families and their children. Much of their feedback has been incorporated into this updated version.

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.

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. Parent's 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 BUGK program and the contribution it makes to the range of parenting support programs currently available.

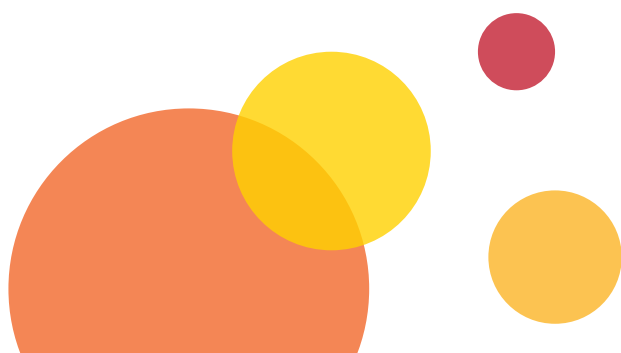




| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 7 |
| Program Resources | 10 |
| Glossary | 11 |
| Setting the context for use of 'Bringing Up Great Kids' with a group of parents | 12 |
| Section 1 - Preparing to deliver 'Bringing Up Great Kids' (BUGK) | 12 |
| Why 'Bringing Up Great Kids'? | 13 |
| Why use the metaphor of 'messages'? | 13 |
| The important role of mindfulness and reflection | 14 |
| Facilitator comments | 15 |
| Preparing to deliver BUGK | 17 |
| Use of Icons in the manual | 22 |
| Repeated Activities | 23 |
| Evaluation | 24 |
| Pre-group reflection | 25 |
| Chapter 1: The Message Centre | 26 |
| Chapter outline | 27 |
| Key Messages | 27 |
| Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators | 27 |
| Preparation and set-up | 28 |
| Part 1: Introduction and warm-up | 30 |
| Part 2: The Message Centre | 36 |
| Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support | 44 |
| Session Wrap Up | 47 |
| Chapter 2. Messages from the Past | 48 |
| Chapter outline | 49 |
| Key Messages | 49 |
| Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators | 49 |
| Preparation and set-up | 50 |
| Part 1: Welcome and Feedback | 52 |
| Part 2: Messages from the Past | 54 |
| Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support | 58 |
| Session Wrap Up | 61 |

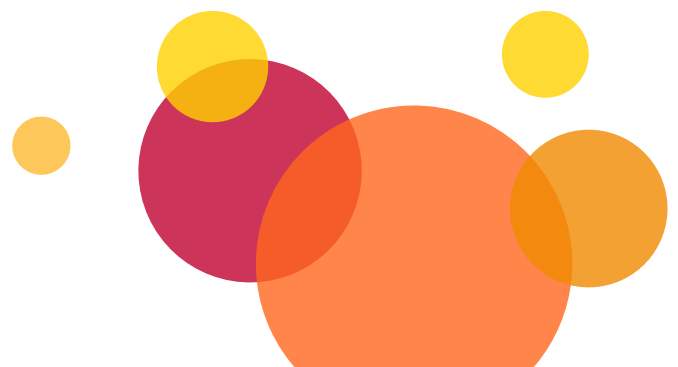


| | |
|--|-----------|
| Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages | 62 |
| Chapter outline | 63 |
| Key Messages | 63 |
| Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators | 63 |
| Preparation and set-up | 63 |
| Part 1: Welcome and Feedback | 65 |
| Part 2: Giving and receiving messages | 67 |
| Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support | 75 |
| Session Wrap Up | 78 |
| Chapter 4. Messages of Behaviour | 79 |
| Chapter outline | 80 |
| Key Messages | 80 |
| Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators | 80 |
| Preparation and set-up | 80 |
| Part 1: Welcome and Feedback | 82 |
| Part 2: Messages of Behaviour | 84 |
| Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support | 90 |
| Session Wrap Up | 93 |
| Chapter 5. Messages about me | 94 |
| Chapter outline | 95 |
| Key Messages | 95 |
| Pre-session Facilitator Reflective Activity | 95 |
| Preparation and set-up | 95 |
| Part 1: Welcome and Feedback | 97 |
| Part 2: Messages about me | 99 |
| Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support | 106 |
| Session Wrap Up | 109 |





| | |
|--|------------|
| Chapter 6. Passing on Messages | 110 |
| Chapter outline | 111 |
| Key Messages | 111 |
| Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators | 111 |
| Preparation and set-up | 112 |
| Part 1: Welcome and Feedback | 113 |
| Part 2: Passing on Messages | 115 |
| Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support | 119 |
| Session Wrap Up | 121 |
| Appendix 1: Mindful activities | 122 |
| The Sandalwood Box | 123 |
| Breathing Activity | 124 |
| Leaves Activity | 125 |
| The Sultana Exercise | 126 |
| Quiet Reflection | 127 |
| Appendix 2: Children's Story books | 128 |
| Appendix 3: Resources for parents | 131 |
| Appendix 4: References | 132 |





INTRODUCTION



Background

The 'Bringing Up Great Kids' (BUGK) Parenting Program has been developed by ACF in 2011 and deemed to meet the evidence-based program criteria by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (<https://apps.aifs.gov.au/cfca/guidebook/programs/bringing-up-great-kids>). This updated version was completed in 2019 and includes more content about the impact of trauma on the relationships within the family and a deeper explanation of content and topics .

The program has been developed into an easy to access facilitator's package comprising of facilitator manual, handouts and a parent journal and can be used by professionals working with families and/or supporting parents and any other adults supporting children.

The program is written as six chapters or 12 hours that can be flexibly delivered in a format that best meets the needs of the participants less or more hours, less chapters, more chapters or chapters in a different order.

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. Content/topics/activities**
- 4. Mindful/Reflective Activities and Self-care**

BUGK program and resources are underpinned by a philosophy of promoting and supporting respectful, caring and nurturing relationships between parents 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.

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 program aims to support parents to review and change their patterns of interacting with their children which promotes more respectful interactions and encourages children's positive self-identity. BUGK aims to identify and address the sources of unhelpful or hurtful attitudes held by parents. BUGK 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
- it is critical to 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.



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 'Bringing Up Great Kids' program. It includes background information, session preparation and comprehensive outlines of each of the six 'chapters' or sessions that comprise the program.

It is essential that facilitators read the questions and answers, this resource in its entirety and be aware of the terms and conditions of use prior to undertaking the facilitation of the group program.

'My Story as a Parent' Journal

The 'My Story as a Parent' journal can be provided to each parent to review or complete for themselves over the course of the program or can be used as an optional resource.

Handouts for Parents

Handouts for parents used in each chapter of the program are included at the end of each chapter of and as separate files for the convenience of the facilitator.

Evaluation Tools

There are a variety of evaluations tools offered as part of the package including a template for facilitator reflection.

Extra Resources

These include:

- Possible template for an invitation to the group
- Certificate of completion for participants





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 BUGK 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 term 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 parent group and who the activities are designed for.

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 for use of 'Bringing Up Great Kids' with a group of parents

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 who they either lived with or lived close by.

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.

Moqvist (2003) in Bloch, Holmund, Moqvist and Popkewitz 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 also recognised that a child is positioned differently in the community and society and therefore needs a different type of parenting experience.

Moqvist (2003) suggested that in Sweden parent education was seen as having a three fold purpose:

- to prevent the assault and battery of children
- to promote a good understanding of and the right support for children's development
- to support the parent's understanding of him/herself in connection with the child.

The above supports the idea that nurturing parenting is not innate and that many parents require support and information to become more actively engaged with their children (Tasmanian Early Years Foundation, 2009). Shonkoff and Phillips, (2000) and others have identified that parents can benefit from “education” to change and modify their parenting.

These 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 so as 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 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 of children's basic needs are core features associated with positive outcomes for children, just as harsh, coercive parenting is regarded as detrimental (Centre for Community Child Health, 2004, citing Teti 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).

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver 'Bringing Up Great Kids' (BUGK)



Why 'Bringing Up Great Kids'?

BUGK acknowledges the above research and 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.

'BUGK' 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.

The program is also built upon a belief that all parents need good support and self-care to be the kind of parent they aspire to be for their children. Acknowledging the significant 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 experience of being parented.

Parents are invited 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.

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 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.

Section 1 - Preparing to deliver 'Bringing Up Great Kids' (BUGK)



The key themes of 'messages' as a parenting metaphor include:

- All behaviour and interaction has meaning attached to it;
- The meaning parents attach to their children's behaviours and interaction is determined by their own experiences, beliefs and attitudes;
- Messages are conveyed via their content and manner of delivery; and,
- Messages can be intentional or unintentional.

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.

The important role of mindfulness and reflection

There is a strong focus on personal reflection for parents throughout this program. The practise of mindfulness can support parents 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; Grienemberger, 2006; Slade, 2006; Singh et al, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Creswell; 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 more rational 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 child.

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



Facilitator comments

The BUGK parent program has been designed to be reflective in every aspect, and at every level. As such, we encourage participants to be reflective in their evaluation of the program. Overwhelmingly trained facilitators commented 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.'

Most telling were 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.'





Participant Comments

Parents who had undergone the program have given this kind of feedback:

“I am more calm and listening better. The girls seem not to be fighting as much and I hope this will improve when I put in place more of the things I have learnt”

“The kids are responding better when I deal with them calmly. Their tantrums do not last as long”.

“I have found myself being more mindful of what causes behaviour. Stop, Pause, listen rather than just reacting”

[I have learnt to] “be more understanding of my child’s feelings and emotions”

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, 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.



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.



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 needs to be facilitated by professionals who have completed the one day 'BUGK' foundation training. Where possible the sessions would have two facilitators. 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 session 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 chapters

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

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

Chapter 1 – “The Message Centre”

Chapter 2 – “Messages from the Past”

Chapter 3 – “Giving and Receiving Messages”

Chapter 4 – “The Messages of Behaviour”

Chapter 5 – “Messages about Me”

Chapter 6 – “Passing on Messages”

Structure of each chapter

For each chapter the manual 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, handouts and power point graphics
- A step-by-step guide to facilitation of the chapter

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
 - Journal writing in 'My Story as a Parent'
- Case studies
- Role plays



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

- give the facilitator choice and variety; and,
- address the varying needs of the 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 within each chapter.

Male Carer



This icon indicates those activities that specifically identify the male role in parenting.

Culture



This icon indicates reflections about cultural aspects of activities.

Repeated Activities



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



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.

Preparing to deliver BUGK



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.

Using Children’s Storybooks

The creation and telling of stories and creating meaning through story 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. Parents 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 or use any book of your choice.

Evaluation

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 chapter 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?

Facilitator Notes Form

A Facilitator Notes Form has been included, It is a simple way for facilitators to keep track of what has worked well and not worked well and supports discussion and adjustments as needed.

Participant Evaluation Tools

Also included are 3 possible Participant Evaluation Tools using different formats and asking different questions. One has a more reflective nature and ask participants to share some of their experiences from the group experience with a focus on healing, repairing relationships and hope for the future.



The background is a vibrant orange color. It features several decorative elements: a large yellow circle at the top center, a smaller yellow circle to its left, and a dark red circle to its right. In the top right corner, there is a dark red speech bubble containing two white hearts. In the middle left, there is a yellow speech bubble with a white handprint icon. In the bottom left, there is a yellow speech bubble with a white house icon. In the bottom right, there is a yellow speech bubble with a white lightbulb icon. The central text is contained within a large, dark red, rounded rectangular shape that resembles a speech bubble.

Chapter 1

THE MESSAGE CENTRE



Chapter outline

This first chapter introduces the BUGK program and invites participants to get to know each other and have the opportunity to express their parenting goals.

Participants are given an overview of the program.

Beliefs and values about parenting are explored, together with the factors that impact on the parenting experience.

This chapter includes an exploration of normative brain development in children with a major focus on the relationship between a child's stage of neurological development and their behaviour. Participants are encouraged to base their responses to each child, on their understanding of the child's stage of neurological development.

Participants will be encouraged to continue reflecting on the chapter content during the following week through the provision of take home activities.

Key Messages

- There is no perfect recipe for bringing up children
- There is no such thing as the perfect parent
- Parents' relationships with their children are critical to children's healthy brain development
- An understanding of early brain development can help parents better understand, and more appropriately respond to children's needs and 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 face to face meetings. 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?
 - Provide debriefing or referral as required?
2. How do you think you/your parents may have parented differently had you/they known more about early brain development?

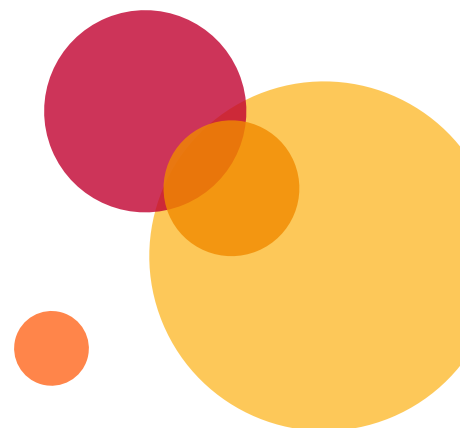


Preparation and set-up

- Prepare refreshments
- Become familiar with the Stop..Pause..Play routine
- Prepare Acknowledgement of Country

You will need:

- Data projector, screen and laptop (optional)
- 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)
- Optional: marching or bush dance music, or Zorba the Greek music for closing activity
- Be familiar with the Hand Model of the Brain (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>)
- 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
- Examples of mindful activities and a list of children's books can be found at the back of this manual



Chapter 1: The Message Centre



For each participant you will need:

- Folders for parents to store handouts
- *My Story as a Parent Journal* (optional)

Handouts:

- My Children
- Incomplete Parent Brain
- Completed 1st Parent's Brain
- Completed 2nd Parent's Brain
- Connecting Brains
- Neuronal Connections
- Bottom-up Brain Development with ages
- Bottom-up Brain Development (blank)
- Left and Right Brain/Lateral Brain Development (optional)
- The Midline
- Mindfulness – the diagram (referred to in facilitator conversation)
- Stop Pause, Play
- Brain Food Fun for Kids





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.
- Hand out the folder, 'My Story as a Parent' journal (optional) and name tags.

Facilitator Conversation - Welcome and Introductions



The introduction and welcome process sets the scene for the rest of the program. As the facilitator has already been in contact with the participants before the group began the respectful, mindful relationship now continues as the group begins.

- Welcome parents to the group
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Introduction of facilitator/s
- Outline housekeeping details relevant to the group such as Work Health Safety issues; like emergency evacuation procedure and first aid, also the location of toilets, parking and time and duration of breaks. An evening group may decide against a break and prefer to have 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.

Facilitator Conversation: Program Overview



Outline the structure of the program explaining that sessions are known as chapters in an ongoing parenting story. Explain the major theme of each chapter. These could be listed on butcher's paper or the whiteboard to show the parents the titles of each of the six chapters of the program.

Chapter 1: The Message Centre

Chapter 2: Messages from the Past

Chapter 3: Giving and Receiving Messages

Chapter 4: The Messages of Behaviour

Chapter 5: Messages about Me

Chapter 6: Passing on Messages

Chapter 1: The Message Centre



In overviewing the program, explain that the focus of the chapters will be on assisting parents to be mindful about their parenting and to try and see the world from the child's perspective. There will be opportunities to reflect on the messages that each of us has received from our family of origin and the impact of them messages

Participants will be provided with:

- an understanding of children's early brain development with a focus on young children's emotional development and reasoning abilities;
- an appreciation of different communication styles;
- an understanding the meaning behind their child's behaviour and the triggers the behaviour has on the parent's own responses;
- strategies to improve mindfulness; and,
- an appreciation the significance of the child's gender, position in family and personality on the family dynamic.

It is hoped that with these new insights, parents will have the tools to build mutually satisfying, positive relationships with their children.

Facilitator conversation: Icebreaker



This activity is an opportunity for the participants to introduce themselves, their story and the children they care for. For many groups the carers 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. Give the participants a bit of time, particularly to introduce themselves and their story. The start of building a trusting and respectful relationship is important here for the carers to feel safe in the space and even safe enough to provide information about themselves, their story and to share the names of the children they care for.

Activity 1:



Option 1

Ask each participant to share their name, and the names and ages of their children and record these. Facilitator/s may reflect back commonalities such as the number of boys or girls, the age of most of the children in the group or any other commonality that can be seen.

