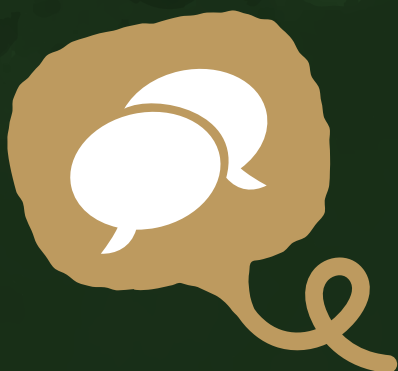




Bringing up Great Kids
**KINSHIP AND
FOSTER CARE**

Facilitator Manual





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

Knowledge about the neurobiology of child development, trauma and attachment is invigorating the child protection and welfare field. It increasingly is underpinning fresh conceptual maps that better resource the care and protection of children and young people who have experienced abuse and relational disruption.

ACF is at the forefront nationally of how this evidence base is translated into practical applications in the area of specialist therapeutic intervention for traumatised children and their families, therapeutic foster care and residential care programs, parenting education and support, and professional education initiatives.

ACF's Parenting and Early Years team has developed a suite of programs within the brand Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) program that is nationally recognised and evidence based.

BUGK for kinship and foster carers uses the premises from BUGK and adapted them to meet the unique needs of kinship/foster carers. BUGK for kinship and foster carers has a range of materials and resources to support BUGK for kinship and foster carers.

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

For more information on BUGK www.bringingupgreatkids.org

Acknowledgements



We would especially like to thank the carers who participated in the pilot BUGK in Kinship and Foster care groups which contributed towards the development of this program. Their willingness to share their stories of parenting and of being parented has been inspiring. Their feedback about the positive difference the program made to their lives has confirmed our belief in the value of the program and the contribution it makes to the range of parenting support programs currently available.

Feedback from carers

“This group gave me confidence that I am doing the right thing by these children”

“...has made my mind a bit relaxed and able to deal with the children”

“...enjoyed it (the group) it makes a difference to know there is help out there”

“...a great learning experience and finding other kinship carers who share the same experiences”

“I have got a lot of help from listening to others in the group”

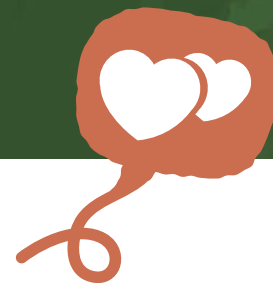
Feedback from facilitators

“It has been a great honour to work with the kinship and foster carers group.”

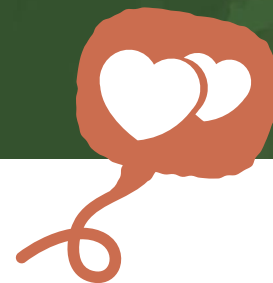
“It has been wonderful to see the carers accept their strengths by the end of the group.”

“These carers are amazing, what they have had to give up to care for these children is breathtaking.”

“It is absolutely unbelievable to work with kinship carers who can be so much older than the children they look after. The program provides lots of opportunities for them to share from their decades of experience of parenting; successes and failures; smiles and tears. I learned a lot from them.”



The Australian Childhood Foundation	2
Acknowledgements	3
INTRODUCTION	7
Background	8
Kinship care.....	8
Foster Care.....	9
Principles of working with kinship and foster carers	10
Program Resources	12
Glossary	13
Preparing to deliver the program	14
Why use the metaphor of ‘forest/trees’?.....	14
The important role of mindfulness and reflection.....	15
Managing Vulnerability.....	16
Male Carer.....	16
Principles underpinning the program	17
Target Group.....	18
Program Objectives.....	18
Reflective Group Facilitation	19
Co-Facilitation.....	20
Group Size.....	20
The Importance of Group Safety Guidelines.....	20
Program Chapters	22
Structure of each chapter.....	22
Acknowledgement of Country.....	23
Use of Icons in the manual.....	24
Repeated Activities.....	24
Stop... Pause... Play.....	24
Deep Listening Activity.....	24
Using Children’s Storybooks.....	26
Evaluation.....	26
Pre-group reflection.....	26



CHAPTER 1 – THE FAMILY STORY	27
Chapter Outline.....	28
Key Messages	28
Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators	29
Resources.....	29
PART ONE – Welcome and Introduction	30
PART TWO – The Family Story.....	32
PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support	34
Session Wrap Up.....	35
CHAPTER 2 – THE KINSHIP/FOSTER CARER STORY	36
Chapter Outline.....	37
Key Messages	37
Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators	37
Preparation and Set-up	37
Resources.....	38
PART ONE – Welcome, Feedback and Overview	40
PART TWO - The Carer Story.....	42
PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support	47
Session Wrap Up.....	47
CHAPTER 3 – THE BIOLOGICAL PARENTS’ STORY.....	48
Chapter Outline.....	49
Key Messages	49
Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators	49
Preparation and Set-up	49
Resources.....	50
PART ONE – Welcome, Feedback, and Overview	51
PART TWO – Perspectives in Parenting.....	53
PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support	56
Session Wrap Up.....	57



CHAPTER 4 - THE CHILD'S BRAIN STORY	58
Chapter Outline.....	59
Key Messages	59
Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators	59
Preparation and Set-up	59
Resources.....	60
PART ONE - Welcome, Feedback and Overview	61
PART TWO – Brain Development	63
PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support	70
Session Wrap Up.....	71
CHAPTER 5 - THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR STORY	72
Chapter Outline.....	73
Key Messages	73
Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators	73
Preparation and Set-up	73
Resources.....	74
PART ONE - Welcome, Feedback and Overview	75
PART TWO – Behaviour as a Protective Response.....	77
PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support	81
Session Wrap Up.....	82
CHAPTER 6 – THE RELATIONSHIP STORY	83
Chapter Outline.....	84
Key Messages	84
Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators	84
Preparation and Set-up	85
Resources.....	85
PART ONE - Welcome back, Feedback and Overview	86
PART TWO – Strengths, Community & Repair.....	88
PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support	94
Evaluation	95
Session Wrap Up	95
REFERENCES	96
Web Links	97
Children's Books	97



INTRODUCTION



According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020-21 Child Protection Australia Report, *“During 2020–21, more than 178,800 Australian children received child protection services. Of these children, 68% (around 120,800) were the subject of an investigation of a notification of abuse or neglect and about 49,700 children were the subjects of substantiations in 2020–21. At 30 June 2021, more than 46,200 children were in out-of-home care with 91% being in a home-based care placement.”*

Within the out of home care setting home-based care is the care of children within the family/home setting, this care is often provided by foster carers, carers who are not related to the children they care for; Or kinship carers those who are relatives, close family friend or member of the child’s community who take on care of the child. It is these two forms of care that are the focus of this Bringing Up Great Kids Program.

With so many vulnerable children entering home based care placements, with approximately 54% or 21,834 young people entering kinship and 36% or 16,674 young people entering foster care. With the majority of the substantiated notifications of abuse and neglect pertaining to emotional abuse (55%), physical abuse (21%), and sexual abuse (10%), a higher proportion of girls (14%) were subjected to sexual abuse than boys (5.8%).

It was felt that a specific program to support kinship and foster carers in the unique parenting journey that is caring for children who have experience trauma would be of value.

Kinship Care

Some recent research has confirmed the benefits of kinship care for children who can no longer live with their biological parents. Two reports have been written by Dr Meredith Kiraly, Senior Research Fellow, University of Melbourne, to highlight the significance of further supporting kinship carers, their needs and expectations. See reference for details.

Research suggests “that children who remain with kin are less likely to experience the trauma of separation and more likely to remain connected to their families, friends and culture. Managed and supported well, kinship care is best-placed to promote the rights and wellbeing of children requiring care.” (Liana Buchanan – Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People).

Although kinship carers are not a homogeneous group, the literature consistently highlights commonalities between the characteristics of kinship carers, which contrast with the characteristics of foster carers.

Kinship carers are often older family members, usually grandparents, although there is a growing cohort of younger kinship carers who are siblings. They are often propelled into the role of kinship carer at times of crisis, without planning or preparation (Commission for Children and Young People (2019). An audit in Victoria found that 52% of kinship carers were over 50 years of age, 47% were on income support and 38% were single (Department of Human Services, 2000).

Kinship carers often have low incomes and experience great financial hardship. Many may be required to stop working in order to look after the child or children in their care, adding to this financial strain (Victorian Ombudsman, 2010).



In contrast to the training and preparation that foster carers receive around caring for traumatised children, kinship carers often have no warning and little time to prepare for the arrival of the child into their care and therefore do not receive any specialised training prior to the child's placement.

In a research report by Bapcare (2017) kinship carers reported that the children in their care suffered physical and psychological impacts including anger and aggressive behaviours, physical scars, developmental delays, cutting, self-harm and suicide attempts, somatic illness and dissociation, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression.

Foster Care

For many varied reasons, at times it is unsafe for children to remain in the care of their parents, where there are no family members to take over the care, these children may be placed in the care of foster carers. Across Australia there is approximately 46,000 children in foster care, many of whom (30,600) have been in foster care for more than two years.

Foster caring may present a variety of challenges to those who take on the role. In the 2021 Carer Census Data from Victoria, foster carers identified that caring had negatively affected their relationships and life more broadly in the following areas; levels of stress (62%), ability to attend social events (51%), personal finances (51%), work/career (49%), personal mental health (38%), personal social relationships (38%), their relationship with partners (29%), and immediate family members (26%). Carers also report caring having positively affected their relationships and life more broadly in the following areas: feelings of making a difference in a child's life (85%), the relationships they have with the child/young person they are caring for (79%), care has positively affected their immediate family members (39%) and for many caring having positively affected their relationship with immediate family members (33%), community (35%) and their partner (31%).

Foster carers offer children and young people the opportunity to experience a consistent home and family like environment with parent figure/s, in the case where family or kin cannot provide this to them. If it was not for the efforts of foster carers, many children would reside in residential based settings with paid rostered staff.



Facilitators of this program are encouraged to consider the above findings in their approach to and in understanding the kinship and foster carers attending their sessions.

The following principles are based on the specific needs expressed by an Australia-wide sample of carers:

- **Prioritise nurturing and self-care of carers**
- **Practise deep listening with carers and acknowledge their experiences, feelings and needs**
- **Facilitate carers' accessibility to the program (e.g., by providing a free service, childcare, transport, food, fun)**

When there is trust felt at a deep level that others experiences are respected and understood the facilitator carer relationship will be strong. There are three 'core attitudes' for effective facilitative practice in working with kinship and foster carers – realness, acceptance and empathy. Our success as educators and facilitators of learning and change is heavily dependent on the people we are – and the way we experience others.

The experience of being real or genuine in the facilitator role is an important attitude when entering into a relationship with a carer. Being who you are without presenting a front or façade, accepting the carer as they are and acknowledging their feelings will allow them to be themselves and more open to change.

Acceptance is the second attitude that is so important, accepting the carer for who they are, their feelings, opinions and them as a person with worth in their own right. Acceptance will build trust and confidence in the facilitator carer relationship.

The last attitude that will establish a climate of self-initiated experiential learning is empathic understanding. When the facilitator has the ability to understand the carers point of view, to understand the learning style of the carer, there is the possibility of increased learning. Carers will feel appreciative that they are understood – not evaluated, not judged but simply understood.



Another principle/approach which could be beneficially adopted in all interactions with carers is that of P.A.C.E. developed by Dan Hughes.

This model of interaction could also be encouraged in interactions with children. PACE encourages attitudes of:

P **Playfulness:** conveys optimism that things can change. The principle of playfulness is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. It means using a light tone with your voice, like you might use when story-telling, rather than a lecturing tone. It conveys optimism that things can change.

A **Acceptance:** unconditional acceptance of feelings, desires and beliefs helps people feel safe with you and strengthens your relationship

C **Curiosity:** an attitude of wondering about, rather than of interpreting what is happening

E **Empathy:** the ability to feel with someone and to express our understanding of them

Finally, documented feedback from carers is their wish to work with professionals who are mature, experienced, empathic and knowledgeable which may make you feel less than confident in your facilitator role. In working with carers it may be helpful to take a playful approach – talking about yourself that acknowledges how the carers might be perceiving you, e.g. *What does this person know about looking after grandkids whose parents have gone off the rails?! How can this person understand the difficulties of being a foster carer, with kids who are flipping out all the time?!* An empathic facilitator, who can walk in the shoes of the carers will be well able to facilitate a group of carers.



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 in Kinship and Foster Care' program. It includes background information, session preparation and comprehensive outlines of each of the six 'chapters' or sessions that comprise the program.



Handouts for Parents

All the handouts used in each chapter of the program are provided. There is also a booklet of stories called 'Once upon a parent'.



Parent Group Resources

These include:

- A template of an invitation to a parent group
- A pre-program reflection document
- A template of a certificate of completion for participants
- Post-program reflection and evaluation documents
- A participant evaluation tool
- A facilitator notes form



Mindfulness

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

Throughout ‘BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care’ 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 carers to create the metaphorical space.



Deep Listening

‘BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care’ 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’.



Carer

For reasons of succinctness, the word ‘carer’ is used throughout this manual to encompass both kinship and foster carers.



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 any ‘BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care’ group and who the activities are designed for.



Why is the 'Bringing Up Great Kids in Kinship and Foster Care' program different?

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/carers with a set of skills which can be applied to a range of child behaviours that are deemed problematic.

Because of their behaviour management approaches, these programs often neglect elements which promote positive and nurturing relationships between parents/carers and children and which encourage parents/carers to reflect on the nature of their relationship with their children.

