











# smalltalk is supported by the Victorian Government

smalltalk smalltalk@parentingrc.org.au www.smalltalk.net.au

Parenting Research Centre Level 5, 232 Victoria Parade East Melbourne, Vic, 3002

www.parentingrc.org.au

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#### INTRODUCTION

Parents are children's first and most enduring teachers and a home environment that is warm and supportive, stimulating, and rich in conversation and written language, promotes children's social and emotional development and communication skills. It also helps to prepare them for school. *Smalltalk* supports parents to provide a home environment that is high in warmth, language and in tune with children's needs.

Smalltalk is a set of evidence-based strategies that are shared with parents in a way that recognises that parents are the experts on their children, and recognises the current positive efforts parents are making towards their child's development. The smalltalk strategies are shared with parents during a Supported Playgroup and/or when visiting the family home. Smalltalk is for parents with children aged from birth up to school age who may benefit from extra ideas about how to use everyday opportunities and activities to enhance their child's early literacy and learning in the home.

Smalltalk was developed with input from families, facilitators, coordinators and researchers. Between 2009 and 2012, over 2200 Australian families participated in a large-scale study resulting in support to expand the use of the *smalltalk* program. At the heart of *smalltalk*, is a set of evidence-base strategies which enhance the efforts parents are making to positive child development.

#### **USING THIS MANUAL**

This manual has been developed as a resource to facilitators and supervisors. Prior to sharing *smalltalk* with families, facilitators are required to complete the *smalltalk* e-learning modules and to participate in a skill development workshop. Please contact the Parenting Research Centre for further information on training opportunities.

In developing *smalltalk*, we recognise the expertise and strengths that facilitators have in their work with families. Facilitators and supervisors are encouraged to use their professional knowledge and judgement to apply *smalltalk* in the context of their work to achieve positive outcomes with the families with whom they work. Sharing the *smalltalk* strategies and encouraging families to practice the strategies in their home involves knowledge of the *smalltalk* model as well as the 'how' of the *smalltalk* approach.

The manual comes in sections: facilitator manual, facilitator resources and parent resources. The facilitator manual starts with the theoretical base for *smalltalk*, the *smalltalk* model, the *smalltalk* approach of working in partnership with parents and how to share the *smalltalk* strategies with parents in group and via home-coaching.

The facilitator resources are intended to provide guidance to facilitators in their work with parents. This includes guides for facilitators as well as tools to share with families. The parent resource section is an example of the range of resources available to share with parents.

A note on language for the purpose of this manual and the *smalltalk* resources. By parent, we mean any individual, whether biologically related to a child or not, who performs the tasks and responsibilities society assigns to parents. This includes mothers, fathers, grandparents and other carers. We use the term 'parent' for efficiency.

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# **Early Home Learning Study**

# A model for enhancing home learning







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**Authors** | This document was developed by the Parenting Research Centre in association with Professor Donna Berthelsen

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Parenting Research Centre Level 5, 232 Victoria Parade East Melbourne, Vic, 3002

Phone: 03 8660 3500

Email: info@parentingrc.org.au

Web: www.parentingrc.org.au

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# WHAT'S IN THIS SECTION

This section presents a detailed analysis of the two core components of *smalltalk* and the Early Home Learning Study – *Quality Everyday Interactions* and a *Stimulating Environment*. The program is shaped by the interests and needs of children at home and in playgroups as well as how to support parents to develop confidence in their own parenting abilities.

Information on the early development of young children is presented in this section. This is followed a detailed analysis of the core components of the program for *Quality Everyday Interactions* and *Stimulating Environment*.

# CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FROM BIRTH TO THREE

In the period birth to three years, children are active learners. There is a relatively rapid development of children's physical and motor development. As children increase their mobility, they have the freedom to move and explore their environments. Children's capacity for communication also rapidly increases and they learn to express their needs, pleasures, and frustrations with those around them.

Children's early learning and development – physical and motor; thinking and language; social and emotional development are inseparable processes. Infants are especially interested in other people and in communicating with them using eye contact, crying, cooing and gurgling to have 'conversations'. Toddlers are sociable and curious individuals. They are also explorers as their motor skills develop and their mobility increases. Infants and toddlers develop their competence in communicating through having frequent, enjoyable interactions with others in familiar contexts in which they feel safe and secure.

Adults play a critical role in supporting young children's learning. When adults are attuned to children's feelings and children's communicative efforts, children are receptive and eager learning partners. Children learn more when activities are meaningful to them and applicable to their world. The role of adults is to be proactive and responsive in teaching children about the world through quality interactions.

# Adults at home and in playgroups can:

- Model appropriate language and actions;
- Use words to describe what the child is doing; even for young infants this is important.
- Teach children in simple instructive ways that extend and elaborate children's ideas;
- Show interest, responsiveness, and approval of a child's interests and curiosity about the world.

#### LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE - A DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCE

The key focus of the *Early Home Learning Program* is on young children's language development. Language is a magical skill for young children. Using oral language opens up new worlds of thinking, imagining, self-expression, and capabilities for social interactions. It allows children to make choices, to make friends and influence people in ways they were not able to do as infants. It adds a new and powerful dimension to their ability to connect with the world. Children can express their needs in words, exchange ideas, describe their feelings, and make conversational connections with others.

Infants communicate from birth. They use sounds, facial expressions, and body movements. Infants' communication repertoire increases when adults recognise and respond to children's communicative efforts. Consequently, infants learn to tell others about what they need or want. Within 3-4 months, infants realise that when they make sounds, people respond. Generally, from six months of age, babies begin to babble in the language of their parents and other caregivers.

While every child develops differently in learning to communicate with others; nevertheless, there are common sequences in young children's development as children learn to understand others (receptive language) and communicate with others (expressive language). For example:

- **By 6 months**, infants can relate to significant others with real joy; smile often while others play with them; and coo and babble when happy;
- **By 9 months**, children begin to take turns in interactions with others, exchange back-and-forth smiles, sounds and gestures, give and take, reach for objects of interest;
- **By 12 months**, children can use many gestures to get needs met, such as giving, showing, reaching, waving, and pointing; play peek-a-boo, patty cake, or other social games; repeat sounds like "ma", "na", and "da"; and turn to the person speaking when called by their name;
- **By 15 months**, children can use pointing to draw attention to something of interest; use different sounds to get needs met and draw attention to something of interest; use and understand a small number of words, such as mum, dad, car, and bye- bye;
- **By 18 months**, children use a lots of gestures with words to get their needs met, like pointing or taking you by the hand and saying, "biscuit"; use a number of different sound consonants in their vocalization and words, such as m, n, p, b, t, and d; use and understand at least 20words; knows the names of familiar people or body parts by pointing to or looking at them when they are named; and engage in simple pretend play, like feeding a doll or toy animal.
- **By 24 months**, children can engage in pretend play with you with more than one action, like feeding the doll and then putting the doll to bed; use and understand at least 50 words; use at least two words together (without imitating or repeating) and in a way that makes sense, like "want biscuit"; enjoy being next to children of the same age and show interest in playing with them, perhaps giving a toy to another child.
- **By 36 months**, children enjoy pretending to play different characters with you or talking to dolls or action figures; enjoy playing with children of the same age, perhaps showing and telling another child about a favourite toy; use thoughts and actions together in speech and in play in a way that makes sense, like "sleepy, go take nap; answer "what," "where," and "who" questions easily; talk about their interests and feelings about the past and the future?

# QUALITY EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

Quality interactions between parents and their children occur in every family but what matters for children's optimal developmental is the frequency of those interactions. Quality everyday interactions involve doing something a little extra to capitalise on everyday learning opportunities that result in children's positive disposition towards learning. What parents do in order to add quality to their interactions with their children is simple. It is not overly complex, nor does it require extensive training. *smalltalk* focuses on increasing parental awareness and understanding about increasing the frequency of these interactional skills with their children.

The elements of *Quality Everyday Interactions* are functional communication behaviours that can be taught through modelling, explanations, and instructional materials. The expression of these skills may vary according to the age of the child.

#### The elements are:

- Warm and Gentle. When parents express pleasure in shared interactions and other child behaviours, acceptance is conveyed to the child that is the basis of building mutuality in the relationship. This skill is about the positive emotional tone expressed by the parent to the child in everyday interactions.
- **Tuning In:** This interactional skill is about the degree of responsiveness that a parent exhibits in interactions with the child, evident when parents notice and acknowledge a child's interactive signals.
- **Following Your Child's Lead**: This skill is related to the level of joint of attention between parent and child demonstrated when a parent follows a child's interests rather than redirecting the child's attention to other things.
- **Listening and Talking More**: This skill is reflected in the nature and duration of verbal exchanges between parents and children. Parents can encourage turn-taking in conversations and give prompts, such as a question, to the child to continue talking.
- Teachable Moments: This skill is about incidental teaching when parents take advantage of
  opportunities in everyday routines and activities to extend their child's knowledge and skills
  during everyday activities.

The key features are summarised in Figure 1. Each of these skills is considered below through a framework of:

- What is (the skill)?
- How does a parent do (the skill)?
- Explaining (the skill) to parents
- How can (the skill) be observed?
- When can a parent use (the skill) at home and at playgroup?

**Figure 1:** Summary of the key features of components for Quality Everyday Interactions

Key interactional skills	1. Being Warm and Gentle	2. Tuning In	3. Following Your Child's Lead	4. Listening and Talking More	5. Teachable Moments
How are these skills demonstrated?	<ul> <li>Parent shows affection to the child at incidental moments.</li> <li>Parent shows pleasure in parent-child interactions.</li> <li>Parent sets limits calmly and provides gentle behavioural guidance.</li> <li>Parent responds calmly to the child's intense emotions to encourage the child to manage their emotions.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Parent gives         exclusive attention         to the child.</li> <li>Parent acknowledges         the child's efforts         (verbal or non-         verbal) to gain         attention.</li> <li>Parent responds to         the child's emotional         cues quickly and         appropriately.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Parent stays focussed on what the child is interested in by comments or actions.</li> <li>Parent does not attempt to redirect the child's attention.</li> <li>Parent gives the child time to respond (verbally or nonverbally) when they are jointly engaged in an activity.</li> <li>Parent minimises instructions and directions to the child when they are jointly engaged in play.</li> </ul>	conversation by asking a question.  Parent listens attentively to what the child says.  Parent provides just enough talk to keep child engaged in the conversation.  Parent takes turns	<ul> <li>Parent talks to teach by naming and explaining things, pointing out what is important, and cueing the child what to expect in any situation.</li> <li>Parent models an action and then allows the child 'to have a go' and supplies supportive feedback.</li> <li>Parent encourages the child's persistence to complete a task.</li> <li>Parent praises child's accomplishments.</li> </ul>

#### WHAT IS BEING 'WARM AND GENTLE'?

Being 'Warm and Gentle' is about the positive feelings expressed between a parent and a child in everyday interactions that indicate acceptance. Being 'Warm and Gentle' is also about understanding and responding to children's feelings when they are upset. As a result of positive interactions that are built over time between parent and child, a relationship is built. As a result, children are more amenable to following parental instructions and as a consequence parents are able to enforce rules and set limits on children's behaviour.

#### HOW DOES A PARENT DO 'WARM AND GENTLE'?

Being 'Warm and Gentle' builds the parent-child relationship. When parents behave in a Warm and Gentle way, children learn positive behaviours that they then use in their interactions with others.

Being Warm and Gentle means noticing when children are doing the right thing and commenting on it. It is about expressing pleasure when good things happen. Specific approval about things that children do well gives children confidence in their abilities.

Being Warm and Gentle is also important when children are upset or misbehaving. This does not mean that the parent shows approval of negative behaviour but that parents stay calm and give guidance about the behaviours that they want from the child in that situation.

For example: A mother and her child are playing when the child begins screaming and throws the toy. The mother ignores the screaming. She picks up the toy and says in a calm firm voice; "We do not throw things, or we have to put the toy away for a little while."

#### **EXPLAINING 'WARM AND GENTLE' TO PARENTS**

The most important relationship that your child has is with you. A key ingredient of a positive relationship is to show approval to the child about what he/she does. By being 'Warm and Gentle', you are modelling important behaviours that you want your child to learn to use with you and others.

Being Warm and Gentle is about:

- Smiling;
- Using a positive tone of voice;
- Making positive comments.

Being 'Warm and Gentle' means noticing when your child is upset and showing care and concern:

- Remaining calm;
- Showing concern;
- Soothing the child through calming verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

Being 'Warm and Gentle' is also important when your child is angry or misbehaving. This does not mean showing approval of misbehaviour. Instead, it means staying in control and ignoring minor misbehaviour and using words and actions that can calm and guide your child on the right thing to do.

#### HOW CAN 'WARM AND GENTLE' BE OBSERVED?

- Does the parent show affection to the child at incidental moments?
- Does the parent show pleasure in parent-child interactions?
- Does the parent set limits calmly and provide gentle behaviour guidance?
- Does the parent respond calmly to the child's intensive emotions and encourage the child to manage their emotions?

#### WHEN CAN A PARENT USE 'WARM AND GENTLE' AT HOME AND AT A PLAYGROUP?

Any interaction with the child can be an opportunity to show acceptance and warmth throughout the day, at home and at playgroup. Through the use of positive verbal and non-verbal language, parents can enhance relationship-building with the child. Very young children learn to 'read' the behaviours of their caregivers and model on those behaviours. From an early age, children learn to read gestures and the emotional tone of interactions from their caregivers. Parents can communicate important messages and help children to learn to understand their feelings and how to label them; for example, happy and sad. Children then learn to express their feelings through words as their language develops. This is the essential basis through which children learn to regulate their emotions in stressful situations - by being able to understand and label their feelings.

#### WHAT IS 'TUNING IN'?

This skill is about responsiveness. The nature of this responsiveness will vary with the age of the child. Children make interactive signals through verbal and non-verbal means. Responsiveness is the quality most consistently associated with children's communicative and social-emotional competence throughout the early childhood years. It is important for parents to recognise and monitor young children's non-verbal signals, their gestures, actions, and facial expressions. Different children give these signals in unique ways. An important task for parents is to become an expert in interpreting their child's signals. When parents are attuned to the way in which their child communicates then parents are more likely to respond appropriately.