The list can be stored for display at each subsequent meeting of the group as a reference point or typed up and given to each parent at the next session



To help engage dads if running a fathers only group, you could ask the following question as well as or instead of any of these options:

- What is the one thing that people would never guess about you?

Option 2

The facilitator invites each parent to share where their name has come from, how they were named or anything about their name that they want to share.

Explain to parents that each person will now have an opportunity to call out another parent's name and throw the ball/soft toy to that person. The parent who catches the ball then tells the group something that they enjoy doing to relax. The activity continues until every parent who wishes to participate has had a turn.

Option 3

Ask participants to sit or stand in a circle with the facilitator/s.

One facilitator holds a small soft ball or toy.

To familiarise parents and facilitator/s with the names of participants, go around the circle asking each person, in turn, to say his or her name. As each name is spoken invite that person 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, as long as the adjectives are positive/complimentary/funny. When each person has had the opportunity to say their name move onto step 2.

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

Facilitator Conversation - Deep 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.

Chapter 1: The Message Centre



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.

Activity 2:



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?
- What are you hoping will be discussed in this group?

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 - 'My Story as a Parent' Journal



Introduce the use of 'My Story as a Parent' as a reflective journal. Explain that throughout each session participants will be given a brief opportunity to make notes about what they are thinking. This program affirms that all parents want the best for their children and supports and equips them to do this.

This journal is divided into sections that relate to each of the chapters in the program. There are some questions to prompt participants reflections as well as some blank pages for parent's own free writing and drawing. Participants can use the blank pages at any time during the sessions to write or draw what's on their mind or note down messages to themselves. Journals can also be written in during the week.

Activity 3:



Using the **HANDOUT: "My Children"** ask the group the question: "What sort of adult do you want your child to be?" This handout is part of the 'My Story as a Parent' reflective journal so this activity can be used as part of the journal or as a separate activity.

Participants can reflect on the sort of qualities and attributes they would like for their children to have as adults. Suggestions might include good health, motivation, initiative, happiness, etc.

Encourage participants to note their thoughts in their journal or on the handout.



Facilitator Conversation - Developing Group Guidelines



Parents 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.

Activity 4



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

- Confidentiality – it is always necessary to discuss the idea of confidentiality within 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 to your own
- Giving everyone an opportunity to participate
- All participants have a choice as to whether to participate in any activity
- Reminder to have fun

These can be written up on butcher's paper and displayed each week or typed up and a copy given to each participant as parents may need reminding of these agreements in subsequent sessions.

This is a good time to make sure that parents are aware that all activities offered in the program are optional. Parents always have the option to 'pass' whenever they are invited to participate in activities or discussions during the sessions.

It is also important to acknowledge that most of what we learnt about being a parent we learnt unconsciously when we were young. With that understanding parents are encouraged to be gentle with themselves in regard to any aspects of their parenting which they might be unhappy about. It is also hoped that with the unfolding understanding of the trans-generational nature of parenting practices parents will become aware that *understanding* and making changes is more productive and transformative than *blame*.



Facilitator Conversation



The rest of today's session will focus on children's brain development. Knowing more about a child's developing brain is a good way for parents to understand how children think, feel and behave which can help parents respond appropriately and mindfully.

We will look at brain development from various aspects including:

- Our own perceptions of the brain
- Brain physicality
- Neurobiology
- The different sections of the brain
- The hemispheres of the brain (optional)

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. What is 'switched on' is the emotional centre of the brain.

Understanding how children's brains develop gives us an insight into the questions parents often ask...Why?

- 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 their child's brain development better, parents can also begin to understand what is happening in their own brain and why they respond to children's behaviour the way they do. When a parent is tired, stressed or anxious the emotional centre of the brain gets in the way of thinking rationally. With this understanding parents can then make choices about changing their response through what they learn in the program. Parents develop strategies to calm themselves down so they can reason and think clearly before responding to their child.





Part 2: The Message Centre

Facilitator Conversation - Parent Brain



The brain is a message centre; it receives sensory signals about our experiences. It interprets the intensity and content of these signals as the meaning of the message. It stores these messages and their relevance as memories that can be retrieved and used later. Messages are important because they shape our perception of our experience in the future. They influence the way we see ourselves, relationships and each other. They organise our behaviour and influence 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 into the present. Sometimes we are not even aware of how those messages affect us.

An understanding of how children's brains grow and develop will help parents understand how children think, feel and behave and better guide parent's interactions with and responses to their children.

When a child has experienced relational trauma their brain is wired differently. The child's view of the world is one of danger, uncertainty, and where the child feels unsafe. Their brain is wired to be alert to danger and can assess any changes in routine, new people and new situations as dangerous and react violently or in an antisocial way. This behaviour is related to the child's experience of relational trauma and not "bad behaviour". The child needs and deserves support and understanding not punishment.

This activity provides the participants with the opportunity to have a bit of fun with the brain – exploring how the brain has changed since the participants became parents.

Activity 5



Use **HANDOUT- Incomplete Parent Brain** and give participants the opportunity to fill it out by suggesting what happens in their own brains. You can suggest a few examples of your own or from previous parent brain handouts. Participants can share their ideas with each other in groups of 2 or 3.

THEN

Invite a light-hearted discussion that highlights some of the features of the **HANDOUT- Completed 1st Parent Brain** and/or **HANDOUT- Completed 2nd Parent Brain** such as the size of the worry centre, the introduction of the bragging centre, the size of the sleep gland, the very small and fading 'memory of what life was like before children', etc. Any part of the brain can be identified and comments invited from the participants or just comparisons of sizes between the different sections or what has taken over the parent brain and what is shrinking or has gone forever. Compare with what participants put in their incomplete parent brain.



Facilitator Conversation- Children's brains



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.

Activity 6



The aim of this activity is 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 newborn brain model (stocking filled with rice) 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. Facilitators may choose to restrict the activity by using just newborn and 3 year old brain.

Newborn brain= 400grams

3 year old brain =1100 grams

Adult brain= 1300 grams

Facilitator Conversation - Connecting Neurons



When parent's cuddle, talk, sing, read and play with their child, the child's brain is flooded with hormones that help build the new connections in their brain. These connections help them to grow and develop healthy relationships with other people in their life.

Explain that at birth a baby has billions of brain neurons but that they are not yet all connected. The number of connections and how they are organised influences how we make sense of our experiences, understand relationships, remember things and learn.

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.

Brain plasticity refers to the brain's ability to change throughout life. 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 human brain has the amazing ability to reorganize itself by forming new connections or pathways between neurons. The neural pathways are altered as an effect of environmental, behavioural and neural changes.

During early childhood the plasticity switch is on, whereas in adults it's usually off. So children's brains are more malleable or "plastic" and learning is easier. Learning gets harder as you get older but in certain circumstances it can be switched back on. These circumstances might include focused attention, determination, hard work and maintaining overall brain health.



Activity 7



What do brains need to develop?

This activity is designed to illustrate healthy neuronal connections. Encourage a discussion on what is needed to grow a healthy babies brain. It can help to think about two buckets. A bucket for physical growth and a bucket for emotional growth. What needs to go in each?

Or a list could be developed on a whiteboard. Possible responses might include:

- Responsive physical care like feeding, changing, bathing, etc.
- Engaging in play including sensory, social engagement, language (singing, talking, reading), going to the park, beach etc
- Provide nurturing like massage/touch, hugging/cuddling

Facilitator Conversation – Growing Children’s Brains



Young brains are very sensitive to experience. Early experiences and the environment in which children live have a very strong influence on the development of children’s brains. This plays a critical role in helping to shape the structure of children’s brains.

Supportive, caring and consistent relationships between children and their parents are the key to healthy brain development. The human brain can only develop in relationships with other human brains. It is the interaction between parents and their child which literally grows their brain. Healthy brains grow when children are interacting with people who love them.

There are two activities below one that shows how neurons connect to grow a healthy brain and the other has a trauma overlay to illustrate how the brain connects unhealthy connections and the resultant brain is damaged and the brain’s capacity for repair.

It is important that facilitators nurture participants and help reduce feelings of guilt, shame and blame.

NB: For the general parent group activity 8 is sufficient as it explains healthy brain development.

If the participants in the group have been affected by relational trauma or their children then activity 9 explains the impact of trauma on brain development and activity 8 explains the plasticity of the brain and the potential for repair.





Activity 8



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.

HANDOUT- Connecting brains may be helpful here

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 baby which would grow a healthy connection in their brain.

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.

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 helpful*’, ‘*The world is a good and safe place*’.

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.

Invite a discussion on “repetition” how a brain needs many repetitions of a healthy connection to firmly imprint on the brain. Whilst saying this, encourage participants to pull on the wool network to form a strong ‘template’ for positive, healthy relationships.

Activity 9



While the brain is growing so fast in early childhood - faster than it will ever grow again during the lifespan, it is highly vulnerable to toxic influences. Ask participants what sort of things might be toxic to the developing brain. Possible responses might include:

- Drugs/Alcohol – substances taken by the mother during pregnancy
- Violence
- Homelessness
- Youth – too young
- Mental health issues
- Health issues
- Addictions
- Criminal activity
- Trauma
- Poverty
- Disability
- Toxic stress – as a result of neglect, abuse or being exposed to family violence



This activity is designed to illustrate 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.

Facilitators could use the following prompts to generate responses for the activity ‘What about the brains of children who have had repeated experiences of rough handling, or of seeing frightening faces, or hearing angry voices? What about the baby who is sometimes cuddled and fed, but is left alone and hungry at other times?’

The facilitator throws the wool to one of the participants and identifies an unhealthy connection. 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 they caught it, throws the ball to another person whilst calling out another activity which could be an unhealthy connection in a child’s brain. The responses above could help here.

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 ball to someone else, the more integrated and connected the neuronal network (i.e. the brain) becomes. Use **HANDOUT - Neuronal Connections** to help explain.

Suggest that the repetition of these experiences will still grow connections. From those experiences children will derive negative messages such as ‘I’m no good.’ ‘Relationships are scary.’ ‘You can’t trust people.’ ‘I have to do everything myself.’ ‘The world’s a bad place.’

Remind parents about the plasticity of the brain and that there is always countless opportunities for repair. (refer to activity 8)

Facilitator Conversation – Bottom Up Brain Development



There are two handouts that show 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 as a child in a nurturing environment. Choose the handout that will be most appropriate for the families you are sharing this information.

The brain is comprised of different structures that grow and develop at different rates and different times.

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 few years of life. 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.

Chapter 1: The Message Centre



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.

Activity 10



Distribute the appropriate **HANDOUT- Bottom Up Brain Development** to support participants and to provide new language and understanding about children's behaviour. The explanation of the sections of the bottom up brain is on the back of the handout.

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 a safe place to move and not be cross or punish them for moving.

The same for 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 no 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 behaviour. Children are entitled to having feelings. Historically these BIG feelings have been misinterpreted as bad behaviour such as "temper tantrums". This behavior would have resulted in a punishment. The new brain research shows us that the limbic system (feelings) develops BEFORE the cortex (thinking and reasoning). It would be useful for parents to replace the words "temper tantrums" with 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.

Ask participants to think about each of their children and ask if an understanding of their brain development might help make sense of their behaviour.

Chapter 1: The Message Centre



Facilitator Conversation- Hand Model of Brain



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

Activity 11



Demonstrate the hand model of the brain, encouraging parents to use their own hand to follow the instructions: There is a useful youtube on Dan Siegel presenting a model of the hand brain.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw&list=PLApatvLMi9RnQBEctS1v2gWOqRV46wFQ>

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.
- 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.

Facilitator Conversation – Left and Right Brain



The brain has two hemispheres – left and right. At the same time as bottom-up development is occurring, there is also 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** **HANDOUT - Left and Right Brain.**

The development of the left and right hemispheres occurs at different times over the child's development from birth to 10 years. By having a closer look at this diagram, we can have a better guess about the kinds of activities children might be attracted to as they grow up.

Neuro-scientific findings show that any activity in which hands and feet cross the middle line of the body supports in integrating the two hemispheres of the brain and is a neural exercise. The following activity supports parents about how to assist children to strengthen their right and left connections across the brain.



Activity 12



Using the **HANDOUT - The Midline** ask participants to introduce activities they know where arms or legs cross the midline of the body. They can write them on the handout and/or demonstrate for the whole group. The rest of the group can actively follow them if they like.

Some suggestions are dancing, hopscotch, string games, clapping games. (Other examples are in activity 15)



To further engage dads ask them this question: What can you tell me about yourself that relates to the right hemisphere of your brain, give us some examples?

- What relates to the left?

Facilitator Conversation - Summary



So far this session we have had a look at what is happening for children as their brains grow and develop and what that means for their behaviour and how we respond to them.

Next we will look at the importance of the parent recognising what is happening in their own brain and how they can regulate their reactions to their child's behaviour using a range of mindful strategies.





Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation – Stop Pause Play



When parents are stressed, tired, worried or emotionally upset, it is not easy to be attuned to the needs of their children.

When parents are highly stressed, connections to the cortex, the rational area of our brain, are blocked, so parents are more likely to act without thinking and to do and say things that they later regret. In fact parents are likely to act more like the child who is having the big feeling!

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.

Ask parents if they are familiar with the term ‘Mindfulness’ and/or if they can define the term. Accept all responses.

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

When parents relate to their children with mindfulness parents activate the part of the brain (the medial pre-frontal cortex) which allows their defensive systems to switch off, putting them in a more relaxed state allowing them to think and act more rationally and to be more present to their children’s needs.

In the context of BUGK mindfulness can help us to put a metaphorical space between what happens and how we respond to it. Each week parents will do an exercise which will help them to practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness is consciously thinking about the things we usually do unconsciously, for example; walking, listening, eating, breathing. When we do things over and over we are stronger, better equipped and more prepared to respond rather than react. Practicing mindfulness is similar.

Think about the ‘Karate Kid’ movie where Mr Miyagi asks Daniel to frequently repeat exercises over and over again. Daniel could not see the significance in the exercises but eventually he learnt that through repetition the actions become automatic, which were useful in karate and in defending himself. This is the same for mindfulness exercises, do them repetitively and when we are calm and they become part of our unconscious routine.

Think about athletes, they do lots and lots of practice in a safe place when they are calm and relaxed to ensure they are prepared and ready for the competition.

If we practice mindful and self-care activities regularly we will be prepared and ready to use them when the need arises, for example when your child needs you to be calm and in control because they are not.

The facilitator/s will introduce the notion of Stop...Pause...Play..



Activity 13



Distribute copies of **Handout - Stop...Pause...Play** and the remote controls. Introduce this activity as a mindful exercise that we will be practicing every session. 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 (or at work!).

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

Once the whole group has practiced the exercise, ask the group: “Can anybody guess when is the best time to practice Stop...Pause...Play?” participants might guess that the best time for practicing mindfulness exercises (i.e. Stop...Pause...Play) is when you are calm and everything is OK! When we can concentrate and feel safe. To clarify you can use the metaphor of the athlete. Athletes do not leave their practice for the Olympic track. They do their practice in their clubs when they don’t feel anxious about competitions and when they are perfectly healthy and ready to practice. Correct practice make perfect! Enough practice in suitable conditions brings the skills to our subconscious level and makes us able to act properly at the right moment. What would be the best time to practice mindful exercises?

Facilitator Conversation - Reading stories to parents



The BUGK program provides the opportunity for parents to go on their own parenting journey, to understand their parenting story and the story of their place in their family and how their childhood experiences impact on the parent they are.

In each chapter of the BUGK program there is the opportunity to nurture and take care of the parents attending the program by reading them a picture book. These stories may remind them of happy times when they were read to as a child. The story experience may also remind the parents that they were not read to and so may become a message from their past that they want to put in the rubbish bin and change this message to one of “reading/sharing a book with my child is something I want to do.”

Being read to is a caring and nurturing activity for the parents to enjoy and learn about picture books.

Activity 14



Choose a picture book of choice or one from the selection provided.

You may choose to tell a story to the group of parents.



Facilitator Conversation - The Importance of Play - Serve and Return



Sometimes optional activities are offered to families. This selection of take home activities will provide opportunities for parents to practice the ideas talked about in the chapter with their children. Some of these activities might also have been completed during the session. Facilitators may have to demonstrate these activities first as per descriptions below.