The suite of 'Bringing Up Great Kids' parenting programs use ideas of mindfulness and reflection to support parents/carers to review and enhance their patterns of communication with their children, to promote more respectful interactions and encourage the development of children's positive self-identity. They aim to identify and address the sources of unhelpful and hurtful attitudes held by parents and carers. They also work to establish a new relationship context for children and their parents/carers through promoting opportunities for positive exchanges.

The 'Bringing Up Great Kids in Kinship and Foster Care' help carers to appreciate the child's perspective or experience of the world. Carers are provided with an understanding of children's brain development with a focus on their emotional development and reasoning abilities, and supported to reflect on how this understanding may influence their parenting approach.

Carers are encouraged to reflect upon and understand the meaning behind their child's behaviour. Together with an awareness of the carer's own triggers, this insight gives carers the ability to contain strong emotions and to think through their responses to the child, rather than give 'knee-jerk' reactions. With these skills, carers have the tools to build mutually satisfying, positive relationships with their child.

The program is built upon a belief that all people in parenting roles need good support to be the kind of carer they aspire to be for all children in their care. Acknowledging the significant challenges faced by all parents, the 'Bringing Up Great Kids in Kinship and Foster Care' provides self-care strategies for carers. The notion of accessing support is normalised and encouraged during the course of the program.

Why use the metaphor of 'forest/trees'?

The idea of using the metaphor started from the picture book "Family Forest" by Kim Kane and Lucia Masciullo. The story expands the traditional idea of the family tree into the family forest which is more relevant to a kinship or foster care family. Trees don't live alone in a forest they are connected to the other trees around them. The metaphor visualises different aspects of a kinship or foster care family by looking at the roots, earth, trunk, branches, and the connections between trees in a forest. The connections between the trees in the forest can represent the dynamics between the kinship/foster carers and the children.



The important role of mindfulness and reflection for carers

There is a strong focus on personal reflection for carers during the course of this program. The practise of mindfulness can support carers in their efforts to develop contingent and thoughtful rather than reactive ways of responding to their children.

Caring for children, who have experienced abuse, neglect and loss exposes kinship and foster carers to some of the most intense and traumatising thoughts and feelings there are. Therefore, a response for dealing with them is essential for the adults but also to help to prevent those difficult thoughts and feelings spilling back into their relationship with the traumatised children in their care.

Mindfulness allows us to cultivate space before we react to a stressor like our misplaced keys, a support worker's disagreeable statement, or your child spilling their dinner plate while the phone is ringing, and their baby brother is crying. In creating a moment to pause, we may be able to turn reaction into reflection and gain control of the way we respond under pressure.

Another very important reason mindfulness can be helpful for kinship and foster carers is that mindfulness promotes self-acceptance and a non-judgemental attitude towards our inner worlds. Getting into this mindset for ourselves is the first step towards being able to do the same for the very difficult thoughts, feelings and behaviours of traumatised children.

Another way of describing mindfulness is 'the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment' (Kabat Zinn, 1994).

Being mindful:

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

Throughout the program, carers are provided with a range of opportunities to practise mindfulness and develop their 'mindful strategies' toolbox. For example, the *Stop...Pause...Play* response or a variation is practised each week.



Managing Vulnerability

Facilitators need to be aware that carers 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 carers with difficult early experiences by validating and acknowledging the efforts they have made to survive and commit to develop positive and nurturing relationships with the children in their care.

It is worth highlighting that some kinship carers will be acutely aware or feel that their own parenting of their biological children may have contributed to the challenges that they now face. Some carers may feel that they will be judged by others or carry a high level of parent guilt.

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

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

The Male Carer

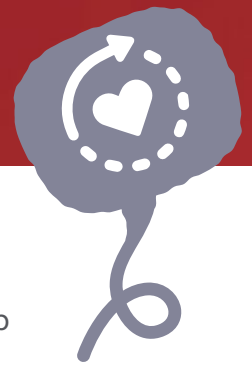
Growing evidence supports the critical role of male caregivers in the life of the child and a child's development, particularly in terms of facilitating play exploration which helps a child to develop emotional and behavioural self-regulation.

The following list was created by male foster carers regarding what constitutes a positive role model:

- **caring, non-threatening, non-violent;**
- **supporting partner;**
- **appropriately using power and authority;**
- **showing feelings and emotions (not just anger);**
- **'breaking the mould';**
- **humility;**
- **showing (boys) right and wrong;**
- **challenging stereotypes;**
- **social, reasonable drinking;**
- **promoting cultural differences and belief systems;**
- **being consistent;**
- **sharing care and routine tasks such as cooking.**
- **spending time with children, including one to one;**
- **providing a stable, loving environment;**

Men who care constitute a massive, underused resource. We must appreciate the importance of the role of an involved, active male carer. We should amend practices that serve to marginalise men, such as running groups and events at times that working men cannot attend, regarding female carers as 'the main carer' and discussing the role of men solely in terms of risk or only bringing them more actively into the care team space at times of crisis within the placement.

Principles underpinning the program



There are several core principles which shaped the design and content of the 'Bringing Up Great Kids in Kinship and Foster Care' Program:



1. The Rights of the Child

Underpinning the development of this program is a commitment to upholding the Rights of the Child. The best interests of the child are a primary consideration.



2. 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.



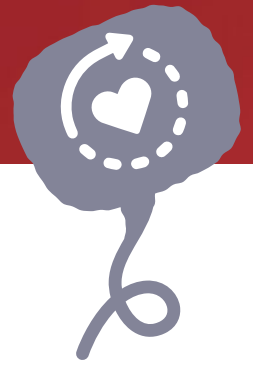
3. The Importance of Narrative

Self-narrative, or the ability to tell our own story, helps us make meaning of our lives. How we make sense of our childhood experiences has a profound effect on how we parent our own children. With a deeper understanding of ourselves and our motivations we can build a more effective and enjoyable relationship with our children. Without this self-understanding, negative patterns of interactions may be passed on through the generations.



4. Learning unfolds within a cultural context

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



Target Group

The 'Bringing Up Great Kids in Kinship and Foster Care' Program is suitable for use by any service providing support to carers involved in caring for children in kinship care and non-familial arrangements. It has the capacity to be used by professionals working with more vulnerable or 'at risk' carer situations.

Program Objectives

The major aim of the program is to promote positive, respectful carer/child relationships.

Through the program it is expected that carers will come to:

- **learn more about the origins of their own parenting style and how this knowledge is transferred and adapted to the kinship foster care arrangements;**
- **identify the important messages they want to convey to the children in their care, and how to achieve this;**
- **understand the messages that children communicate to their carers and how they do this;**
- **discover how to overcome some of the obstacles that are getting in the way of being the kind of carer they would like to be;**
- **discover ways for carers to take care of themselves and to find support when they need it; and,**
- **develop strategies to manage their parenting approach despite the mounting pressures on their time and role.**



‘BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care’ supports facilitators who are reflective and mindful.

Relationship and reflective practise are at the heart of the program. The program encourages carers to practice mindfulness and reflection regularly and consistently. The aim of these practices is to support carers in building up the capacities they need to be able to manage challenging moments in relationships and be mindful in big emotional situations. The program suggests that by spending a little time daily practising mindfulness and being reflective, carers will gradually find themselves more able to do whatever is important for them in relation to the children in their care.

It is hoped that facilitators of the ‘BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care’ program will model this practise in every interaction and create relationships with carers 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 carer begins with the engagement process, from the moment of first contact, through supporting carers to attend the program and then continues with each interaction with every carer throughout the program.

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

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 in each chapter.

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 carer to act mindfully. It is practice that builds a capacity that let carers to respond rather than react. We have learned that reading and memorising the material provided in ‘BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care’ does not make a real difference by itself, neither in facilitators nor in carers. 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 in Kinship and Foster Care’ 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 and experienced. Providing firsthand and fresh anecdotes gives facilitators a power to change lives.



Co-Facilitation

Ideally this program will be facilitated by professionals who have completed the 'BUGK' foundation training. Where possible the sessions would have two facilitators. There are many benefits for carers when there are two facilitators including one facilitator tracking participation opportunities for carers, to be able to give time to an individual carer, to be able to pick up side conversation threads while the other facilitator stays with the main conversation.

Both children and carers involved in care arrangements are likely to have experienced significant complexity and trauma in their lives. As such, the stories shared in these groups may trigger emotional responses in participants and facilitators. It is strongly recommended that facilitators of these groups access clinical supervision during the course of the program.

Group Size

The most important consideration in a reflective group is to ensure that carers feel safe enough to share their thoughts and feelings.

We would recommend between 8 – 12 participants per group, depending on the needs of carers and facilitator confidence. Often the practicalities of the available venue size can dictate the numbers for the group.

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.

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

In facilitating interactive groups like 'BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care', we find it helpful to think in terms of creating a container where things can happen. We want to create a safe, engaging atmosphere where participants are encouraged to experiment with new behaviours, consider new possibilities or explore different ways of seeing things.

Some considerations might include:

- Confidentiality
- Starting and finishing time – expectations about punctuality
- Mobile phones – on/off/silent
- Being respectful of other peoples' thoughts and opinions that may be different from your own
- Giving everyone an opportunity to participate
- All carers have a choice as to whether to participate or not in any activity
- Reminder to have fun



The group agreements we normally use contain the following:



1. Treat everyone with respect



2. No putdowns even jokes

This is important as you want to create a space where people know they were safe to say what they think, ask questions and to have a go at a variety of activities. We want them to know that no matter what they did they would be respected and not laughed at. We emphasise that humour is important but that this was an opportunity to experiment with humour that built people up rather than put them down.



3. Share group space

This largely relates to how much people speak in the group. We encourage those who tend to have a lot to say to make sure they give other people a chance to have a say and also encourage those who normally don't have much to say to have the courage to share their insights and experience with the larger group.



4. Share only your own story

This is essentially confidentiality. We ask that people only share their own story and that after the workshop they were welcome to talk about their experience of the workshop but not to share the stories of other people.



5. You have the right to pass

We emphasise that nothing in the program is compulsory and that while we encourage everyone to have a go, if they didn't want to do anything during the group, that was OK and they wouldn't be made to do anything they were unwilling to do.



6. Have fun



The program is structured into six chapters or sessions.

Each session has been called a chapter reflecting our view of parenting as an ongoing story. Each chapter focuses on a particular component of the carer–child relationship. The chapters are designed to help carers understand the dynamics of and build confidence in building healthy, respectful relationships with their children.

The program can be delivered flexibly to suit the needs and availability of carers. The program has 6 chapters, but facilitators might consider adapting the content structure in different ways depending on your circumstances and those of the carers who wish to participate in the program.

To meet the needs of kinship and foster carers, it may be beneficial to extend the time spent on particular sessions or aspects of the program. Facilitators are encouraged to be flexible with timelines and to use as many sessions as needed to explore each chapter (e.g. a pre-program session to allow carers time to tell their complex stories).

The program is divided into the following chapters, with each chapter focussing on a particular theme.

Chapter 1: The Family Story

Chapter 2: The Kinship/Foster Carers Story

Chapter 3: The Biological Parent’s Story

Chapter 4: The Child’s Brain Story

Chapter 5: The Child’s Behaviour Story

Chapter 6: The Relationship Story

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 and handouts
- A step-by-step guide to facilitation of the chapter

Each chapter has been divided into three parts:

- Part 1 includes Welcome, Feedback and Overview
- Part 2 includes Information and activities related to the theme of the chapter
- Part 3 includes Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support



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

- Experiential activities
- Small and whole-group discussion
- Self-reflection through:
 - Mindfulness exercises
 - Handout activities
- Case studies
- Role play

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 participants.

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 could say:

“Our group 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 can make every effort to determine the Traditional Owners of the Country where they are delivering the program. However, if they are uncertain about whom the Traditional Owners of an area, they could 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.



Repeated Activities

Using Mindfulness and Reflection in the Program.

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

It is important to appreciate that for some participants, 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 participants that they participate in reflective or mindful activities. For similar reasons, it is recommended that the facilitator/s be available to debrief participants, where required and provide referral information to local support services if necessary.

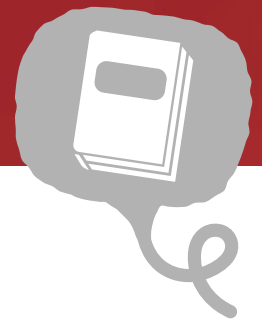
Stop... Pause... Play

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

Deep Listening Activity

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

Current research tells us that when carers 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)

Participants are invited to break into pairs and one participant 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 participants have the experience of talking and listening.

Adaptions to the *Deep Listening* activity:

- **Generally, 2 minutes is recommended for the carer to talk and the other carer to listen however this may be decreased down to 30 seconds depending on the carer group and the carers’ capacity to be able to talk or listen for two minutes.**
- **Carers 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 carers to be able to talk about appropriate parenting issues.**

Feedback from our evaluation of BUGK by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (where parents were the target group) 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”.

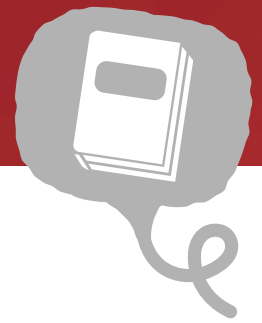
Deep listening is a radical act: it starts with our ears—making sense of words as well as of the speaker’s tone—and it also involves our eyes, because body language can say a lot. Importantly, though, deep listening requires that we push the MUTE button on our internal commentary. This last step is probably one of the hardest, because rather than truly listening to what another says, we too often merely hear a word or an idea that connects with something we want to say. The old proverb that states, “We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak,” would be more accurate if it explained that the reason for two ears and one mouth is that it’s twice as hard to listen as it is to talk.