# HOW DOES A PARENT DO 'TUNING IN'?

Especially for infants, 'Tuning In' means responding as soon as possible to infants' babbles and smiles. 'Tuning In' is the basis of trust between children and their caregivers. Infants develop the belief that their communication is important when others make a response to their communication intentions.

With toddlers, 'Tuning In' means monitoring children's mood and interests and feeding this information back to the child without overwhelming the child and being overly intrusive. For example,

Sam puts his arms out to his mother, and she picks him up. She uses simple words; "You want up." When he coos, she coos back. When Sam gazes at his mother, she makes eye contact and talks to him. These immediate and attuned responses tell the child that his communications are important. This encourages him to continue to communicate.

Lisa directs her mother's attention by combining a vocalisation with pointing to a toy. Her mother responds "Oh, what's over there?" Lisa continues to engage her mother's attention by again making a vocalisation and pointing.

#### **EXPLAINING 'TUNING IN' TO PARENTS**

You can 'tune in' to your child by carefully observing facial expressions and gestures in order to understand how you child is feeling at that particular moment; then by responding to your child's emotional expressions and vocalisations in a meaningful way.

- Identify your child's emotions and mood or what is engaging their interest;
- Talk, in a low-key way, about 'what you notice';
- Describe what is happening for the child or what is happening in the environment;
- Watch how your child responds;
- If your child does not immediately respond, watch and wait and look for other opportunities to 'tune in'.

# HOW CAN 'TUNING IN' BE OBSERVED?

- Does the parent give exclusive attention to the child when the child attempts to communicate?
- Does the parent acknowledge a child's efforts, either verbally or non-verbally, to gain attention?
- Does the parent respond to the child's cues quickly and appropriately by describing what is happening for the child or what is happening in the child's environment?
- Does the parent encourage the child to engage in further communication?

### WHEN CAN PARENTS USE 'TUNING IN' AT HOME AND AT PLAYGROUPS?

'Tuning In' can occur at any time of the day in a variety of activities but particularly in everyday routines. It is very much about observing a child's emotions, moods, and interests and pitching responses to match those emotions and interests. It is also about providing opportunities for the child to engage with the world. For example, by positioning the child so that he/she can see others and what is going on; or by placing toys or materials within easy reach so that he/she can reach for

them. For older children, it can be about anticipating reactions to any new challenges that the child faces and reassuring them as they experience them.

In new and unfamiliar situations, it is important for parents to tune in to gauge children's reactions and reassure the child that all is well. Children, according to their temperament, can be wary of strangers and require encouragement to respond to new people. Children use parents as a social reference point and become just as skilled as parents at monitoring parents' emotional reactions and mood and learn to respond in line with parental responses.

#### WHAT IS 'FOLLOWING YOUR CHILD'S LEAD'?

'Following Your Child's Lead' extends the skill of 'Tuning In' to actively build upon joint attention between the parent and the child in their mutual engagement in activities. The parent remains mindful of the child's emotions and mood but more actively follows the child's interests. The length and frequency of joint attention sequences between parents and children predicts vocabulary and language development. The size of children's vocabulary and their ability to differentiate sounds are major predictors of how easily that child will learn to read. Vocabulary and understanding the sounds in words are the building blocks of language. Working with infants and toddlers is an important time in which they gain the initial abilities in informal ways to distinguish sounds and learn new words in everyday contexts.

### HOW DOES A PARENT DO 'FOLLOWING YOUR CHILD'S LEAD'?

'Following Your Child's Lead' means observing the child, watching what the child does, and responding to the child's vocalizations and/or actions in a meaningful way. By 'Following Your Child's Lead' the child learns that communication is a powerful tool for engaging with others and for controlling actions and events in his/her environment.

Daniel is on the floor with his mother and some toys are in front of him. He is looking towards the toy phone. His mother pushes the phone closer to him and he reaches for it. She allows him time to play with the phone in his own way. She. then holds up the receiver and says; "Let's call Daddy on the phone. Say hi to. Daddy."

Emma is looking at a wooden block that she has picked up. Her father picks up another block and drops it into a plastic bucket and says, "There it goes – INTO the bucket." He moves the bucket closer to Emma and looks at her. Emma takes the block out of the bucket and then drops it back in again. Emma repeats this action. He continues this game with her and turns it into a language game – "IN the bucket; OUT of the bucket", and encourages Emma to say, "In, Out."

Karen is pushing a toy truck around the room and Dad says, "That truck is driving fast. It must be going to put out a fire, vroom, vroom." Karen looks at him and her repeats the sound of the truck, "Vroom, vroom." She says; "Vroom, vroom." Dad then says to Karen, "What sound does the truck make as it goes to the fire?"

#### EXPLAINING 'FOLLOWING YOUR CHILD'S LEAD' TO PARENTS

Children learn best when they are engaged in an activity in which they are interested. 'Following Your Child's Lead' requires that you be a keen observer of the things which are of interest to your child. By following children's lead, you are helping your child to learn something new by simply keeping their attention focussed a little bit longer than your child might have done on their own.

- Observe what your child is looking at or doing;
- Comment briefly on this to the child by describing something about the situation without redirecting the child's attention away from the original source of interest wait for the child to respond;
- Prompt the child to respond verbally or nonverbally by asking a question. Wait for the child to respond. Ask open-ended questions, such as "What do you see?" "What should we do?" Reword or repeat any words that the child says.

#### HOW CAN 'FOLLOWING YOUR CHILD'S LEAD' BE OBSERVED?

- Does the parent recognise the child's interest in an object or event?
- Does the parent maintain the child's focus on the object or event by way of comments and actions?
- Does the parent maintain the child's focus and not attempt to redirect the child's attention?
- Does the parent give the child time to respond (verbally or nonverbal) when they are jointly engaged in an activity?
- Does the parent minimise any directions to the child on what to do?

#### WHEN CAN A PARENT USE 'FOLLOWING A CHILD'S LEAD' AT HOME AND AT PLAYGROUP?

'Following Your Child's Lead' can occur at any time of the day in a variety of everyday activities but especially in times of relaxation when parents have the time for play and shared book reading. It is very much about following the child's attention and interests at any moment when there is opportunity and time for the adult to pause and engage. It is about extending interactions and having fun with language. It provides opportunities for children to hear language from an adult model.

# WHAT IS 'LISTENING AND TALKING MORE'?

The most important contributor to young children's language development is the amount of talk that occurs around them. Children's vocabulary growth is strongly influenced by how much adults talk directly with them. It is not just about hearing language, for example, from the television. It is the frequency of conversation in which children have the opportunity to engage and participate that positively predicts children's language development. While conversation helps children to learn vocabulary, they are also learning about the functions and use of language and how it can be used to have their physical, personal and social needs met.

#### HOW DOES A PARENT DO 'LISTENING AND TALKING MORE'?

Parents initiate simple conversations by asking and answering their own questions to model the purpose of questions ("Where are ... our hats? ... Oh, there they are in the basket."); by pausing to allow for turn taking with a child ("Do you want milk, Megan? ... "Okay, here you go."); by repeating words to reinforce their meaning for a child ("Look at all the cows in the paddock, over there. Can you see all the cows, Jamie?"); and by using positive affirming language to guide children's behaviour ("I like it when you help me pick up the blocks, Emily. Thank you"). Another good strategy in encouraging 'Listening and Talking More' is to give young children choices, for example, "It's cold, would you rather wear your red jacket or your blue jacket?" rather than, "Put your red jacket on, it's cold." This approach gives young children a sense of being in control and also the satisfaction of having their opinions valued.

In conversations with young children, parents also consciously simplify their language to make meanings clearer or to emphasise a particular word; "Look at that BIG elephant, Sam."—the emphasis on BIG highlights its importance for a listening toddler. Researchers call this 'parentese'.

Parents include regular pauses in talking with a young child. This helps to reinforce that the child has a role in the conversation by acknowledging that a response can be made. It encourages turn taking in language. Parents also often exaggerate the sound and pitch of their voices from high to low.

Routines like bath time are good times to talk to a baby. "It's bath time. I'm putting you in the water. Oh, that feels nice, doesn't it? Yes, it's nice. I'm washing your hands. I'm washing your toes. (Sings: "This is the way we wash our .... toes, hands, etc.). What wiggly toes, I'm rubbing your tummy. What do I wash now? (waits and watches child's reaction) Oh, wash your fingers. All done. What a nice clean baby"

Routines like mealtime are a great time to help your child learn to combine words. Allow your child to help fix meals and snacks, wash vegetables or make a sandwich. Help your child to set the table ("One plate for Mummy", "One spoon here", "How many cups do we need?"); teach table manners ("Please pass the butter?", "Would you like some sauce on your sausage?" "Thank you."); and expand a child's words, "Juice – More juice?", by repeating or restating your child's words.

Mealtime can be fun and enjoyable, by talking about the colour, size, smell and taste; use lots of different words to describe how foods taste, for example, 'good', 'yummy', 'delicious', etc).

# **EXPLAINING 'LISTENING AND TALKING MORE' TO PARENTS**

'Listening and Talking More' means having conversations with your child and making language fun. These 'conversations' are important even before your child can talk. It helps your child to learn to listen and distinguish sounds and learn new words. Conversations can be initiated by you or your child for many reasons (e.g., "I want a biscuit?" "What sort of biscuit do you want?", and so the conversation can continue). Conversations can also be used to engage your child's curiosity, encourage imaginative ideas, and to have fun in the interaction.

Conversation can involve telling stories, learning nursery rhymes, singing songs and using music, playing games, and using finger plays, and make a rich language environment for your child.

- Initiate a conversation with your child around an immediate experience;
- Extend any conversation by comments and questions to the child that make the conversation enjoyable and fun;
- Encourage turn-taking in the conversation by waiting for the child to respond;
- Describe activities and experiences and introduce new words what things feel like (hot, cold, soft, scratchy), taste like, smell like, things that feel sad, things that feel happy;
- Find time to do something together a few times a day where you can enjoy something together something that your child loves to do that makes your child smile or laugh.

#### HOW CAN 'LISTENING AND TALKING MORE' BE OBSERVED?

- Does the parent engage in conversation with child?
- Does the parent respond to content of child talk?
- Does the parent seek clarification if the meaning of a child's statement cannot be understood?
- Does the parent expand upon child utterances?
- Does the parent talk about what child is doing?
- Does the parent give the child time to respond?
- Does the parent take turns with the child to maintain the conversation?

# WHEN CAN A PARENT USE 'LISTENING AND TALKING MORE' AT HOME AND AT PLAYGROUP?

'Listening and Talking More' provides the opportunities for children to lean new words. Parents can start conversations for many reasons, but it is how they extend and enrich those conversations that are important. As children explore their world, they need new words to talk about what they see, touch, taste, smell, and hear.

- Talking about what children see and hear helps young children to attach meaning to these experiences with words.
- The younger the child then the fewer the number of words the adult should use. About one to four words would be appropriate for infants and toddlers.

Listening and talking can be around such activities as:

- Reading stories, sharing rhymes and enjoying finger-plays that highlight sounds;
- Creating opportunities to talk about people, places, actions, feelings, objects, experiences and future events;
- Talking about things that happened in the past. This is a great way to help toddlers remember and revisit experiences and prepare them for new situations;

• Children's awareness of the world can be encouraged by pointing out small details and interesting things in the environment (e.g. "Look at that bird in the tree." or "Can you hear the rain outside? Pitter, patter, drip drop goes the rain.").

#### WHAT ARE 'TEACHABLE MOMENTS'?

This skill is about incidental teaching. It occurs when parents take advantage of presenting opportunities in everyday activities and routines to extend a child's knowledge and skills. It uses a child's interests and natural motivation to learn new things and maximises opportunities for verbal exchanges. Parents can scaffold their children's learning by exposing them to activities that challenge but do not overwhelm the child. Flexibility in the nature and timing of explanations or directives to guide the child's actions are dependent on the child's interest and attention.

#### HOW DOES A PARENT DO 'TEACHABLE MOMENTS'?

There are many opportunities for 'Teachable Moments' at home in everyday activities, like bedtime, bath times, meal times or preparing a snack.

Bath time is a good time to learn new words – about body parts, common objects, and simple actions. Ask questions, (e.g. "Where's the soap?" "Can you make a splash?" "What should we wash now?" "Where's your nose?" "Can you wash your toes?". "Can you clean those ears?"); make simple comments (e.g. "Look at the bubbles"); and play simple word games (e.g." Find your nose" Show me your hair" "Point to your eyes").

Mealtime is a good time to involve children and teach new knowledge and skill. Mother; "We need a bowl. We need milk. Can you get your breakfast bowl from the cupboard? Where is the cereal? You get the cereal from over there." Mother; "Just take three spoonfuls – one, two, three," while guiding the child's hand to add one scoop to the bowl. Mother; "Now we need the milk. Can you get the milk from the fridge?" Child gets the milk and mother talks about the milk carton and how to open it. She helps the child to pour the milk into the bowl. Mother, "All done. Now we have breakfast."

#### **EXPLAINING 'TEACHABLE MOMENTS' TO PARENTS**

During conversations with your child, there are many opportunities for your child to learn new things, but 'Teachable Moments' also allow young children to learn a lot about language from these exchanges.

By repeating and adding words to what your child says, you can help your child learn to make sentences and learn numbers and mathematics concepts, such as about size, patterns, quantity and colours. By involving your child in doing things, especially everyday activities, children can learn about different qualities – size ("This is very big."), texture ("Look how soft it feels."), quantity ("Can you get me two apples?" "Now we need more."), time ("We will go to the shops in the afternoon."),

temperature ("Do not touch the stove. It is very hot."), and colour ("Can you get me the red table cloth?").

- Pause to allow time for your child to follow your instruction or answer your question or tell you what he or she wants to say.
- Model things for your child to say in three to five words: "Time to qo"; "I want a red apple."
- Build upon instruction as your child gets older, from giving your child one instruction for them to follow to giving two instructions (e.g., from "Put on your pyjamas." to "Put on your pyjamas and get a book that you would like to read."
- Use lots of descriptive language that teaches about concepts when you are capitalising on a teaching moment size, colour shape, quantities, and qualities.