Activity 15 (Optional)



Family Fun Time Activities

Distribute the **HANDOUT - Brain Food Fun for Kids** which outlines fun activities for parents to share with their children.

The purpose of these activities is to reinforce the message that pleasurable interactions and fun in relationships grow healthy brains.

Invite the group to join in a cross-crawling activity (an activity that encourages integration of left and right hemispheres of the brain). Here are four options from which to choose.

Option 1

Invite parents to work in pairs. One person extends both arms in front of him/her with the backs of both hands turned inwards to face each other. Cross the hands and clasp them together with fingers entwined. Bring clasped hands towards the body and upwards towards the face so that the elbows are resting against the body.

Without making contact, the other partner points to one of the fingers of their partners crossed hands and asks the person to lift that finger. Repeat this by pointing to the other fingers, one at a time.

Partners could swap roles so that each has a turn at trying the finger lifting exercise.

Option 2

Invite parents to sit on their chairs with both feet on the floor. Ask each person to use his/her right foot to trace a clockwise circle on the floor. Whilst continuing to trace the circle with their foot, ask that they also use their right hand to trace the number 6 in the air.

Pause then ask parents to notice in which direction their foot is circling now. It is likely that all will have changed the direction so that they are inscribing a circle in an anti-clockwise direction!

Option 3

Invite parents to stand in a circle with the facilitator/s. Ask parents to make an arm's length space between each person.

Ask every second person to turn to face their right, while the rest of the group turns to their left. Each person should now be facing a partner.



Explain that everyone will walk around the circle in the direction in which they are facing. As you pass the person facing you extend your right hand and take the other person's hand in a 'handshake' as you pass on to the next person. As you meet the next person you extend your left hand and so on.

Option 4

With parents and facilitators standing in a circle, take participants through the steps of the 'Zorba the Greek' circle dance (step to the right, left foot crosses over the front of the right foot. Step to the right, left foot crosses over the right foot...)

Once parents seem confident enough, play Zorba music so that the group can join in the circle dance together.

Session Wrap Up

Ask participants 'what messages are you taking away from this session'?

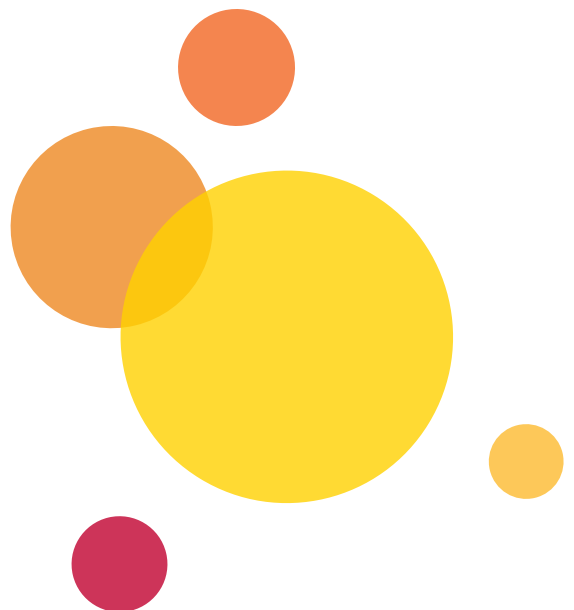
Participants can share these in the group, reflect on them for themselves or write in their journal.

Remind parents as they leave to:

- take time to practice calming activities for themselves and play brain games with their children
- use their journal during the time between sessions
- bring their handouts folder with them to the next session

Farewell

Wish parents a great week.





Chapter 2

MESSAGES FROM THE PAST



Chapter outline

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

In the previous session parents have:

- developed understanding about why children behave the way they do through learning about brain development;

Key Messages

- 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 children is essential.
- Self-care for parents is vital.

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

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 influenced your own parenting or caring style, and your facilitation style and relationships with parents?





Preparation and set-up

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

You will need

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

Prepare learning materials

- Small, soft ball or soft toy
- Australian Childhood Foundation Reflective Parenting Cards
- Innovative Resources Positive Parenting Cards
- Parcel prepared for Pass the Parcel – lollies, “post it notes”
- Rubbish bin & re-useable supermarket/shopping bag
- Post it notes or small pieces of paper
- **Innovative Resources Strength Cards** attached under participants chairs before the session begins (available from Innovative Resources, www.innovativeresources.org)
- Set of images representing parenting from any of the following:
 - o Pictures from magazines that may include images that are metaphorical. For example a bridge, scenes from nature, a fence, a maze etc.
 - o **Photolanguage** a set of black and white photos for conversation and reflection (available from Innovative Resources, www.innovativeresources.org)
- Suggestions of mindful activities and list children’s books can be found at the back of this manual



For each participant you will need:

Handouts:

- Family Facts Bingo
- Family Facts Review) (some completed statements and some left blank for facilitators to add to)
- Family Facts review (empty)
- Values and Goals
- Parenting Rainbow
- Breathing Relaxation Exercises
- Children's Rights

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





Part 1: Welcome and Feedback

- 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 parents refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags after Activity 1

Welcome parents back to the group.

Acknowledgement of Country.

invite them to share any feedback about their experience of last week's session or any reflections they wrote in their parenting journal they wish to share. Invite any questions, concerns, thoughts that parents may have.

Explain that the first session focused on children's brain development - that when we understand how a child's brain is working, we can better understand how to respond to their children's behaviour.

This week's session will focus on the role of parenting and what impact messages from the past has on parent's reactions and responses to children's behaviour and the importance of nurturing relationships.

Activity 1: Reconnecting



Usually, participants reconnect organically as soon as they walk in. They start to talk to each other and share their week. Please be mindful of these "informal" reconnections and choose reconnecting options that does not repeat what is already done. Be careful about individuals who are not comfortable with starting conversations by themselves. Sometimes the aim of a reconnection activity is to activate one or a few participants in joining the rest of the group.

The aim of this activity is to bring the group back together and recall people's names. Three options for this activity are included below. The group can help with recall of names whenever that is needed.

Option 1a 'Family Facts Bingo'

Give each parent a **HANDOUT- Family Facts Bingo** sheet and ask them to read the statements.

Ask parents to walk around the room talking to other parents in the group. The task is to add the names of other parents against a statement on the handout that is true for that parent. As participants find someone who can honestly say that one of the facts apply to him or her, they write the name of that person next to the fact... and so on until one parent has 3 or 4 names written next to each of the statements on their sheet.

To add an element of fun to the activity you can offer a prize to the parent who records the most names (e.g. a packet of lollies)



Option 1b 'Family Facts Review'

Using the **HANDOUT- Family Facts Review** projecting the slide on a whiteboard where everybody can see the content easily. Then ask the participants each of the questions: "In whose family are there more females than males?" etc. Count the number and write it on the whiteboard in front of the relevant statement. Once all statements are finished ask participants: "what do all these things have to with parenting?" Then while listening to their responses and by using their own comments conclude that these are all things that have a powerful effect on our parenting styles however they might not seem to at first glance.



As the facilitator/s of culturally diverse groups you may want to come up with more culturally based questions for this activity. You may ask the participants what would be culturally appropriate statements for their group to use in this activity. You may choose to use the **HANDOUT- Family Facts Review** (empty) to do this exercise.

Facilitator Conversation - Stop Pause Play



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1

Activity 2



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

Take the group through the exercise again using the handout as a reference if necessary Revisit *Stop...Pause...Play* Exercise and the remote controls. 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 (or at work!).

Facilitator Conversation – Deep Listening



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1

Activity 2



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully in much the same way as we would hope they listened to the needs of their children. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement or solutions. After the decided 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 by using the Australian Childhood Foundation Reflective Parenting Cards, Innovative Resources Positive Parenting Cards or you could use some of the topics listed below:



- The things that are most important to me being a parent are.....
- The things that I remember the most about how my parents raised me were ...
- A message from my childhood that influenced my life is

Once each parent has had time to speak and time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.

Part 2: Messages from the Past

Facilitator Conversation - Values, beliefs and goals



Values and goals are both essential in life. Imagine soccer without “fair play” (value) or without goals. Values are meant to build the context of life and goals work as objectives. It is important to differentiate between them and be aware not to mix them up. The purpose of this activity is to help participants better understand the difference between values and goals and how to use them more appropriately.

Activity 3



Ask participants to divide in pairs and interview each other. Distribute **HANDOUT - Values and Goals** and give each interviewer a few minutes to interview their partner using the questions. Interviewers are not supposed to give feedback or correct their partners' answer. Ask them to just write down what they hear from interviewees.

This handout can be worked on in pairs, in small groups or participants can work on their own if they don't feel comfortable with being interviewed.

THEN

Invite participants to have a look back at **HANDOUT - My Children** that they worked on last session. Ask them to review their wishes for their children to see whether they relate to their values or goals. Don't ask them to modify their answers but leave them as they are.

Facilitator Conversation – Influences from the past



Messages from the past influence how parents react and respond to their children's behaviour. 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.

A useful first activity to introduce the next section is to ask parents to think about the stories they grew up with about all aspects of life. (leaving out parenting messages at this point. 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 parents the opportunity to question as to whether these myths are still relevant or no longer relevant.

The following activities now focus on parenting influences.

Activity 4



These activities invite parents to begin to consider the influences from their past and the impact of these influences on the parents they are today. Below are 3 activities, one is optional but if time permits try all activities.

Part 1: Mapping parenting influences

The aim of this activity is for parents to map and become aware of what influences the way they parent. Discuss the idea that there are a range of influences other than our own parents which have shaped the way we parent. For example: extended family, the media, culture, geography, education, religion and gender roles.

Distribute copies of the **HANDOUT - Parenting Rainbow** and ask parents to write the relevant influences that have shaped the way they parent around the rainbow. Point out the metaphor of seven colours being the different influences on being a parent.

Part 2: Group Discussion

The purpose of this discussion is to offer an opportunity to reflect on where our ideas about parenting originate. The messages parents received in their own childhood about children and parenting influence their own parenting style.

Facilitator/s can introduce this activity by relating a message they remember being told as a child. Examples of these may include: *‘Only speak when you are spoken to’*, *‘Big boys don’t cry’*, *‘If you can’t say something nice, say nothing at all’*, or *‘children should be seen and not heard’*.

Ask parents if they can remember any such messages and invite them to spend a few minutes reflecting on messages from their childhood as they write responses to some of the questions on page 2 of their copy of ‘My Story as a Parent’ journal if you are using this, otherwise it could just be a discussion.

Parents’ responses can be shared with the group and noted on the whiteboard. When parents have added all they need to say facilitator/s 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 experience for better or worse.



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

Part 3: Photo language (optional)

With parents seated in a circle, spread out on the floor in the centre of the circle, the set of photo language images that could be representative of parenting. Ask parents 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.

Facilitator Conversation: Pass 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. If you are concerned about the literacy of the participants, allow the participant to open the layer of wrapping paper and take optional sweet. Then the facilitator/s reads the myth/statement to the participants.

Activity 5



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

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 one layer of wrapping and reads out the message found in that layer to the group and eats the optional sweet if there!

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.



For culturally diverse groups/ your parent cohort you may include a relevant piece of text in praise of parents that can be placed in the last layer to be unwrapped.

Facilitator Conversation rubbish, recycle, reframe



The aim of this activity is to assist parents 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 parents 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 6



Invite parents 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.
- 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?”.
 - **(Rubbish)** If the answer is no then the message goes into the rubbish bin.
 - **(Recycle)** If the answer is yes then they will keep the message with them to be passed on.
 - **(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.

If the parent group are using the parent journal they may want to stick the messages they want to pass on to their children into the journal or their handouts folder or whatever is appropriate.

Some facilitators feel it is appropriate to share the messages parents have chosen to keep to pass on to their children so parents can see what others are keeping. This may be helpful but there is the question to think about if a parent 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.



To further engage dads the facilitator/s could use rubbish and recycling ‘trucks’ to collect the messages that dads want to throw away and recycle. Get dads to reread their messages before discarding, keeping or rewriting them to reinforce what messages have been identified and then what the decision about what to do with them has been made.



Facilitator Conversation: Summary



This session has looked at where we may have received our parenting messages from, whether they were messages we wanted to pass on to our children (Reuse/Recycle), messages we wanted to throw away (Rubbish) or messages we want to change to meet our parenting needs (Reframe).

We have looked at some myths around parenting and whether they are appropriate statements for you and your family which in turn gave parents the opportunity to think about what their values, goals and beliefs are in relation to their parenting and what they want for their children.

It is important to reassure parents that parenting is an ongoing journey- parents can learn all the time. All parents have baggage from the family they grew up in. This chapter has offered an opportunity to reflect, learn, grow and heal.

We will now look at the importance of reflection – reflecting on what we know, what we have learnt and how we are going to use this knowledge is a practice that helps us to focus, set goals and to be able to be mindful.

Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation .Relaxation breathing exercises



This session will introduce a breathing activity. This is a great way for participants to practice the “pause” in Stop Pause Play and to be calm when interacting with their children.

Activity 7



Choose one of the breathing activities from **HANDOUT - Breathing Relaxation Exercises**

Explain that these are exercises that parents may wish to use with their children. All these breathing exercises help us to practice 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 practice any of the exercises listed at home during the week.

Facilitator Conversation- Quiet Reflection



Remind parents that when they reflect on their parenting they are becoming more conscious of the way they are parenting. They can keep, reuse or rewrite the messages from the past to ensure they work for them in the here and now.



Activity 8 (optional)



Ask participants: Think about someone from your childhood who has had a special influence on your life. If you were to write a letter to that person, or to draw a picture for them what would you write or draw? What would you want to bring to their attention or thank them for or tell them how important they are/were in your life.

Facilitator Conversation – Strengths as a parent



For some parents this session may have been challenging. Parents may need reassurance about their parenting skills. This activity is designed to assist parents to remember and focus on the more positive aspects of themselves as parents.

Activity 9



Ask participants to reach under their chair and retrieve the ‘Strength Card’ stuck to the underside of their chair. In pairs, parents are invited to relate their ‘strength card’ to themselves in their parenting role.

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

Facilitator Conversation – Children’s Rights



This activity is in preparation for an activity next week. Go through the handouts and their purpose and note that they have come from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

Activity 10



Distribute **HANDOUT - Children’s Rights** for parents to review before next week’s activity.

Facilitator Conversation- Reading stories to parents



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1





Activity 11



The purpose of this activity is to reflect on the messages we got from our past and decide if they are relevant in the here and now.

Option 1: The Roast Story

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 pan. "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 pan". 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 pan that we had back then. I had to cut off the ends to fit it into the pan I owned".

Three generations later when pans are bigger and roasts are smaller the same method of preparation was being used when no longer needed.

Ask dads/culturally diverse parents if they have a similar story as a dad/in their culture – invite them to share if they are comfortable to do so.

How often do we take action and not even ask, "Why do it this way?" Some of our behaviours were learnt long ago and out of circumstances that may no longer be relevant, that belong to another place and time. Yet we just keep doing the same thing, over and over. It is sometimes helpful to ask ourselves;

- Why do I do it like this?
- Is there a better way of responding to this?
- Is there new information that would help me decide which way to do it?
- What might I do differently and perhaps more effectively if I did not feel obligated to do it the way "I have always done it"?

Option 2: Children's Story Book

Choose a picture book of choice or one from the selection provided.





Session Wrap Up

Ask parent 'what messages are you taking away from this session'?

Parents can share these in the group, reflect on them for themselves or write in their journal.