Carers are reminded that the Chinese symbol for listening (from Foundation BUGK) is made up of 6 different parts. We listen with:

- our eyes,
- our ears,
- an open heart,
- undivided attention,
- without judgment,
- and as if listening to a king

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 opening up the reflective space for participants in each chapter. We look at ‘Deep listening’ as an exercise that can be practised throughout the week as well to increase kinship and foster carer’s mindful capacity.



Using Children's Storybooks

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

A facilitator may choose to open the session 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?



CHAPTER 1 THE FAMILY STORY



Chapter Outline

This first chapter aims to create a safe space for kinship and foster carers and introduces the ‘Bringing Up Great Kids in Kinship and Foster Care’ program. It provides opportunities for carers to begin to get to know one another and to have their feelings and needs acknowledged and heard. This chapter is very conversational and provides carers with the space to share their experiences and connect. It is a delicate journey exploring parenting in kinship care where grandparents are now caring for the children of those whom they originally parented and raised. For some carers in this situation, they may be carrying a sense of embarrassment, guilt and/or shame. For foster carers who have chosen to parent other people’s children, they may struggle to understand and acknowledge the story that these children bring with them.

This chapter provides the opportunity for the kinship/foster carer to acknowledge and reflect on the changes that have occurred within their family as they have stepped into the kinship/foster care role. Consider how roles and positions in family have changed, normalised different family structures and reflect on the role of culture in kinship/foster care.

This chapter introduces the metaphor of the tree/forest to help visualise the kinship/foster family situation. A tree does not stand alone it is part of a forest and this chapter starts the conversation throughout the program of children and their carers being part of a bigger system.

Key Messages

- **Individual differences will be respected in this group.**
- **Self-care and support are vitally important for all carers.**
- **Change can bring about a mixture of different feelings for each member of the biological or foster/kinship family.**
- **Understanding what the changes are better enables us to support those navigating these changes.**
- **Appreciating there are many different family structures.**

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

1. Reflect on your role as facilitator in supporting and guiding a group of kinship/foster carers.

How will you:

- provide a safe, warm, respectful atmosphere in which carers can 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 might the experience of being a kinship carer differ from that of being a foster carer or a parent? What do you imagine might be some of the challenges which are specific to the role of kinship/foster carer?

Preparation and Set-up:

- Have music playing as participants arrive (optional)
- Have refreshments prepared so that you can offer tea/coffee, at least, on arrival.
- Have chairs arranged informally e.g., in a semi-circle/circle or provide couches and armchairs.
- Greet each participant as they arrive. Offer a name tag and refreshments

Resources



You will need:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Flipchart and textas
- Name tags and extra sticky labels
- Pens and textas
- Smart TV or Computer and screen for videos
- A set of 'Ups and Downs' cards (available from Innovative Resources, www.innovativeresources.org)
- Video: "Dadirri the deep inner spring inside us"
Link: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653941145>
- Glue/sticky tape
- A4 paper
- Refreshments



For each participant, you will need:

- A folder in which to store handouts
- HANDOUT: Who is in your Family Forest
- HANDOUT: What I admire and appreciate in you



Stories and Children's Story Books

- "Family Forest" by Kim Kane & Lucia Masciullo



PART ONE – Welcome and Introduction

- Acknowledgement of country.
- When all participants are seated comfortably, welcome them as a group and introduce yourselves as facilitators of the program.
- Outline that during the program you will be offering them the opportunity to take part in a range of activities that you hope they will enjoy, but where participation is always optional.

Introducing the Program

Introduce the program as an opportunity to explore their story, the biological parent's story, the child's story, and what that might mean for their relationships with each other.

Show participants that the program content has six sections referred to as 'chapters'. You may wish to write the six-chapter headings on a whiteboard or flip chart as follows:

Chapter 1: The Family Story

Chapter 2: The Kinship Carers Story

Chapter 3: The Biological Parent's Story

Chapter 4: The Child's Brain Story

Chapter 5: The Child's Behaviour Story

Chapter 6: The Relationship Story



Facilitator Conversation

This activity is an opportunity for the participants to introduce themselves, and the children they care for.

It is suggested that facilitators take some time here to introduce themselves to get the group started and comfortable enough to talk about themselves. Give the participants a bit of time. This is the start of building a trusting and respectful relationship, it's important for the participants 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.

For many groups the participants will not know each other so introductions are a vital part of the process and should not be rushed.

This activity may trigger some participants into wanting to share the complex story that likely surrounds their placement, however, the opportunity for this will come later in this chapter.



Activity 1 - Connection

Ask each participant to share their name and the names and ages of all children in their care (biological and non-biological), and their relationship to the children.



Facilitator Conversation

Participants are invited to contribute to the development of a set of agreed group guidelines that will be in place for the duration of the program. Assure participants that it is important to you that they all feel safe and comfortable whenever they meet in this space as a group.

It is important that confidentiality is assured in this group. If this is not suggested spontaneously by participants, then facilitators support the process to ensure it is added to the list and that participants are assured that whatever they choose to share with the group, is not spoken about outside the group.

Refer to information section in this manual.



Activity 2 - Developing Group Guidelines

To ensure their safety, suggest that together as a group, they compile a list of things that each individual needs while in the group. Suggest that their group guidelines be displayed every time the group meets as a reminder to everyone.

Record every individual response on a flip chart or in a more informal way depending on the group.

Offer participants the opportunity to add to their list in subsequent sessions if that is needed.



Facilitator Conversation

This set of cards can open up the conversation about the rollercoaster that is parenting children affected by trauma. Sometimes kinship carers will say that they need a card that reflects every minute of their day and choose many cards. Some kinship carers may find the task overwhelming and not be able to choose any or just choose a “black card” to describe the whole experience.

Foster carers in the group may have a different take on the activity as they have chosen to look after other people’s children. Foster carers may be surprised that the one thing they have in common with kinship carers is the level of difficult behaviour and their struggles to respond.



Activity 3 - ‘Ups and Downs’ Cards

Using the ‘Ups and Downs’ cards, ask participants to choose one or more cards that reflect how they feel about their role as a kinship/foster carer at this moment.

This activity could generate discussion about feelings, etc. Allow enough time to complete this task.



PART TWO – The Family Story

The aim of this chapter is for participants to begin to explore their family story, looking at how the structure of their family has changed as they have stepped into becoming kinship/foster carers.

This session allows the space for participants to debrief and share their story, to feel heard and be seen. The aim is to provide the space for deeper reflections in the coming weeks.

This chapter also introduces the metaphor of tree/forest, although a tree may look like a single entity it is part of an intricate and complex community where trees communicate, connect, and look after each other.



Facilitator Conversation

This activity is in 2 parts.

Part 1: will provide an opportunity for the facilitator to lead a conversation on the different structures of families and to normalise that all families look different and may have a different structure, which may support the participants in having similar conversations with the children the care for.

Part 2: offers participants the opportunity to reflect on who makes up their family currently, including the foster/kinship child/children and create a family tree or illustrate their new family in some way.



Activity 4 - Family Forest

Part 1

Facilitators can introduce this activity by leading the participants in a conversation about the different make up of families and consider the different kinship/foster families.

To support the conversation below are possible family structures that can be spoken about:

- Nuclear family
- Spilt family
- Single parent families
- Blended families
- Foster families
- Same sex families

Then extend the conversation to their own families and who is in them:

- Kinship/foster families
- Grandparents
- Uncles & Aunties
- Sibling
- Extended family
- Friends of the family
- Neighbours
- Foster/kinship child/children

Conversations could include who lives in the house and who are close by.



Part 2

Distribute the **HANDOUT – Who is in your family forest** and provide participants with the time to complete the handout. Inviting participants to create a family tree/forest or family illustration. The handout includes an example family tree/forest to support carers in drawing their own or pasting pictures of trees to represent their family.

Upon completion participants may want to share difficulties and frustrations as well as satisfaction and happiness in this new family structure.

Foster families may want to share how their family keeps changing as foster children come and go.

Kinship carers may share the frustration of having too much or no contact with the biological family of the child/children in their care or may start the conversation about the biological parent taking the child back time after time but always returning them and the impact on the child/children.

Facilitator Note: You may also come back to this activity in chapter 6 when talking about rings of support for participants to consider who is in their network that can be a support.



Facilitator Conversation

Facilitators can introduce a conversation about how relationships within the family may have changed, consider that these changes could be either positive or more challenging changes for different families.

This conversation could include:

- Relationships with the children in their care
- Relationships with the biological parents
- Relationships with their own children
- Relationships with extended family

Acknowledge and normalise all the feelings that may be present recognising these may be different between kinship and foster carers. There may be grief and sadness as they reflect on where they find themselves at this stage of their lives and what they had hoped to be doing, alongside concern, sadness and perhaps even guilt and shame for what is occurring in their own child's life if they are now caring for their grandchildren. Foster carers may reflect on their sadness that children cannot live happy childhoods with their own families. Perhaps there is relief to know that the children are safe. All feelings are welcomed in this space.



Activity 5 - Relationship Changes

You may choose to invite participants to represent these changes on their family tree in the **Who is in your family forest** handout from activity 4 above. You may suggest circling those who live in the home of the carer, or different coloured lines between the different relationships that are strong, supportive, tricky, or needing repair. The handout has allowed the space for the participants to show which colour corresponds to each category.



PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support

This section supports participants to make the time to take care of themselves and take the time to be mindful and reflective.

This section supports participants to feel OK about themselves and ready to take on the next week.

The story at the end of each session is an opportunity to nurture the participants. It is also an opportunity to support the theme presented in the weekly discussion and offer participants a resource that may be useful in the conversations they have with their children.



Facilitator Conversation

This reflection offers the opportunity for participants, while acknowledging there are very real challenges, to look below the surface of any challenges they are experiencing with different people. To shift the focus just slightly to also acknowledge the strengths, qualities and contributions various people bring to their journey of raising a child through foster/kinship care. This activity could be one that is revisited in the last session to see if there are any changes



Activity 6 – What I admire and appreciate in you

Distribute **HANDOUT - What I admire and appreciate in you.**

Write one kind, nice, respectful or loving thing about each person.

It is ok if participants are not be able to write something against each name on the list at this point.



Facilitator Conversation

This program also uses Deep/Mindful listening as does all BUGK programs. You may refer back to the introduction to this program to read more about it.

It is the idea of listening with respect – hear, think, don't hurry. Listen to the story – and consider what is in the spaces. Don't interrupt with questions. Wait to hear what the speaker wants to tell you without trying to guide the conversation. You prepare the space and listen, to take in the wisdom you are about to receive and contemplate it, understanding that you might not fully comprehend what you are being told straight away. You need to think, to grow into the knowledge.

The idea of listening and being ready to hear. The silences are as powerful as the words.

Participants will be given an opportunity to practise the deep listening activity each time the group meets.



Activity 7 - Deep Listening

This first mindful listening activity involves watching the video: “Dadirri the deep inner spring inside us” <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653941145>

How do you feel after watching the video?

The elements of the video include:

- To breathe with me
- To listen deeply
- To connect
- To wait
- To slow down

Did any of these messages resonate with you as you watched the video?

How do you relax? Are you conscious of your breath?



Facilitator Conversation

Explain to the group that each time the group meets, one of the facilitators will read/tell a story. Refer to introduction.



Activity 8 - Reading stories to carers

Read children’s story: “Family Forest” by Kim Kane & Lucia Masciullo

Session Wrap Up

Ask participants to reflect on messages from the session that were useful.

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

Remind participants to:

- practice Deep Listening with partners/family/friends/children
- bring their handout folder to the next session

Farewell

Wish participants well until the group meets next.



CHAPTER 2

THE KINSHIP/FOSTER CARER STORY



Chapter Outline

This chapter supports carers to continue to get to know each other and normalise the experience of providing kinship/foster care. This chapter looks at the messages we have received in our past, that in turn impact on and influence our parenting. It is also an opportunity for the kinship/foster carers to reflect on the challenges and their strengths in their carer role.

Key Messages

- Carers are courageous and have amazing strengths
- Kinship/foster care is a particularly challenging responsibility
- Carers need support as they navigate often uncharted waters.

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

Think about the difference between foster carers and kinship carers.

- What might it mean to be a kinship carer (relative) to family members?
- What does it mean to choose to care for children not known to the family?

Preparation and Set-up

- Have music playing as participants arrive (optional)
- Have refreshments prepared so that you can offer tea/coffee, at least, on arrival.
- Have chairs arranged informally e.g., in a semi-circle/circle or provide couches and armchairs.
- Greet each participant on arrival. Offer a name tag and refreshments



Resources



You will need:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Flipchart and textas
- Smart TV or Computer and screen for videos
- Name tags and extra sticky labels
- Pens and textas
- Slips of paper with dates on them
- Stop, Pause, Play Remotes
- A parcel prepared for Pass the Parcel activity
- Video: “Parenting – Then VS Now”
Link: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653941436>
- Video: “Tomato Graft Time-Lapse”
Link: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940479>
- Refreshments



For each participant, you will need:

- HANDOUT: Mindful Exercise Stop...Pause...Play...
- HANDOUT: 5 Strong and Positive Messages
- HANDOUT: Parenting Then Versus Now
- HANDOUT: From the Diary of a 2-year-old



Stories and Children’s Story Books

- “Just the way we are” by Jessica Shirvington and Claire Robertson.



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 prize in layers of paper with a statement (and a small lolly- optional) taped between each layer.