#### HOW CAN YOU OBSERVE 'TEACHABLE MOMENTS'?

- Does the parent talk to teach by naming and explaining things, pointing out what is important, and by preparing children what to expect in any situation?
- Does the parent offer the child choices so that child can become a part of the action?
- Does the parent give guidance through simple instructions, geared to the level of the child?
- Does the parent model an action and then allow the child 'to have a go'?
- Does the parent give supportive feedback?
- Does the parent encourage persistence so that the task is completed?
- Does the parent praise accomplishments?

### WHEN CAN PARENTS USE 'TEACHABLE MOMENTS' AT HOME AND AT PLAYGROUP?

Almost any situation throughout the day can be made into a 'teachable moment'. Daily routines that can be used for teaching include: meals, dressing, playtime, car trips, watching television, or in doing family chores. 'Teachable Moments' are about capitalising on the moment – seizing an opportunity for incidental teaching.

Elaboration is a very important part of 'Teachable Moments' through conversational exchanges about the task at hand. Incidental teaching should be relatively brief and enjoyable. If a situation becomes lengthy or the child loses interest, then it is time to stop teaching.

# A STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT

Family activities provide children with many opportunities for learning. Family activities can be planned, like a family barbecue, or structured, like the routine for bedtime. Planned family activities give both, children and adults, time for pleasurable interactions, like making time for water play in a wading pool or going for a walk in a local park. Family activities provide many opportunities for adults to talk to children – to discuss things, show how things work, explain things that are happening, and teach new words.

Some family activities need to be completed by adults but can be structured in ways that allow children to participate, like cooking dinner. Activities that are child-centred provide opportunities to teach children skills for independence, like getting ready to go to playgroup – finding the clothes to wear and putting on sandals; or washing hands after going to the toilet.

The features of a 'Stimulating Environment' are dependent on the social and physical resources available to the child at home and in other places:

- **Social resources** are about people. For example, parents, grandparents and siblings who have a genuine interest and affection for the child and who want to be involved.
- **Physical resources** include the places, spaces and time made available to a child for activities and play.

The key features are summarised in Figure 2. The elements of a stimulating environment are:

- Everyday routines: These are the daily activities that give meaning to family life and reduce parenting hassles. These predictable events give children a sense of stability and continuity, as well as opportunities to learn new skills.
- **Shared reading**: Adult time, given to regularly read to children at home, develops children's early literacy skills and awareness of reading as a source of knowledge and pleasure.
- **Play:** Places, spaces, and time for children to play with everyday materials, with minimal restriction and direction, allow children to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Using digital media at home: Parental understandings of the value of digital media, such as television, videos and tablets and how to maximise children's learning experiences through these media and other electronic resources is important.
- Using community resources: Accessing services and resources in the community provide children and parents with a sense of connectedness to others outside the family.

Figure 2: Key features of a Stimulating Environment

1. Everyday routines	2. Shared reading	3. Play	4. Using digital media at home	5. Using community resources
<ul> <li>Every day routines are activities, such as mealtimes, bath-time, and bed-time.</li> <li>Everyday routines allow consistency and predictability in children's lives.</li> <li>Everyday routines give extended opportunities for language and conversation between adults and children – describing what is happening, listening to children's ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>A regular shared reading each day will advance children's early literacy and knowing about print and books.</li> <li>Shared reading is as much about conversation as the reading of the actual story.</li> <li>Effective shared reading is about: Supporting children's interest in the book; Asking questions to get children's ideas; and Expanding children's ideas so that they learn something new.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Play allows children to explore their world.</li> <li>Through play, children have opportunities to build their social, physical, communication and thinking skills.</li> <li>Children's play is supported when parents: make time for play each day; provide space that your child can use for regular playtimes; supply simple materials to play with; offer playmates.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Parents should limit exposure to digital media for children aged less than three years of age in favour of other one- on- one language activities.</li> <li>If there is selective viewing and parental participation when children are using digital media, there can be positive effects on children's learning.</li> <li>Television programs can promote new vocabulary, but this is more likely when parents are present to explain, interpret and discuss the content.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>It is important to build parental awareness of local community resources for children and families.</li> <li>Parents need confidence so that they will access community- based activities when needed.</li> <li>Through using community resources, like a playgroup or parenting group, parents develop: a sense of support through a group of parents with common interests; an increased sense of confidence and selfesteem as a parent.</li> </ul>

#### WHAT ARE 'EVERYDAY ROUTINES'?

Everyday routines are characterised by regularity and repetition. If it happens on most days, then it is a routine. Routines include the daily structured activities of families – mealtimes, snack times, dressing, bathing, and bedtime. Routines can also be about regular activities in which family members engage for pleasure – like listening to the radio in the morning or sitting on the back deck every afternoon.

Activities which involve parent-child interactions, like looking at pictures in a book or listening to stories, can become everyday routines that will enhance children's language learning.

Children like routines. Routines help children to appreciate the continuity and the predictability of family life. Routines afford opportunities for 'Teachable Moments'.

A routine need not be a strictly scheduled and inflexible activity; just that the activity occurs regularly so that a child can anticipate when, where, and what will happen.

Through routines, parenting hassles are reduced because children know the routine and automatically engage in the tasks that make up that routine.

Routines are 'constructed' differently across families according to family preferences. Families evolve their own routines – when they occur and what happens. For example, every family has unique mealtime 'rituals.

### WHAT CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH 'EVRERYDAY ROUTINES'

Family life with young children can be chaotic. Establishing basic routines provide a sense of order that makes life easier for both parents and children. A routine doesn't mean a rigid schedule. Young children need structure with some flexibility. For most families, things work better when everyday activities follow a predictable pattern.

Through routines, children:

- Get a sense of security routines bring feelings of safety and security;
- Learn to trust others routines allow children to see others as dependable;
- Gain self-confidence —routines that let children participate meaningfully let children learn new things.

While routines will look different across families, they have some common features:

- Have a beginning and an end;
- Are predictable and have a sequence of tasks;
- Are repeated regularly;
- Are oriented toward some outcome (e.g., getting ready for bed).

Routines allow parents to plan their time. With young children, finding time to take a shower and complete household chores can be a challenge. When there are routines, children are less likely to test the limits. If bath time is always followed by bed, a story, a goodnight kiss and a wave from the bedroom door, children will settle more easily.

#### **EXPLAINING 'EVERYDAY ROUTINES' TO PARENTS**

Routines are never set in stone. They need to be adapted as conditions change. By observing your child, by knowing your own needs, you will be able to develop predictable routines that suit all the members of the family. There are no 'recipes' for a routine that works for every family. Some things to consider include:

- Does a routine need to change as children get older? More choices can be offered within a routine as children become more capable of the skills that are a part of the routine. For example, "Will you brush your teeth before the bath or after?"
- Does a routine take account of a child's temperament? Children have very different personalities and routines need to accommodate these differences. Some questions you might want to ask yourself include:
  - o Is lots of flexibility needed for my child?
  - o Does this routine need to stay the same because my child doesn't like surprises?
- **Be prepared to change a routine**: Even if people tell you a bath before bed calms children, your child may get overexcited and have trouble going to sleep. The problem might disappear if bath time occurs at an earlier time of the day.
- Recognise a need for a routine: If your child always has a tantrum when you are making dinner then maybe he's very hungry. Perhaps you could add an afternoon snack time as a part of the daily routine. Or, maybe he just wants your attention. Try a short playtime before you start cooking dinner or let him help make the salad with you.
- **Smooth transitions**: Children often get upset when it is time to change activities. You can signal upcoming changes and give advanced warning. For example, "In five minutes, we need to go and get Michael from the school bus." Giving your child time to adjust, anticipate, and prepare to accommodate changes makes for smooth transitions.

Everyday routines provide many opportunities for 'Teachable Moments'. For example, incidental learning about reading and numbers. While routines get family tasks done, they also are about conversation:

- **Doing household tasks**: Lots of ideas about numbers are available to children through routines at home:
  - "Can you bring me two towels, please";
  - o "Will you help set the table? How many plates do we need? We need one for dad and one for mum and one for you".
  - "Can you find the biggest packet of cereal in the cupboard?"
  - o "We need one cup of flour for this recipe. Can you measure that out?"
- At the supermarket: Show your child the words on the grocery list and let your child help you find the items. Read the labels. Read the prices.

Reading the advertising catalogues from the mail or in newspapers. Supermarket and
product catalogues can be read like a book. Talk about the various items and encourage your
child to point to the pictures, draw children's attention to the symbols and words in the
catalogue. Through such activities, children learn that print materials have a meaning and a
message.

#### WHAT IS 'SHARED READING'?

Shared reading is a powerful way to introduce children to literacy. Parents read to children because parents also find it enjoyable when they see how much pleasure that children gain from books. When adults read to children, the interactions are often warm and intimate through physical contact because parents hold young children on their laps or sit close to them while reading aloud.

Through shared reading, children can learn a lot about literacy before they can actually read. Familiar picture books can be read and re-read.

Shared reading is not about formally 'teaching' young children to read. It is about introducing children to books and print materials to understand what reading is about and the enjoyment that can be gained.

Spoken language competence increases when children have lots of exposure to reading from an early age. For children to learn to read they must have strong spoken language skills:

- Spoken language includes vocabulary and sound awareness of letters in words.
- Spoken language includes capacities to listen and to understand what is being said.

When parents engage in shared reading with their children, children build their expressive language skills (communicating ideas to others) and their receptive language skills (understanding the meaning in what is being said).

#### WHAT CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH 'SHARED READING'

When parents have conversations about the stories that are being read, children's vocabulary increases, their understanding and recall of stories improves, and their knowledge of print conventions increases.

Through sharing reading, young children learn the conventions of print:

- Print awareness: Words have a meaning;
- Book awareness: Books have different parts a front cover, pages, a back cover;
- **Book orientation:** Books are read from front to back; each page is read from the top to the bottom, and from left to right;

• **Structure of stories**: Stories have characters. Stories have a beginning, a main event, and an ending.

Children develop their understanding of print and books when parents read to children and point out where the front and the back of a book are; show how you turn the pages from front to back; and point to different words.

Children gain book knowledge through:

- Physically handling books;
- Having their favourite books read to them, time and again;
- Learning that there are connections between the pictures and the words in the book;
- Observing their parents reading books
- Practising 'their reading' by turning the pages and pretending to read.

#### **EXPLAINING 'SHARED READING' TO PARENTS**

Shared reading is as much about conversation as the reading of the actual story. There are three important principles about shared reading that you can use with your child to ensure that your child benefits. **Support, Ask, and Expand (SAE):** 

Support children's interest in the book

- Ask questions to get children's ideas about the story; and
- Expand children's ideas so that they learn something new.
- Support: Let your child choose the book to read, even if the book has been read many times before.
- Follow the child's lead Talk about what your child is looking at.
- Take turns "Can you turn this page and I will turn the next one."

**Ask**: By asking questions you let your child know that you interested in their ideas.

- Use lots of "wh" questions (what, why, where, when, how, who) "I wonder why the boy looked inside the box? What do you think he will find?"
- Ask for more information "Ah, that's interesting. Have you seen one of those before?"

**Expand**: You can label and expand on whatever a child is interested in while you are reading. Talk about any related experiences that a child has had.

- Expand on what a child says: Your child points to a picture of a truck and says: "Truck." You could say, "That's right. It is a red fire truck. Can you say, 'fire truck'?"
- Introduce new words and ideas: If you are talking about a dog in a storybook, you might say,
   "That dog is a Dalmatian. He has lots of spots. Our dog is a Labrador. Labradors do not have spots."

• Bring in a child's experience: "Do you see the horse in that picture? Do you remember the day we went to the football? A policeman was riding the horse near the entrance to the football ground." And let the child take the conversation from there.

For shared reading to be effective, it is important that you do not bombard your child with too many questions and give your child plenty of time to talk.

Home activities that you can support children's early literacy include:

- Finding books with rhymes that let you and your child play with sounds: Sing or listen to songs with rhyming words (Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star); repeat nursery rhymes (Jack and Jill); make up silly rhymes to use during routines (Go to bed and cover up your head);
- Making a picture book with your child: Cut paper into same sized pieces; staple or tie the
  pages together with wool; put a picture of someone or something that your child likes on
  every page (family, pets, toys) using photos or pictures from magazines;
- **Encouraging writing and drawing**: Have a supply of crayons and markers and scrap paper handy; let your child scribble and draw pictures, shapes and patterns; use finger paint; draw in the sand, on steamy car windows, or with foam in the bathtub.
- **Going to the library**: It's never too early to go to the library with your child. Find books, magazines, music and videos; check out the children's books, and books on tape; listen to stories; find out when the library has activities and events coming up that are designed for parents and children.

#### MAKING READING PART OF FAMILY LIFE

Parents support children's engagement in reading from a young age by:

- Sharing a book as an everyday routine, for example, reading a book at bedtime.
- Very young children can attend for only a few minutes. Over time, they will be able to listen for longer periods to stories.

At home, children are encouraged to read when:

- They see parents reading for themselves;
- There is a wide variety of reading materials at home magazines, newspapers, picture books;
- There is access to lots of books. Parents can become a member of the local library or buy second-hand books at weekend markets.
- Children have books and a bookshelf of their own so that they can easily find their favourite books.
- Children are encouraged to have quiet times and look at books by themselves.

# WHAT IS 'PLAY'?

Play allows children to explore their world. Through play, children have opportunities to build their social, physical, communication and thinking skills. Play allows children to discover, explore, problem

solve, and practise things that they have observed. Children can create imaginary situations or recreate experiences that they had in their pretend play.

The essence of play is free choice – deciding what to do, when and with whom to do it. Play allows children to make choices. Children should discover for themselves what works and what doesn't work through experimentation. Playing with other children allows children to learn to negotiate and to compromise with others, like sharing and taking turns with toys.

# Play is:

- Any activity that a child has fun doing;
- Simple and spontaneous and has no specific goals;
- Initiated and led by the child.

