

Starting out  
Being prepared  
How your baby develops

Session 2 - Parenting  
Travelling together  
Issues for single parents  
Parenting as a team (including engaging fathers)

Session 3 - The First Three Years  
What children need in the first years  
Setting boundaries for your children  
Anger management  
Anxiety & fear

Session 4 - Relationships  
Relating with your partner  
Attitude check  
Tips for healthy relationships

Session 5 - Conflict  
Working together  
Understanding conflict  
Resolving conflict through negotiation

Resources  
Where to find support  
Useful websites  
Useful phone numbers

A Parenting Together® booklet and DVD has also been developed using the same program context and practice ingredients for use in delivery of the training. The booklet and DVD combo illustrates key concepts such as being prepared for baby, what children need in the first years, child development, setting boundaries, issues for single parents, parenting as a team, mindful parenting, working together, understanding and resolving conflict. It also includes a range of resources, useful websites and contact phone numbers.

## Evaluation

Evaluation of courses with a variety of groups including NESB cultural groups, participants referred by agencies and more generic groups have been conducted using pre and post tests and feedback questionnaires. With cultural groups a basic and more complex self efficacy questionnaire has been developed and used. The feedback received has demonstrated that parents felt that they had an improved understanding of their child's behaviour and how to manage this behaviour systematically. Cultural groups have found it particularly helpful in relation to issues around discipline, schooling/education transitioning and family wellbeing.

## Program Outcomes

Parenting Together® is an interactive preventative educational programme which aims to improve family life by changing parental child-rearing attitudes and practices – primarily by promoting and increasing awareness of the positive impact of the following in a child's emotional and social well-being:

- Understanding a child's needs
- Encouraging parents to be mindful and respectful in their parenting to provide a secure base for their child's exploration
- Having a unified and consistent parental approach
- Creating improved relationship and bond between parents and children/babies
- Understanding how to resolve conflict

The course also aims to link participants with available resources and support networks.

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## Program Evaluation

# About Parenting Together®

## Program Objectives

The objectives of Parenting Together® are in line with the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* and include but are not limited to:

- Promoting that families function well in nurturing and safe environments
- Providing support for parents to care for their children before and after birth and through the early years
- Providing support for parents to provide children with secure attachment, consistent discipline and quality environments that are stable, positive, stimulating, safe and secure

## Program Principles

Parenting Together® is modelled on the following principles:

The birth of a child can put extreme pressure on relationships

- Early intervention can prevent family breakdown.
- Preparing for relationships should start as early as possible and continue throughout life. Co-Parenting is beneficial in child development:
- Healthy father involvement can result in improved outcomes for children.
- Teamwork in parenting results in improvement in child behaviour.
- Parental unity provides a secure base which leads to improved developmental outcomes.
- Getting couples to work together in a group setting on parenting and relationship issues is very challenging and not easily achieved.
- The course is most effective when attended as a couple. Building/maintaining healthy family relationships is essential:
- Families want relationships to last for life but all relationships are demanding and require work.
- Conflict resolution may lead to less vulnerability to poor social and emotional health outcomes. Engaging methods of course delivery is required for parents:
- Skills transfer can be optimised by using culturally relevant platforms, language and media. There needs to be a significant level of trust in the facilitators on the part of those potentially becoming involved. New participants are more easily engaged when at least one partner has an established connection with the facilitator such as having previously attended a preliminary course such as Circle of Security Parenting or Bringing up Great Kids.

## Client Focus

The course is available to all parents/to-be parents desiring to better their parenting skills. It has also been adapted for CALD communities.

Parenting Education has been identified as a need for CALD groups through the development of Salisbury Communities for Children partnerships. These groups are referred via CALD service providers and community leaders, such as leaders of faith communities.

Existing clients of Salisbury Communities for Children are informed of the Parenting Together® courses by FamilyZone- Ingle Farm Hub. This is done by way of leaflets, posters, website, social media (facebook), in addition to a quarterly newsletter sent to over 1500 families by either mail or email.

Clients are also referred through collaborating partners/networks.

## Pathways to Parenting Together

There are a number of pathways which may potentially lead to participation in a Parenting Together course.

There are now quite a number of evidence-based parenting resources/ courses that are on offer. We usually recommend that in the first one thousand days of the life of their child parents get a good foundational understanding of attachment, healthy child development and communicating with baby provided by resources such as Circle of Security Parenting. Beyond that



*Parenting Together* is good follow up training as children develop from early childhood through to adolescence. It is particularly helpful for parents prepared to prioritise working together in a manner that has significant benefits for their children’s wellbeing and development.

Parents who are participating via this pathway will be able to engage most effectively with the core skills developed in this program as they are likely have more developed communication skills etc.

Parents who are new arrivals face many challenges in adapting to western culture and the generation gap is exacerbated by their children’s ability to learn a new language much faster than them. The usual expertise of children at playing parents off against each other becomes even more difficult to manage in this context. Parenting Together in a New Land has been adapted especially for new arrivals parents. The use of a translator will be needed where English proficiency is very low. Presenters will need some skills in working with families from Non- English speaking backgrounds. Some basic training is provided.

NESB participants will most likely need additional practice in using newly acquired skills and resources to help them retain their learnings from the course. A small purse-sized card listing the essential skills taught in the course has been developed to aid this process. Follow up sessions would also be valuable.