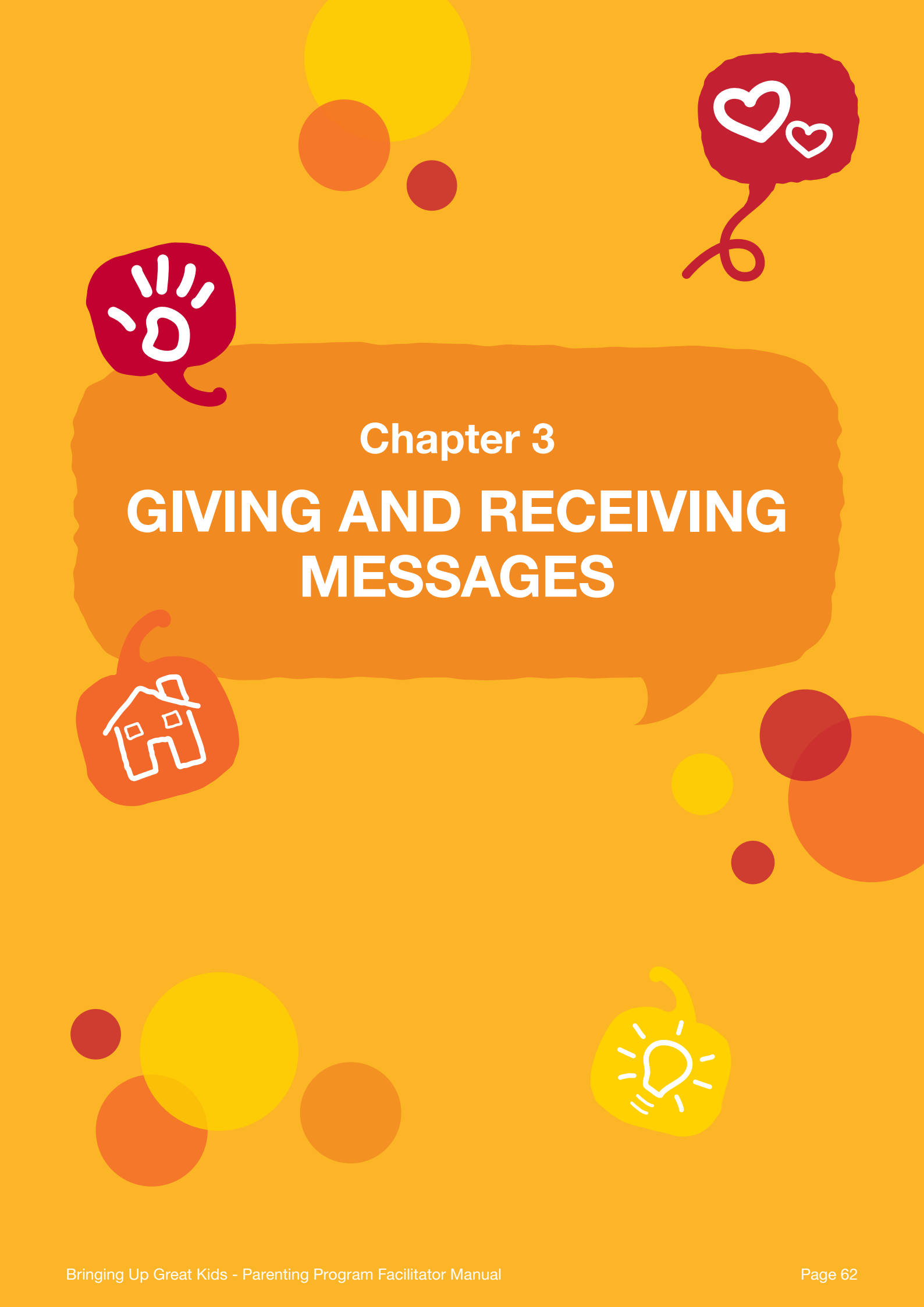
Remind parents to:

- reflect over the week on those messages they would like to take into their parenting
- practice Stop...Pause...Play
- use their journal during the time between sessions
- to bring their handouts folder with them to the next session

Farewell

Wish parents a great week.





Chapter 3

GIVING AND RECEIVING MESSAGES

Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



Chapter outline

This chapter will focus on the exploration of elements of communication using a series of activities which involve reflection and role-play. Specifically, the chapter will consider deep listening and the power of non-verbal communication. Parents are also encouraged to reflect upon messages from their past which might impact on their current communication with their children.

Parents will be encouraged to continue reflecting on the chapter content during the following week through the provision of take-home activities.

Key Messages

- Non-verbal messages are very powerful in our communication with children
- Messages we received from our childhood can create barriers to or enhance effective communication with our children
- Being in a calm state is crucial to effective communication

Pre- session reflective activity for facilitators

Think about your own childhood memories of communication in your family.

- How were you spoken to by your parents?
- Did you feel listened to?
- What do you think might have informed your parents' approach to communicating with their children?
- What do you think about children having a say in what happens in their lives?

Preparation and set-up

- Prepare refreshments
- Prepare Acknowledgement of Country

Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



You will need:

- 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

- A long roll of paper, selection of magazines, scissors and glue
- Prepared piece of music (e.g. Titanic)
- Examples of mindful activities and a list of children's books can be found at the back of this manual

For each participant, you will need

Handouts:

- Chinese Symbol for Listening
- Children's Rights
- Barriers to Communication
- Are we missing anything?
- 10 Breaths





Part 1: Welcome and Feedback

- 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 parents refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags (Optional)

Welcome parents back to the group.

Acknowledgement of Country

Invite them to share any feedback about their experience of last week's session or any reflections they wrote in their parenting journal they wish to share. Invite any questions, concerns, thoughts that parents may have.

Over previous sessions parents have:

- developed understanding about why children behave the way they do through learning about brain development;
- been able to recognise where their own parenting messages have come from and the impact they may have had on their children

Explain that in this session the focus will be on communication, the ways we give and receive messages to and from our children. Exploring how and why parents communicate with their children in the way they do and how that might be experienced by their children. We will particularly explore some of the non-verbal messages we give children through our body language and tone of voice. Even when we use words to express ourselves we continue to use non-verbal signals to communicate.

Remember a lot of the messages we receive from our parents we learnt subconsciously.

Activity 1: Reconnections



Reconnection activities may or may not be needed by session 3. Often parents automatically start to reconnect as they arrive.

Below are 2 options if you feel the group still needs them.

Option 1 - 'Do as I say'

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.

Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



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 2 – ‘When I was a child my favourite person was....’

Ask parents to think about someone who was a favourite 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 favourite 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 listening to children).

Facilitator Conversation- Stop...Pause...Play



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1

Activity 2



At this stage of the program perhaps a discussion on if or where or when parents thought about or actually used Stop Pause Play and asking parents how did they feel.

OR

Take the group through the exercise again using the handout as a reference if necessary Revisit Stop...Pause...Play Exercise and the remote controls. 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 (or at work!).

Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



Facilitator Conversation - Deep Listening



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1.

Activity 3



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully in much the same way as we would hope they listened to the needs of their children. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement or solutions. After agreed 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 by using the Australian Childhood Foundation Reflective Parenting Cards, Innovative Resources Positive Parenting Cards or you could use some of the topics listed below:

- One thing my children would say about me as a parent is.....
- What would your children say in telling the story of their childhood so far? ...
- Something I find difficult as a parent is ...
- How do you show your child that you are listening and understand?

Once each parent has had time to speak and time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.

Part 2: Giving and receiving messages

Facilitator Conversation – Birthday Line



This is a great activity to demonstrate communication without using verbal language. Inevitably participants will be gesturing and using hand signals. At the end of the activity you could ask whether anyone thought of writing down birthday and show others! A bit of fun.

Activity 4



Ask participants to form a line across the room according to their birth date and month. January is at one end of the line and December at the other. Get participants to place themselves on the line in the correct order without using words.

Discussion at end of activity about how participants communicated, usually the method used is gesturing and using number of fingers etc. Observe how many, if any, people used other methods such as writing down day and month!

Conclude with comments about how we are dependent on verbal communication with non verbal is just a powerful, and can tell us just as much.

Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



Facilitator Conversation – Listening to Children



The following discussion explore listening, it is a nice way to reflect on the mindful listening activity that is being practiced each week. When parents are listening to each other are they listening with all aspects of the Chinese symbol? Do they listen to children with all aspects of the Chinese symbol?

Activity 5



Distribute **HANDOUT - Chinese Symbol for Listening** and discuss this with the group.

When we really listen we use more than just our ears!

Facilitator Conversation - Rights of the Child



UN convention on the rights of the child Article 12 is the right that states that children have to be listened to. The wording is “Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account” Article 12 refers to the child’s right to be heard it does not say anything about whatever the child says has to occur. Australian children interviewed on this Article say they just want to be heard and if what they say cannot occur they would like to know that what they said was considered and that they received an explanation if what they said could not be acted on. This might be an important point to bring up in the discussion.

Activity 6



Part 1

Discuss with parents **HANDOUT - Children’s Rights**. Discuss with group thoughts and feelings. This session will look in more detail at Article 12. The child’s right to be heard

Part 2: Are we really listening to children?

Write the words of UN convention on the right of the child Article 12 on paper or whiteboard and discuss some or one of these points:

What do parents think this right means

- How might this right look in everyday situations?
- Can you think of times when your children are listened to and do have a say in decisions being made.
- What are the circumstances when although you listen to the children you don’t take what they say into account?

General discussion on Article 12 and what it means for families.

Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



Facilitator Conversation - Listening to children



The following activities also give participants opportunities to listen to children, choose the activities that you feel comfortable presenting.

Activity 7



Option 1

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).

- Ask parents to step inside the experience of their child during this session as we explore the notion of listening to children.
- 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.

Option 2

Think about a recent time with your child where you misunderstood each other, where there was a miscommunication or the communication was misread or misinterpreted, for example you are asking your son to turn the TV volume down. He is watching his favourite show and does not respond to your request. You repeat your request twice and finish up shouting. He is scared by the look on your face and starts crying.

Or

You have parked the car and have crossed the road together with your daughter. You remember that you have left your phone in the car. You ask her to stay where she is and you go back to the car. She follows you and comes to the other side by herself. A car is on the road and a near miss happens. She is terribly scared and you are hysterical.

What happened next?

- How did you feel?
- How do you think your child felt?
- If you could replay this situation is there anything that you might do differently?



Option 3

Ask parents to spend a few seconds imagining that they've had a bad day (e.g. run out of milk at breakfast time, dog/baby sick, run out of petrol on way to work, missed a meeting, torn your favourite shirt getting out of the car). You can ask parents for suggestions that they can relate to in their own lives.

Then ask them to imagine that they ring two friends at the end of the day and tell them what has happened. The friends respond in the following ways:

Friend 1: *"Oh Jeanette, you are always so disorganised. You are a disaster really!!! How many times have I told you to keep your car full of petrol/spare milk in fridge/be careful. You really must drive everyone in your family/at work crazy. You really need to sort yourself out."*

Friend 2: *"Oh Jeanette! How awful for you! Some days are so busy and then when little things go wrong it can feel really overwhelming."*

Ask parents to reflect on and discuss how they felt listening to each of these scenarios.

Facilitator Conversation - Non-verbal Communication



To understand fully what a child is saying to us we need to be able to not only hear the words being spoken and the tone of voice but to see and read their facial expressions, gestures, movements, posture and positioning.

Likewise, when we are communicating with children, we need to be aware of not only the words we say but the tone of voice we use, our facial expressions, the way we hold our bodies and the distance between us and the child.

Activity 8



Can you remember nonverbal messages received from your parents? What nonverbal messages do parents pass on to their children? Have a few examples ready:

- The look (usually from mother)
- Producing the wooden spoon
- Wagging of finger
- Raising an eyebrow etc





Facilitator Conversation - Role play



The following activities are role plays that enable participants to see what is going on for children when adults respond to them in different ways. It is often less intimidating for participants if the facilitators take part in the role play and take the major role.

Activity 9



Scenario 1:

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

‘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 and tone match the words?

Scenario 2:

Repeat the 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 their toys?

Facilitate a group discussion on how the two scenarios looked to the participants. Ask the volunteer ‘child’ to share how they felt in each of the scenarios.

Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



Facilitator Conversation - What messages are we communicating?



This activity gives participants the opportunity to think about their communication styles and consider what they might miss when they are not listening and tuning into the child's body signals.

Activity 10



Ask parents 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. Give an example such as:

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!'



A dad example to use in father's groups or as an alternative in other groups:

It is in the morning and you are in a rush. You are sitting in the car waiting for your daughter to join you. You need to drop her off as fast as possible at school and head to your work place to be on time for a couple of appointments. She opens the car door and joyfully says, 'I tied my shoelaces by my self for the first time in my life.'

You respond by saying, 'I wish you could understand how it is important for me to be on time today!'

Ask parents:

- 'How might the child feel when she/he gets that response?'
- 'What messages might she/he be getting from her/his parent?'
- 'What might the child do next?'

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

Facilitator Conversation – Communication



When we communicate with our children (both verbally and non-verbally) we need to keep in mind that we love them and want what is best for them. This, however, does not mean allowing them to have or do whatever they want – this would not be in the best interests of the child. We actually need to balance between listening to children and setting limits and boundaries to keep them safe.

We also need to remember that we are the parent (adult) and in some situations (safety) we need our children to listen to and respond to us. This will only happen if we think about how our communication style is interpreted by our child.



Activity 11



The aim of this activity is to help participants to differentiate between listening to their memories, judgments, expectations and needs and listening instead to what has actually been said.

Choose a nostalgic piece of music that you think participants may have memories about (i.e. Music from the Titanic).

- Ask participants to listen to the music and see what the music reminds them of.
- Discuss their memories.
- Play the music again, but this time ask them to listen to the actual music, not their memories!
- Ask them what they heard the second time you played the music.

Most often after listening for the first time participants remember the movie, actors, and/or their memories of the music (i.e. first love, funeral, etc.). This is a personal interpretation of what the music reminds them of rather than the music itself. When listening the second time they are more able to tune in to the actual music (i.e. the instruments, tones, etc.).

Ask participants about the message they get from this activity.

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

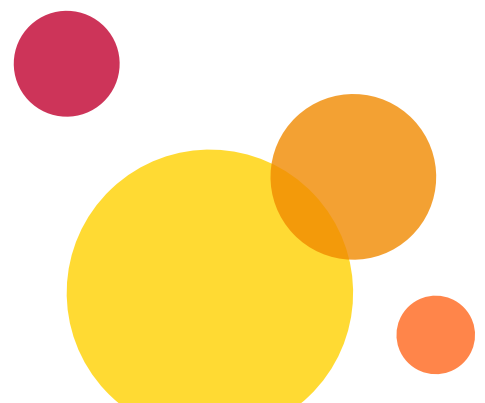
Then ask them to consider how their child might react if they went back to him/her now and told the child that they can now understand what that experience was like for him/her.

Facilitator Conversation - Barriers to communication



This activity is a fun way to discuss with participants what can get in the way of clear communication – are we speaking to our children in a language they do not understand.

How can we be clearer in what we communicate?



Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



Activity 12



Distribute **HANDOUT – Barriers to Communication**. Ask participants if they can understand what is on the handout:

‘Waht tnihs get in the way of us cmomiuntcanig celalry wtih our clihrdn?’ and

‘Yuor bairn is so pfworeul, taht it can raed sntcenecs wtih mexid up wrdos as lnog as the frsit and lsat lterets are in the rgiht pacle.’

Open a group discussion with parents by asking them to think about some barriers to effective, respectful communication with children. Responses might include:

- Unrealistic expectations
- Not considering the age and stage of the child (e.g. using language they don’t understand, trying to reason with a toddler)
- Tiredness/stress (in parent and/or child)
- Technology (phones)

Unhelpful messages from the past that influence unsupportive or unconstructive responses to children’s behaviour.

Facilitator Conversation



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%.

You may use **HANDOUT - “Are we missing anything”?** to support further discussion with participants.

Activity 13: The sound of behaviour



Ask parents: *‘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 swore you’d never use with your own children?’*

‘Do as I say, not as I do.’

Ask parents to reflect upon (and share if they wish) some of negative messages they received as children.

Invite parents to ask themselves:

- Where are those words coming from?
- Do they belong to the past or the present?
- Will they help to meet my child’s need right here, right now?



If they are unhelpful we can choose to leave those messages in the past and to make new choices about the ways we communicate with our own children.

It may be useful to invite parents to reflect back on the rubbish/recycle/reframe exercise from Chapter 2.

It takes effort, time and practice to change. Over time your new ways of talking and listening will become more natural.

Suggest to parents that those moments would be an excellent time to Stop...Pause...Play. (Refer back to **HANDOUT - Stop...Pause...Play**)

Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation - Quiet Reflections



Remind parents that when they reflect on their parenting they allow themselves the opportunity to decide what is useful and what is not useful. They can have positive communication interactions with their children.