#### WHAT CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH PLAY

Children's play provides opportunities to:

- Practise and build ideas, concepts and skills;
- Take risks and make mistakes;
- Think creatively and imaginatively;
- Communicate with others.

# Important features of play are:

- **Social play:** As children get older, they enjoy play with other children. Through play with others, children learn about cooperation and negotiation. However, children of all ages like to play alone sometimes. At any age, they may also just play alongside other children without a lot of engagement. This is parallel play.
- Cognitive play: Children enjoy play that allows them to use their thinking and problem-solving skills. Children often use objects creatively. For example, a child may use a stick for a wand or an empty box for a car. Through play with puzzles and blocks children also learn a lot of cognitive skills; for example, how things fit together, about matching colours and shapes, about how to stack and sort things. There is also a lot of learning when children spend time in pretend and dramatic play creating and re-creating their experiences and what they have seen on television or in books.
- **Physical play**: Active play may be indoors or outdoors. Physical activities build co- ordination and motor skills. There are also benefits for physical health. Physical play and games expend children's energy as well as building their capacities for self-regulation and concentration.

#### **EXPLAINING PLAY TO PARENTS**

At home, ensure there is time, space, and props for your child's play. Take your child to new places to stimulate ideas and imagination. Children then often enact their new experiences in their play at home.

- You do not need to direct your child's play.
- Trust your child to be able to play alone and to learn from it.
- Respect your child's choices and efforts in how and what they play.
- Let your child discover for themselves what works and what doesn't. They can't learn to solve their own problems if an adult is always doing it for them.

While adults would usually take a secondary role in children's play, there are times when you can be a helper and partner in play. For example, if your child is getting frustrated when his block tower keeps tumbling down, lend a hand to help her rebuild it.

Toys are the basic tools that children use to enrich their play. Toys need not be expensive or sophisticated. Children learn to imagine the possibilities when they use everyday objects at home – items from the kitchen cupboard or discarded packaging materials.

You can support your child's play by:

- Making time for play each day;
- Providing space that your child can use for regular playtimes.
- Making storage of toys easy with large plastic boxes or on shelves;
- Supplying simple materials to play with;
- Offering playmates;
- Letting your child know that you think that play is important;
- Not interrupting unnecessarily.

#### USING 'DIGITAL MEDIA' AT HOME

Screens and their effects on children's learning generate many debates. Many of these debates centre on the amount of screen time that young children should access each day. Research indicates that parents should limit exposure to screens for children aged less than three years of age in favour of other one-on-one language activities.

Screen-based programs and tools, like television and tablets, remain essentially a passive activity at a time when key experiences for developing language and communication skills are important. Children learn best from interactive, hands-on experiences with people who care about them rather than passive viewing.

While watching television and videos provide variation in young children's language experiences (i.e., exposure to new words), language exposure via screen differs from language exposure through other social interactions because, in watching screens the child is not a participant in the language interactions.

#### WHAT CHILDREN LEARN FROM TELEVISION AND OTHER DIGITAL MEDIA

Children watch television for different reasons and respond to it in different ways. Television itself has no good or bad influence. Its effect depends mostly on individual use and reactions.

There are educational benefits when programs are designed specifically for children.

The optimal television viewing experience for children's language development is one that includes exposure to age-appropriate content, to new and familiar words, and which offers possibilities for interaction; and also, interesting material to engage adults so that parents are encouraged to co-view programs with their children.

While television is beneficial under certain conditions, it should be seen as just one of many activities that offer opportunities for children's language learning:

- Television programs can promote new vocabulary, but this is more likely when parents are present to explain, interpret and discuss the content.
- Active engagement in programs (e.g., performing actions, singing, dancing) enhances children's learning.
- Educational programs, such as Sesame Street, increase young children's letter and number knowledge, and vocabulary, while cartoons and adult programming do not.
- Negative consequence for children from extensive television viewing is the degree to which it replaces engagement in other physical and social activities.

#### **EXPLAINING EFFECTIVE MEDIA USE TO PARENTS**

Television and the use of tablets have many complex and contradictory roles. Television can be a unifying experience for a family around which many activities revolve. Television is a part of our lives and will remain part of children's lives.

You can incorporate television without letting it run family life by:

- Locating the television in a room where you can co-view programs with your child.
- Limiting television for young children to less than two hours a day.
- Choosing times of the day when the television is always turned off so that children do other activities.
- Letting your child select programs within reasonable guidelines.
- Creating a timetable with your child about when and what programs will be watched.

- When you watch and use screen-based devices with your child you can make this an interactive time by explaining and commenting on what you're watching and seeing.
- Discuss programs with your child: "What did you like best about that program?"
- You can steer children to choose programs which model positive behaviour, such as cooperation and treating others with respect, such as the Wiggles and Bananas in Pyjamas.
- You can choose children's programs designed to promote imaginative play, such as 'Play School'.

#### **USING COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

Being a part of a community, like a playgroup or parenting group, builds parent wellbeing through the social support that come through connections with others. Such connections can provide respite from parental responsibilities when parents come together to share experiences and ideas, to discuss common concerns and frustrations. These social contacts build parents' capacities for their parenting role as well as social support.

Important forms of social support for parents through community services and connections include:

- Information, guidance, and feedback about parenting;
- Emotional and peer support from other parents;
- Practical direction about other services that a parent may need.

Parents may need specific information, advice, and feedback about children's health and development, basic child-rearing practices, and information about where to go for special kinds of assistance when crises or problems occur. For many parents, information and feedback may be all the help that they need to do a good job of raising their children.

Parents can get support from various informal sources – relatives, other parents, neighbours, and friends. Less often they seek help from more formal sources such as health care professionals. It is important to recognise that parents' need for support and information cuts across socio-economic and educational lines.

#### SIUPPORTING PARENTS THROUGH COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Through using community resources, like a playgroup or parenting group, parents develop:

- A sense of support through a group of parents with common interests;
- Increased sense of confidence and self-esteem as a parent;
- Increased understanding of child development;
- Changed expectations and perceptions of parenting;
- Changes in parenting behaviour.

There is a growing perception that parents have a much more difficult time nowadays in getting the help that they need from both informal and formal sources. For a variety of reasons, parents' need for support has changed in nature and become more intense in recent decades.

Explanations for why parents might need more support vary but include:

- Decreased availability of informal social support from extended family;
- Increased knowledge but also confusions about the expectations of parenting.

On one hand, there is a wealth of new research on children, child development, and parenting. Parenting is no longer primarily an intuitive job. Whereas this knowledge should be regarded as a valuable new resource, often parents are puzzled by all the information available to them. It is often difficult for parents to translate this new information in a way that they can use constructively. Even more confusing is that collectively many 'experts' have changed their minds over time and often disagree with each other about desirable parenting behaviours.

Through discussion with other parents and drawing on professional advice, parents can weigh and evaluate ideas to make decisions on how they want to proceed as they work their way through a parenting dilemma.

#### USING A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH TO WORK WITH PARENTS

Programs such as *smalltalk* can build understanding of the tasks of parenting:

- What it means to be a parent;
- What to expect from their child in terms of new behaviours over time, and
- What supports are available to assist with parenting.

With respect to the availability of support from family members and friends, parents can be encouraged to identify their existing sources of parenting and personal support. They can choose the nature and manner in which they wish to use community resources for help with parenting and child rearing.

It is important for facilitators to:

- Build parental awareness of local community resources for children and families;
- Identify the ways for parents to access and use those resources;
- Compile information about services for families and community activities.
- Build parental confidence so that they will access community-based activities and attend community events.

When practitioners in community services, focus on the strengths of families, this helps to empower parents. Parent empowerment is a process through which parents decide on appropriate action on their own behalf about their own and their children's needs.

- "The facilitator helped me to see strengths in myself I didn't know I had."
- "The facilitator knew about other services that I can use if I need them."
- "The facilitator encouraged me to share my knowledge with other parents."

Important principles of a strength-based approach in working with parents are:

- Recognition of the strengths that a parent has;
- Seeing parents as partners so that parent input is sought and welcomed;
- Mutual respect between parents and practitioners;
- Listening to parents and use non-judgmental feedback;
- Valuing diversity and encouraging the sharing of ideas about different ways that parents might handle similar issues.

In a strength-based approach, practitioners consciously strive to respect parents' preferences, values, and attitudes. This is especially true for families from a different cultural, and/or linguistic background from the mainstream.

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# **Facilitator Manual**









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smalltalk smalltalk@parentingrc.org.au www.smalltalk.net.au

Parenting Research Centre Level 5, 232 Victoria Parade East Melbourne, Vic, 3002

www.parentingrc.org.au

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# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

# Section 1 smalltalk Content



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#### SECTION 1: STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCHING CHILDREN'S LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

#### What's in this section?

An outline of the parenting strategies and factors shown to be associated with good learning and development outcomes for children.

This section explains a model for enhancing home learning comprising the following domains:

- Quality Everyday Interactions
- Stimulating Environment
- Parents' Self-Care
- Parenting Confidence
- Community and Services Connectedness

After the description of each domain, there is a list of resources to be used with parents.

#### MODEL FOR ENHANCING HOME LEARNING



There are two child domains: 'Quality Everyday Interactions' and 'Stimulating Environment'. Research tells us these domains have a direct impact on children's learning and development. The two parent domains, 'Self-Care' and 'Parenting Confidence', focus on strengthening the parent as a person, and have a strong but indirect effect on children's outcomes. Parents' attention to their own needs and having increased confidence in their parenting will help them provide learning opportunities for their children. 'Community and Services Connectedness' refers to the extent to which families know what's available and participate in their community. Each of these domains is explained below in more detail.

#### **QUALITY PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS**

Quality interactions between parents and their children happen in every family. What matters is how often they occur, and in how many different ways. This domain is about doing something a little extra to capitalise on everyday opportunities for children to learn.

#### Our aim is to:

- Introduce parents to a small number of parenting 'essentials' parenting strategies that lead to optimal child outcomes
- Help parents become aware of how important this is
- Help parents increase how often they interact with their children in this way
- Help parents increase the number and type of situations in which they interact in this way.

Quality Parent-Child Interactions				
Warm and Gentle				
Tuning In				
Following Your Child's Lead				
Listening and Talking More				
Teachable Moments				

#### WARM AND GENTLE

Being warm and gentle strengthens the parent-child relationship. It's about the tone of everyday interactions – *how* parents relate to their children. Parents demonstrate acceptance and positive regard for their child when they show pleasure while interacting. When the child needs behavioural guidance, the parent enforces rules and limits gently. Being warm and gentle is also about protecting their children from inappropriate disapproval, teasing or punishment.

We know parents are being 'Warm and Gentle' when they:

- · Smile at their child
- Are affectionate with their child
- Use a positive tone of voice when speaking to their child
- Make positive comments
- Remain calm and show concern when their child is upset
- Soothe their child with calm words and actions
- Stay in control when misbehaviour happens
- Handle misbehaviour calmly and assertively rather than angrily.

#### **TUNING IN**

This is when parents give their child their full attention. Parents notice and 'read' their child's cues and respond appropriately. Different children give cues in different ways. For example, through their actions, gestures, facial expressions, sounds or words. When parents are able to read their child's cues accurately, the way they respond is more likely to help their child learn and develop.

We know parents are 'Tuning In' when they:

- Notice and pay attention to their child's attempts to communicate
- Do or say something to acknowledge their child's efforts to get their attention
- Respond to their child's cues quickly
- Describe what is happening
- Encourage their child to communicate more.

#### FOLLOWING YOUR CHILD'S LEAD

Parents notice that their child is interested in something and follow that interest, rather than shifting their child's attention to other things. Instead of asking questions, or telling their child what to do, parents comment on and describe what is happening. This helps their child to learn by encouraging them to focus their attention for a bit longer on what they are interested in.

We know parents are 'Following Their Child's Lead' when they:

- Recognise that their child is showing interest in an object or activity
- Say or do something to maintain their child's focus

- Take part in the activity, building on what their child is doing
- Do not redirect their child's attention
- Give their child time to respond (words or actions) when they are doing things together
- Try not to tell their child what to do
- Try not to ask questions.

#### LISTENING AND TALKING MORE

The most important thing for young children's language development is the amount of talk that happens around them. It's not just about hearing lots of words – although that is very important. It's about them participating – having a 'conversation' with the people around them. It's about parents listening to them. It's even possible to have regular 'conversations' with young babies – taking turns to make and copy sounds, expressions and gestures.

We know parents are 'Listening and Talking More' when they:

- Talk to their child about something that has just happened
- Respond to their child's questions and extend the conversation
- Take turns with their child and give them time to respond
- Encourage their child to say more by asking 'wh' questions 'What', 'Why', 'Where', 'When', 'Who'
- Describe experiences and introduce new words what things feel like (hot, cold, soft, or scratchy), taste like, smell like, things that feel sad, things that feel happy.

#### **TEACHABLE MOMENTS**

This means taking advantage of brief, frequent everyday opportunities for children to learn. A teachable moment can be a few seconds, or a few minutes. It starts with their child being interested in something. The parent seizes the chance to help their child learn something new, or practice something they learnt earlier. Almost any situation throughout the day can have a teachable moment: meals, dressing, playtime, car trips, shopping, watching television, or doing family chores. Ways to teach children include telling, showing, guiding and giving feedback.

We know parents are taking advantage of 'Teachable Moments' when they:

- Name and explain things
- Repeat and add words
- Point out what is important
- Prepare their child for what to expect in a situation
- Offer choices
- Give simple instructions, appropriate to the developmental level of their child
- Show their child how to do something, and then encourage them 'to have a go'
- Give positive feedback
- Encourage their child to complete tasks

Praise effort and accomplishments.

# Parent resources for Quality Everyday Interactions Conversation Cards Warm and Gentle Tuning In Following Your Child's Lead Listening and Talking More Teachable Moments Posters – one for each strategy

#### Filmed examples of strategies

#### STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT

A stimulating environment for a child is one designed to help them learn and develop. We focus on five components shown by research to be important: Routines, reading at home, play, using digital media and community resources.