Relevant feelings attached to the parcel, might include:

- I'm too old for this!
- These kids are out of control!
- I feel out of my depth in all of this
- What have I done wrong?
- I feel really sad about my family
- I am learning lots from the children
- The kids are better off with me
- Foster parents get better looked after than we do
- My grandchildren are safe now
- I'm frightened of my own children
- I've lost all my friends
- I thought I'd be playing golf at this stage of my life
- Children are more expensive now
- I get really angry sometimes
- Why me?
- I get really tired taking care of the children
- What happens if I die or get sick? Who will care for the kids?
- My greatest fear for these kids is that they'll end up like their parents
- I feel challenged by the system
- It is all so different 'parenting' now
- Am I doing the right thing?
- I thought I'd get more support
- It is so hard to understand ... (birth parent)



PART ONE – Welcome, Feedback and Overview

- **Acknowledgement of country**
- **Welcome the participants back to the group and invite them to share any feedback about the previous session. Invite any questions, concerns, or thoughts the participants might have.**

In the last session we reflected on the changes that have occurred within their family as they have stepped into the kinship/foster care role.

This session will look at the messages from the past that influences their parenting.



Facilitator Conversation

The aim of this activity is to bring the group back together, to reconnect and continue to get to know each other.



Activity 1 - Reconnection

Considering the age of your participants, type or write various years, printing/writing two slips of paper for each year, E.g., 1990, 2020, 2010. Distribute the slips of paper, inviting participants with the same years to pair up, provide the participants with a few minutes to discuss the year.

The below questions could be prompts:

1. Where were you living?
2. What were you doing?
3. Did you have children/how many?
4. Best memory from that year or thereabouts?



Facilitator Conversation

‘BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care’ also uses the concept of Stop...Pause...Play... to support participants to be able to be in a calm place when responding to the children in their care. The thinking is the same as in Foundation BUGK “If we practise mindful and self-care activities regularly, we will be prepared and ready to use them when the need arises, for example when the child in your care needs you to be calm and in control because they are not.”

When carers are highly stressed, connections to the cortex, the rational area of their brain, are blocked, so carers are more likely to act without thinking and to do and say things that they later regret. In fact, carers are likely to act more like the toddler who is having a tantrum!

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



Activity 2 - Stop...Pause...Play...

Distribute the **HANDOUT – Stop...Pause...Play...** and remote controls, discuss when participants are stressed, tired, worried or emotionally upset, it is not easy to be attuned to the needs of their children. In the context of kinship/foster care there are many situations where taking a breath and keeping calm is a useful strategy.

Introduce Stop... Pause... Play... as a mindfulness exercise that will be practised every session. It is an exercise that participants 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!)

Practise the exercise together as a group using the **HANDOUT – Stop...Pause...Play...** as a guide.

Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.



Facilitator Conversation

Explain that one person in each pair will be given time to talk while their partner listens. Then the same amount of time is given to the listener when their roles are reversed. Emphasise that the role of the listener is just to listen, without making comments or suggestions. Possible topics:

- The hardest things for me in my situation are.....
- Sometimes I wish.....
- Something the kids do that I find really hard is.....
- A lot of the time I feel.....

Once the activity is completed ask the participants how it felt to be the talker and how it felt to be the listener. Discuss this further.

If needed, reiterate the purpose and process of active listening...that its sole purpose is to allow the other person to be heard, and that we use body language to show that we are interested in what the other person is saying and to empathise the way we are feeling. For further explanations refer to introduction.



Activity 3 - Deep Listening

The aim of this activity is to give participants a quiet space in which to reflect on the story of their family, acknowledging the changes that have occurred and the feelings that have come with this.

Invite participants to choose a partner and to arrange their chairs so that they can sit facing each other.



PART TWO - The Carer Story



Facilitator Conversation

The aim of this activity is to generate discussion about reflections, feelings or statements about kinship/foster caring. If you are concerned about the literacy of the participants, allow the participants to open the layer of wrapping paper and take optional sweet. Then the facilitator/s reads the statement to the participants and invites the discussion.

Possible statements/reflections/feelings are listed earlier in this chapter. It may be useful to use the more in-depth feelings/statements earlier in the activity and end with “The kids are better off with me” which does not need any discussion and ends on a positive note.

As with the children’s party game, you will need to prepare a parcel around a gift in the middle and a written message stuck to each layer of wrapping. For those unfamiliar with the game, the idea is to pass a parcel around the group while music is playing until a facilitator stops the music at random. When the music stops, the person who is holding the parcel at that moment unwraps one layer of paper and reads the exposed message to the group. In this case, the ‘messages’ will be feelings commonly experienced by kinship/foster carers. Repeat this process until each participant has had a turn.



Activity 4 - Pass the Parcel

As each feeling/reflection/statement is read aloud to the group, invite discussion about the relevance of that feeling to the participants lived experience of caring for children. Encourage participants to share anything at all that they would like to say in relation to each of the messages.

To summarise this activity – highlight the positives such as “children are better off with me” etc.

This activity offers the opportunity to talk about the loss and grief for “the life I thought I would be having by now.”



Facilitator Conversation

The following activity refocuses activity 4 with positive, strong messages that participants can pass on to the children in their care. This activity reminds participants of the important work they are doing when caring for kinship/foster children.

Building on the previous conversation and the participants acknowledgement of how they feel caring for the children. Acknowledge that the participants may already be bringing with them their experience of having previously cared for their own children or other children, but even before that they are bringing with them their own experience of being parented when they were children. These previous experiences are like the earth that provides water, nutrition, and support to the trees as they grow. These past experiences of parenting or being parented may provide a template for how we will now parent.



Activity 5 - Strong and Positive Messages

Part 1

Distribute the **HANDOUT - 5 Strong and positive messages**.

Invite the participants to think about the nurture/messages that were provided/passed onto them through what their parents did. These may be:

- Practical – home, bed, meals
- Routines- going to school, homework, park to play football
- Feelings – respect, empathy etc.

You may invite participants to write these among the earth that supports the tree in the handout.

Part 2

Acknowledge the important work they are doing when caring for kinship/foster children.

Invite participants to consider 5 positive and strong message they want to pass on to the children in their care by what they are already doing/providing etc., invite participants to write these messages among the branches of the tree. Similarly, as above, these may be:

- Practical – home, bed, meals
- Routines- going to school, homework, park to play football
- Feelings – respect, empathy etc.

Celebrate with participants how amazing they are in what they are able to give to the children in their care.



Facilitator Conversation

This activity leads participants into beginning to consider and acknowledge the difference in parenting children now compared to when they were parenting previously, what they expected parenting to be like or when they themselves were parented. This conversation then leads into the next conversation considering the impact of trauma on children in kinship or foster care which may also be a difference that is present for these participants when parenting these children now.



Activity 6 – Then versus Now

Begin this conversation by watching the Video “Parenting – Then VS Now”
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653941436>

Distribute **HANDOUT - Then versus now** and invite participants to discuss and note down the differences they see in parenting then vs now.

This could include but is not limited to:

- Technology
- Media
- Cultural differences
- Schooling
- Routines
- Family contact commitments
- Parenting approaches
- Extracurricular commitments
- Additional appointments



Facilitator Conversation

As trauma will be explained in relation to brain development and behaviour in later chapters this section is just to support participants to understand that the children in their care will be different to their own biological children due to the trauma they may have experienced. We know that children react to their trauma through their behaviour and need strong, loving and supportive carers to support the healing process these children need to be able to live fulfilling lives.

Take the time to acknowledge with the participants that parenting these children may not be the same as parenting their own children or what they expect parenting to be like if they haven't parented before. What we know of children entering the kinship or foster care system is that they have most likely had experiences of trauma.

Gabor Mate defines trauma as “Trauma is not what happens to you, it's what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you.” For some children this may be, but not excluded to the presence of family violence, parenting substances misuse, or abuse. For some children it may be the absence of a present, attuned and responsive caregiver providing love, care and nurture.

These experiences illicit a survival response from young children, meaning their little bodies are constantly scanning for danger and then automatically accessing the fight, flight or freeze response in order to manage the challenging situation.



This can mean that they have not had the opportunity to develop particular skills as they have grown. You may find them with a restricted capacity to be sociable and connect with others, they may experience fear, mistrust, or ambivalence in interpersonal relationships, remaining distant and hard to connect with.

For children who have experienced ongoing and chronic relational trauma, they may be less trusting, have diminished empathy, and difficulties with impulse control and regulating their emotions and moderating stress. For some there may be impaired cognitive functioning, delays in language development and other developmental delays depending on their experiences in those early years.

What is positive is that we know that with the right support these children can begin to heal from these early experiences, which we will talk about in Chapters 4 & 5, and yourselves as kinship and foster carers play a pivotal role in this.



Activity 7 – From a child's perspective

In small groups discuss the **HANDOUT - “From the diary of a two-year-old”** about how trauma affects children’s ability to connect and learn.

It is important to reinforce how amazing the carers are and the importance of their care for these children.

End this activity with the Video: “Tomato Graft Time-Lapse”
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940479>

This video reinforces that the care of kinship and foster carers can be experienced as tedious at times with no visible rewards but in time the amazing care that they are giving now will have its rewards.



Facilitator Conversation

This discussion activity provides the opportunity to explore parenting a child with trauma and the additional challenges experienced, with a particular focus on position and roles within families.

Often a child who has experienced trauma has taken on various roles within their family of origin, when they then move into a home with an adult available to care for them it can be challenging for them to relinquish this role and accept care, as it was a mechanism they used to keep themselves and, perhaps, siblings safe. This may have included the child stepping into a care taking or parentified role toward other siblings and/or the parents.

It is important to consider the position in family both in the family of origin and the kinship or foster care family. Children may be adapting from being the eldest in their family of origin to being a middle child or the youngest in the family if there are other children in the carer family. In addition, a factor to consider when guiding these conversations may be the role of culture and/or religion as to the beliefs and roles of children, position in family and boys compared to girls for example.



Activity 8 – Position in Family

Facilitate a discussion around the position and roles in the family, in particular, in relation to the children being cared for. The following questions are only discussion prompts:

- What role did each child take in their family before they came into your care?
 - Care taking of other siblings and/or the parent/s
 - Parentified – acting as the parent
- Has gender made a difference in the role they took on, e.g., eldest girl vs eldest boy?
- How has culture or religion influenced this? i.e., Girls expected to be responsible and motherly.
- What was the position the child had in their family of origin? Eldest, youngest middle etc.
- How have/might these roles and positions in family change since moving into a kinship or foster care family?
- If you have your own biological children still in the home how have the changes in positions impacted them?



PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support



Facilitator Conversation

Participants have reflected on the differences in parenting since they parented their own children. While many ideas around parenting have and are changing over time, there are aspects and themes that remain the same or similar. This activity will invite carers to consider the similarities between parenting then vs now, which will be reassuring for participants and acknowledge the skills and experience they are bringing with them into the journey of caring.



Activity 9 - Reflection

Invite participants to reflect on what they have found to be similar about parenting children now if they have had children of their own. If the participants haven't previously parented invite them to reflect on how it may be similar to what they expected parenting children to be like or how it is similar to when they were being parenting as children.

You may choose to prompt the conversation with the themes or handout suggested in activity 6.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation in Chapter 1 about reading stories to carers.



Activity 10 - Reading stories to carers

Read: "Just the way we are" by Jessica Shirvington and Claire Robertson.

Session Wrap Up

Ask participants to reflect on messages from the session that were useful.

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

Remind participants to:

- practice Stop Pause Play with partners/family/friends/children
- bring their handout folder to the next session

Farewell

Wish participants well until the group meets next.



CHAPTER 3

THE BIOLOGICAL PARENTS' STORY



Chapter Outline

Biological parents play a crucial role in the kinship and foster care story. This chapter looks at the story about the biological parents and barriers that get in the way of the biological parent parenting in a way that would be best for the child.

Key Messages

- **Understanding the role of the biological parent in the kinship and foster care story.**
- **Understanding the disruptions to the biological parents parenting brain and the impact on their ability to parent.**
- **For carers to understand and hold the biological parent's story without blame, shame, or guilt.**
- **Looking at the biological parent's story from different perspectives.**

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

Reflect on your own experience of being parented:

- What did your parents provide to you to meet your basic and emotional needs?
- How could you reflect on your childhood memories from your parents' perspective?

Reflect on your life experience as an adult:

- How does it feel for you when you have your weekend planned, and at the last minute, someone else makes a change that disrupts all your plans?

Preparation and Set-up

- Have music playing as participants arrive (optional)
- Have refreshments prepared so that you can offer tea/coffee at least on arrival.
- Have chairs arranged informally, e.g., in a semi-circle/circle, or provide couches and armchairs.
- Greet each participant on arrival. Offer a name tag and refreshments.



Resources



You will need:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Flipchart and textas
- Smart TV or Computer and screen for videos
- Name tags and extra sticky labels
- Pens and textas
- Soft ball/toy
- Video: “The Giving Tree”
Link: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940409>
- A set of ‘The Bears’ cards (available from Innovative Resources, www.innovativeresources.org)
- Refreshments



For each participant, you will need:

- HANDOUT: Brain diagram
- HANDOUT: Brain systems that support parents
- HANDOUT: The Pre-Frontal cortex
- HANDOUT: Barriers to parenting
- HANDOUT: PFC and the reward system
- HANDOUT: Unhealthy rewards
- HANDOUT: Kinship and Foster parenting
- HANDOUT: How does it feel?
- HANDOUT: Two perspectives
- HANDOUT: The old tree
- HANDOUT: Visual reflection: new growth



Stories and Children’s Story Books

- “Ubuntu” story from Foundation BUGK resources



PART ONE – Welcome, Feedback and Overview

- **Acknowledgement of country**
- **Welcome the participants back to the group and invite them to share any feedback about the previous session. Invite any questions, concerns, or thoughts the participants might have.**

In the first two sessions, we shared some of our feelings about being a kinship or foster carer, the ways that our family has changed, and looked at the messages from the past that influence our parenting.

This session looks at the biological parent and their parenting.