Activity 14



'Pause on the Positives'

Invite parents 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:

- My favourite moment with my kids this week was...
- One way that I stayed in touch with friends this week was...
- One way I was kind to myself this week was...
- One person who supported me this week that I feel grateful for is...
- One way I could connect more with my kids next week is...
- A simple pleasure I could treat myself to next week is...I



Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



Facilitator Conversation



As discussed in the first week, when parents relate to their children with mindfulness they activate the part of their brain (the medial pre-frontal cortex) which allows their defensive systems to switch off. This enables them to relax. They can then think and act more rationally and step outside the experience so that they can be more present and responsive to the needs of their children.

Parents will find they are able to communicate better with their children when they are calm and rational.

Select and prepare a mindful activity for this week from the mindful resources section at the back of this manual.

Activity 15



Invite the parents to participate in the mindful activity chosen from examples at the back of manual or a mindful activity the facilitator is familiar with.

Facilitator Conversation - Self-care



Looking after yourself, or self-care, is important in helping you stay at the top of your physical, emotional and mental well-being. Self-care is any activity that you do voluntarily which helps you maintain your physical, mental or emotional health. It can help you feel healthy, relaxed and ready to take on your responsibilities.

Activity 16



Option 1

Spread out a long piece of paper on the floor with a selection of magazines, scissors and glue sticks.

Ask parents to search through the magazines for pictures/words that appeal to them as activities/prompts to take care of themselves/relax/stay calm.

Invite parents to cut and paste what they find to make a group collage of self-care reminders.

Option 2

Choose one of the calming breathing exercises **HANDOUT - 10 breaths** and practice this as a group.

These exercises can be used anytime you feel like you need to anchor yourself in the present moment in order to respond in a calmer and more appropriate way with your children. These are also great exercises to teach children and practice together as a family.

Chapter 3. Giving and Receiving Messages



Facilitator Conversation



Take home activities are not compulsory but sometimes participants are keen for a bit more information.

Activity 17



The following take home activities will provide opportunities for parents to practice reflective times with their children.

- Provide parents with an overview of the following handout content (**HANDOUT - Ideas for reflective discussions with children**) ask them to think about their own children and opportunities for reflective discussions.
 - Deep Listening for Kids – Imagine that the child you are listening to is your most favourite person in the whole world. Try this and see if your listening skills change
-

Facilitator Conversation – Reading stories to parents



Below are two different ways to end the session.

Activity 18



Option 1:

Invite parents to express their feelings about this session in a non-verbal way.

Option 2: Children's Story Book

Share a children's picture story book with the group which does not have text to illustrate the power of non-verbal communication.



Session Wrap Up

Ask parent 'what messages are you taking away from this session'?

Parents can share these in the group, reflect on them for themselves or write in their journal. Use their journal during the time between sessions

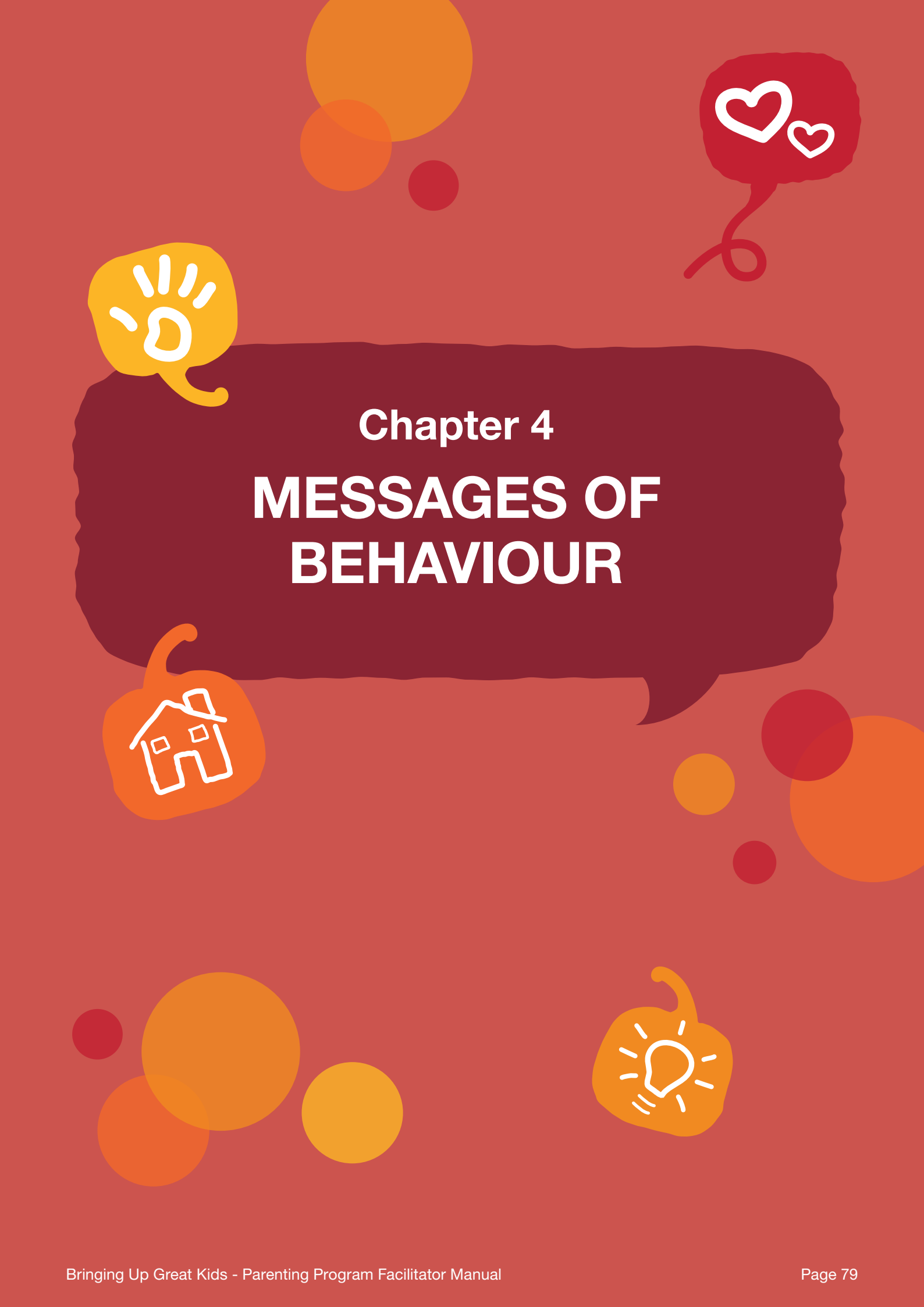
Invite parents to:

- practice mindfulness during the week and to explore creative ways to really listen to their children, acknowledging feelings and watching their body language
- practice Stop...Pause...Play
- use their journal during the time between sessions
- bring back their handouts folder

Farewell

Wish parents a great week.





Chapter 4
MESSAGES OF
BEHAVIOUR



Chapter outline

The focus of this session is on assisting parents to understand that children show how they are feeling through their behaviour. Often parents react to the behaviour (tip of the iceberg/anthill) rather than to the feelings and needs that are hidden underneath (below the surface) the behaviour.

Parents who respond appropriately to their children are trying to understand their needs and feelings and not just focusing on their behaviour. This chapter seeks to enable parents to become aware of their reactions to children's behaviour and where these come from. This knowledge can assist in understanding how children's behaviour can 'press our buttons' and how to respond more mindfully.

Key Messages

- All behaviour has meaning
- Behaviour is an expression of our feelings and needs
- An understanding of the emotional needs of children assists parents to appropriately respond to children's behaviour
- A child learns to regulate his/her behavior through the experience of being soothed by a regulated or calm adult.
- It is important for parents to be calm when responding to children.

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

Think about how your parents responded to you, as a child, when you were in a highly emotional state e.g. when you were feeling angry, sad or frightened.

What were their responses? How did their responses make you feel?

Preparation and set-up

- Prepare refreshments coffee/tea
- Prepare Acknowledgement of Country

You will need:

- Data projector, screen and laptop (optional)
- Whiteboard & whiteboard markers
- Flipchart / butcher's paper / large Post-It notes, thick textas

Chapter 4. Messages of Behaviour



- 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

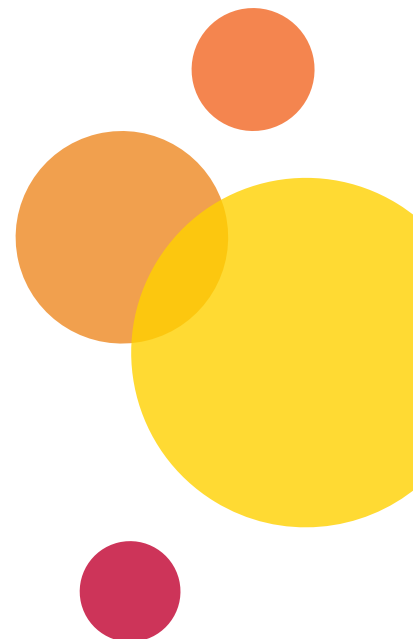
Prepare learning materials:

- Innovative Resources Bear Cards
- Australian Childhood Foundation Behaviour Buster Cards- (these can be purchased at <https://shop.childhood.org.au/pages/professional-resources>)
- Examples of mindful activities and a list of children's books can be found at the back of this manual

For each participant you will need:

Handouts:

- Children's Behaviour
- Behaviour Iceberg
- Behaviour Anthill
- Feelings and Needs
- Partially Completed Iceberg/Anthill Scenarios
- Blank Iceberg/Anthill Scenarios
- Managing BIG Feelings
- Time In Vs. Time Out
- My Parenting Chart
- Good Enough Parenting
- Repairing Relationships
- You are not your behaviour
- I still love you (Blank mother bear)
- I still love you (mother bear)





Part 1: Welcome and Feedback

- 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 parents refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags (optional).
- Acknowledgement of Country

Facilitator Conversation - Reconnecting



Welcome parents back to the group and invite them to share any feedback about their experience of last week's session or any reflections they wrote in their parenting journal they wish to share. Invite any questions, concerns, thoughts that parents may have.

Over previous sessions parents have:

- developed understanding about why children behave the way they do through learning about brain development;
- been able to recognise where their own parenting messages have come from and the impact they may have had on their children;
- considered the role of communication in relationships and that communication includes listening, non-verbal language and how we say things

Introduce this week's session, outlining that the focus will be on viewing children's behaviour as an expression of children's emotional needs. Understanding the meaning behind behaviour or understanding the situation from the child's point of view, assists parents to be able to respond in a more helpful and mindful way to children.

Activity 1: (optional)



Reconnection activities may or may not be needed. Often parents automatically start to reconnect as they arrive.

Below is an option if you feel the group still needs one.

In the large group, ask parents to share one good thing that happened between themselves and one of their children during the week.



Facilitator Conversation – Stop... Pause... Play



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1.

Activity 2



At this stage of the program perhaps a discussion on if or where or when parents thought about or actually used Stop Pause Play and asking parents how did they feel?

OR

Take the group through the exercise again using the handout as a reference if necessary Revisit *Stop...Pause...Play Exercise* and the remote controls. 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 (or at work!).

Facilitator Conversation - Deep Listening



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1.

Activity 3



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully in much the same way as we would hope they listened to the needs of their children. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement or solutions. After agreed 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 by using the Australian Childhood Foundation Reflective Parenting Cards, Innovative Resources Positive Parenting Cards or you could use some of the topics listed below:

- What do your children need when they feel overwhelmed? How can you support them?
- I find it difficult when my children's behaviour.....
- One thing I would like to change about my parenting is.....
- One thing I find challenging about my child's behaviour is.....

Once each parent has had time to speak and time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.





Part 2: Messages of Behaviour

Facilitator Conversation - Children's behaviour



The purpose of this activity is to support participants to be able to understand the feelings and needs of children's behaviour

Ask parents "what do we see when a child misbehaves?".

Have a discussion about their ideas in relation to this question and explain that we don't actually SEE anything of the child just their behaviour. But we label this behaviour based on our understanding, interpretation, judgment, and messages from the past. For example, "bossy" could be seen as 'confident and capable' in one family or 'derogatory and negative' in another family. Also note that this label could come from a variety of behaviours.

It is beneficial for parents to be aware of their own triggers when looking at their children's behaviour. In this sense we might sometimes confuse children's actual behaviour with our own judgments or triggers. Sometimes we tend to call our own judgments, the children's behaviour. Explain to the participants that as a parent it might be useful to try to differentiate between behaviours and judgments.

Activity 4



Ask parents to divide in pairs and distribute **HANDOUT - Children's Behaviour**. Ask parents to look at each picture and write the child's "behaviour" in the first column. Ask parents not to allow the behaviour to trigger a "judgement" but to actually just see what behaviour is occurring.

Then ask them to write their "understanding" of the behaviour, the emotion, reason and/or intention of the behaviour in the next column.

Bring the parents back to the big group and discuss the behaviours they saw. Ask them what they learnt in doing this activity.

Facilitator Conversation – Behaviour Anthill/ Iceberg



Navigating different and difficult behaviours in children is challenging for parents and can provoke a range of responses and emotions. Often parents react to their children's behaviours rather than responding to the child's emotional needs causing the behaviour.

To help parents better understand children's behaviour use **HANDOUT - Behaviour Iceberg/ Behaviour Anthill**.

You may choose to use the **Behaviour Buster** cards. These have suggested scenarios and parents/child's feelings and needs. There are also blank sheets that group participants can use and take home.



The analogy of the iceberg/anthill has the behaviour in the tip whilst the hidden part below contains the purpose of the behaviour (i.e. feelings and needs). Often so much reaction is put into the behaviour, which is the smallest part of the whole situation because it can be seen. The behaviour is what we see, it provokes a response/reaction in us. The feelings and needs are not as obvious unless we tune in and recognise them.

The key to understanding behaviour is to pay attention to feelings and needs, the hidden part of the iceberg/anthill.

Activity 5



Distribute the handout that is most suitable for your group with the side showing just the tip of the iceberg/anthill labelled 'behaviour' and say to the parents 'So here it is, the iceberg/anthill of children's behaviour.'

Support parents to understand: *'All behaviour has meaning. The behaviour we see is just the tip of the iceberg/anthill.'* And this is the way that the child tells us what they feel and need.

Children act out their feelings and needs through their behaviour. Often it is the behaviour that is responded to rather than the child's feelings and needs.

Now ask the parents to turn over their handout to reveal the full iceberg/anthill with the part of the iceberg/anthill under the water/ground labelled 'feelings and needs'.



There may need to be a discussion/clarification about an iceberg/anthill – it may be beneficial to talk about the movie 'Titanic' as most people have seen it and can discuss what happened. (a large passenger ship on its maiden voyage hit an iceberg – ice under the sea and sank). This analogy of an iceberg/anthill for children's behaviour is that they all have a small tip showing on the surface but there is a much larger part under the surface that explains the behaviour. (feelings and needs)

Facilitator Conversation - Feelings and Needs



To understand behaviours, it is important to be able to identify feelings and needs.

However, we sometimes mix them with each other, use them interchangeably in our sentences and find it hard to label them properly.

For example when a two year old screams, throws themselves on the floor and kicks, when taken off coin-in-slot ride at shopping centre,

- The child is probably **feeling** "frustrated" and **needs** "amusement"
 - o To fulfil this need, the child **wants** "another ride"
- The parent may **feel** "frustrated" as well and may **need** "compliance or cooperation"
 - o To fulfil this need, the parent's **want** is "to take the child off the machine", and/or "to leave the shopping centre", and/or ...



'Child's **want**' and 'parents **want**' look opposite. By focusing on wants, there is no way to find a solution that fits both. But by being mindful about **needs**, the parent might be able to suggest a solution that meets both needs (i.e. comfort, a hug that then promotes cooperation). This is complicated and we will all have our own ideas about what the want, feeling and need is in different situations.

Once we are more aware of feelings and needs, or have a good guess about them, we have the opportunity to suggest other solutions that might work better in that situation and fulfil both child and parent needs.