Our aim is to encourage parents to:

- Think about the opportunities for learning they provide at home
- Maximise the use of space and time for children to play
- Involve themselves in their children's reading and TV watching
- Establish a level of predictability in daily operations that frees them to interact with their children
- Connect with community activities that support their children's learning.

#### **ROUTINES**

Routines are important because they give children a sense of security and stability. Routines also assist parents to organise their daily activities into predictable patterns, especially those associated with the daily care of children. This creates time for positive interaction with children, and parents and other family members will feel less hassled.

#### **READING AT HOME**

Sharing books with babies and young children is a powerful way for parents to build their children's literacy skills. Research tells us that if a child becomes involved in a book, as a participant not just a

listener, the outcomes are better. Reading is not just about books - it's about pictures, letters, words, and numbers. Words are everywhere- on food packets, signs, in supermarkets, in junk mail, on toys and clothing. Reading can be talking about the pictures in books, and expanding on stories, or making up your own. The key message is that children are never too young to share books.

#### **PLAY**

Play allows children to explore and learn about the world. It is also fun and doesn't need lots of toys. A child's learning benefits when their parents and other family members become involved in their play. Play is also a good opportunity to 'Follow Your Child's Lead'.

Adults can support children's play by:

- Making time for play
- Providing space
- Supplying simple materials
- Offering companions, including themselves
- Letting their child choose how and what they play.

#### **COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

Parent and child well-being are fostered when families are connected to their community. A community can be based on a location, like a school, or formal and informal networks. Communities support individuals by providing resources and services and reducing social isolation.

Facilitators can help link parents to their community by:

- Increasing parents' knowledge of what services are available
- Helping parents access and use these resources
- Providing information about community activities for families
- Building parents' confidence so that they will access community-based activities and attend community events
- Encouraging parents to get to know each other at playgroup and at other times.

#### **USING DIGITAL MEDIA**

Television and tablets are the most common forms of media exposure for young children; however, over-use continues to be of concern. Apart from the fact that children may be watching programs that are unsuitable for them, passive viewing of TV filmed material means that the child is not participating in a language experience.

The main message from the research on the young children's 'screen time' is that it should be minimised in the early years or avoided if possible when children are very young. Despite all this, we acknowledge that screens are a part of almost every family's entertainment.

If young children are using screens, the best conditions for doing this are when:

- Parents watch or using the screen with them, so they can explain and repeat content, and prompt the children to respond in some way to the content
- Parents choose programs suitable for children, particularly those without advertisements
- Screen use is a 'sometimes' activity
- There are other activities that can replace screen time playing outside, looking at books.

Parent resources for Stimulating Environment							
Tipsheets on Pla	ау	Tip	osheet on Routines				
Tipsheets on Reading  Reading and Play Ideas Reading with Babies	Posters  O Reading  O Words are everywhere		Conversation Cards  O Reading  O Words are everywhere				
Tipsheets on Screen time and quality media choices	Poster on Watching TV together		Conversation card on Watching TV together				
Worksheet on Community Resources – Me and My Community							

#### PARENT SELF-CARE

Parents' efforts to enrich their children's learning and development are maximised when they also attend to their own health and well-being. What is particularly important is the social support parents receive; the amount, the type and the suitability. What's more, parents who are feeling stressed might benefit from help with stress management and coping strategies.

Our aim is to encourage parents to think about:

- Their own needs for well-being and what might help them
- What types of support they need emotional/personal, practical or information
- What support they are getting, and how helpful it is
- How they can get the support they need
- How they could make changes to improve their well-being.

Parent resources for Self-Care					
Tipsheets on support					
Services and supports in a nutshell	Getting support				
Tipsheets on stress and coping					
Feeling stressed	Healthy eating				
Taking time-out for yourself	Keeping active				
Helpful thinking	Your plan for charging up				
Sleeping better	Tips for saving energy				

#### PARENTING CONFIDENCE

Parenting confidence enables parents to be the kind of parent they want to be. It helps them turn knowledge (i.e., knowing what to do) into actions (i.e., actually doing it). Confidence in the parent role is influenced by a number of things: parenting self-efficacy, parent feelings of self-sufficiency, their sense of personal agency and their capacity for self-management. Parenting programs and strategies should aim to build these aspects of parenting confidence.

Facilitators have an important part to play in promoting parenting confidence. How you work with parents will influence whether they become more or less confident in their parenting role.

The Facilitator's Guide, 'Promoting Parenting Confidence' has guidance on how to this with detailed examples of how a confidence building approach can work with families.

#### **COMMUNITY & SERVICES CONNECTEDNESS**

The model for enhancing home learning shows Community & Services Connectedness underpinning the other four domains. This is recognition that the wellbeing of individuals and families is affected by the quality of their social environment, particularly the extent to which they are supported by and contribute to their community.

smalltalk is delivered in groups in existing service platforms, such as playgroups, that are well connected with community services and activities. Because of these existing links, there is great potential for increasing families' community connections.

#### Key messages

This section gives an outline of the key parenting strategies and supports that benefit children's early learning and development.

- Parents are already doing some or all of these things.
- The aim is to encourage them to do it more often and in a broader range of situations.

A more comprehensive description of Quality Everyday Interactions and creating a Stimulating Environment is available at the front of this manual — Early Home Learning Study: A model for enhancing home learning.



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

# Section 2 Working with Parents



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#### **SECTION 2: WAYS OF WORKING WITH PARENTS**

#### What's in this section?

Key features of the facilitator's role.

Section 1 focused on the 'What' -that is, the parenting content of the smalltalk. This section is about the 'How'. That is, important aspects of facilitation.

#### How to:

- Work in partnership with parents
- Provide opportunities
- Provide encouragement
- Use modelling
- Prompt practice and give feedback
- Promote parental confidence
- Communicate with parents

#### **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS**

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Seeking to work in partnership with parents acknowledges that parents have an important contribution to make that is equal to the contribution of the staff involved. It acknowledges that parents are the experts on their children and have strengths that can be enhanced by the planned intervention.

Having a positive/collaborative relationship with parents is critical for a number of reasons - parents are more likely to:

- come to playgroup
- participate in activities
- offer their own ideas and feel that their ideas are valued
- listen to your ideas
- try new things out that you have suggested
- enjoy the experience
- are less likely to feel isolated or judged

#### IDEAS ON HOW TO DO IT

In Section 9 of this manual, you'll find two Facilitator's Guides with some ideas on how to work effectively with parents. They are:

- 'Working in Partnership with Parents'
- 'Communicating with Parents'

#### **PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES**

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Rather than telling parents what to do, a key feature of the facilitator role is to provide opportunities for parents to learn and practise the *smalltalk* parenting strategies. Here are three ways to think about how to achieve this.

- 1. Consider if the activities you've set up afford the parents an opportunity to practice. Your task is to select activities that are relevant to the strategy focussed on in that week's session.
- 2. Notice how parents are interacting with their children during the session and you draw their attention to this.
- 3. Encourage parents to come up with their own ideas for practice at home by using the Opportunity Sheets.

#### IDEAS ON HOW TO DO IT

- 1. The Group Session Planner (Section 4, page 80) can help you think ahead about what playgroup activities might be relevant to the parenting strategy highlighted that week.
- 2. You can introduce the parenting strategies one-on-one, small group conversations, or even to the whole group using the *smalltalk* Conversation Cards, the posters and the Opportunity Sheets. But remember, your aim is to keep the presentation casual and not to turn the group into a lecture.
- 3. If you see that parents are using the strategies in the session, this is the time to comment and give positive feedback. Similarly, if you notice a missed opportunity, this might be the time to discuss this with the parent.
- 4. You can assist parents to fill in the Opportunity Sheet relevant to the particular parenting strategy discussed in the session.

In the first session, you can talk to parents about how you will be working together. Encourage them to tell you when they have used the strategies in the session and at home, and to let you know how it went.

#### **ENCOURAGEMENT**

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

There are two ways to think about encouragement – as inspiration and as feedback. The first requires thought about what motivates parents to do things, to do things more often, or to try new ideas. The second is about noticing and celebrating positive attempts and achievements.

Parents might need encouragement for the following:

- coming along to playgroup regularly
- participating in playgroup activities when they are there
- interacting with their child while at playgroup
- interacting with the other parents
- trying out the *smalltalk* strategies
- helping with packing up.

#### IDEAS ON HOW TO DO IT

- Seek and incorporate parents' ideas about playgroup activities
- Regularly ask for parents' feedback on how the playgroup is running
- Check what might be getting in the way of parents attending or participating
- If time permits, think about contacting parents between sessions via text messages or phone
- Avoid appearing judgmental try to be solution focussed if problems arise
- Identify parents' strengths and draw their attention to them
- Praise effort and persistence.

#### MODELLING

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Modelling is a powerful tool for acquiring new skills – by learning through observation and imitation. What you do in the playgroup can have an influence on what parents do at home. As a facilitator you can strengthen a parent's learning by demonstrating the strategies and encouraging them to try them out.

#### IDEAS ON HOW TO DO IT

This is about incidental teaching. That is, seizing a natural opportunity in the course of the playgroup to demonstrate the parenting strategy you are introducing in the session. It can occur casually or in a more directed way.

- The casual approach involves incorporating the *smalltalk* strategies in your everyday interactions with the children, especially when the parents are nearby to observe this.
- A more directed approach is when you draw the parent's attention to what you are doing saying things like 'Watch me while I have a go and then tell me how you think it went'.

When you notice a parent practising what you modelled, this is the time to ask them to reflect on what they have just done, for example, 'I've just noticed that you were following Micah's lead, how do you think that worked with him'.

#### PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Learning is strengthened when there are many opportunities for parents to practice and receive feedback. For *smalltalk*, practice means parents trying out the five strategies for Quality Everyday Interactions and the reading approach with their children. This can happen during the playgroup, but it is even more important that it happens at home.

Effective feedback is descriptive. That is, it states exactly what was observed and what went well. Feedback works well when it is self-feedback, that is, when parents notice what they have done well, can describe what happened and comment favourably on it.

#### IDEAS ON HOW TO DO IT

- In conversation, ask parents for their ideas and, if necessary, suggest ideas for practice at playgroup and home.
- Acknowledge and praise any attempt by parents, at playgroup or at home, to practise the smalltalk strategies.
- Acknowledge the parent's effort, even if things have not gone as well as expected.
- Encourage and demonstrate how to give self-feedback.
- Always focus on the positives first. Parents often want to tell you what they think went wrong. Encourage them to tell you what worked well first.
- Then, if a parent wants to talk about what went wrong reframe this as an opportunity to try something different in the future. Ask them what they would like to do differently next time.

#### PROMOTING PARENTING CONFIDENCE

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

When parents are confident it helps them to be the kind of parent they want to be. It helps them turn knowledge (knowing what to do) into actions (actually doing it). It is influenced by a number of things:

- how effective they feel in their role
- their capacity to solve their own problems
- the extent to which they attribute change to their own efforts
- self-management the ability to set their own goals, monitor and follow them through.

#### IDEAS ON HOW TO DO IT

The Facilitator's Guide, 'Promoting Parenting Confidence' (Facilitator Resources Section, page 121) has ideas on how facilitators can assist parents to become more confident in their parenting role. It covers how to build early success by jointly setting small achievable goals and tasks, how to plan and review progress on goals together, and how to reinforce success.

#### COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS - HANDLING QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The way we communicate with parents – how we listen and speak to them – can affect the quality of our relationship and how well our partnership works.

#### IDEAS ON HOW TO DO IT

The Facilitator's Guide, 'Communicating with Parents' (Facilitator Resources Section, page 129) has suggestions about listening, speaking and handling concerns.

#### Key messages

- Parents are the experts on their children and have strengths which can be identified and enhanced.
- The parent-facilitator relationship works best when it is a partnership.
- The facilitator plays an important role in developing parents' skills and confidence.
- However, when parents set their own goals and come up with their own ideas, they are more likely to follow through.



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

# Section 3 Putting It All Together in a Group Setting



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#### SECTION 3: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER IN A GROUP SETTING

#### What's in this section?

- How to plan and prepare for sessions
- How to introduce smalltalk strategies to parents
- How to track progress

#### PREPARING FOR SESSIONS

#### **WEEKLY SESSION PLAN**

The *smalltalk* parenting strategies are incorporated into the playgroup sessions, this can occur over a school term or any consecutive ten-week period. The first session is a chance for you and the parents to get to know each other, and to outline the aims of the playgroup sessions and how the sessions will be run. The order that you introduce the *smalltalk* topics is presented in the 'Session Sequence for Groups and Concurrent Home coaching' table (*Section 4, page 78*), which can be your weekly session plan.

#### **SESSION STRUCTURE**

Every session will have seven phases - welcome, social chat, *smalltalk* topics, snack time, wind-up, clean up, and farewell. There is a logical order to the phases, however, you may wish to have snack time earlier or later than stated or include a *smalltalk* activity during snack time. After the second phase – parents' social chat – you will introduce the *smalltalk* topic/s and activities for the session. Before the session ends there will be a wind-up activity, such as singing, in which the group comes together briefly.

The 'Group Session Structure' table (Section 4, page 79) lists these phases in order, with a suggested time allocation for each phase. These times are recommendations only, and times will vary depending on the number of parents and children attending the session and the type of activities. However, we anticipate that Phase 3, covering the smalltalk topics, can take at least an hour to complete.

#### **SESSION PLANNER**

The' Group Session Planner' (Section 4, page 80) is a tool for you to use in advance for each session. Here, you can note your purpose for the session, the *smalltalk* topics you will be introducing, and the playgroup activities that provide an opportunity for parents to practise the strategies during the

session. There is also space to write down your thoughts about your role for the session and what resources (equipment/materials) you will need for the activities.

#### **EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS**

There are two kinds of equipment/materials: *smalltalk* materials and playgroup equipment and materials.

