



## Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Story

*"Given the impact of parenting on child outcomes it is fair to say that parenting is an issue of public health"*

### PROJECT BACKGROUND

- The Engaging Families in the ECD Story is a national project supported and funded by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC).
- The project supports the reform priority under the National Early Childhood Development Strategy to engage parents and the community in understanding the importance of early childhood.

### PROJECT RATIONALE

The initiative is founded on two critical assumptions for which there is compelling evidence:

- Parenting matters: parents are the first and primary educators of children
- Brain development in the prenatal period and early years affects physical and mental health and learning in childhood and adult life.

### PROJECT AIMS

Stage 1 of the project identifies key messages from the neuroscience for parenting and the most effective means of providing information to parents.

- Review of the neuroscience evidence base
- Review of existing parenting initiatives
- National parent focus groups and telephone survey
- Final report.

### PROJECT FINDINGS

- Almost 1 in 5 parents thought that parents cannot make much difference to how a child's brain develops
- 126 parenting initiatives – 98 different messages
- 70% of initiatives were targeting parents who met specific requirements.
- Friends and other parents were one of the most used and least criticised sources of useful information.

### KEY MESSAGES IDENTIFIED

- The first five years last a lifetime
- Good nutrition, health, and exercise are critical
- Children are born ready to learn
- The best learning happens in nurturing relationships
- The brain develops through use
- Children's wellbeing is critical to brain development and learning
- Children learn through being engaged and doing
- Children learn from watching and copying
- Children's self-control is critical for learning, responsibility and relationships
- Children learn language by listening to it and using it
- Children are born ready to use and learn mathematics.

## ENGAGING FAMILIES STORY Stage 2

South Australia is leading stage 2 that includes:

- Building an alliance of interested organisations/corporations to develop a long term, sustainable **social marketing campaign** to share the key early childhood messages with the community as identified in stage 1 of the project
- Trialling and refining strategies to engage parents including grandparents as carers, Aboriginal families and fathers
- Progressing recommendations 1a to 1d identified in stage 1 of the project, particularly with regard to the development of an **ECD Toolkit for practitioners working with families**.

## ENGAGING FAMILIES STORY Stage 2

National Steering Group with representatives from:

- Early Childhood Development Working Group (ECDWG)
- Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC)
- Community and Disability Services Ministers Advisory Council (CDSMAC)
- Child Health and Wellbeing Subcommittee (CHWS).

DEEWR have been strong supporters of the project and provided extra hours for ARACY to work on the project via their funding agreement.

## ECD TOOLKIT for practitioners working with families

- The aim of the Toolkit is to share the early childhood development story in a consistent and compelling way with parents and the community.
- We can achieve this by commencing from the same starting point, using a common language, and providing consistent messages about the early years regardless of what service, support or information parents access.

## ECD PARENTING TOOLKIT

- ECD definition and ECD conceptual foundation
- Principles
  - **Children are at the Centre:** Brain development, Rights of the Child, Key messages and behaviours
  - **Parenting is important:** Parenting styles, parenting self-efficacy, parent adaptability
  - **Communities support families:** Engagement models & practice, engagement diversity
  - **Professionals are partners:** Strengths based approach, Partnership model, Adult learning methodologies
- Strategic planning and evaluation tips
- Self reflection

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

### Over all aim

- To improve the wellbeing and development of children, particularly aged 0-5
- To facilitate a social environment more conducive to children's wellbeing and development

### Overall objective

- To increase the frequency of parental behaviours that are conducive to positive child development & wellbeing

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

The media strategy consists of the following activities:

- Media approach – television and print
- Website and mobile applications
- Social media
- Events
- Collateral, including signage, point of sale, collateral distribution
- Public relations
- Promotions
- Service agency engagement.

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

### Expert reference group

- Jane Caro - Jara Consulting
- Prof Anne Sanson - Uni of Melbourne
- Dr Richard Fletcher - University of Newcastle
- Assoc Prof Roz Walker - TICHHR
- David Zarb - Playgroup WA
- Michael Moore - Public Health Association of Australia
- Prof Elizabeth Waters - University of Melbourne
- Dr Lisa Studdert - Australian National Preventative Health Agency
- Prof Sven Silburn - Menzies School of Health Research
- Dawson Ruhl - Child Australia
- Prof Frank Oberklaid - Centre for Community Child Health
- Prof Rob Donovan - Curtin University
- Warren Cann - Parenting Research Centre
- Donna Van Bueren - TNS
- Karen Miller - TNS
- Jodie Benveniste - Parent Wellbeing

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

### Methodology

- **Desk research** and stakeholder consultation: identifying existing information on what shapes **parenting behaviours**, identification of existing strategies similar to the proposed.
- Developmental quantitative research: belief diagnosis, behavioural segmentation – exploring and enumerating variation in attitudes & behaviours re: parenting for baseline plus to inform qualitative stage, and using Sheth-Frazier attitude/behaviour segmentation for **1,000 parents**.
- Qualitative developmental research: including **25 in-depth interviews**, online discussion with parents and concept development & testing consisting of **eight discussion groups**.
- **Strategy development:** including communications strategy (position, channels, language etc.), identifying how to engage service & build coalition with other agencies, identification of the evaluation strategy, etc.