Facilitator Conversation

This activity aims to bring the group back together, to reconnect and recall people’s names.



Activity 1 - Reconnection

Ask participants to sit or stand in a circle with the facilitator/s. Provide them with a soft ball/toy to throw to each other. The facilitator starts by throwing the ball/toy to a participant calling out their name.

Invite participants to share a plan that they had for their life that did not go as they expected. Each participant has one minute to share and then throw the ball/toy to the next person calling out their name. Continue until all participants have had a turn.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to facilitator conversation in Part 1 of Chapter 2



Activity 2 - Stop...Pause...Play...

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

OR

Take the group through the exercise again using the Handout (from chapter 2) as a reference if necessary. It is an exercise that participants 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!).

Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation in Part 3 of Chapter 1



Activity 3 - Deep Listening

Explain that one person in each pair will be given time to talk while their partner listens. Then the same amount of time is given to the listener when their roles are reversed. Emphasize that the role of the listener is just to listen, without making comments or suggestions. Possible topics:

- The hardest thing for me in my situation is.....
- Sometimes I wish.....
- Something the kids do that I find really hard is.....
- A lot of the time I feel.....

Check in with the participants to see if they have used mindful listening and/or any other activity to look after themselves in the time since the last session.



PART TWO – Perspectives in Parenting



Facilitator Conversation

This session assists participants in understanding what is going on for the biological parent and what gets in the way of them caring for their child. This activity helps set the scene for kinship and foster carers to explore what is going on for the biological parent.

This activity asks the participants to think about what is needed in their brains to care for children.



Activity 4 - Carers Brain

Ask the participants to think about what is needed in the carer’s brain to care for a child. Examples may include:

- Responsibility, patience, sense of humour, energy, routine, a home, safety

You may use the **HANDOUT - Brain diagram provided in this program** or **HANDOUT - Incomplete parents brain** from Foundation BUGK and ask participants to write their thoughts on the handout.



Facilitator Conversation

The Pre-Frontal Cortex (PFC) is the last area of the brain to mature - in our mid to late '20s. It is essential to consider that trauma (in its many facets) can cause further delay in brain development. If a young adult becomes a parent before the PFC is fully developed, their capacity to fully attune and care for their child diminishes. A fully developed PFC provides parents with five systems that support them to build the best relationship with their children.



Activity 5 - Fully developed brain

Distribute **HANDOUT - Brain Systems** and discuss which systems participants think were available to the biological parents when they had their children with them.

Then use **HANDOUT - Prefrontal Cortex** to explain how a fully developed cortex enables carers to provide children with a responsive and caring environment.



Facilitator Conversation

It is important to believe in the biological parent, their dream, and want to be the best parent they can be for their child. Parenting is an emotional rollercoaster. There are no qualifications for the job. The community is often judgmental and cruel. Social media, marketing, and the parenting “experts” who write and talk about parenting can give parents conflicting information making their parenting journey even more difficult. Negative attitudes towards parents who are struggling with their parenting are not helpful.

Belief: Every parent is doing the best they can with what they have.



Activity 6 – Barriers to parenting

Recount the story of a tree in a forest. The forest has plenty of healthy and tall trees that compete for oxygen and sunlight. But for many different reasons, a sapling may not make it as tall, green, strong and healthy as others. Sometimes that sapling cannot receive enough light, or its roots are not capable enough to absorb the required water and minerals; it might be stuck between other mighty trees that do not share the resources. Sometimes pests might affect the health of the young tree, or underground creatures may eat its roots. A young tree with a situation as such has trouble finding its way to the top of the forest, let alone having the capacity to accommodate birds and their nests.

Ask participants about the barriers that get in the way of parenting well?

Distribute **HANDOUT - Barriers to parenting** and discuss the barriers for the biological parents in your group of participants. For example:

- Drugs – substance misuse
- Violence
- Homelessness
- Youth – too young
- Mental health issues
- Health issues
- Addictions
- Criminal activity
- Trauma
- Poverty
- Disability

This list can be used to support Activity 5, ‘Growing connections in the brain’ in Chapter 4.

When these other needs are overwhelming, this is what stops parents from being able to parent to the best of their ability.



Facilitator Conversation

The following conversation is about the impacts on the reward systems. The most significant effect is the reward centre being fulfilled by other means rather than by loving and being loved by their child.

If the participants ask for more detailed information on the reward system, you may refer them to the **HANDOUT - PFC and the reward system**.



Activity 7 - PFC and the reward system

Distribute **HANDOUT - Unhealthy rewards** and ask participants their opinion about the illustration and what unhealthy rewards they think the biological parents received from the unhealthy social interactions they experienced.



Facilitator Conversation

A mature brain that includes a fully developed PFC has capacities that provide the carer with abilities to appropriately respond to the needs of children and their own needs. These include primary needs as well as social and emotional needs. A mature brain allows carers to respond to children with mindfulness and understand the need for connection with the biological parent. Although maintaining this complicated situation is hard at times, the kinship and foster carers’ life experience and profound social and cultural roots can provide them with enough stability and resources to do so.



Activity 8 - Kinship and Foster Parenting

Distribute **HANDOUT – Kinship and Foster Parenting** and recount the story of a big old tree that has vast roots underground. This tree can keep connected to the sapling and support and feed them through their roots. The tree is also still partially related to the damaged tree and occasionally nurtures them as well.

Ask participants about what they are already providing the children with. Encourage them to think about supporting the biological parents, at least by taking care of their children.



PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support



Facilitator Conversation

This activity is about supporting kinship and foster carers to better walk in the biological parents’ shoes. It may help them experience less emotional pressure when thinking that the biological parent has not fulfilled their responsibilities.

To further understand the biological parents’ behaviours, it is important to be able to identify feelings and needs.

Think about the parent who has lost the eligibility to have their child in their care. They work hard to be in a better place to care for the child and regain access to their child. But after a short period, they find that caring for their child is not as rewarding as anticipated but rather too overwhelming.



Activity 9 - How does it feel?

Distribute **HANDOUT - How does it feel?** Ask participants how it might feel to be a biological parent who cannot nurture their child and feels completely disconnected from them? Explain that this conversation is not about finding an excuse for the biological parents but understanding them. It is rather about a practise to see their situation through the biological parents’ eyes.

Then distribute **HANDOUT -The two perspectives.** Looking at the first side of the handout, participants see a forest with trees standing next to each other, and no difference between them can be seen. However, a tree in the next row that seems younger is not as vivid and fresh as others and is lying on other trees. Ask participants about how they feel about the sick tree.

The second side illustrates the scene from the opposite perspective. Now we can see that the sick tree is suffering a landslide in the forest and further soil erosion. Ask the participants again about how they feel. Facilitate a discussion about how perspective matters in understanding the biological parent and our emotional relationship with our situation as kinship/foster carers.



Facilitator Conversation

This activity aims to acknowledge negative emotions held by the carers about the biological parent that directly impacts the child that they care for. Although the previous activities have highlighted the barriers the biological parent might have in not being able to parent their child, this does not eliminate the negative feelings by the carer. This activity will give a platform to discuss these negative feelings in a contained manner.



Activity 10 - The Old Tree

Distribute **HANDOUT – The Old Tree** or share the Video “**The Giving Tree**” (<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940409>) and, using the ‘The Bears’ cards, ask participants to choose an emotion that represents the relationship between the biological parent, the child and themselves. Participants can share if they feel comfortable to do so.



Facilitator Conversation

The purpose of this activity is to provide an opportunity for a metaphorical, visual reflection about all possible hopes regarding the biological parent and the child that kinship/foster carers are caring for.



Activity 11 – Visual reflection: new growth

Distribute **HANDOUT - Visual reflections: new growth** and ask participants to reflect on how the photo might relate to their family’s situation and what different generations are experiencing. We have intentionally chosen a general name for this handout to prevent any bias with their reflection.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation in Chapter 1



Activity 12 - Reading stories to carers

Read the “Ubuntu” story from Foundation BUGK resources.

Session Wrap Up

Ask participants to reflect on messages from the session that were useful.

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

Remind participants to:

- practice Deep Listening with partners/family/friends/children
- bring their handout folder to the next session

Farewell

Wish participants well until the group meets next.



CHAPTER 4 THE CHILD'S BRAIN STORY



Chapter Outline

This chapter explores children's brain development, acknowledging that parenting kinship and foster children is different to parenting carers own biological children with a major focus on the carer child relationship. Information is shared about the effects of relational trauma on the developing brain, brain plasticity and supporting the rewiring/healing of the brain.

Key Messages

- **Carers relationships with their children are critical to children's brain development.**
- **The experience of trauma in relationships has major negative impacts on the developing brain and consequently, on children's behaviour.**
- **Lifelong brain plasticity allows potential for repair and change even in adulthood.**

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

1. What does relational safety mean to you?
2. Recall a child or parent who you know has experienced relational trauma in their formative years. Imagine what that person's brain looks like. Imagine the messages that person has been given about themselves; about the way relationships work, and about the world in general.... messages which shape that person's story about themselves and the way they live their life.

Preparation and Set-up

- Have music playing as participants arrive (optional)
- Have refreshments prepared so that you can offer tea/coffee at least, on arrival.
- Have chairs arranged informally e.g., in a semi-circle/circle or provide couches and armchairs.
- Greet each participant on arrival. Offer a name tag and refreshments.



Resources



You will need:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Flipchart and textas
- Smart TV or Computer and screen for videos
- Name tags and extra sticky labels
- Pens and textas
- Post-It notes
- 1 ball of thick, strong wool or string
- Book: The Life of Tree; author Lucy Van Sambeek and illustrator Christine Burarrwanga
- Video: "The growing tree"
Link: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940528>
- Refreshments



For each participant, you will need:

- HANDOUT: Visual Reflection - Growing out of the rock
- HANDOUT: Growing Brains
- HANDOUT: Healing/rewiring the brain
- HANDOUT: Where trauma affects the brain



Stories and Children's Story Books

- "The Rabbit Listened" by Cori Doerrfeld



PART ONE – Welcome, Feedback and Overview

- Acknowledgement of country
- Welcome the participants back to the group and invite them to share any feedback about the previous session. Invite any questions, concerns, or thoughts the participants might have.

In previous sessions, we shared some of our feelings about being a kinship or foster carer, the ways that our family has changed, and looked at the messages from the past that influence our parenting.

We also explored the biological parent's story, acknowledging what may be going on for them and in their parenting brain that may help us to make sense of what they may or may not do.

This session looks at children's brain development and how trauma may affect that development.



Facilitator Conversation

The aim of this activity is to bring the group back together and to reflect on their childhood.



Activity 1 - Reconnection

Invite participants to think about how they might complete the following sentence:

When I was a child, I loved.....

Encourage the group to think about some categories of possible responses, e.g., foods, pets, games, friends, family members, places, celebrations.

You might wish to list their suggestions on a whiteboard or flip chart.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation Part 1 of Chapter 2



Activity 2 - Stop...Pause...Play...

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

OR

Take the group through the exercise again using the Handout (from chapter 2) as a reference if necessary. It is an exercise that participants 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!).

Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation in Part 3 of Chapter 1



Activity 3 - Deep Listening

Explain that one person in each pair will be given time to talk while their partner listens. Then the same amount of time is given to the listener when their roles are reversed. Emphasise that the role of the listener is just to listen, without making comments or suggestions. Possible topics:

- The hardest thing for me in my situation is.....
- Sometimes I wish.....
- Something the kids do that I find really hard is.....
- A lot of the time I feel.....

Check in with the participants to see if they have used mindful listening and/or any other activity to look after themselves in the time since the last session.



PART TWO – Brain Development

Mother trees nurture their new saplings to grow and develop by feeding them and also reducing their own root systems to make room for the saplings roots. When a mother tree is injured or dying, they send messages including defence mechanisms to the next generation to help protect the young saplings from future stresses.



Facilitator Conversation

Kinship/foster carers are nurturing children in their care, they have changed their own lives to accommodate the children to grow and develop into strong resilient community members. Carers recognise the children in their care have been shaped by their adverse experiences. When children don't feel safe in relationships, they are unable to learn, their brain will not develop.

When carers cuddle, talk, sing, read and play with their child, the brain is flooded with hormones that help build the new connections in their brain that help them to grow and to develop healthy relationships with other people in their life. This is called relational safety.

This activity supports carers in being the mother trees to their saplings by reflecting on what they are already doing and what else they might be able to do to help grow healthy brains.

NOTE: Remember you can also refer to chapter 1 in Foundation BUGK and use any of the activities.

Chapter 2 started the conversation on trauma.



Activity 4 - Growing brains

Part 1

Distribute **HANDOUT - Visual Reflection: Growing out of the rock**. Ask participants what this picture represents to them about brain development. You could use the following questions as prompts:

- Can you see where trauma has affected the tree?
- Why has the tree survived despite the trauma?

Part 2

Brainstorm with participants the following question. The responses could be put on a whiteboard or flip chart.

What is relational safety? Examples:

- Feeling heard and understood (when someone does or says something and you think, wow they really heard and understood me)
- Feeling connected to another (having a close bond that cannot be broken)
- Feeling safe, stable and secure (in the company of this other knowing you are safe from harm, that they will always be there for you and you are in their protection)



- Feeling loved and nurtured (that warm feeling of being cherished and nourished by another)
- Feeling comforted (empathic response to distressed child)
- Being listened to (getting down to the child's level and giving undivided attention)
- Building and sharing new stories, memories and narrative (engaging in experiences together)
- Anticipating love and trust (having the expectation of being loved and trusted by another)
- Sharing joy and playfulness (having fun together)
- Supporting regulation through co-regulation (knowing that someone will be there to help you when you are overwhelmed)

Part 3

Distribute the **HANDOUT – Growing brains**. Ask participants to put on their tree the things they are doing for their children to support relational safety and the building of the carer/child relationship. They can write directly onto the handout, or you can provide Post-It notes for them to write on then stick on their tree.