#### smalltalk materials:

- For each of the five Quality Everyday Interactions there are
  - Conversation Cards (one for every parent)
  - o a poster that can be put up in the playgroup,
  - Opportunity sheets (one for every parent).
- For reading, there are
  - three Conversation Cards
  - one Opportunity sheet for every parent
  - o one poster for the playgroup.
- Parent tipsheets on self-care and services
- A parent worksheet on "Me and My Community"
- A DVD for every parent to take home

Contained in Section 10 of this manual is a copy of every printable resource for you to keep. Before Session One you will need to ensure you have sufficient printed copies of the parent materials and DVDs for the families in your group. The 'Schedule of Parent Resources – Group' table (Section 4, page 81) shows which resources are used each week.

#### Playgroup equipment and materials:

When planning your session, think about the materials and/or equipment you need for the session's activities. The materials and equipment should facilitate practice in the topic for the session. For example, a craft activity, building with blocks or playing with play-dough would allow parents to follow their children's lead. The session on reading needs books and other printed materials (catalogues, food packet etc).

#### INTRODUCING STRATEGIES TO PARENTS

The *smalltalk* strategies are introduced within the normal running of the playgroup. Unlike parenting programs that are run as formal group presentations, facilitators discuss *smalltalk* ideas in casual conversations with parents.

The facilitator's role is not that of content 'expert', but it is to introduce the materials and ideas, encourage and join in discussion and promote positive feedback on parents' contributions. Importantly, the facilitator identifies areas of parents' strengths, looks for opportunities to observe when parents are using the strategies and helps them to reflect on how they went.

#### TO GROUP OF PARENTS

Depending on the number of families in your playgroup, and how parents feel about talking in a small group, you may decide to have the *smalltalk* conversations with two or three parents at a time, or even to all members of the group at the same time. You may choose to do this when you notice parents talking together and use this opportunity to introduce the *smalltalk* topic for the day.

If you choose to present to the whole group at once, remember to do it in a way that is casual and demonstrates an interest in engaging everyone in a discussion on the topic at hand. Try to avoid presenting the information as a lecture or using a didactic style of teaching.

When working with small groups or the whole group of parents, ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute to the discussion. If necessary, encourage a parent to participate by asking a specific question such as "Mary, I'm interested in what you think about this example. When the mum talks like that, what could her child be learning?"

#### TO INDIVIDUAL PARENTS

One-on-one conversations are preferable when parents are less likely to share their ideas in a group or feel uncomfortable about doing so. One-one-one conversations would be necessary if a parent has missed a session so that the missed topic can be discussed. Try to keep conversations brief, no more than 10 minutes with any parent.

#### HOW TO USE THE SMALLALK CARDS, OPPORTUNITY SHEETS AND PARENT TIPSHEETS

Use the Conversation Cards and tipsheets to start the discussion. You may choose to use the following example as a process for doing this.

- 1. Give the parent(s) the conversation card and them what they think is meant by ...... (name of strategy e.g. Tuning In).
- 2. Encourage them to look at the speech bubbles on the card and engage them in discussion about what they might mean. Think of an example, or ask the parents to think of an example, to illustrate what is meant
- 3. Discuss the scenario presented in the picture on the card for example, "Why is the parent saying/doing this?" "How do you think the child might react or respond?" or, "How would the child learn from this?"
- 4. Encourage parents to talk about their experience how they are already using the strategy, or what they would like to do
- 5. Discuss with parents what they might like to try out at home

- 6. Introduce the Opportunity sheet. You might notice that you have already discussed with the parent many of the opportunities on the list. Ask the parent if they would like to fill in (or have you fill in) the section on trying the strategies at home
- 7. Tell them you'll be interested to hear how it went and will ask them to let you know at the next session.

#### **ENCOURAGING PRACTICE**

#### AT PLAYGROUP

Playgroup provides an excellent opportunity for parents to interact with their children and to practise the *smalltalk* parenting strategies that have been introduced in the session. An important part of your role is to encourage them to do this by:

- arranging playgroup activities that require parents to interact with their children
- observing when parents are demonstrating the strategies and letting them know what you've noticed
- helping parents identify their strengths what they are doing already that is working well
- giving positive feedback and encouraging their positive self-feedback (See Section 2 of this manual)
- suggesting that parents 'have a go' using the strategies during a playgroup activity.

#### AT HOME

The Opportunity sheets are a way of planning ahead for practice at home. If parents do not want to write down their ideas for home practice, ask them if they mind you writing it down, so that you will remember what they have decided to do.

When encouraging home practice, it is important to remember to follow up with the parent in the next playgroup session.

#### TRACKING PROGRESS

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It is a good idea to keep track of

- which parents you have spoken to about the *smalltalk* strategies each session
- which parents have demonstrated the current and previous sessions' strategies during the current session
- which parents have given you examples of using the strategies at home.

This information is useful for planning subsequent sessions and catching up with parents who might have missed a session.

#### IDEAS ON HOW TO DO IT

After each session you can use the Topic Tracker (*Section 4, page 84*) to record this information. This involves ticking three columns next to the names of each parent. A tick in the first column indicates that you discussed the topic with them, and in the second column that you observed the parent practising the strategy during the session. If a parent described how they practised a previous session's strategy at home, put a tick in the 'Home' column for that strategy.

#### Key messages

- Time spent in planning and preparation before the session, and tracking and recording after the session, contributes to the success of the smalltalk intervention in the playgroup.
- The facilitator is not seen as the content 'expert'. Parents and facilitators access the content together.
- The facilitator identifies areas of parents' strengths, observes when parents are using the strategies and promotes self-reflection.



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

# Section 4 Group Session Guides



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# **SECTION 4: GROUP SESSION GUIDES**

# SESSION SEQUENCE FOR GROUPS WITH CONCURRENT HOME COACHING

There are ten, weekly group sessions scheduled which will generally be run within a school term, although this is not absolutely necessary. The session guide is based on a ten-week term.

Week number	Playgroup	Home coaching			
1	Getting to know you and your child Introduce purpose of sessions, session structure and aims	Getting to know your child, family and you			
2	Getting to know you (continued)  'Warm and Gentle'  Play	Discussing how we will work together Routines			
3	'Tuning in'	'Warm and Gentle'			
4	'Following Your Child's Lead'	'Tuning in' Play			
5	'Listening and Talking More'	'Following Your Child's Lead' '			
6	'Teachable Moments'	Listening and Talking More'			
7	Reading Sharing a book	'Teachable Moments'			
8	Words are everywhere  Making a Book	reachable Monients			
9	Watching TV together / Using media together	Exploring books and reading Words are everywhere			
10	Looking after yourself	Watching TV together / Using digital media together			

# GROUP SESSION STRUCTURE

# Group session format for every session

Phase	Activity	Time (approx.)
1	Welcome: Greet every parent and child as they arrive	10 mins
2	Parent social chat	15 mins
3	Introduce parenting strategy via a playgroup activity. One-on-one, small group or whole of group, facilitator - parent conversations.  Practice activity in playgroup suggested to parent.	60 mins
4	Snack time: Opportunity to practice strategy	10 mins
5	Play activity	15 mins
6	Clean up	5 mins
7	Farewell: Every parent and child are farewelled	5 mins

# GROUP SESSION PLANNER

Date	of Session	Session no.					
Purpose of session							
Whic	Which parenting strategy or strategies will be focussed on?						
What	What activities (play or other) will support practice of the parenting strategy/ies?						
My re	ole today: (Tick relevant roles and write notes in	space provided)					
•	Describe strategy/ies						
_							
	Give verbal example						
-	Ask for parents' example						
	Demonstrate - Activity for my demonstration	is:					
-	Encourage parents to use strategy/ies						
	Observe parents using strategy/ies						
	Provide feedback by prompting parents' self-	reflection					
	Discuss opportunities for using the strategy/ies at home						
Resources I will use today							
	Parent resources						
	Resources for children						

# SCHEDULE OF PARENT RESOURCES - GROUP

A list of materials given out to parents in the group.

Week	Topic	Conversation Card	Opportunity Sheet	Other Resources
1.				
2.	Warm and Gentle	Warm and Gentle	Warm and Gentle	<ul> <li>RCN tipsheets:</li> <li>Toddler Imagining and Creativity</li> <li>Toddlers at Play</li> <li>smalltalk Parent DVD</li> </ul>
3.	Tuning in	Tuning In	Tuning In	Parent tipsheet: Mobile Phones and Devices
4.	Following Your Child's Lead	Following Your Childs Lead	Following Your Childs Lead	
5.	Listening and Talking More	Listening and Talking More	Listening and Talking More	RCN tipsheet:  Communicating well with children
6.	Teachable Moments	Teachable Moments	Teachable Moments	

7.	Reading Sharing a book	Reading Reading with your child	Shared Reading  Language and Literacy at  Home	Parent tipsheet: Shared Reading Picture Book
8.	Words are everywhere Making a Book	Words are everywhere		
9.	Watching TV together	Watching TV Together		RCN tipsheets:  • Healthy Screen Time 2-5  • Screen Time
10.	Looking after yourself			Parent tipsheet: Me and My Community  Wide Awake Parenting tipsheets:  Charging your Batteries Healthy Eating Helpful Thinking Keeping Active Saving Energy Sleeping Better and Resting Taking Time Out for Yourself

Other materials for you to use as required in the groups.

Raising Children Network (RCN)	smalltalk
Raising Children Network tipsheets	Group posters.
<ul><li>Services and Support</li><li>Victoria Services</li><li>Feeling Angry</li><li>Feeling Stressed</li></ul>	<ul> <li>Use the poster that matches that weeks' topic:</li> <li>Week 2: Warm and Gentle</li> <li>Week 3: Tuning In</li> <li>Week 4: Following Your Child's Lead</li> <li>Week 5: Listening and Talking More</li> </ul>
RCN website: www.raisingchildren.net.au	<ul> <li>Week 6: Teachable Moments</li> <li>Week 7:         <ul> <li>Reading</li> <li>Reading with Your Child</li> </ul> </li> <li>Week 8: Words are Everywhere</li> <li>Week 9: Watching TV Together</li> </ul>
	Parent tipsheet: Routines

# TOPIC TRACKER

Use this form to record whether this topic was discussed or observed with the parent during the program. Tick the relevant box if you a) discussed the topic with the parent, b) observed the parent practice the strategy and c) if the parent told you they used the strategy at home, between sessions.

You only need to note these occurrences once throughout the program, not EACH TIME they were observed.

	- VV c	arm and G	entle		Tuning ir	1	Following you child's lead				reachable moments			Reading				
ıτ	Dicc	Prac	tice	Dicc	Prac	tice	Dicc			Disc	Prac	tice	Disc	Prac	tice	Disc	Prac	tice
	DISC	Session	Home	DISC	Session	Home	DISC	Session	Home	DISC	Session	Home	DISC	Session	Home	DISC	Session	Home
	it	Disc	Disc	Disc	Disc Practice Disc	Disc Practice Prac	Disc Practice Practice	Disc Practice Practice Disc	Practice Pra	Practice Practice Practice Practice	Practice Practice Practice Practice Practice	Practice Pra	Practice Practice Practice Practice Practice Practice	Practice Pra	Practice Pra	Practice Practice Practice Practice Practice Practice Practice Practice	Practice Pra	Practice Pra



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

# Section 5 Home coaching Delivery Guide



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# SECTION 5: HOME COACHING (CONCURRENT TO GROUP DELIVERY)

# What's in this section?

- How to prepare for home coaching
- How to use the home coaching materials and resources, including how to use the 'Home Coaching' video segments (DVD)
- Your role as a home coach
- How to track progress

## PREPARING FOR HOME COACHING SESSIONS

## WEEKLY SESSION PLAN

The *smalltalk* parenting strategies are usually introduced to parents over a school term while they attend ten sessions of the playgroup. The Home coaching sessions are scheduled to occur every two weeks and follow the same order of introduction of the parenting strategies as the playgroup. The order that you follow for the *smalltalk* topics is listed in the 'Session Sequence for Groups and Home coaching' in Section 6 (*page 97*). This can be your fortnightly session plan.

The first session is a chance for you and the family to get to know one another and to discuss the sessions' aims and how the sessions will be run.

# **SESSION STRUCTURE**

Every session has three phases:

- 1. Setting the stage,
- 2. Working on parenting strategies,
- 3. Session review and planning ahead.

The Session Structure for Home coaching lists these phases in order, with a time allocation for each phase. These times are recommendations only and times may vary from session to session. However, working on the strategies should take the major part of the session - around 30 minutes.

You might want to take a copy to every session as a way of remembering what you need to cover before you and the parents commence each session.

# **EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS**

The following *smalltalk* materials are available for every family:

- Conversation Cards
  - o one for each of the five Quality Everyday Interactions
  - o three for Reading
- Opportunity Sheets
- Tipsheets on self-care and community services.
- Family Map
- 'Me and My Community' worksheet
- 'My Action Plan'
- Parent DVD (received in the second week of playgroup).

At the back of this manual, you will also find a copy of every printable resource for your records. You will be able to print most of these resources directly from the restricted Provider area of the *smalltalk* website (www.smalltalk.net.au).

Before Session One you will need to ensure you have sufficient printed copies of the parent materials for the families you are coaching and the Home coaching DVD.

Parents will be given the Conversation Cards and the Opportunity Sheets when they attend their group. However, it is a good idea to take a spare set along to the home coaching session.

The 'Session Sequence for Groups and Home coaching' table (Section 6, page 97) indicates the order of topics introduced and the 'Schedule of Parent Resources – Home coaching' table (Section 6, page 98) show what parent materials you will need in each session.

During the home coaching session, you will need the following equipment:

- Home coaching DVD (or access to each of the session video segments on your laptop, mobile
  phone or tablet device if you've downloaded them from the restricted Provider area of the
  smalltalk website (www.smalltalk.net.au).
- Video recording device, such as a phone or tablet

# INTRODUCING STRATEGIES TO PARENTS

# HOW TO USE THE HOME COACHING DVD

The Home coaching DVD is watched by you and the parent/s together. At each home visit you watch one *smalltalk* session. The narrator will tell both of you when to stop and start the session video,

what to discuss and what activities to do. All the *smalltalk* content for the session is contained in the video segments.

In your role as a home coach, you are not the content 'expert', rather, you are a partner with the family in the learning experience. As stated in the video segments, the facilitator – you - will never tell parents what to do but will assist them to come up with their own solutions.