Activity 6



Ask parents if they can think of behaviours their parents showed when they had an unmet feeling or need. (E.g. slamming door, silent cleaning with determination, withdrawn and silent)

Ask parents about their current need(s) and feeling(s). This can be done whilst being silent for a minute and then sharing it with the parent beside them or you can ask for volunteers to share with the group. Be aware that they might mix feelings and needs. This can be a good opportunity for a discussion about the importance of differentiating between them.

Now distribute **HANDOUT - Feelings and Needs** cards to parents. To make the card ask parents to cut out on the lines and fold in half along the dotted line. They now have a handy card they can keep in their pocket to refer to following each session.

Ask them to have a look at their "Needs and Feelings Card" and repeat labelling their current need(s) and feeling(s) and share with their partner.

Facilitator Conversation



Below are three options one that can be done in the group and the other a reflective opportunity at home if no time to do in the group or continue to use the **Behaviour Buster Cards**, scenarios and blank sheets.

Activity 7



Option 1

Using the scenarios **HANDOUT - partially completed Iceberg/Anthill Scenarios** ask parents to think about each scenario and then finish the 'I feel..... I need.....' sentences.

Give parents a little time to do this then go through each scenario and their responses.



Option 2

Using the blank **HANDOUT - Iceberg/Anthill Scenarios** ask parents to think about one example of their own child/ren's behaviour and their thoughts about their child's feelings and needs.

In small groups get the parents to discuss their examples and responses.

Option 3

Distribute the **Behaviour Buster Cards** – either just the parent cards and parents and child cards as per suggestions that come with the cards. Participants can use the blank pages to work through behaviour that is worrying them and their feelings and needs in relation to the behaviour and then think about their children's feelings and needs when displaying this behaviour.

Facilitator Conversation



The idea of this activity is to bring previously explored concepts together (i.e. messages from the past, communication, mindfulness, reflection, emotional brain).

Children need help to manage BIG feelings. Some behaviour is caused by BIG feelings that children cannot easily control.

Encourage parents to share some of the stressful situations they have had with their children. 'What did they feel?', 'How did they react?'

Examples might include:

- bedtime
- homework
- dinner time
- cleaning up their bedroom
- packing away their toys
- leaving somewhere where they are having fun; park, play date, etc.

Apart from the inevitable tiredness and stress which comes from being a parent, re-iterate that messages parents received in childhood can get in the way of responding to children in a respectful, mindful and positive way. Being aware of their reactions to the BIG emotions that children's behaviour can evoke and where their BIG emotions come from can help parents to change their responses to their children's behaviour.

Circulate **HANDOUT - Managing BIG Feelings** to the parents.



Activity 8: Role play



Using the above handout the facilitator/s can demonstrate the scenario that addresses the first 4 steps. Divide parents into small groups and invite them to role play their own scenarios (they could use the examples shared earlier).

Bring the group back together and using the handout as a guide discuss the role plays and how parents felt about responding to children's BIG feelings in this way.

Facilitator Conversation



Before parents can help children with their BIG feelings it is important for them to recognise and manage their own BIG feelings. The aim of these activities is to highlight that parents can also have BIG feelings that 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 parents have a BIG feeling they are not at their best and this feeling can prevent them from looking after themselves properly and responding to their children in the most positive, nurturing and mindful way.

Activity 9



Option 1

Using the Innovative Resources 'Bear Cards' put out the bears that display anger in its many different forms. Ask the parents to choose a bear card that represents them when they are angry.

Reflect on different ways we show anger and the impact on our children

Option 2

Using **HANDOUT - Time in Vs. Time out** facilitate a discussion about the different messages parents may communicate through their behaviour.

Facilitator Conversation



Reassure parents that there will always be times when their interactions with children are less than perfect. Sometimes it is the parent's behaviour can disrupt the sense of connection between children and their parents. The most important thing is to repair the disruption in the relationship. It is important that a child is not left in a state where they feel they are bad, unloved or unwanted.

When disconnections in the parent-child relationship are repaired, children learn that it is OK to make a mistake. Having a parent apologise to their child for their own behaviour communicates important messages to children about the importance of saying sorry. This also communicates to the child that their parents love and care for them.

The "good enough parent" who has ruptured can regulate the child's negative state by repairing in a timely manner. This reassures the child and enables continued development, whilst maintaining the relationship. The child is able to integrate pleasure and frustration, affection and anger within themselves, and in relationship to their parent.

Chapter 4. Messages of Behaviour




This reintegration sets the pattern for being able to survive and learn from mistakes throughout life (resilience).

“Infants who auto-regulate best, are those whose mothers are best at repairing misattunement - not those whose mothers are perfectly attuned”. (Ed Tronnik)

Activity 10



Circulate **HANDOUT - My parenting chart** to the parents. Give them enough time to reflect and draw their two lines.

Most parents might expect themselves to be perfect or almost perfect in maintaining a calm and unchallenged relationship with their children (their expected line in the chart). The actual line for some might be like  meaning that they had agreeable moments as well as ruptured ones. Others may draw their actual line similar to the expected one. Ask parents if there is any difference between the two lines and have them guess about the meaning behind what they see on the chart. Ask them how they feel when they look at the chart.

Now distribute **HANDOUT - Good Enough Parenting** among participants. Give the group a few minutes to discuss the three questions. Then start a conversation with the whole group to come up with a common understanding about “good enough parenting”.

Facilitator Conversation



The following activities are a great way to explore the meaning behind the behaviour and help participants take their attention away from the child’s behaviour to focus on what they might be needing and feeling by the behaviour.

Ask parents if they have had an experience where they have or could have apologised for their behaviour of yelling or getting angry – opens up discussion about regulating self to be able to co regulate child. (Hand brain activity could be shared again here, again!).

Activity 11



Distribute **HANDOUT - Repairing relationships** and divide participants into smaller groups of 3 or 4 people. Invite them to read and discuss the case. Invite them back to the whole group and ask for their opinions to sum up the repairing relationship and good enough parenting conversation.

Explain that in the scenario of the 18 month old child who takes off in the car park while his mum is putting the baby in the car restraint - the behaviour is running off but the need is to explore and be free. The parent’s behaviour might be to yell stop and run after the child, to tell the child it is dangerous to run off, they might get hit by a car because their need is for their child to be safe. We know the 18 month old is full of curiosity and emotion so this behaviour is not misbehaviour but rather developmentally normal. The parent’s behaviour is because they are scared for their child and annoyed at the behaviour. Once parents can see the developmental needs then their response can be appropriate for the situation such as putting the toddler in the car first as it is known he will run off.



Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation



Remind parents that when they reflect on their parenting they allow themselves the opportunity to decide what is useful and what is not useful. When we reflect we are allowing ourselves time to look for the positives and reject the negatives.

Activity 12



'Pause on the Positives'

Invite parents 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:

- My favourite moment with my kids this week was...
 - One way that I stayed in touch with friends this week was...
 - One way I was kind to myself this week was...
 - One person who supported me this week that I feel grateful for is...
 - One way I could connect more with my kids next week is...
 - A simple pleasure I could treat myself to next week is...
-

Facilitator Conversation



As previously discussed, when parents relate to their children with mindfulness they activate the part of their brain (the medial pre-frontal cortex) which allows their defensive systems to switch off. This enables them to relax. They can then think and act more rationally and step outside the experience so that they can be more present and responsive to the needs of their children.

They will find they are better able to understand what their children are trying to tell them through their behaviour when they are calm and rational.

Activity 13



Select and prepare a mindful activity for this week from the mindful resources section at the back of this manual or one known to facilitators.



Facilitator Conversation



Children show how they are feeling through their behaviour. This is as true for very young children as it is for young adults. It may even be argued that all adults show their feelings through their behaviour! To assist children to regulate their feelings, parents need to be calm and able to regulate their own feelings.

An angry or distressed parent is of limited help in calming down an angry or distressed child. You could also use the metaphor of being on a plane during a mid-air emergency. Flight attendants always instruct parents to put their own oxygen mask on and breathe normally before fitting an oxygen mask to their child. The message: if parents are not calm and in control, they can't help their children be calm and in control.

Activity 14



Divide parents into small groups and allocate some scenarios **HANDOUT - You are not your behaviour** to each group.

Each group can consider the scenarios and discuss what is going on.

What is the behaviour and what are the feelings/needs?

1. For each scenario ask the group to consider:
 - What the child is feeling?
 - What do they need?
 - What is the parent feeling?
 - What do they need?

For example: In the scenario of the 7 years old, the child's behaviour is leaving the bike in the drive way. The parent's behaviour might be yelling at the child to put the bike away because he needs respect from the child. The child might feel playful and his need might be to play. The priority for the child is to do something else other than to put the bike away.

Discuss possible responses to each of these children in ways that help the child understand that: **What you did is not ok. But you are not your behaviour. You are still a good person and I still love you.**

To address the needs of both the parent and the child, the parent can ask the child to come back and put the bike away by saying: "I am aware how excited you are to go inside and play. It is absolutely fine but we still need also to put the bike away." Dad can even help the child to put the bike away.

By doing this the parent differentiates between the child and his behaviour. The message behind this approach is that children might behave inappropriately but it doesn't mean that they are "bad" and they will continue the inappropriate behaviour.

Parents are 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.

Chapter 4. Messages of Behaviour



Facilitator Conversation



This activity can support participants to explore the difference between separating a parent's love for their child and their contrary feelings about the child's behaviour. Always love the child but sometimes the child's behavior needs discussion and addressing.

Activity 15



Distribute **HANDOUT - I still love you** and ask parents what they think is happening in these pictures. You may choose to use the filled **HANDOUT - I still love you - filled** to generate a discussion.

Facilitator Conversation: Reading stories to parents



Refer to Facilitator Conversation chapter 1.

Activity 16



Option 1:

Choose a picture book of choice or one from the selection provided.

Option 2: The resilience story

Read a story to the group which illustrates the development of resilience through bouncing back from making mistakes or challenges.

The dog story

At a country show there is dog jumping competition. The two finalists are a brown kelpie, full of enthusiasm, vitality and bounce, eager to please his owner. The other finalist was a sleek black dog, well groomed, poised and full of confidence. Each dog had three attempts to jump over a barrier onto a ledge and the competition is over when one dog cannot complete the jump after three attempts.

So the brown dog jumped, missed and fell. With encouragement from his owner he attempted again but missed and fell. On the third attempt he just made it over. This is what happened every time, two miss and falls and then finally scrambling over.

The black dog received his owner's signal. He jumped cleanly to the top first time every time.

This scenario continued for a number of rounds as the barrier was lifted higher and higher.

In the final round, something unexpected happened. The gutsy brown tried and missed, tried and missed and on the third attempt managed to claw his way to the ledge.



Then it was the black dog's turn. He jumped and for the first time in the entire event he missed. Everyone thought he would attempt again and make it in the second or third time. But the black dog wasn't thinking like that at all. He simply refused to try again, no matter how much his owner coxed him. Having missed once the black dog simply gave up. The brown dog won!

What do you think helped the brown kelpie to try again and succeed?

Session Wrap Up

Ask parent 'what messages are you taking away from this session'?

Parents can share these in the group, reflect on them for themselves or write in their journal.

Invite parents to:

- practice mindfulness during the week and to explore creative ways to really listen to their children, acknowledging feelings and watching their body language
- practice Stop...Pause...Play
- use their journal during the time between sessions
- bring their handouts folder to the next session

Farewell

Wish parents a great week.





Chapter 5

MESSAGES ABOUT ME



Chapter outline

This chapter will provide an opportunity for parents to better understand their children's emotional development. They will discover that their children have unique personalities and temperament and that gender and position in the family are also significant in shaping children.

Key Messages

- Consider emotional development when looking at children's behaviour.
- Understand that individual differences in personality, gender, position in the family and temperament, can affect children's behaviour
- How we parent is usually culturally determined
- Calm parents equals calm children

Pre session Facilitator Reflective Activity

Think about yourself as a child. What is your position in the family? What did you like or dislike about your position?

- How did you fit into your family?
- 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 the family, your gender and unique personality?

Preparation and set-up

- Prepare refreshments coffee/tea
- Prepare Acknowledgement of Country



Chapter 5. Messages about me



You will need:

- 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
- List of group safety guidelines from first week

Prepare learning materials:

- Examples of mindful activities and a list of children's books can be found at the back of this manual

For each participant you will need:

Handouts:

- Children's Emotional Development: Birth – 10 Years
- Personality
- 16 suggestions for personality types
- Reflections on Culture
- Family Case Scenarios
- Family Case Scenario (2)
- Your Family Case Scenario
- Stress Thermometer
- Mindfulness Bottle
- Selfcare prescription





Part 1: Welcome and Feedback

- 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 parents refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags (optional)
- Acknowledgement of Country

Facilitator Conversation: reconnection



Welcome parents back to the group and invite them to share any feedback about their experience of last week's session or any reflections they wrote in their parenting journal they wish to share. Invite any questions, concerns, thoughts that parents may have.

Over previous sessions parents have:

- developed understanding about why children behave the way they do through learning about brain development;
- been able to recognise where their own parenting messages have come from and the impact they may have had on their children;
- considered the role of communication in relationships and that communication includes listening and non-verbal language;
- learnt about the importance of understanding children's emotional needs and how children show their feelings through their behaviour

This session will focus on some of the many factors which influence our relationships with our children – the impacts of the child's unique personality, temperament, position in the family, gender and developmental stage. We will also explore cultural expectations in relation to children and our relationships with our children.

Activity 1: (optional)



Reconnection activities may or may not be needed. Often parents automatically start to reconnect as they arrive.

Below is an option if you feel the group still needs one.

Pair up participants who have not previously paired up before and spend five minutes each talking about what you know about yourself as a child, e.g. place in the family, role in the family, which members of your family you are like in appearance, interests, etc. Both parents in the pair have equal time to speak.

When returning to the large group pairs might like to share similarities or differences they learnt about each other's stories.



Facilitator Conversation Stop...Pause...Play



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1.

Activity 2



At this stage of the program perhaps a discussion on if or where or when parents thought about or actually used Stop Pause Play and asking parents how did they feel.

OR

Take the group through the exercise again using the handout as a reference if necessary Revisit Stop...Pause...Play Exercise and the remote controls. 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 (or at work!). At this stage of the program perhaps a discussion on if or where or when parents thought about or actually used Stop Pause Play and asking parents how did they feel?

Facilitator Conversation: Deep Listening



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1.

Activity 3



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully in much the same way as we would hope they listened to the needs of their children. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement or solutions. After agreed 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 by using the Australian Childhood Foundation Reflective Parenting Cards, Innovative Resources Positive Parenting cards or you could use some of the topics listed below:

- I would like our family to be doing more...
- One thing my children need is ...
- How do you think your child feels about the position he/she holds in your family?
- How would you describe your personality? How does this affect your parenting?

Once each parent has had time to speak and time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.



Part 2: Messages about me

Facilitator Conversation - Children's Emotional Development: Birth – 10 years



Acknowledge that parents may know more about children's development than they think they do. They may also recognise that it is unhelpful to compare same age children. Children will develop in their own time and are usually working on one developmental area at a time.

Parents need to have an understanding of their children's emotional development to help them further understand their behaviour. It is important for parents to try to understand the emotion/feeling behind children's behaviour, to acknowledge the emotion and let the child know that all emotions, such as sadness, anger, happiness, etc. are all normal and acceptable.

Activity 4



The content of the following section is provided for parents in **HANDOUT - Children's Emotional Development: Birth – 10 Years** which focuses on normative socio-emotional development in the following age groupings:

- Birth – 18 months
- 18 months – 3 years
- 3 -6 years
- 6 – 10 years

Divide parents into small groups according to the ages of their children. Ask parents with more than one child to choose an age group on which they would like to focus.

Distribute handout mentioned above and ask each group to read the age group relevant to their children's ages. Ask them to share what they know about developmental stages of their children (emotional, social, language, intellectual and physical). Explain that in this part of the session we will focus particularly on children's emotional development.

Reinforce that parents know a lot about child development – their children have taught them well.



Bring the large group back together and discuss the findings.

Discuss what may be different in your culture to what is identified in the Handout – e.g. eating with cutlery, eating with your fingers, using chopsticks, etc.



Facilitator Conversation - Gender and Position in the Family



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

The following activities are 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 personality, 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 5



Invite parents 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 parents 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 parents 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 Personality and Temperament



The aim of the following two activities is to help parents reflect on the unique qualities of their children. Allow parents plenty of time to complete both parts of this activity.