Support participants to be strong in their skin – the confident, strong, steady and secure adult for the child.

Also, to recognise parenting these children will not be the same as parenting their own children.



Facilitator Conversation

Explain that we will now discuss some of the effects of childhood trauma on the developing brain. Express that while it may be painful to think about the parents of the children they care for causing children harm, when we understand the damage, we can better understand the child's resulting behaviour, and how we might be able to help.

Encourage participants to think about what that might mean for themselves in their interactions with their traumatised children (e.g., being more aware of their non-verbal communication with children: tone of voice, facial expressions, postures, gestures - and the possibility that aspects of non-verbal communication can act as trauma triggers for children).



Activity 5 - Growing connections in the brain

This activity is designed to illustrate neuronal connections for a child affected by trauma.

Ask participants to sit or stand in a circle. Each person represents a neuron.

The facilitator holds a ball of wool and lets out a length of yarn while still holding on to the ball.

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 (the list compiled by carers in Activity 6 'Barriers to parenting' in Chapter 3 could be useful here).

Ask, '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 ball of wool to a participant at the same time identifying a trauma experience for the child. The participant who caught the wool now does the same and this is repeated until every participant has at least one go throwing the ball of wool and identifying a trauma experience.

Suggest that the repetition of those trauma experiences will still grow connections, but that the messages children derive from those experiences will be different. Encourage participants to think about what those messages might be. E.g., *'I'm no good.'* *'Relationships are scary.'* *'You can't trust people.'* *'I have to do everything myself.'* *'The world's a bad/scary place.'*



Facilitator Conversation

This activity is designed to illustrate re-wiring of the brain.

Reassure participants that brain science has some good news for them and for the children in their care. We now know that the human brain remains 'plastic' or malleable to change for the whole life span. Brain plasticity gives us hope that, with repeated nurturing, healthy experiences in relationship with loving, respectful carers, children's brains can be 're-wired' after negative experiences. Kinship/foster carers are in the business of building new brains for the children in their care!



Activity 6 - Brain Plasticity

Using one of the 'brain connections' in the group's wool network, demonstrate re-wiring of the brain.

Suggest that one of the wool connections relates to a child's repeated trauma experience of, e.g., not being responded to when they cry. Imagine the child has been removed from that situation so they no longer have that experience. Ask the participant what the new experience might be for the child, e.g., responded to immediately in a nurturing way when they cry.

Ask the participant holding that 'connection' to let go of the wool to represent the connection fading away once the trauma experience stops. Pick up the dropped wool end and take it to another person to represent the growth of the new, healthier connection once the child is having the repeated loving experience over time, in relationship with their kinship/foster carer.

Repeat this with the other trauma connections identifying a nurturing loving experience to replace it with.

Impart the message that the earlier in a child's life that we begin to grow healthier connections, the better, but that it's never too late.



Facilitator Conversation

In the previous activity we explored brain plasticity, now we will look at healing or rewiring the brain. The participants might find this activity challenging to understand so will need support from the facilitators to complete this activity. There are three parts to this activity, the first looks at the definitions of the 6 healing messages.

The first part of the following activity is for all audiences and then you may choose to continue the activity with either option provided. Option one looks at what the participants are doing or could do to support this healing and option two provides an opportunity to specifically look at healing from the perspective of the aboriginal culture.



Activity 7 – Healing/Rewiring the brain

Write the following 6 healing messages onto a whiteboard or flip chart and facilitate a conversation about what each of these mean, here are some thoughts to help:

Healing/rewiring is supported by:

1. Connection – is about relationship
2. Reconnection – who or what are we reconnecting to? Family, community, culture, spirituality
3. Reconstruction – is about re-building the brain
4. Finding meaning - meaning making is about making sense of the experience with the child
5. Positive self-image – how we feel about ourselves
6. Renewal of hope and love – is about finding hope and love through having a positive self-image

Option 1

Distribute **HANDOUT – Healing/rewiring the brain** and ask participants to brainstorm what they are doing or could do to support healing/rewiring the brain. They can write or draw their responses onto the handout. Some responses might include:

- **Connection** – relationship (Being interested and supportive of a child (in whatever they are doing or interested in) which helps them to feel connected, valued and accepted.)
- **Reconnection** – family, community, culture, spirituality (Helping children to be connected to family, community and culture is very important and this can easily be done through play experiences.)
- **Reconstruction** – re-building the brain (When we provide safe, stimulating and repetitive play experiences we are rewiring the brain.)
- **Finding meaning** (Meaning making is about making sense of the experience with the child, with a sense of scaffolding and attunement.)
- **Positive self-image** (Finding children something they really love can help them to know their likes and dislikes are valued and respected, which helps to build their sense of self.)
- **Renewal of hope and love** (We can help children to find meaning in their play which will promote a positive self-image which in turn promotes hope. When we have hope we can heal.)



Option 2

The following book could be used if participants are in Aboriginal families or caring for Aboriginal children. "The Life of Tree" (Lucy Van Sambeek and illustrator Christine Burarrwanga) is a fictional story that takes children on a metaphorical journey about the difficult times in life. Incorporating metaphorical narratives with traditional cultural imagery from Arnhem land, this book invites Aboriginal children into a safe place to express what is too hard to say, celebrate their strengths and receive the help they need to heal.

This book could be used to replace or expand the above activity.



Facilitator Conversation

Note: Facilitators can refer back to Bottom-Up Brain Development in Foundation BUGK if necessary.

This program focus' on the limbic system or the emotional centre of the brain rather than the whole of the bottom-up brain. For children living in kinship/foster care the trauma they have experienced directly affects the limbic system. Children's thinking is impaired when they are operating from their emotions - we all act without thinking when highly stressed.

Using the metaphor of the tree: When a tree grows it spreads its branches far and wide experiencing the world around it. If a storm comes along sometimes the branches are bent and broken and the tree has to rebuild itself. This is the same for children, their limbic system starts to develop and the children experience their world through their emotions but if there is trauma (a storm) the limbic system is injured or shuts down and has to be rewired (rebuilt).

Trauma affects the limbic system, including the:

- Amygdala (smoke detector/watchdog of the brain), when there is perceived danger or threat the amygdala goes on high alert, scanning for the danger/threat. The amygdala becomes enlarged and stress hormones are released.
- Hippocampus which gives context/meaning to memory, gives a sense of beginnings and endings and laying down long term memory. The hippocampus is damaged by stress hormones.

Children affected by trauma will also have a damaged corpus callosum (the bridge linking the left and right brain). When the corpus callosum is damaged the two hemispheres are unable to communicate with each other. We need the two hemispheres to be able to communicate and be integrated so we are well rounded in both creative and organised ways.



Activity 8 – Limbic System and Corpus Callosum

Distribute **HANDOUT – Where trauma affects the brain**

Part 1

Ask participants to think about the limbic system (the emotional centre of the brain). What does the behaviour look like when children are responding from their limbic system?

What could they do/are they doing to support their children when they are reacting from the limbic system? Some responses may include:

- Calming activities (for the amygdala and hippocampus)
- Role modelling appropriate social interactions including adult to adult interactions
- Support games with winning and losing, and turn taking (to assist with emotional regulation/co-regulation)
- Encourage sharing while understanding there are special things the child does not want to/may not want to share
- Playing in a team (to assist with emotional regulation/co-regulation)

Part 2

Corpus Callosum – activities we are already doing or could do to support the rebuilding of the corpus callosum. Some responses may include:

- Crossing the midline activities – Pat a Cake, Waddley Archer, patting your head and rubbing your tummy, etc.
- Drumming
- Dancing – Zorba the Greek, Can Can, etc.



PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support



Facilitator Conversation

Reflective activities stimulate deeper thinking. This activity assists participants to reflect on how they are supporting healthy brain development.



Activity 9 – Reflection

Ask participants to reflect on the following while watching the video:

- how are they supporting their children (saplings) to grow and develop strong, healthy brain connections (branches) through the safe, positive, sensitive, attuned, caring, nurturing relationships that they are building with their children.

Watch the video – **The growing tree** - time lapse video

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940528>

Invite comments about the participants reflections as they watched the video.

Ask participants if they noticed how long it took for the tree to grow to maturity?

If it takes over 140 years, how long will it take to see changes in our child's:

- brain structure and behaviour
- relationship with us



Facilitator Conversation

This session introduces 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 10 – Self-Care

Invite the whole group to participate in some calming breaths together. Invite the group as a whole to take a simultaneous inhalation and then to exhale that breathe with a big sigh.

Repeat the exercise, this time

- acknowledging the pain and hard work that goes with the kinship/foster carer role, as the group takes a deep breath in, and
- acknowledging the great job that these carers are doing in difficult circumstances, as they exhale with a long sigh.

Ask participants what self-care activities they might do this week.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1 about Reading stories to carers



Activity 11 - Reading stories to carers

Read "The Rabbit Listened" by Cori Doerrfeld.

Session Wrap Up

Ask participants to reflect on messages from the session that were useful.

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

Remind participants to:

- practice Stop. Pause. Play with partners/family/friends/children
- bring their handout folder to the next session

Farewell

Wish participants well until the group meets next.



CHAPTER 5 THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR STORY



Chapter Outline

The focus of this chapter is to assist carers to understand that children show how they feel and what they need from us, through their behaviour. To start to understand that the behaviour is a protective response, to keep the child safe when their environment was not safe.

This chapter seeks to enable carers to become aware of their own reactions to children's behaviour and where these have come from. This knowledge can assist carers to understand how children's behaviour can 'press their buttons' and help them to respond more mindfully.

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

Key Messages

- Carers can redefine the internal working model of the children they care for
- Understanding how trauma affects the brain
- Supporting safety in relationships
- Children have strengths we are not always aware of

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

1. Think about the ways that adults responded to you as a child, when you were in a highly aroused emotional state, e.g., when you were feeling very angry, sad or frightened. How might those early responses to your emotional state, impact on your responses now to emotionally aroused children?
2. How did you as a child respond when you were scared and stressed? How do you respond now as an adult?

Preparation and Set-up

- Have music playing as participants arrive (optional)
- Have refreshments prepared so that you can offer tea/coffee at least, on arrival.
- Have chairs arranged informally e.g., in a semi-circle/circle or provide couches and armchairs.
- Greet each participants on arrival. Offer a name tag and refreshments.



Resources



You will need:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Flipchart and textas
- Smart TV or Computer and screen for videos
- Name tags and extra sticky labels
- Pens and textas
- Book “Once I Was Very Very Scared” or video of the story on the following link <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940800>
- A3 paper
- Large picture/drawing of a tree
- Paper leaves
- Video: “Bullying A Plant”
Link: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940672>
- Video: “Kung Fu Panda – Who are you?”
Link: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940927>
- “Angels” cards (available from Innovative Resources, www.innovativeresources.org)
- Blu Tack
- Refreshments



For each participant, you will need:

- HANDOUT: Behaviour Scenarios (7 pages)
- HANDOUT: Behaviour Scenarios (blank)
- HANDOUT: Visual reflection – the two trees



Stories and Children's Story Books

- Moody Cow by K.L. MacLean



PART ONE – Welcome, Feedback and Overview

- **Acknowledgement of country**
- **Welcome the participants back to the group and invite them to share any feedback about the previous session. Invite any questions, concerns, or thoughts the participants might have.**

In previous sessions, we shared some of our feelings about being a kinship or foster carer, the ways that our family has changed, and looked at the messages from the past that influence our parenting. We also explored the biological parent's story and children's brain development and the effects of trauma.

In this session we will explore further messages of behaviour in the context of children's behaviour as protective responses within foster and kinship care.



Facilitator Conversation

The aim of this activity is to bring the group back together and to reflect on their week with their children.



Activity 1 - Reconnection

Invite participants to share with the whole group, something that one of their children did since the last session which was:

- Funny
- Surprising
- New
- Embarrassing
- Brave



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to facilitator conversation in Part 1 of Chapter 2



Activity 2 - Stop...Pause...Play...

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

OR

Take the group through the exercise again using the Handout (from chapter 2) as a reference if necessary. It is an exercise that participants 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!).

Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation in Chapter 1



Activity 3 - Deep Listening

Explain that one person in each pair will be given time to talk while their partner listens. Then the same amount of time is given to the listener when their roles are reversed. Emphasise that the role of the listener is just to listen, without making comments or suggestions. Possible topics:

- The hardest thing for me in my situation is.....
- Sometimes I wish.....
- Something the kids do that I find really hard is.....
- A lot of the time I feel.....

Check in with the participants to see if they have used mindful listening and/or any other activity to look after themselves in the time since the last session.



PART TWO – Behaviour as a Protective Response

In this section we will be using the tree analogy to support participants in thinking about their child's behaviour. What we know about trees is that they are influenced by the conditions around them – in a forest or by themselves, temperatures that are extremely hot or cold, drought or a flood, access to enough food. When trees have optimal conditions (enough sunlight, water and food) their growth will be steady and strong but when the conditions are not so good (not enough sunlight, water, food or there is crowding in the forest) the tree has restricted growth and may be weakened.

Each tree is unique, no two are exactly the same, and they need just the right amount of sunlight, water and food to survive. Trees that grow in a community (forest) will support each other and their saplings (offspring) to grow and develop. Older trees (mother trees) will provide food to their saplings (young trees) and reduce their size to give their saplings room to grow.

When we stop and pause to wonder about what children are trying to tell us when they behave in a particular way... what they are feeling, and what they might need from us, then our responses are more likely to help children feel understood. This understanding changes the meaning we give the child's behaviour, i.e., they are not just 'naughty', 'bad' or 'mad' kids. We need to learn to ask "What is this behaviour telling me?" and be curious about what it might mean so that we can respond in most supportive way.