# A Home coach's tasks include:

- managing the session timing and the use of the video segments
- introducing the parent resources for the session
- encouraging and taking active part in discussions prompted by the video
- assisting the parent to identify their strengths (i.e., what they are doing already and what is working well)
- encouraging parents to practise the strategies in the sessions and between sessions
- reviewing with parents their between session practice
- promoting parents' positive self-feedback (See Section 2 for more information on working with parents).
- assisting parents with their action plan

Session One of the home coaching video segments describes the way the home coaching works. It is important to ask the parents their views on this, answer questions and address any concerns.

The parents and children in the film clips are real families and for the majority of scenes we asked them to interact with their children as they normally do. Like most parents, these parents do a great job. In the last session we have what we call 'Opportunities to do more'. For these scenes we asked some parents to do less than what they would normally do. This is so parents viewing the scenes can consolidate their learning by making positive suggestions.

When viewing any of the filmed scenes, it is important to discourage negative statements about what the parents are doing. If the parents you are viewing with want to critically evaluate what they are seeing, ask them to frame it as "What else could the parent have done?" or "What is the missed opportunity here?"

# **ENCOURAGING PRACTICE**

# FILMED PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

During the home coaching session, the narrator will indicate when it is time for parents to practise the strategies with their children. Research shows that in vivo practice with an opportunity for focused feedback is a powerful way for parents to learn or consolidate parenting skills.

Your task is to help parents think of an activity that is suitable for practising the strategy or strategies introduced in the session and demonstrated in the video clips. If possible, these should be naturally occurring, everyday activities for the child, something that they are likely to cooperate with or enjoy.

The filming should only take a couple of minutes, then play it back, giving the parents an opportunity to comment and reflect on how it went.

Praise the parents' effort and willingness to do this task.

When prompting parents to give themselves feedback, start with asking them what went well. If needed, suggest something you observed and ask them to comment on it. Talk about all the things that went well before talking about things that did not go well, or missed opportunities. Instead of saying "What did you think went wrong?" say, "What would you do differently next time?" or "What else could you do if you were doing this again?"

# INCIDENTAL LEARNING

As well as the practice tasks suggested in the filmed sessions, there will be opportunities for parents to use the *smalltalk* strategies at any time during the home visit.

One of your key tasks is to 'tune in' to parent-child interactions. That is, notice those incidental times when parents are using the strategies whenever they interact with their child, or have missed an opportunity to use the strategies. An important part of 'tuning in' to parents is to help them become aware of what they are doing, and prompt them to reflect on how well it went.

# USING 'MY ACTION PLAN'

My Action Plan is a tool for parents to record what they have decided to practise at home between sessions. The video narrator will tell you when to stop and fill this in. The narrator also asks you to talk with the parent about how this will be used and who will write down the parents' ideas. Some parents might prefer you to do this, however, all the ideas should be the parents', not yours.

At the beginning of each session it is a good idea to look together at the Action Plan to prompt discussion about what has happened since the previous session.

**KEEPING TRACK** 

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

You may wish to record the main points raised in your home session each week as session notes. This can help you remember what was discussed and what you might want to follow up next time. If you do this, discuss it with the parents first and gain their approval. Also, show them what you have written. These notes are for your purposes only and should only be looked at by you and the parents.

# Key messages

- The Home coach is not seen as the content 'expert'. Parents and the Home coach access the content together.
- The Home coach ensures that the session runs smoothly, but the parents are 'in the drivers' seat'
- The Home coach identifies areas of parents' strengths, observes when parents are using the strategies and promotes self-reflection.
- Time spent in preparation before the session, and recording after the session, contributes to the success of the session.



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

# Section 6 Home coaching Session Guides



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# SECTION 6: HOME COACHING SESSION GUIDES (CONCURRENT TO GROUP DELIVERY)

# SESSION STRUCTURE FOR HOME COACHING

Phase	Activity	
1	Set the stage Social chat	5 mins
	Settle child/children in planned activities	5 mins
	Introduce purpose of today's session	2 mins
	Check if parent went to playgroup and ask what strategies were introduced if relevant.	2 mins
	Ask if the parent tried using the strategies between sessions and how they went.	8 mins
2	<ul> <li>Work on parenting strategies.</li> <li>Watch, discuss and engage in activities suggested by coaching DVD.</li> </ul>	30 mins
3	Review the session and plan ahead  • For next session  • For practice at home	10 mins
	Fill in 'My Action Plan'	

# SESSION SEQUENCE FOR GROUPS WITH CONCURRENT HOME COACHING

There are ten, weekly group sessions scheduled which will generally be run within a school term, although this is not absolutely necessary. The session guide is based on a ten-week term, with home coaching sessions occurring every two weeks.

Week number	Playgroup	Home coaching		
1	Getting to know you and your child Introduce purpose of sessions, session structure and aims	Getting to know your child, family and you		
2	Getting to know you (continued)  'Warm and Gentle'  Play	Discussing how we will work together Routines		
3	'Tuning in'	'Warm and Gentle'		
4	'Following Your Child's Lead'	'Tuning in' Play		
5	'Listening and Talking More'	'Following Your Child's Lead' '		
6	'Teachable Moments'	Listening and Talking More'		
7	Reading Sharing a book	'Teachable Moments'		
8	Words are everywhere  Making a Book	reachable Moments		
9	Watching TV together / Using media together	Exploring books and reading  Words are everywhere		
10	Looking after yourself	Words are everywhere Watching TV together / Using digital med together		

# SCHEDULE OF PARENT RESOURCES - HOME COACHING

The following table presents the materials used in the Home coaching sessions

Home Session	Home coaching Resources
Every session	Home coaching DVD  My Action Plan
1st session	Getting to Know You Family Map
As needed	Tipsheets (see details in Parent Resources - Group):  Opportunity Sheets  Smalltalk Parent tipsheets  Raising Children Network tipsheets  Wide Awake Parenting tipsheets



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

# Section 7 Stand-alone Home coaching Delivery Guide



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# SECTION 7: STAND-ALONE HOME COACHING

## What's in this section?

- How to prepare for home coaching sessions
- How to use the parent resources
- Your role as a smalltalk home coach
- How to track progress

# PREPARING FOR HOME COACHING SESSIONS

# **SESSION PLAN**

The *smalltalk* parenting strategies are introduced to parents using discussion, video demonstration clips, and through practice opportunities. The sessions can be delivered in the suggested sequence, as needed by the family with whom you're working, or as specified by your agency.

The structure and sequence as presented in Section 8 (page 111), can be adapted to fit with your service's provision to your client families. The suggested structure allows for:

- Flexibility in delivering sessions in sequence or out of sequence depending on a families' needs or other services' requirements
- **Flexibility in the frequency and duration of sessions**. For example, workers can deliver *smalltalk* content as part of a longer home visit session or as a stand-alone session
- Sessions to be combined as needed
- Sessions to be repeated as needed

For the remainder of this section, we will assume you are delivering the content in the suggested sequence, but as noted, you can change this to best fit your service model.

# **SESSION STRUCTURE**

Every session has four phases:

- 1. Setting the stage
- 2. Discussing smalltalk strategies,
- 3. Practice and review of the strategy
- 4. Session review and planning ahead.

The 'Session Structure for Stand-Alone Home coaching' table (Section 8, page 114) lists these phases in order with a time allocation for each phase. These times are recommendations only, and times may vary from session to session. However, bear in mind that discussing and practicing the strategies (phases 2 and 3) should make up the majority of the session.

You might want to have a copy of this table readily available at your sessions as a 'ready reckoner' or prompt to you for what you need to cover at each session.

# **EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS**

For all the session, you will need the following smalltalk materials for parents:

- Conversation Cards
  - o one for each of the five Quality Everyday Interactions
  - three for Reading
- Opportunity Sheets
- Tipsheets on self-care and community services.
- Family Map
- 'Me and My Community' worksheet
- 'My Action Plan'
- Video demonstration clips

Before you commence working with a family, you should ensure you have the resources and materials you'll need for the family, as well as access to and capacity to show the demonstration videos.

At the back of this manual (*Section 10*), you will also find a copy of every printable resource for your records. You will be able to print most of these resources directly from the restricted Provider area of the *smalltalk* website (<u>www.smalltalk.net.au</u>). The video demonstration clips are also available to watch directly from the website, or they may be downloaded to your laptop, phone or tablet for viewing without the need for a Wi-Fi connection. For non-printable resources, such as the Conversation Cards and the Parent DVD, those materials need to be ordered for delivery to you before you commence work with your families. You will have been informed about the ordering procedure at your training program.

The 'Session Sequence for Stand-Alone Home coaching' table (Section 8, page 115) indicates the order of topics introduced and the Schedule of Parent Resources – Home coaching table (page 116) shows what parent materials you will need in the session.

## INTRODUCING STRATEGIES TO PARENTS

# HOME VISITOR/FACILITATOR ROLE

Your role in the delivery of *smalltalk* is not to be the content 'expert', but rather, to act as a partner in the learning experience alongside the parents. You should never tell parents what to do, your task is to assist them to come up with their own solutions.

# A Home coach's tasks include:

- managing the session timing
- introducing the parent resources for the session
- encouraging and taking active part in discussions
- supporting the parent to identify their strengths (i.e., what they are doing already and what is working well)
- encouraging parents to practise the strategies in the sessions and between sessions
- reviewing with parents their between session practice
- promoting parents' positive self-feedback (See Section 2 for more information on working with parents).
- assisting parents with their action plan.

# ABOUT THE VIDEO DEMONSTRATION CLIPS

The video demonstration clips are designed to provide parents with a visual example of how other parents use the strategies presented within *smalltalk*. The video clips are used to help generate ideas for the parents about how they might use these ideas and approach within their family. They also provide you with an opportunity to engage the parent is a practical discussion of the strategies.

The parents and children in the video clips are real families and for most scenes we asked them to interact with their children as they normally do. Like most parents, these parents do a great job. In the last session we have what we call 'Opportunities to do more'. For these scenes we asked some parents to do less than what they would normally do. This is so parents viewing the scenes can consolidate their learning by making positive suggestions in discussion with you during the session.

When viewing any of the scenes in the clips, it is important to discourage negative statements about what the parents are doing. If the parents you are viewing with want to critically evaluate what they are seeing, ask them to consider the question, "What else could the parent have done?" or "What is the missed opportunity here?"

## PHASE 1 - INTRODUCING THE DAY'S SESSION

All sessions will follow the structure as outlined in the 'Session Structure for Stand-alone Home coaching' table (page 114). The first session is different to the subsequent sessions as it is an introductory session to *smalltalk*.

## STARTING THE FIRST SESSION

In the first session, you will describe the way your home coaching works. It is important to ask the parents their views on this, answer questions and address any concerns. You will introduce materials such as using the *My Action Plan* booklet, Getting to Know Your Child, complete a Family Map and talk about Routines. This session is an opportunity to build rapport with families. You may choose to use the Home coaching Introductory video clip to assist you with getting through some of the content of this introductory session.

The first session is a chance for you and the family to get to know one another and to discuss the program's aims and how the sessions will be run. You may not need all the resources and discussion in this session if you already have an established relationship with the family.

At times, the first session might be part of another visit that you have scheduled with the family. It will be helpful to speak to your supervisor or manager about what program activities and information to include in the first session, particularly if you have an established relationship with the family. However, there are aspects of the introductory session that will need to be discussed with the family, such as filming the parent's practice of the skills you'll be introducing them to and introducing other *smalltalk*-specific resources.

It is worth reviewing the resources to check which will be needed for the session. For example, you may have a current eco-map or genogram of the family. However, this might not contain all the information that the *smalltalk* Family Map activity is designed to collect and review, such as where the family gets their *informational*, *practical* and *emotional* support.

As mentioned, you will also introduce the idea of filmed practice to the family. The purpose of filming the parent's practice of the skills they've been introduced to, is to help facilitate their self-review. There are also example video clips in the restricted Provider area of the *smalltalk* website (<a href="www.smalltalk.net.au">www.smalltalk.net.au</a>) that provide suggestions for how to introduce this to parents.

# USING 'MY ACTION PLAN'

My Action Plan is a tool for parents to record what they have decided to practise at home between their sessions with you. Ask the parent how they would like to use the plan and who will write down the parents' ideas. Some parents might prefer you to do this, however, all the ideas should be the parents' not yours.

At the beginning of each session after the first session, it is a good idea to review the family's Action Plan together to prompt discussion about what has happened since the previous session.

## AFTER THE FIRST SESSION

Now you have established how the sessions run with the family, it is important to follow the phases in the 'Session Structure' (page 114).

Each session can start with a brief chat about how the family is going, introducing the topic of today's session, and after Session 2, checking in on the parent's practice between visits. You may also want to use this time to encourage the parent to set their child up in an engaging activity so you and the parent can have some time for your discussions without being interrupted or distracted. However, if the child wants to sit with you and listen, that is ok too.

#### PHASE 2 - SMALLTALK CONVERSATIONS

# SESSIONS 2-8: HOW TO USE THE SMALLTALK MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

As presented in the 'Session Sequence' (page 115), you can see that in Sessions 2 through 8, you will present the parent with a specific *smalltalk* topic. Once you've gone through the introductory, settling stage of the session, you can then begin introducing this session's *smalltalk* content. You may choose to give the family the relevant Conversation Card for this session's topic.

Use the Conversation Cards and tipsheets to start the discussion. You may choose to use the following process for doing this.

- 1. Give the parent(s) the conversation card and ask them what they think is meant by ...... (name of strategy, e.g., Tuning In).
- 2. Encourage them to look at the speech bubbles on the card and engage them in discussion about what they might mean. Think of an example, or ask the parents to think of an example, to illustrate what is meant
- 3. Discuss the scenario presented in the picture on the card. For example, you might ask, "Why is the parent saying/doing this?" and "How do you think the child might react or respond?" or, "How would the child learn from this?"
- 4. Encourage parents to talk about their experience how they are already using the strategy, or what they would like to do
- 5. Discuss with parents what they might like to try using
- 6. Introduce the Opportunity sheet. You might notice that you have already discussed with the parent many of the opportunities on the list. Ask the parent if they would like to fill in (or have you fill in) the section on trying the strategies
- 7. Tell them you'll be interested to hear how it goes and will ask them to let you know at the next session.