Figure 7: Grouping the eleven child development statements into behaviours

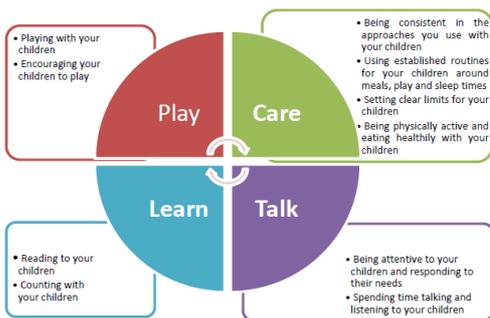
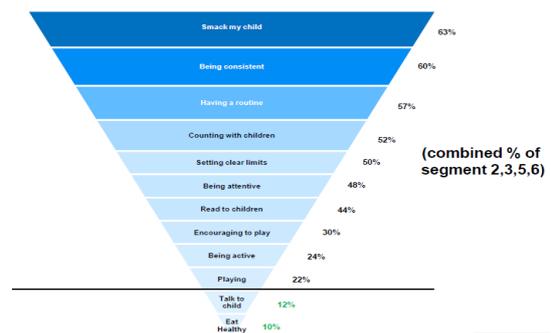


Figure 4: Compliance with 'Desired' parenting behaviours (Ranked by low-medium performing the behaviour, favourable attitude)



## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

The neuroscience "truths" don't work as stand-alone messages

Some are misunderstood or confusing:

- The first 5 years last a lifetime

Some are accepted, but lacked impact or did not motivate or activate:

- Children are born ready to learn
- The best learning happens in nurturing relationships
- Good nutrition, health and exercise are critical
- Brain develops through use
- Children learn through being engaged and doing
- Children learn from watching and copying
- Children learn language by listening to it and using it

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

Some were unconvincing, or were rejected outright:

- Children's wellbeing is critical to brain development
- Children's self-control is critical for learning, responsibility and relationships
- Children are born ready to use and learn maths

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

### What parents think....Implications for the campaign

- Children develop according to milestones not years
- All children are different – there is not one solution for all situations
- ...about how they were parented – mostly positively, but sometimes negatively; That their parents may have the answer

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

### What parents think....Implications for the campaign

- Parents are well intentioned, but many have an underlying sense of guilt about not doing enough of the “right thing”
- They don’t like to be judged, but still find themselves doing it
- That other parents have lots of good ideas
- They are not in the market for information or advice until they have an “issue”

The five propositions tested are presented below.

Figure 10: Propositions presented in research

Validation of parents role (Parenting Matters)	Self efficacy	Empathy	Aspiration & Incentive	New information (Brain story)
The early years 0-5 are extremely important for how well your child does in life. What you do as a parent in the first five years makes a big difference. This is because parenting is the primary influence on children's development. What you do as a parent can have a really positive outcome for your child/children. Parents are so important because they make the difference as to how well children develop and grow up.	It's possible for parents to make a really big difference in how well children do in life. There's lots of different things parents can do to help their children develop. Every child is different, but there are some common things all parents can do to help their children develop...	Every parent can struggle at times with bringing up their kids. Children's needs are constantly changing. Parents doing well learn as they go. Every step of the way. Every parent wishes their child was born with a socket or manual. But parenting is not like that, it's millions of decisions that you make from birth onwards. Great parents do particular things with their children, from birth onwards. If you do these things most of the time, your child will have the best possible start in life	Every parent wants what's best for their child, and every parent wants to give their child the best start in life. Parents all over Australia have one thing in common, they want to help their child achieve his or her potential. For the best start in life, children need parents to do certain things, from birth. There is no single way to be a parent, but to help children be the best they can be, here's how some parents have tackled it. Helping your child to reach his or her potential is the greatest gift you can give them.	Brain story aimed to present new information to parents regarding the impact of early years brain development on children's outcomes and the critical role that parenting plays in this. Two executions were presented for this option: • Rational appeal 'brain story' • Scientific 'brain story'

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

### Avoid

- Generalising parents
- Specific behaviours
- Any hint of condescending language or tone
- Judgement (positive or negative)

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

### What works?

- Empathy and realism
- Control and choice
- Holistic nature of children’s development
- Positive and hopeful tone
- Rational brain story

## SOCIAL MARKETING PLAN

### RECOMMENDATION

- Different behaviours associated with optimum parenting are promoted with an overarching rational style ‘brain story’.
- Engage parents with the campaign (enhancing brain development) while giving them practical, behavioural-based activities to do.

Figure 16: Target audiences

Parents and primary carers of children aged 0-5	• Improve awareness and belief towards each of the eleven key behaviours to increase actual compliance with behaviours
Grandparents and other carers	• Improve awareness and belief towards behaviours so Grandparents and other carers can both convey correct information to parents and support parents in their parenting choices
Parents of older children	• Improve awareness and belief of key behaviours so these parents become advocates of the behaviours
Practitioners working with children	• Improve awareness and belief of key behaviours so practitioners are conveying consistent messages to parents
Young adults considering a family	• Improve awareness and belief of key behaviours longer term so compliance with behaviours happens early
Whole of population	• Improve awareness and belief of key behaviours so parents are supported in their choices.

## WHAT'S NEXT

- BCM developed a number of concepts for consideration
- The concepts need further testing with families
- Pilot the campaign for two years before full implementation
- The Social Marketing Campaign has been submitted for endorsement to the various ministerial committees.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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