Facilitators need to be aware that if children have been affected by relational trauma they are most likely to develop in all areas at a slower rate to children not affected by relational trauma. Always support all parents to understand that children’s development is not “by the book” and that they will most likely meet their developmental milestones in their own time.

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



Activity 6



Distribute **HANDOUT - Personality** and have a conversation about the meaning behind this exercise.

Ask parents to read the activity carefully or you could read it together as a group first. Parents can complete one sheet per child or one sheet for all their children. Allow parents plenty of time to complete both parts of this activity.

Now either distribute **HANDOUT - 16 suggestions for personality types** or project it on to the wall. Ask parents to read the activity carefully or it could be read together as a group first. Ask them what they think about their own and their children's personality type.

This handout is one of the many interpretations about personality types. Parents might find that they are actually a combination of several or they become close to some of them in different situations. Personality types are diverse, and every child is a unique combination of them.

Facilitator Conversation: Cultural Background



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 7



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.

The drawing activity on the reverse side of the handout can be done either individually or in group on butcher paper.

Facilitator Conversation Family Case Scenario



The aim of this activity is to explore possible outcomes for the children in a fictional family, where the children differ in age, personality, temperament and gender. The purpose is to open discussions around how different children may react to the same event based on their uniqueness.

The facilitator/s need to have thought about all angles this scenario offers to be able to propose another viewpoint to parents in their discussions.

For example:

- the quiet child may appear to handle the situation well but inside be very distressed while an outgoing child may demonstrate being unhappy with the situation
- parents may think that a young child will not be affected by the changes because they are too young to understand but they can be, in fact, quite traumatised by the change



Activity 8



Distribute **HANDOUT - Family Case Scenario** and divide the large group into 4 smaller groups. Ask each group to discuss the scenario, reflecting on how they think each of the children might react to the family's change in circumstances.

There are several ways the small groups may explore this scenario:

1. Each small group could have 4 parents who could each represent one of the 4 children in the scenario. Each parent discusses the scenario from the position of that child.
2. There could be 4 small groups and each group represents one of the children in the scenario and the whole group explores the scenario from the eyes of that child.

Invite the parents back to the large group and invite all the parents who represented a particular child to share with the others how the scenario might affect him/her taking into account the points in the scenario such as his/her stage of development, unique personality, temperament, gender and position in the family.

OR

Depending your group, you may choose to use **HANDOUT - Family Case Scenario (2)** which is an alternative scenario of a single parent family that has a child with additional needs.

OR

HANDOUT - Your Family Case Scenario is an opportunity for participants to reflect on their own scenarios. Once they are familiar with the concept through one of the above options you may suggest this handout as a homework.



This scenario may need to be contextualised for your cultural or parent group – discussion may be needed to explain some of the scenario content.



There may need to be some discussion around dad's personal decision making and how it may affect the whole family, i.e. when the father makes the decision to change location for their job where there is no family consultation, this may be cultural also.

Facilitator Conversation (optional at discretion of facilitator and needs or group)



We know from research that from birth onwards babies can experience stress and can sense whether their parents are angry or sad. They can be affected by their parents' moods. How children respond will be determined by their temperament, age and stage of development. Babies and young children are not able to describe their feelings and are more likely to complain of a headache, feeling sick, be irritable or cry.

It is helpful for children to learn what their bodies are doing when they get stressed and to learn the appropriate ways to release their stress.

Below is a brief definition of the types of stress. This content is provided to inform the facilitator and is not intended as a handout for the parents.



Positive Stress is the kind of stress that is embedded in everyday life and can promote growth, is manageable and builds resilience. Children may encounter positive stress

- when they attend a new school
- meet new people
- undertake a medical procedure or
- have to learn a new skill.

This type of stress is considered normal and coping with it is essential to development.

Tolerable stress refers to challenging experiences that are more intense but still relatively short-lived. Examples include the death of a loved one, a natural disaster, a frightening accident, and family disruptions such as separation or divorce. If a child or young person has the support of at least one caring adult, tolerable stress can usually be overcome. In many instances, tolerable stress can become positive stress and benefit the child developmentally. However, if children and young people lack adequate support, tolerable stress can have a detrimental impact and lead to long term negative health effects.

High impact stress results from intense adverse experiences that may be sustained over a long period of time. Children are unable to effectively manage this type of stress by themselves. This can lead to permanent changes in the development of the brain. Appropriate adult support and intervention can help in returning the stress response system back to its normal baseline. High impact stress can result from exposure to parent and carers:

- with alcohol and drug problems
- with mental health issues
- in high and prolonged conflict

Toxic Stress results from intense experiences that target the child directly and carry with them intentional messages of intimidation, fear, shame and abuse of power. It too can be sustained over a period of time. Examples of toxic stress are

- child sexual abuse
- neglect
- physical abuse
- bullying

Toxic stress causes sustained disintegrative effects in both the structure of the brain and communication between the body and brain. The destructive effects of toxic stress can be reduced by supportive adult interaction with the child.



Activity 9: Children and Stress (optional as above)



Ask parents whether they think stress might be useful in anyway or not? After a short discussion distinguish the four kinds of stress for the whole group.

Now distribute **HANDOUT - Stress Thermometer** and ask parents to write down examples of each kind of stress in their children.

NB: Let participants know that going back their own painful memories, especially about toxic stress, might be distressing, so participants can feel free to skip some parts or the whole activity.

Facilitator Conversation Mindfulness bottle



For a better understanding of mindfulness, as a facilitator, you might need to metaphorically visualise what happens to our mind while we do mindfulness practices. Having a visual tool can also be useful for parents should they discuss mindfulness with their children. The mindfulness bottle activity is a popular way of simulating the brain on occasions of big feeling.

Activity 10



Option 1:

Distribute **HANDOUT - Mindfulness Bottle** and explain how to make the bottle to participants by showing them a sample of the bottle you have made before. Then ask them to be mindful about different feelings present in them at the moment. Shake the bottle and get participants to breathe deeply while they are looking at sparkles settling slowly down to the bottom. You may find it useful to gently ring a gong or bell if you have one. Please be sure that the sound gets softer and softer as the bottle becomes clearer.

Option 2:

If you have enough time distribute **HANDOUT - Mindfulness Bottle** and bring the material needed to make a mindfulness bottle for three groups. Divide participants in three groups and have them make the bottle according to the instructions. Ask them to think about what's going on in their heads and name one of their feelings while putting each color of sprinkles in the bottle. Then shake bottles and do the mindfulness bottle practice as above.

Facilitator Conversation



When children have support from significant adults in their life they are able to learn ways to better manage their stress. Play, relaxation and fun with family are protective factors for children to manage their stress.



Activity 11



In a large group brainstorm parents' suggestions for playful, relaxing and fun activities they could share with their children. Write these ideas on the whiteboard. The list might include such things as:

- listening to music
- deep breathing
- massage
- skipping
- hugs
- taking a nap
- singing
- running
- reading a book together
- playing with pets
- drawing
- water play
- imaginative visualization
- dancing
- brushing hair
- jumping on trampoline

Encourage parents to undertake one/some of these activities with their children during the week or something else everyone will enjoy.





Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation - Quiet Reflections



Remind parents that when they reflect on their parenting they allow themselves the opportunity to decide what is useful and what is not useful. They can have positive communication interactions with their children.

Activity 12



'Pause on the Positives'

Invite parents 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:

- My favourite moment with my kids this week was...
 - One way that I stayed in touch with friends this week was...
 - One way I was kind to myself this week was...
 - One person who supported me this week that I feel grateful for is...
 - One way I could connect more with my kids next week is...
 - A simple pleasure I could treat myself to next week is...!
-

Facilitator Conversation – Reflection



Invite parents that when they reflect on their parenting they allow themselves the opportunity to decide what is useful and what is not useful. Reflecting on each person's uniqueness allows us time to accept our similarities and differences for what they are, part of our unique make up.

Activity 13



Option 1

Invite parents to reflect on the uniqueness of children and on their relationships with their own children.

Based on the child's age and stage of development, personality, temperament, position in the family, gender and cultural expectations, ask participants if their approach to their children and their behaviour has changed.



Option 2

With parents seated comfortably suggest to them that they may like to spend a few moments thinking about themselves with their children.

Give people the option of closing their eyes (facilitator/s should close their eyes too if asking parents to do this) and ask them to imagine being with their child and sharing an experience which is enjoyable for both of them.

Imagine where you are, what you are doing, how it feels, and what the scene might look like if you were a 'fly on the wall'.

Facilitator Conversation



As previously discussed, when parents relate to their children with mindfulness they activate the part of their brain (the medial pre-frontal cortex) which allows their defensive systems to switch off. This enables them to relax. They can then think and act more rationally and step outside the experience so that they can be more present and responsive to the needs of their children.

Parents will find they are better able to accept their child's uniqueness and be less concerned about comparing one child with another.

Activity 14



Select and prepare a mindful activity for this week from the mindful resources section at the back of this manual or one that is known to the facilitator.

Facilitator Conversation



Suggest that self-care is a personal matter. Everyone's approach will be different. It relates to what you do at work and outside work to look after your holistic wellbeing so that you can meet your personal and professional commitments.

- Develop a regular sleep routine
- Aim for a healthy diet
- Take lunch breaks
- Go for a walk at lunch-time
- Take your dog for a walk after work
- Use your sick leave
- Get some exercise before/after work regularly

Activity 14 supports parents to integrate all their thoughts about selfcare.



Activity 15



Use the **HANDOUT - Selfcare Prescription** and encourage parent to put together a selfcare routine program for themselves. Parents can do the prescription in groups or individually.

Facilitator Conversation – Reading stories to parents



Refer Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1.

Activity 16



Read to the group the story below

No Bruno!

'No Bruno! That's the third time today, I've asked you not to do that!' growled mother bear, as she came into the cave to find her baby cub dipping his paw into the honey pot yet again.

Bruno scowled at his mother, then yelled at her as he picked up the pot and threw it on the floor. The big honey pot smashed as it landed, and golden sticky honey oozed out across the floor of the cave.

'Now look what you've done!' she growled in frustration. It had been a wet spring, with fewer flowers for the bees and much less honey for the bears than in other years...and now, thanks to her mischievous son, they had even less of their precious honey store for the coming winter.

Bertha was tired after a long day looking after her youngest and busiest boy. It was almost time to pick up the older ones from Care Bears, and to top it all off, Bruno's dad was away on an extended hunting trip with his mates, so she'd have to manage 'zoo hour' all by herself.

Bertha was tempted to just send Bruno into the cave and leave him there by himself so that she could have a moment's peace, but instead she:

Took a deep breath

Blew it out with a sigh

Smiled at her son

And thought about why...

'It's the end of the day. He's hungry and tired...and probably bored because I've been on the phone a lot today trying to organize the builders to finish our cave extension before the cold weather begins. It might look like he just wants attention, but I think what he really wants is connection...with me.

And as for me: I'm hungry and tired too-and annoyed that Ben's been away for so long. I could really do with some help here!'



After taking one more big breath and sighing it out slowly, she looked Bruno in the eye, made a scowly face at her son, stamped her front paw and growled, ‘Grrrrrr! Cross! Cross! Cross!’ Then she softened her face and continued. ‘It looks like you felt really angry that I wouldn’t let you help yourself to more honey. It’s OK to feel angry Bruno, but it’s not OK to use that as an excuse to smash our honey pot. We don’t break other people’s things on purpose in our family.’

Bruno turned away from his mother and looked down at his shoes.

Then Bertha said, ‘I don’t like what you did Bruno, but I still love who you are.’ And she picked up her son and gave him a big warm bear hug.

‘You can help me to clean up this mess and then there’ll just be enough time for us to play one game together before we pick up your brother and sister.’

Generate discussion from the following question:

What could Bertha ask Bruno to think about doing the next time he started to feel angry? (e.g. climbing a tree or running outside,)

Session Wrap Up

Ask parent ‘what messages are you taking away from this session’?

Parents can share these in the group, reflect on them for themselves or write in their journal.

Ask parents how they would like to finish the group next week. Perhaps they would like to celebrate with special refreshments and food, e.g. a celebratory cake?

Invite parents to bring a photograph of each of their children to the final session so that we can ‘bring the children into the group’ and share them with the other parents.

Remind parents to:

- to practice mindfulness during the week and to find time to connect with and have fun with their children.
- practice Stop...Pause...Play
- use their journal during the time between sessions
- bring their handout folder to the last session

Farewell

Wish parents a great week.





Chapter 6

PASSING ON MESSAGES



Chapter outline

This chapter focuses on an exploration of parents' responses to the on-going challenges of parenting. Parents will be encouraged to identify accessible sources of support when parenting becomes difficult.

The session will include an agreed celebration to acknowledge parents' participation and to mark the conclusion of the program.

Parents will also be given an opportunity to provide feedback on their experience of the program.

Key Messages

- Looking after ourselves includes asking for help when we need it.
- All parents need help and support at some time
- The best predictor of how a child copes with stress is how their parents cope.
- 'Hot spots' in parent-child relationships often have more to do with parental relationships with their own parents than with their children.
- When parents are reflective of their parenting they are more likely to have happy and positive relationships with their children.
- Parents need to be in a calm state before they can act rationally.

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

- Reflect on your own reactions to stress. Are you generally a 'bottler' of your emotions? Do you 'explode' easily?
- If you are a parent yourself, which situations with your own children 'press your buttons?'
- Do you ever hear yourself saying things that your mother or father said to you in exasperation/anger?.....the very things you swore you would never say to your own children? What could you do to change that reactive response?



Preparation and set-up

- Prepare celebratory food
- Prepare Acknowledgement of Country

You will need:

- Whiteboard & whiteboard markers
- 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
- List of group safety guidelines from first week

Prepare learning materials:

- Examples of mindful activities and a list of children's books can be found at the back of this manual

For each participant you will need:

Handouts:

- Being there for Children
- Pressing Buttons
- Pressing Buttons (blank)
- Asking for Help
- Self-care reflection
- Life Tree
- The Story Continues
- My children (from chapter 1)
- Mindful Walking





Part 1: Welcome and Feedback

- 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 parents refreshments on arrival.
- Distribute name tags (optional)
- Acknowledgement of Country

Facilitator Conversation: Reconnecting



Welcome parents back to the group and invite them to share any feedback about their experience of last week's session or any reflections they wrote in their parenting journal they wish to share. Invite any questions, concerns, thoughts that parents may have.

Over previous sessions parents have:

- developed understanding about why children behave the way they do through learning about brain development;
- been able to recognise where their own parenting messages have come from and the impact they may have had on their children;
- considered the role of communication in relationships and that communication includes listening and non-verbal language;
- learnt about the importance of understanding children's emotional needs and how children show their feelings through their behaviour;
- reflected on the many other factors which influence our relationships with our children such as place in the family, gender, personality, temperament, emotional development and cultural influences.

Introduce the topic of the session as an exploration of parent's responses to the on-going challenges of parenting. When discussing these challenges ensure you use the language relevant to your group. If you have used words like anger or anxiety/stress or frustration ensure you maintain the consistency throughout this chapter.

Activity 1: Reconnecting Stop...Pause...Play



Invite parents to share the photos they have brought of their children. Ask parents to share something they enjoy about each child with the group.



Activity 2



As this is the last session it may be useful to go through the exercise again – parents could lead and then reflect on the usefulness of Stop Pause Play with their children or others in their lives! A final reminder that Stop Pause Play 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 (or at work!).

Facilitator Conversation Deep Listening



Refer Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1

Activity 3



It is the role of the person listening to do so mindfully in much the same way as we would hope they listened to the needs of their children. That is, the listener must listen only and refrain from offering advice, judgement or solutions. After agreed 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 by using the Australian Childhood Foundation Reflective Parenting Cards, Innovative Resources Positive Parenting Cards or you could use some of the topics listed below:

- What gets me through tough times is.....
- What do you do to calm down when stressed, upset or agitated ...
- One thing I hope my children remember me for is ...
- Something my parents did that I would like to do less of is ...

Once each parent has had time to speak and time to listen, draw the group back together and ask parents how it felt to be listened to attentively without interruptions or solutions.