Agencies may refer parents to attend a course such as Parenting Together. In this case facilitators will need to assess the level of parenting and communication skills of participants and make appropriate adaptations to the material presented. For example they may need to first spend considerable time on communication skills which are vital for parents who want to work together for the healthy development of their children. In some cases this may significantly limit the time available to focus on other key elements of the course. Parents may opt to attend a second or extended course to cover the full content.

There will need to be considerable adaptation of the course for participants who arrive via this pathway. Most likely a significant amount of time will need to be spent on listening skills which will probably become apparent in the first session. In this case, the tips on resolving conflict through negotiation on pages 39-41 of the booklet and p 18 of the course facilitator guide would best be taught and practiced in the initial sessions. Facilitators may need to refer participants with more intense issues such as anger management and training in trauma informed practice in becoming a supportive partner, covered in the fourth session, to professional counselling or another specialist support group.

## Course content

Parenting Together is particularly appropriate for parents who are actively looking to improve their skills and prepared to prioritise working together towards nurturing their children and helping them establish healthy boundaries. The key elements in this course can also work with parent and child, parent, teacher and child, grandparent, parent and child, parent, carer and child etc. The course materials, especially the companion booklet, cover a range of issues, which may or may not be included in the course. There are some core skills which are essential elements of the course best developed through practising the role plays during the course and applying them at home.

## Course adaptation

We recommend that facilitators find out what participants are expecting to gain from the course during the first session. Some of this can be determined from the pre-test however it is best to ask the group and individuals, in private if appropriate, and record the responses. This will be most useful in determining how the content is to be adapted to meet the expectations/ needs of participants.

## Cultural adaption

There are some very marked differences in approaches to parenting with people from different cultural backgrounds. In recent times we have delivered the course with culture specific groups of Caucasian, Burmese, Bhutanese, Congolese and Afghani families. There are some common threads to the animated conversations that have been generated during these courses.

Clearly child discipline ranks as the number one issue. Each of these cultures has a much stronger emphasis on physical correction and raised voices, and in some cultures some from a very early age. This highlights the need to include information from neuroscience regarding age-appropriate discipline and the impact of harsh parenting on child development. There are some communication challenges involved with this as it is a new concept to many from diverse cultural backgrounds. It also highlights the need to respond to question which inevitably follows. What can we do? (If we can’t spank and raise our voices) The skills of being able to use the question ‘What are we going to do about it?’ in place of the power struggles, are not easily

learned and much practice in role playing is needed. Cards translating the LABREC acronym into first languages are also useful. In some cultures this approach also brings with it the added complication of having large extended families with grandparents, uncles and aunties also being part of the ‘we’. This is certainly the case among Bhutanese and also the Africans who well know it takes a village to raise a child. As well as a conversation between parent and child, parent and parent, parents and child, parent and teacher, something more of an extended family conference may be more useful.

Some cultural groups such as the Afghanis have been prevented from becoming literate even in their own language by oppressive regimes. For these people understanding concepts other than smacking and yelling will require extra time and patience from group facilitators to explain the concepts and they will need to keep their language as uncomplicated as possible. Use of the more complex self-efficacy pre and post tests will be extremely challenging with such groups and the simplified version would be more appropriate. Alternatively we do well to continue to make further adaptations as we become more familiar in working with specific differences in parenting of different cultural groups.

## Referrals

There may be some issues emerging that may require referral to professionals in the field. It is important that presenters have a range of contacts, preferably known to them in order to facilitate ‘warm referrals’ where needed. If not there is a range of websites and phone numbers of key agencies at the back of the booklet. It would be good to draw attention to these early in the course. and provide some background about particular contacts you recommend. This may need to be supplemented by local knowledge of professional support available. Local contacts can be added to page 45 of the booklet.

It would also be good to also offer some pointers to negotiating the wide range of online content available and draw attention to relevant websites etc during the course.

## Program Delivery

The Parenting Together® course is delivered by trained facilitators with experience and/or qualifications in Social Work, Relationship Education or Family Support Work. CALD clients are supported by a culturally competent team using methods that facilitate the training, such as the use of a translator.

A Facilitator Guide has also been developed. The 54 page manual offers research findings, a seven step skillset relating to partners working together to optimise nurture and development of their children, skills training in partner relationship issues, trauma informed practice, tips on resolving conflict though negotiation and a structured Parenting Together® course option. The Facilitator’s Guide also includes suggestions for presenting the course to multicultural groups. See attachment.

The facilitator is required to customise the Parenting Together® course to the specific requirements of the attendees by taking to account the feedback received at an initial survey completed by course attendees. This survey gives attendees an opportunity to provide comments on areas which they are particularly interested in and/or requiring support. The content detail delivered in each area is guided by this. The training is delivered over 5 sessions (usually over a 5 week period), with each session having a duration of 1.5 to 2 hrs. This gives parents the opportunity to practise skills which are covered in the course and also raise any concerns/issues they have come across for further group discussion/training at the weekly sessions, prior to completion of the course.

The structured program includes core sections including:

- The importance of the early years for brain development as it relates to social and emotional learning and the role of parents in this.

- A six step process that facilitates good practice in co-parenting including listening, agreeing together, setting boundaries and rules, emotional self-regulation in the process of doing this, choices and consequences.

Options that can be tailored in depending on the needs of the group include:

- Partner relationship issues

- Blended families

- Trauma informed practice

- A process for resolving conflict through negotiation

The training developed includes discussion/education in trauma informed practice and the following areas:

- Session 1 - Changes-Dealing with the birth of a child