Facilitator Conversation

How often do we do something and never question why we do it that way?

- Wash the rice before cooking
- The order the cutlery goes in the drawer?
- The drawer the gladwrap lives in?

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 things over and over....

Similarly for our children their bodies have adapted to living in the environment that they grew up in which required them to be monitoring their level of safety, perhaps relationships were unsafe and at times their body responded to keep them safe. Now, they find themselves in a different environment, but their body has not yet learnt that this is different to the old environment, and they are still finding themselves responding as if it was the old environment.

When children have been affected by trauma, they feel scared and stressed but every child will respond in a different way; some will feel sick, some will run away, some will hide and some will be loud. These protective responses support the child to feel in control and safe when they are scared and stressed. When children have an adult that they feel safe with they are able to be supported and cope with their different feelings.



This activity will assist participants to explore the different protective responses each of their children has when they are scared or stressed and what things might help them feel safe and less scared.

You could read the book “Once I Was Very Very Scared” or watch the video of the story on the following link <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940800>



Activity 4 - Feeling Safe

Read or watch up to the page ‘*And very, very importantly, they learned what they could do when they were scared, angry, sad and feeling bad inside*’ then do the activity.

This activity can be done in small groups or in the big group and responses are written onto a large piece of paper. Ask participants to make a list of different things that might have scared or stressed their children (thinking about the trauma these children may have experienced) and write these down the left-hand side of the paper.

Once the left-hand side is completed ask the carers to brainstorm what sort of things children might be able to do when they feel scared or stressed and the ways they can support their children. They can write these down the right-hand side of the paper.

Once the activity is completed, read or watch the rest of the story.

Summary - Neuroception of Safety

For children who have experienced trauma, their bodies are on high alert, constantly scanning for danger (Neuroception). This is an unconscious process, and while they may know they are not in the scary place they once were; their body still needs time to experience the new environment as safe, these children will need ongoing repeated experiences of safety.



Facilitator Conversation

Using the tree analogy, we will illustrate that children’s protective responses (behaviour) are just at the top of the tree. Distribute the **HANDOUT – Behaviour scenarios** and facilitate the following discussion on one of the scenarios that you find most relevant to the group.

Referring to the ‘top’ of the tree, acknowledge that sometimes, children’s protective responses can seem like overwhelming obstacles. But beneath the surface even more is going on the children’s feelings and needs.

Discuss with participants, the concept that all protective responses have meaning. The protective response that we see, is just at the top of the tree. The meaning behind the protective response is a much bigger part of the picture. It lies beneath the ground/surface in the roots of the tree. These roots hold the trauma experiences of the child and are where the feelings and needs are.



Activity 5 - Tree of Behaviour

Part 1

Using a large picture of a tree (facilitators could draw this or use a picture/photo) ask the participants what protective responses the children show that could be related to their trauma experiences. Use a leaf for each protective response then put it on the tree.

Then ask the participants about the trauma/challenging experiences the children might have had, write these on the roots of the tree.

This makes a strong link between the trauma experiences and the children's protective responses and functioning.

Part 2

Distribute the **HANDOUT - Behaviour Scenarios** and use the scenarios (or any actual situations in the carers' families that they are happy to share with the group), to brainstorm approaching children's behaviour through focussing on their feelings and needs. Participants complete the 'I feel...., I need....' part of the handout.

As an extra (or homework) activity you could distribute **HANDOUT - Behaviour Scenarios (Blank)** to participants so they can write their own protective response in the top of the tree and reflect on the feelings and needs beneath it.



Facilitator Conversation

When protective responses (behaviours) get big and overwhelming and we don't offer ourselves a "stop, pause and play" moment it can be easy to slip into thinking that these protective responses are 'manipulative' or 'attention seeking' and we may find ourselves using language to describe the child, such as naughty, bad, silly, stupid, etc...

Children, particularly those that have experienced trauma, are highly sensitive to words and what they sense a person to think/believe about them.

This activity is an opportunity for participants to see what happens when we use language that is or is not supportive and encouraging. Also support participants to recognise that tone, intonation, gestures, facial expressions and actions may also have an impact.

Our intention is not to shame or blame – this activity is about showing how we all flourish when we have positivity and nurturing and that we can struggle when there is negativity. We are not implying that the participants are bullying their children but that when they are overwhelmed they may find that they are less positive and nurturing.



Activity 6 – Words, tone, intonation and behaviour

Watch the **Bullying A Plant** video <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940672>

Facilitate a conversation about what the participants saw, heard and felt about the video. The below questions might help get the conversation started:

- How might this relate to parenting children?
- What might children 'hear' in our words/tone/actions?



Facilitator Conversation

What we know for all children is that within their earliest relationships they learn about themselves, others and the world around them. An infant achieves a sense of who they are through their primary caregiver. These early experiences become their internal working model – a template through which they store and refer to in order to understand future experiences. Their internal working model is like a set of rules stored in their brain that determine how they view themselves, others, relationships and the world more broadly. Trauma impacts children's sense of themselves, relationships and their world and their internal working model can be 'I am unlovable', 'I am unworthy', 'I am useless', etc.

The previous activity shows we need to be mindful of the words we use to verbally describe the children and their behaviours. This activity looks at children's internal understanding of themselves and the behaviours that may go along with that understanding.



Activity 7 – Who am I?

Watch the Kung Fu Panda video – **Who are you?**

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9085365/video/653940927>

Facilitate a conversation about what the participants saw, heard and felt about the video. The below questions might help get the conversation started:

- What stood out for you in this video?
- How might you change the internal working model for your child/ren?
- How can you support the child/ren in your care to be who they want to be?



PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support



Facilitator Conversation

Reflective activities using just a visual image can stimulate deeper thinking.



Activity 8 – Reflection

Distribute **HANDOUT - Visual Reflection: The two trees**. Ask participants what this picture represents to them about behaviour. You could use the following questions as prompts:

- How does this reflect behaviour?
- What is the protective response of the tree?



Facilitator Conversation

For some participants this session may have been challenging. To reassure participants this activity is designed to assist participants to be aware of the strengths each of their children possess, the strengths that have got them to where they are now.



Activity 9 – Kids Strengths

Before the session begins blu tack an “Angels” Card under each participant’s chair. Ask participants to collect their “Angels” card from under their chair. Ask them what this card represents in regard to their child/ren’s strengths and give them a few minutes to look at and reflect on their card.

Encourage participants to share with the group, a reflection that demonstrates the child’s strengths or to discuss their card in relation to their child’s strengths.

Remember it is ok if the participants do not want to share, they can just reflect for themselves.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1



Activity 10 – Reading stories to carers

Read Moody cow by K.L. MacLean



Session Wrap Up

Ask participants to reflect on messages from the session that were useful.

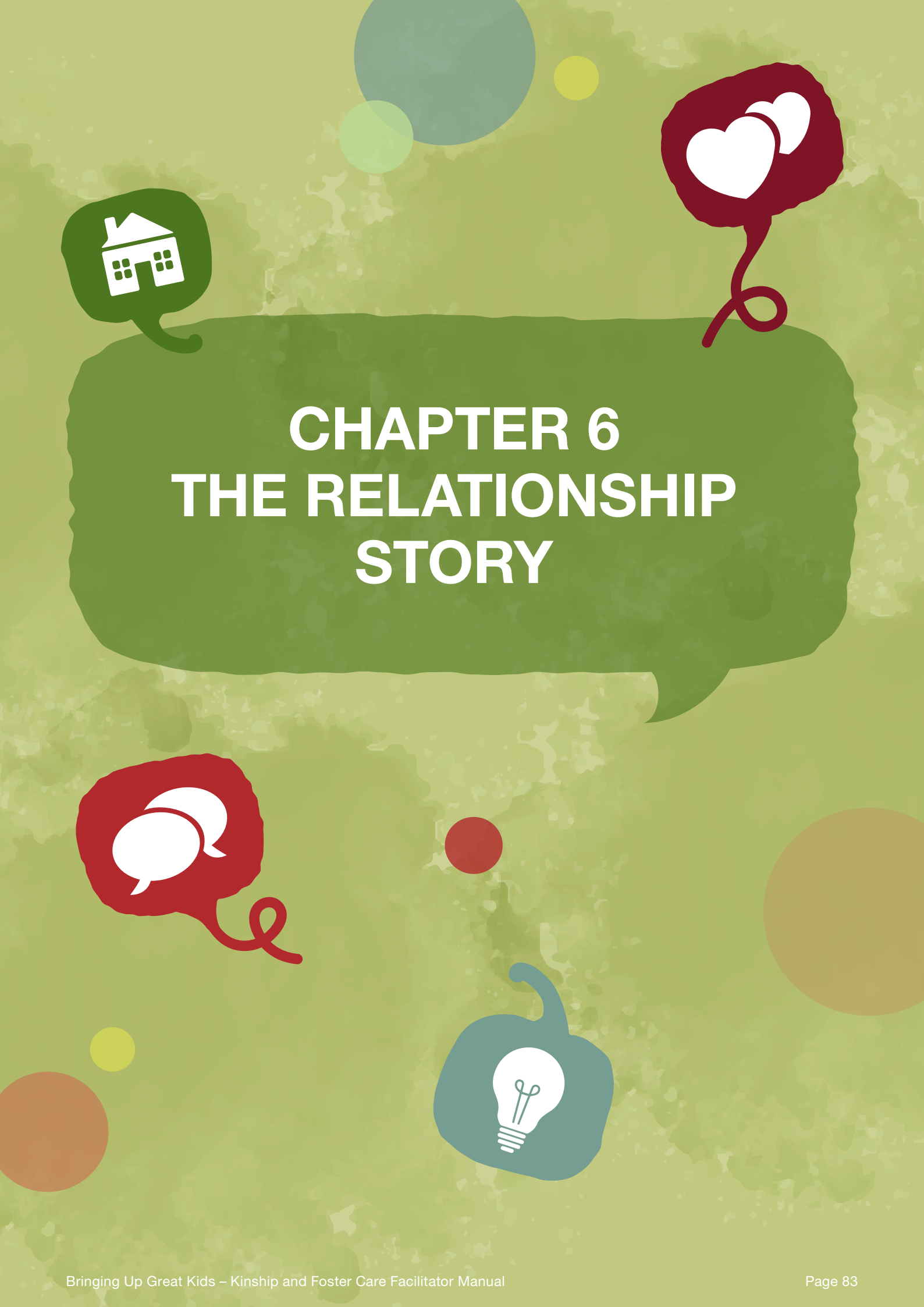
Participants can share these with the group or reflect on them for themselves.

Remind participants to:

- practice self care with partners/family/friends/children
- bring their handout folder to the next session

Farewell

Wish participants well until the group meets next.



CHAPTER 6 THE RELATIONSHIP STORY



Chapter Outline

This chapter focuses on the importance of relationships in the healing journey of children who have experienced trauma. This chapter encourages carers to draw on their personal strengths to acknowledge the challenges they have already overcome in the caring journey and to consider that there will be more challenges. Carers will be provided with the opportunity to identify accessible supports for when things get challenging. The chapter will invite carers to explore how they repair relationships after challenges not only with the children they care for but also their support network.

This session will also revisit earlier activities so carers can reflect on their journey through the program. This session will also include the opportunity for the celebration and acknowledgement of the carers' participation in the group and its conclusion and the opportunity for carers to provide feedback.

Key Messages

- **Carers have more strength than they realise.**
- **All carers need support sometimes**
- **Asking for help & support is a strength**
- **Identifying possible supports makes it easier to access them when necessary**
- **Ruptures in relationships is inevitable and repair is crucial**

Pre-session Reflective Activity for Facilitators

Consider your own experience of times where you felt isolated from support.

Take the time to consider how you will end the group in a way that supports carers to not feel alone as they continue their kinship and foster care journey. Particularly for the carers who may have limited support.

Consider how you will end the group journey with an acknowledgement and celebration of the amazing role that carers play in supporting healing in the lives of the children they care for.

How will you:

- Provide an environment that supports carers to feel nurtured as the program comes to an end?
- Celebrate the ending of the program while holding and acknowledging that the end will mean some carers may feel less supported?
- How can you be prepared to know where else carers may be able to access further support if they feel they need it?



Preparation and Set-up

- Have music playing as participants arrive (optional)
- Have refreshments prepared so that you can offer tea/coffee at least, on arrival.
- Have chairs arranged informally e.g., in a semi-circle/circle or provide couches and armchairs.
- Greet each participant on arrival. Offer a name tag and refreshments.

Resources



You will need:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Flipchart and textas
- Name tags and extra sticky labels
- Pens and textas, post It notes, Blu-tac, fun and positive stickers, glitter, tape and glue
- “Ups and Downs” cards (available from Innovative Resources, www.innovativeresources.org)
- “Strength” cards (available from Innovative Resources, www.innovativeresources.org)
- Pre-prepared large Tree of Life & symbols



For each participant, you will need:

- HANDOUT: Rings of Support
- HANDOUT: Rupture & Repair
- HANDOUT: Tree of life A2 Poster
- HANDOUT: Tree of life A3 Icon Sheet
- HANDOUT: What I admire and appreciate in you
- HANDOUT: Myself as a carer



Extra handouts offered from foundation BUGK:

- HANDOUT: I still love you
- HANDOUT: Time in vs Time out
- HANDOUT: Helping Children Manage Big Feelings & Repairing Relationships.
- HANDOUT: Being there for Children.