Part 2: Passing on Messages

Facilitator Conversation



This section will explore what children need from the adults around them, appropriate responses to their behaviour and the ability of parents to regulate their own emotions so they can respond in a measured way to their children's needs. The role of the parent is to be safe and nurturing so that children can leave to explore their world knowing that they can always return for further nurturing. Sometimes circumstances cause us to react rather than mindful response.

Activity 4



Ask participants to form pairs. Ask one participant in the pair to “make a fist as tight and hard as you can” and tell the other participant “you have just ten seconds to open the fist”. That person must try to unfold the other person's fist.

People will generally try to use physical force. It's the two things I have asked you that has most likely resulted in the use of a physical strategy to open the fist.

Lead a group discussion on the value of looking for positive solutions first rather than thinking of negative physical ones. In this example using words like “tight and hard” and “ten seconds” implies a physical solution and makes people react based on messages from the past about fist.

Then

Ask the group:

- Did anyone succeed in unfolding the fist?
- How did people try to do it?
- What might have been some alternative ways of unfolding the fist? For example, ask the person politely, tickle them, etc.
- Why do we think of the physical alternative first?
- Which methods were most successful?

This activity reminds us of the importance of using an approach such as Stop Pause Play that allows for a mindful considered peaceful response.

Facilitator Conversation Being there for children



Parents often experience occasions in a park, party or family gathering when their toddlers or pre-schoolers tend to move away from them to look at things, touch things and communicate with peers. They later come back to their parent/carer for a short cuddle and leave again. Sometimes parents ask themselves about the reason. “Why do they come back to us every few minutes? Why don't they go and concentrate on their play?” Or they might ask them to stay there with them. “What is the problem with you wanting to leave me all the time?”

Chapter 6. Passing on Messages



Think of the iceberg/Anthill: there are feelings and needs behind this behaviour! Children often need safety and comfort and to explore at the same time. They are extremely curious about whatever goes on around them and this is exactly what parents want for their children.

They also need to feel safe and explore in a secure environment. This is also a common need between parents and children: we want them to be safe! Children are usually the best people to set these two needs in balance by leaving to explore and returning for comfort in a timely manner. The more they grow the further they go to explore but still need to feel safe and return to their parents.

Parenting is like having an elastic band around your child. When they are babies the band is quite tight as you have all the responsibility and can keep the band as tight as you want it. As the child grows and moves out to explore the world the elastic band stretches to allow the child to do this. When the child needs to touch base with you the band shrinks again. The parental band continues to stretch and shrink as the child grows and moves further away from home into the world.

Activity 5



Distribute **HANDOUT - Being there for Children** and ask parents to complete this in small groups. Ask parents to complete side one in their groups and side two for their own children ages individually.

A final light hearted question for parents could be: ‘Now you have an adult child who has left home does the band ever break?’

Facilitator Conversation - Exploring their world



These questions allow the participants to explore their relationship with their child and to think about their comfort in all aspects of their relationship.

Activity 6



In small groups ask participants to focus on one of their children as they reflect upon two questions given to them by the facilitator from the list below:

- What might both providing comfort/protection and supporting exploration look like for your child at their current stage of development? What is your role?
- Which feels easier for you: to provide comfort and protection or to encourage exploration?
- How do you feel when your child wants to be close to you, or when they need comforting? Where might those feelings have come from?
- Think about your parents when you were a child. Where do you think they might have struggled with encouraging your exploration or with offering you nurturing and comfort?



- How do you feel about encouraging your child’s exploration of the world – now and as they grow? How do you recall your experience of being allowed/ encouraged to explore as a child?
- Do you think there are differences between mother and fathers in this regard?

Facilitator Conversation Stressful situations



Stress challenges our ability to cope. When parents know what “presses their buttons”, how that feels and what their response is, they are better able to manage those situations and stop themselves from potentially hurting their children. There are different buttons that children trigger in us in different situation. Some buttons children press affect some parents more than other parents. Sometimes the buttons children press in us remind us of things we don’t like about ourselves. These are sometimes linked to unresolved issues that we carry.

Activity 7



Ask the group to share some of the parenting experiences they would describe as stressful situations with their children that ‘press their buttons’.

Distribute **HANDOUT - Pressing Buttons** and ask participants to identify the button on the handout that represents their experience shared as above.

There is also a blank **HANDOUT - Pressing Buttons (blank)** that could be handed out to participants to fill in for themselves.

Facilitator Conversation



This activity assists the participants to identify stress in their bodies, how it effects his behaviour and how to calm down.

Activity 8



Divide the large group into 2 smaller groups and give each group one of the following questions to prompt discussion. Write the questions on the whiteboard.

Group 1

- What are the parts of your body that stress affects?

Suggested responses might include:

- raised heart rate
- red rash on neck
- jelly legs
- clenched fists



- tight jaw
- headache
- knot in stomach
- tension in neck and shoulders

Group 2

- How does stress affect your feelings, thinking and behaviour?

Suggested responses may include:

- Short tempered
- Less patience
- Unable to think clearly/focus
- Unable to be rational
- Irritable

Bring the parents back together as a large group and ask the question:

- What can you do to calm down in that moment of stress?

Suggested responses may include:

- Take a deep breath
- Count to 5
- Stop...Pause...Play
- Take a break and move away of the situation

Facilitator Conversation



Reaffirm that seeking support and assistance can take courage however asking for help is a sign of strength. 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

Perhaps one of the best sources for support and information are other parents. Facilitators can identify supports for their specific parent groups.



Activity 9



Distribute **HANDOUT - Asking for Help** and ask parents to take a few moments to reflect on the questions.

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:

- Children nightmares
- Anxiety in children
- Bullying
- The child who doesn't eat

Part 3: Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

Facilitator Conversation - Quiet Reflections



Remind parents that when they reflect on their parenting they allow themselves the opportunity to decide what is useful and what is not useful. They can have positive communication interactions with their children.

Activity 10



'Pause on the Positives'

Invite parents 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:

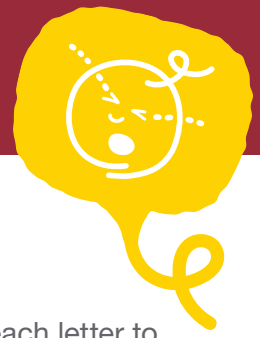
- My favourite moment with my kids this week was...
- One way that I stayed in touch with friends this week was...
- One way I was kind to myself this week was...
- One person who supported me this week that I feel grateful for is...
- One way I could connect more with my kids next week is...
- A simple pleasure I could treat myself to next week is...I

Facilitator Conversation



This activity is just a bit of fun where each person thinks of things they do to relax and take care of themselves against each letter of the alphabet. It is useful to have some ideas for each letter of the alphabet in case there are silences.

Chapter 6. Passing on Messages



Activity 11



Write the letters of the alphabet on the whiteboard with enough space beside each letter to write a word.

Ask parents to think about things that help them relax. Explain for some people that might mean things that involve being quiet and still like reading or fishing, while for others, it might be things that involve movement and noise, like dancing or running.

Invite parents to attempt, as a group, to find a relaxing activity or pastime which starts with each letter of the alphabet. Parents call out their ideas as the facilitator writes each response next to the appropriate letter of the alphabet.

Ask parents to identify those calming activities which appeal to them and find ways to practice those.

Distribute **HANDOUT - Self-Care Reflections** and initiate a group discussion if time permits.

Facilitator Conversation



This activity is an opportunity for participants to review the whole course. Questions at the back of the handout are the best guide for participant to complete the activity. Encourage them to start answering the questions and fill the blanks of tree page in the session and complete them at home together with their partners. The life tree can be a good reminder to keep parents mindful about what they have learned, discovered and decided during the program. They can put this handout on their fridge door once completed.

Activity 12



Distribute **HANDOUT - Life Tree** to parents and ask them to complete the handout. This can be done individually or in small groups.

Facilitator Conversation



Below are opportunities for parents to reflect on themselves as parents and on each of their children.

Activity 13



Option 1: The Story Continues

Distribute **HANDOUT - The Story Continues** and ask parents to think about this and discuss with the person sitting next to them.

Option 2: My Children

Once again distribute **HANDOUT - My Children** and ask parents to complete this again and then to compare their wishes now to the wishes they made 6 weeks ago – are they different or the same?

Chapter 6. Passing on Messages



Facilitator Conversation – Reading stories to parents



Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1

Activity 14



Read/tell a story to nurture and comfort participants.

Suggestion: “Take the Time – Mindfulness for Kids” by Maude Rogiers

Facilitator Conversation



It is important to finish the group in a positive/nurturing way – perhaps a gift or certificate or something that will support the participants to feel comfortable and confident to finish the group. You might use this opportunity to gain some information from the parents about how the group experience was for them. There are some suggestions on questions you might ask at the beginning of the manual.

Activity 15



Option 1:

Invite parents to share something significant they will take away from participating in the group, or other questions you would like them to answer.

Option 2:

Take participants through the meditative activity in the Handout – Mindful Walking.

Session Wrap Up

Congratulate participants on:

- Continuing to practice mindfulness and to find time to connect with and have fun with their children
- Continuing to use their journals (if they were used in the group)

Thank parents for their participation, contribution and commitment.

Wish them well in their ongoing parenting journey and their commitment to supporting their children to be their best.

Conclusion

Conclude with celebratory refreshments.



APPENDIX



The Sandalwood Box

Make yourself comfortable. Take several deep breaths. Relax... (momentary pause.)

Close your eyes and imagine you are holding a beautiful carved Sandalwood box in your hands. It has a brass lock on the sides.... (momentary pause)

Look at the box what are the carvings on all sides. Are there figures and scenes? Perhaps you can see some kind of a story being told? The carvings are deep into the wood.....(momentary pause)

Now feel them with your fingers. What does it feel like? Is your box shiny with varnish or not?....Can you feel the carvings? (momentary pause)

Now bring the box up to your nose and open the lid. Can you smell the perfume from the wood? Take a deep breath....(momentary pause)

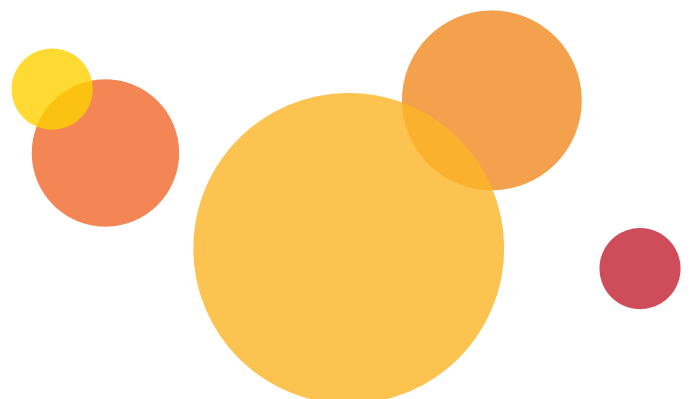
Now put down the box.

I want you to think of all the things you have been doing today starting with when you got Up. You have been busy making decisions about what to wear today. You have had to travel to the group. Think of all the activities at home and the people you have had to speak with today. There will be other things on your mind too. Perhaps issues about friends, lovers or family. Transfer all these thoughts to a mental list that will appear on a piece of paper.

Take the piece of paper and fold it in two. Open the lid of the Sandalwood box and place the paper inside. Lock the brass lock with the little brass key and place the key in you pocket. Take two deep breaths.

Your mind is now free from the distractions of the day and you will now be able to focus on the session.

Open your eyes.





Breathing Activity

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 session.

The facilitator should recite the following:

Let's just take a minute to reflect on everything we have learned today.

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 breath 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.....

[Pause for individual quiet reflection for 30 seconds]

As parents we are sometimes overwhelmed by the task the lies ahead of us but we know that bringing up our children is the most important thing we will ever do

So let's remind ourselves that in order for us to be up for this task, which, as we know, includes times of happiness and excitement as well as tears and frustration, we need to take really good care of ourselves.

The challenge for all of us is how do we do that? How do we find time in our busy lives to take care of ourselves when often we are so used to putting everyone else's needs ahead of our own?.....

As we come to the last few minutes of this session today and 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 ... reading a book..... going to a movie...sleeping.....

So when you are ready open your eyes, take a deep breath, have a stretch if you need to, and we will spend a few minutes exploring ways that we can take care of ourselves.



Leaves Activity

Preparation: A selection of leaves – at least one for each participant, but more is better.

Activity:

We'll be asking you to choose a leaf from the bowl on the table and to study it. Take some time to focus on your leaf and all of its features and characteristics.

I'll ask each of you to now bring all of your attention to study your leaf carefully.

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 this' just note these as thoughts and bring your attention / awareness back to the leaf that you hold in your hand.

You may notice that your mind wanders or gets distracted by other things. Maybe you'll be caught by other noises in the room or notice physical sensations within your body. When this happens, know that this is ok and gently bring your attention back to the leaf.

Thinking now about your leaf

What do you notice when you look at the leaf? What colour is it? What shape? When you move it, how does it catch the light? Are there any imperfections that you can see?

How does the leaf feel in your hand? Its weight or weightlessness? How does it feel against your skin? What do you notice about its texture? Explore the textures of the leaf between your fingers. What do you feel when you run the leaf through your fingers? Are there areas of roughness or is it smooth?

Move your attention to the smell of the leaf. Taking it and holding it beneath your nose. Do you notice any smells or fragrances?

Taste?

Sound?

Once you have studied your leaf, we'll ask you to please return the leaf to its bowl.

Once all the leaves are back in the bowl, take a look at the bowl and see if you can locate your leaf, the one that you have held in your hands and studied.

Processing Activity:

Would anyone like to share their thoughts / feelings about this activity?

Was it hard / easy to find your leaf?

Practicing mindfulness can remind us to pay attention to what is happening right now within ourselves and within our parenting.

It can also greatly improve ways we communicate with our children and our relationship with our children.



The Sultana Exercise

Note for facilitator: 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.

Explain the following to parents: 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').

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 you have never seen anything like it before in your life (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, as if you had never seen such a thing before (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, as if you had never seen such a thing before (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' just note them as thoughts and bring 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 notice 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 realizing that your body is now exactly one sultana/Smartie heavier.

Quiet Reflection

The aim of this activity is to give parents a quiet space in which to reflect on the messages, thoughts and feelings arising from the previous activities.

The facilitator should recite the following:

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.

Spend a moment reflecting on the whole session.....

As parents we are sometimes overwhelmed by the task the lies ahead of us but we know that bringing up our children is the most important thing we will ever do

So let's remind ourselves that in order for us to be up for this task, which, as we know, includes times of happiness and excitement as well as tears and frustration, we need to take really good care of ourselves.

Appendix 2: Children's Story books



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Appendix 2: Children's Story books



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- Kerr, A (2014) **Sorry Sorry**, Boolarong Press
- Lewis, G. (2006) **The Most Precious Thing** Good Books
- McBratney, S (1994) **Guess How much I love you** Walker Books
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- MacLean, K L (2012) **Moody Cow Learns Compassion** Wisdom Publications
- MacLean, K L (2009) **Moody Cow Meditates** Wisdom Publications (MA)
- Maclean, K L (2014) **Peaceful Piggy Meditation** Fitzherry and Whiteside
- McCloud, C & Martin, K (2009) **Fill a Bucket** Nelson Publishing & Marketing
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- McPhail, D (1984) **Sisters** HMH Books
- McPhail, D (2014) **Brothers** HMH Books
- Marlowe, S (2013) **No Ordinary Apple: A Story About Eating Mindfully** Wisdom Publications
- Mitsumasa, A (1986) **All in a Day** Penguin Books
- Munsch R. (2001) **Love you Forever** Red Fox
- Ormerod, J (1981) **Sunshine** Penguin
- Ormerod, J (1982) **Moonlight** Penguin
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- Reynolds, P. (2004) **Ish** Walker Books
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- Seymour S. (2011) **Sometimes I feel** Finch Publishing
- Shanahan L. (2008) **Sleep Tight My Honey** Lothian Books
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Appendix 2: Children's Story books



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- Thich Nhat Hanh (2011) **Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children** Parallax Press
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- Wardell, H. (2005) **Well Done. Little Bear** Walker Books
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- Willis, J and Parsons, G. (2008) **There's an Ouch in my Pouch** Penguin Books
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