PART ONE – Welcome, Feedback and Overview

- **Acknowledgement of country**
- **Welcome the participants back to the group and invite them to share any feedback about the previous session. Invite any questions, concerns, or thoughts the participants might have.**

In previous sessions, we shared some of our feelings about being a kinship or foster carer, the ways that our family has changed, and looked at the messages from the past that influence our parenting. We also explored the biological parent's story and children's brain development and the effects of trauma. Last session we explored children's behaviour as a protective response to their lived experience.

This final session will focus on the relationship between the carer and the child and the strengths the carers possess.



Facilitator Conversation

The following activity provides participants with the opportunity to reconnect and reflect on positive/lovely interactions that occur within their relationship with their child amid the challenges they may be experiencing.



Activity 1 - Reconnection

In pairs share a lovely interaction/moment you have had during the week the child/children with another participant.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to facilitator conversation in Part 1 of Chapter 2



Activity 2 - Stop...Pause...Play...

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

OR

Take the group through the exercise again using the Handout (from chapter 2) as a reference if necessary. It is an exercise that participants 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!).

Address any comments or questions the group may have regarding the exercise.



Facilitator Conversation

Refer to Facilitator Conversation Chapter 1



Activity 3 - Deep Listening

Explain that one person in each pair will be given time to talk while their partner listens. Then the same amount of time is given to the listener when their roles are reversed. Emphasis that the role of the listener is just to listen, without making comments or suggestions. Today's topic is:

What reflections do you have on the program 'Bringing Up Great Kids in Kinship and Foster Care'?

Check in with the participants to see if they have used mindful listening and/or any other activity to look after themselves in the time since the last session.



PART TWO – Strengths, Community & Repair

In this section we will be acknowledging the strengths the participants bring to this journey of parenting the children in their care amid the challenges that may arise. It also offers the opportunity to acknowledge that all parents and carers need support from time to time and provide the participants with the opportunity to identify their support networks.

This section will build on chapter 5's conversation about behaviour. At times a caregiver will need to instil and uphold boundaries and respond to children when those boundaries are not maintained, when this happens a child may feel a sense of shame. This is a normal part of learning, which helps children to develop values of right and wrong. Importantly, in healthy carer/child relationships, the adult quickly reassures the child that it is their behaviour that is unacceptable, rather than the child himself.



Facilitator Conversation

The following activity supports participants to focus on their strengths as highly experienced people in parenting and managing their families. It acknowledges that the participants have likely faced challenges in their kinship/foster care journey thus far and will likely experience more throughout the journey.



Activity 4 - My Strengths

Lead the participants in a conversation around their strengths. Spread a range of “Strength” cards of your choice face-up on the table.

To support the participants in a conversation around their own strengths write the following statements on a whiteboard or flip chart:

- *I have survived and bounced back from tough times in my life because I have...*
- *The strengths I bring to kinship/foster caring are...*

You may wish to invite participants to share with the group, the strength card words they chose to represent themselves, but there is no need for participants to share the details of their ‘tough times’ with the group. Remind the group that as with all activities in this program, their participation is voluntary.



Facilitator Conversation

The following activities support participants to reflect on the supports available to them. Expanding on the previous conversations about their strengths, also acknowledge the challenge that is raising children, particularly those who have had traumatic/challenging experiences in their lives.

This activity normalises that all parents/carers need help and support at times, accessing support does not diminish our strengths or reflect poorly on our capabilities as a carer and identifying supports before we are in the moment of needing them will enable us to more readily access them.

There are two options for facilitators to choose from, option one may be more suited to kinship carers who may have less systematic supports available to them, while option two may be more suitable for foster carers who do have access to more professionals and systemic supports.



Activity 5 - It takes a forest

Option 1:

Refer participants back to the family forest activity in chapter 1 to consider and identify who within their family forest is available in various ways to provide support. They may choose to indicate whom they would access for support, prompt the participants to consider the various types of support. For example:

- Practical – school drop offs, babysitting, respite
- Emotional – debriefing, support, advice

Option 2:

Using **HANDOUT - Rings of Support** with the child in the centre, facilitators will support participants to reflect on the rings of support around the child, consider those closer to the child and those further away. Encourage them to also reflect on who is within their family that may be included as well as the professional supports they have access to. Prompt the participants to consider the various types of support. For example:

- Professionals
 - Case managers
 - Child protection
 - Health professionals
 - Respite carers
 - Therapist
 - Mentor
 - School
- Family and friends
- Practical – school drop offs, babysitting, respite
- Emotional – debriefing, support, advice



Facilitator Conversation

This conversation builds on the “Good Enough Parenting” (work of Ed. Tronick) activity from chapter 4 in Foundation BUGK, facilitators may choose to draw on their knowledge from Foundation BUGK to support this conversation. This activity is just a conversation with handouts as a take home resource.

Acknowledge and reassure participants that there will times in their relationship with the child/children that are less than perfect, where the child/children push the boundaries, or the participant has responded in a way that is not how they are wanting to parent. Some of these moments may be smaller, quickly, and easily repaired before they escalate any further, like the bending of a stem or branch that weakens placing it at risk of breaking off, but with support can be mended and supported to continue to grow.

Other moments will be more significant with a deeper rupture that takes more intentional work and repair to foster new growth, picture a stem or branch breaking off, needing more nurture and support to enable it to regraft back to the original plant or to be propagated, to form its own roots before being planted again.

In early relationships where adults are abusive and neglectful of children, there is no repair after disconnections in the parent/child relationship, and young children are left to cope with the feeling of shame on their own. Without help from sensitive, attuned adults, to integrate the experience, the child comes to believe they are a bad person who is not good enough.



Activity 6 - Rupture & Repair

Distribute **HANDOUT – Rupture & Repair** in relationships to provide a visual reference of the above conversation.

Repeated experience of disconnection without repair, leaves children anticipating rejection. Common beliefs that these children have include:

- ‘I don’t deserve to be loved.’
- ‘I will only be loved if I am good all the time.’
- ‘I can’t trust adults to help me.’
- ‘I have to do everything myself.’

With beliefs such as these, many children display particular protective responses in an effort to feel safe, while trying to be independent at a stage when they still need to depend on adults, this can be frightening. Acknowledge with the participants, that it can be easy to slip into thinking that after X number of years in the placement the children will have healed from their early experiences or perhaps feeling that they came into kinship/foster care so early that its expected there will be less of an impact. Share with the participants that some plants need ongoing watering and fertilising before they begin to sprout, 5 years for Chinese bamboo tree or 6-8 weeks for an avocado seed before they sprout. Similarly, it is ongoing repeated experiences of nurture and care that supports these children to heal.



Facilitators may choose to support conversation with the below prompts.

- What does rupture look like in the relationship between you and the child you care for?
- How do you currently facilitate repair after a rupture?
- Knowing now what we have discussed in all the sessions, how might you like to facilitate repair going forward?

Acknowledge with participants that these ruptures can also potentially occur within any of the relationships they have with the supports they have - friends, family and professionals. It remains just as important for these relationships to be repaired not only for the impact they can have on the support available but also the child/children will feel the impact of strain in the relationships around them.

Facilitators may choose to provide the following handouts from Foundation BUGK (provided in the pack) - for participants to take home.

- HANDOUT: I still love you
- HANDOUT: Time in vs Time out
- HANDOUT: Helping Children Manage Big Feelings & Repairing Relationships.
- HANDOUT: Being there for Children.



Facilitator Conversation

This activity is an opportunity for participants to review what has been covered during the 'BUGK in Kinship and Foster Care' program, reviewing different strengths, challenges, and the wider picture of caring for children in kinship or foster care. This activity could be completed as a group on one large tree or individually on a smaller tree to take home or even do at home with the family on completion of the group.

The below table is a guide for the facilitator to support the participants to make their own meaning of the symbols. The first four symbols are provided in the handout to be cut out and used to complete the poster, the following six components are already part of the tree. Participants can write what each of the symbols mean to them either on the poster or on the label they place on the tree.

Chapter 6 – The Relationship Story



Tree	The Carer	The Child	The Family
 Sun	Culture	Culture	Culture
 Storms	Challenges they are facing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviours • Support 	Trauma experiences	Challenges, repair rupture and repair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviours • Trauma • Dynamic
 Wind	Rhythm, connection, Not out of control.	Rhythm, routine, rituals	Gentle flow of the family Customs, rituals, traditions?
 Cloud	Emotions	Emotions	Emotions
 Earth	What has shaped the carers parenting	The nurture the carers provide	What has shaped the family
 Trunk	Carer's strengths	Child's strengths	Family strengths
 Roots	Beliefs and values	Child's feelings/ needs	What keeps the family connected
 Leaves	Carers hopes and dreams	Childs hopes and dreams	Collective hopes and dreams
 Fruit	Change, success, growth	Change, success, growth	Change, success, growth
 Tree House	Curiosity	What helps the child feel safe	Positive memories and experiences as a family



Activity 5 - Tree of Life

Facilitators have several choices in this activity. Below are two possible options to choose from, facilitators may also choose to guide participants through the activity stepping them from symbol to symbol, or allow the group to guide itself.

Option 1 – Individually

Provide participants with the **HANDOUT - Tree of life** and facilitate a quiet reflective space for them to complete and then invite sharing if it feels appropriate.

Option 2 – Group

Display the outline of the pre-prepared large tree, guide the participants through the process allowing the opportunity to discuss each area of the tree as they complete.

Facilitators also have the option to invite participants to complete the activity with the tree representing themselves as the carer, the child or the family, for easy reference, the table above provides suggestions as to what each symbol may represent.

This activity needs to end on hope and acknowledgement.



PART THREE – Mindfulness, Self-Care and Support



Facilitator Conversation

This reflection offers the opportunity for participants, while acknowledging there are very real challenges, to look below the surface of the challenges they are experiencing with different people. To shift the focus just slightly to also acknowledge the strengths, qualities and contributions various people bring to their journey of raising a child through foster/kinship care. Perhaps participants may think back to when they completed this activity in the first session and notice if their understanding of each person they wrote down then has changed now in the last session.



Activity 8 – What I admire and appreciate in you

Distribute **HANDOUT - What I admire and appreciate in you.**

Write one kind, nice, respectful or loving thing about each person.

It is ok if participants are not be able to write something against each name on the list at this point.

Look back on what was written on this handout in chapter 1 – reflect on any differences and which ones have remained the same.



Facilitator Conversation

Remind kinship and foster carers that when they reflect on their capacities in parenting in a positive way they shed light on strengths that may have been hidden. This activity is an opportunity for this kind of self-compassion.



Activity 9 - Myself as a carer

Distribute the **HANDOUT - Myself as a Carer** and using pens, stickers, etc. ask the participants to fill the frame with words, thoughts and the decorations that reflects the amazing carer they are.



Evaluation

Offer the “Ups and Downs” cards again – are they choosing a different card to the first session? Are they thinking differently about themselves as kinship/foster carers than they did in the first session?

Possible Evaluation as per group or organisations requirements.

Congratulate the participants on completing the program and thank them for their generosity in sharing their stories and how their input has helped shape the group.

Session Wrap Up

Ask participants to reflect on messages from the session that were useful.

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

Remind participants to:

- continue nurturing the relationships with their children
- continue to practice Deep Listening with partners/family/friends/children
- identify and access support when necessary
- continue to practice Stop...Pause...Play
- continue to look after themselves and practice self-care

Conclusion

Time to Celebrate!!

THANK YOU

References



- Atkinson, Judy, (2017), *The value of deep listening – The Aboriginal gift to the nation*, TEDx Sydney
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (2015) *A Review of Kinship Carer Surveys: The Cinderella of the care system?*
- Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2020-21 *Child Protection Report* Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Bapcare (2017) *'It's been an absolute nightmare'* Family violence in kinship care.
- Carer Census Data of Victoria (2021), *Strong Carers, stronger children – Victorian Carer Strategy: Findings of the Home-based carer census*
- Commission for Children and Young People, *'In our own words': Systemic inquiry into the lived experience of children and young people in the Victorian out-of-home care system* (Melbourne: Commission for Children and Young People, 2019).
- Community Affairs References Committee: *Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2014, ISBN 978-1-76010-092-6)
- Dr Meredith Kiraly, Senior Research Fellow, University of Melbourne, ACWA project *Kinship care: Making it a National Issue (2018) & Beyond poverty and disadvantage – Achieving wellbeing for all Australian children in kinship care (2019)*
- Dr Russell Harris, Medical Practitioner and Psychotherapist, (2006), *Embracing your demons: an overview of acceptance and commitment therapy*, Psychotherapy in Australia, Vol 12 No 4
- Hunter, C., Meredith, V. (2014). *The utility of a reflective parenting program for parents with complex needs: An evaluation of Bringing Up Great Kids*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon, (1994), *Wherever you go, There you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*, Hachette Books
- Victorian Ombudsman 2010, *Own motion investigation into Child Protection: out of home care*, State of Victoria, Melbourne.



Web links

<https://www.barnardos.org.au/foster-care-and-open-adoption/>

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2019-20/summary>

<http://www.danielhughes.org/p.a.c.e..html>

Gabor Mate – Trauma is not what happens to you, it is what happens inside you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmJOuTAK09g>

Children's Books

Doerrfeld, C., 2018, *The Rabbit Listened*, Penguin Young Readers Group

Kane, K., 2015, *Family Forest*, Hardy Grant Publishing

MacLean, K L (2009) *Moody Cow Meditates*, Wisdom Publications (MA)

Shirvington, J., 2020, *Just the way we are*, ABC Books

Ubuntu in One upon a parent, Australian Childhood Foundation (part of the training pack)

Van Sambeek L., Burarrwanga C., 2017, *The Life of Tree*, metaphorically speaking



Contact us

PO Box 3335, Richmond Vic 3121

Phone 1300 381 581

info@bringingupgreatkids.org

bringingupgreatkids.org