## WATCHING THE DEMONSTRATION VIDEO CLIPS

After you have had a conversation about the *smalltalk* topic, you can play the relevant *smalltalk* demonstration video. This would be a good time to engage the parent in a conversation about what they noticed. Some questions you can ask could include:

# Warm and gentle

- Can you think of a time or situation with your child when you've used this approach?
- What did you do and how did your child react?
- Are there times when your child is behaving well, how would a warm and gentle approach work then? What could you do to be warm and gentle at that time?
- What about a time when things weren't going so well, how do you think using this approach might work?
- Can you think of some things you could do to stay calm?

# Tuning in

- How does the mum in the clip tune in to her child? What does she say or do?
- How does she work out what her daughter wants?

# Following your child's lead

- What is the child interested in these examples and what do the mothers do?
- How do each of them follow their child's lead?
- Who decides what they will do?
- Can you remember a time when you followed your child's lead? What did you do, and what was your child's reaction?

# Listening and talking more

- Why do you think this is a good example of the mother and child having a conversation?
- How are mum and the little girl listening and talking to each other? What are they doing that shows this?
- How do we know they are listening to each other?

# Teachable moments

- Why do you think this is an example of a teachable moment?
- What are the parents doing in these clip that are helping their children to learn?
- What sorts of things are the children in these examples learning?
- Do you have any of your own examples where you've done this with your children? For example, when you've noticed that your child was interested in something and used that time to help them learn something?

# Reading

- How were the parents in the clips reading with their children? What were they using to 'read' to their child?
- What else were they doing, besides 'reading'? How was the way they were sitting helping the child to get involved in the reading?

- How did the children react and respond?
- What could you use to read to your child?
- Who else might be able to help or get involved in reading with your child?

Watching TV/using digital media

How does the parent get their child involved in the program?

Now you're ready for parents to practise the strategy with their child.

## PHASE 3 - ENCOURAGING PRACTICE

## FILMED PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

Research shows that live practice with an opportunity for focused feedback is a powerful way for parents to learn or consolidate parenting skills.

Your task is to help parents think of an activity that is suitable for practising the strategy or strategies introduced earlier in the session and demonstrated in the video clips. If possible, these should be naturally occurring, everyday activities for the child, something that they are likely to cooperate with or enjoy. It can help if you prompt the parent to consider the components of the *smalltalk* strategy they are intending to practice during the activity. Assisting the parent with planning to use the *smalltalk* strategy can increase the parent's likelihood of success.

The filming should only take 30 seconds to a couple of minutes. Then, play the video back to the parent, giving them an opportunity to reflect on how it went.

When prompting parents to give themselves feedback, start with asking them what went well. If needed, suggest something you observed and ask them to comment on it. Talk about all the things that went well before talking about things that did not go well, or missed opportunities. Instead of saying "What did you think went wrong?" say, "What would you do differently next time?" or "What else could you do if you were doing this again?"

Praise the parents' effort and willingness to do this task.

## INCIDENTAL LEARNING

As well as the practice tasks suggested as part of the session structure, parents will have many opportunities to use the *smalltalk* strategies at any time during the home visit. One of your key tasks is to 'tune in' to parent-child interactions. That is, notice those incidental times when parents are using the strategies whenever they interact with their child, or have missed an opportunity to use the

strategies. An important part of 'tuning in' to parents is to help them become aware of what they are doing, and prompt them to reflect on how well it went.

# PHASE 4 - WRAPPING UP THE SESSION

A key feature in delivering *smalltalk* home coaching sessions is supporting and encouraging parents to come up with an idea to practice between your sessions. Again, it is important for the parent to come up with an idea that fits their family and household; your role in to help them develop a plan for them to achieve their practice.

You can refer to the Opportunity Sheets or *My Action Plan* to help come up with ideas for a parent to practice. Ask them:

- What do you plan to do?
- How are you going to do it?
- Who else might also be involved?
- What might get in the way?
- How will you remember to have a go?

Remember to help the parent come up with an achievable goal or task to practice. Using the everyday opportunities in the home or when families are out with their children provide plenty of occasions for practicing *smalltalk* strategies.

Let the parent know that you look forward to hearing how they went on your next visit. You might want to ask if the parent would like a text between sessions to prompt them to have a go.

Finish the session by giving the parent general praise, summarising the session's activities, restating the practice goal and setting a time for the next session.

## KEEPING TRACK

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

You may wish to record the main points raised in your home session after each session, as session notes. This is an aid to your memory about what was discussed and what you might want to follow up next time. If you do this, discuss it with the parents first and gain their approval. Also, show them what you have written. These notes are for your purposes only and should only be looked at by you and the parents.

# Key messages

- The Home coach is not seen as the content 'expert'. Parents and Home coach access the content together.
- The Home coach ensures that the session runs smoothly, but the parents are 'in the drivers' seat'
- The Home coach identifies areas of parents' strengths, observes when parents are using the strategies and promotes self-reflection.
- Time spent in preparation before the session, and recording after the session, contributes to the success of the session.



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

# Section 8 Stand-alone Home coaching Session Guides



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## SETION 8: STAND-ALONE HOME COACHING SESSION GUIDES

#### SESSION STRUCTURE FOR STAND-ALONE HOME COACHING

Phase	Activity	Suggested timing
1	<ul> <li>Social chat</li> <li>Settle child/children in planned activities</li> <li>Introduce topic of today's session</li> <li>Ask how parent went with previous session's strategy (after Session 3); prompt for self-feedback and provide specific praise.</li> </ul>	10 mins
2	<ul> <li>Present the relevant 'Conversation Card' to introduce the session's smalltalk topic.</li> <li>Engage parents in conversation on their understanding of the topic:         <ul> <li>What does it mean to them?</li> <li>What it currently looks like in their home</li> <li>How they could enhance it with their child</li> </ul> </li> <li>Play the relevant example video segment and prompt the parent to reflect on the demonstration of smalltalk provided</li> </ul>	15 mins
3	<ul> <li>Support the parent to identify how they will practice the smalltalk strategy with their child (to be videoed)</li> <li>Prompt the parent to consider what they will do to ensure they demonstrate the strategy components</li> <li>Video the parent's practice of the strategy with the child</li> <li>Facilitate the parent's review of their practice</li> <li>Summarise the positives and praise the parent for their practise</li> <li>If relevant, identify some goals for improvement in future use</li> </ul>	10 mins
4	<ul> <li>Encourage the parent to set a goal for practice of strategy between sessions</li> <li>Encourage the completion of the 'My Action Plan' if wanted</li> <li>Review the session's activities and re-affirm practice goal</li> <li>Agree on a time for next session</li> <li>Ask parent how they plan to 'look after themselves' this week</li> </ul>	10 mins

#### SESSION SEQUENCE FOR STAND-ALONE HOME COACHING

Session	Session Topic (smalltalk content)	Content delivered (and resources)
1	Introduction	Overview of how the <i>smalltalk</i> home support sessions will be delivered by the facilitator.  Introductory session video clip:
2	Warm and Gentle	'Warm and gentle' conversation card and video.  Play (Raising Children Network resources, Stimulating Environment discussion).
3	Tuning in	'Tuning in' conversation card and video  Opportunity sheet  Looking after yourself (Parent tipsheets - could be delivered in any session as needed).
4	Following your child's lead	'Following your child's lead' conversation card and video Opportunity sheet
5	Listening and talking more	'Listening and talking more' conversation card and video  Opportunity sheet
6	Teachable moments	Teachable moments conversation card and video
7	Reading	'Reading'; 'Reading with your child'; 'Words are everywhere' conversation cards and video  Parent tipsheets
8	Watching TV/media together	'Watching TV together' conversation card and video Opportunity sheet
9	Missed opportunities  Summary and planning for sustaining	Missed opportunities video.  My Action Plan
10	Looking after yourself	Could be presented as an additional session if not as part of previous session

## SCHEDULE OF PARENT RESOURCES - HOME COACHING

The following table presents the materials used in the Home coaching sessions

Home Session	Home coaching Resources
Every session	Video demonstration clips  My Action Plan
1st session	Getting to Know You Family Map
As needed	Opportunity Sheets  Smalltalk Parent tipsheets  Raising Children Network tipsheets  Wide Awake Parenting tipsheets



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

## **Facilitator Resources**



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## **Promoting Parenting Confidence**

#### What does this mean and why is it important?

**Parenting confidence** enables parents to be the kind of parent they want to be. It helps them turn knowledge (knowing what to do) into actions (actually doing it). Any parenting program or strategy should aim to build parenting confidence. Parenting confidence is influenced by a number of things: parenting self-efficacy, parents' feelings of self-sufficiency, their sense of personal agency and their capacity for self-management. Each of these is described below.

**Parenting self-efficacy** is about parents believing that they can overcome problems and make changes in their own behaviour to bring about positive changes in their children and family.

**Self-sufficiency** refers to parents being able to solve problems independently. It is about being less reliant on others and trusting their own judgement.

**Personal agency** means that parents attribute changes to their own efforts rather than to chance or other factors they have no control over. This helps parents understand that they can make a difference in their child's life, as well as their own.

**Self-management** is about parents deciding what they want to change about their parenting, setting goals and selecting strategies to achieve the goals. It also includes self-monitoring checking on how well they are progressing and making changes as needed. Self-management skills help parents become more self-sufficient, feel more effective in their parenting role and believe that their efforts make a difference.

#### Parents with low parenting confidence are more likely to:

Believe that there is little they can do to change the kind of parents they are - the idea that you
are either a 'good' parent or you're not.
Fear that they will fail if they try new things. In this case, they might not try to make changes, or
might not seek help to make changes.

- ☐ Think that if they need to make an extra effort with their parenting then this shows a lack of parenting ability.
- ☐ Tend to give up quickly when trying out new strategies if they don't have immediate success.
- ☐ Think they might look incompetent if they ask for or accept help with parenting.









# **Promoting Parenting Confidence**

Po	arents with high parenting confidence are more likely to:
	Believe that parenting skills can be learnt.
	Think that making mistakes is part of learning to be a parent.
	See mistakes as learning opportunities rather than as a failure.
	Try harder to master a new skill.
	Set challenging goals for themselves.
	Be less anxious about parenting.
	Be highly engaged when participating in parenting education.
Но	ow to do it:
par stra	ilitators have an important part to play in promoting parenting confidence. How you work with ents will influence whether they become more or less confident in their parenting role. Helpful ategies are: to build early success; set realistic between-session tasks together; plan what parents do between sessions; review progress when you next see the parent; and reinforce successes.
Bui	ld early success
	Help parent to set small achievable goals to start with.
	Break down bigger goals into small steps.
	Pick goals that the parent has control over.
Set	realistic between-session tasks together
	Talk about the reasons for trying things out between sessions. For example, 'It's helpful to practice. We can celebrate success and troubleshoot problems in the next session.'
	Encourage parents to come up with their own ideas on what they could try out.
	Help parents to come up with tasks that they are likely to succeed with.
	Check that these tasks are relevant to the goals that the parent sets.







## **Promoting Parenting Confidence**



Old habits are often hard to change. This is why it is a good idea to set small goals that can be achieved in a short time.



When parents set their own goals they have ownership of them.

#### Plan together what parents will do between sessions

Tall	k about what, when, where and how. For example:
	What they would like to do.
	Where they will do it.
	How will they do it.
	When they are going to start.
	What might get in the way.
	How they will know it's working.
Rev	riew progress
Wh	en you next see or speak to the parent, ask them how things went.
	Encourage parents to notice their achievements in the small steps.
	Start by asking for one specific example - so you can picture exactly what occurred.
	Ask about what went well.
	Talk about what went right rather than what went wrong.
	If parents want to talk about what went wrong, get them to come up with ideas about how things could be done differently.
	Ask how they felt about what happened.
	Encourage parents to give themselves positive feedback.



Send a friendly text message between sessions. For example, 'How are you going with (name of strategy being tried)?'









## **Promoting Parenting Confidence**

#### Reinforce success

When you reinforce parents' successes, parents develop a sense of personal agency. Parents are more likely to attribute changes to their own efforts, rather than luck or what other people did. To help parents develop a sense of personal agency:

- ☐ When talking to parents, make the link between what the parent did and the positive changes that occurred. For example, if a parent reports that her child is starting to speak more, ask 'What was it that you did that encouraged Jack to start saying more words?'
- Limit talk about failure instead, talk about what might be done differently and/or what would help to make the strategy more successful.
- ☐ Help parents recognise their persistence and the effort they put in.
- ☐ Give positive feedback for trying out the strategies, regardless of how well they went.



#### **Key Points**

To promote parenting confidence, work together to:

- ☐ Build early success.
- ☐ Set realistic between-session tasks.
- ☐ Plan what parents will do between sessions.
- ☐ Review progress.
- ☐ Reinforce success.









## **Promoting Parenting Confidence**

Example 1	Building in early success	s, setting realistic tasks, and planning
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FAMILY 1: KELLY, RICHARD and baby STACEY (8 MONTHS)

FACILITATOR 'So you said that you think talking more to Stacey while you are

changing her nappy and bathing her, will lead to her making more sounds and 'talking' back to you. Is this something you would like to

try between now and our next session?'

KELLY 'Yes, I think I could do this every day - I just have to remember to do

it.'

FACILITATOR 'Any ideas about what would remind you?'

RICHARD 'Maybe I could remind Kelly and she could remind me to do it too.'

FACILITATOR 'That sounds like a good idea. Any other thoughts?'

KELLY 'Not sure.'

FACILITATOR 'Could you use the Listening and Talking card in some way?'

RICHARD 'We could stick it on the change table.'

FACILITATOR 'Yes that would help. Any ideas about when you could start?'

KELLY 'Today. When we get home.'

FACILITATOR 'Richard, how often are you able to change and bath Stacey?'

RICHARD 'I think it will be a bit harder for me. I can change her nappy after I

get home from work. I usually bath her at the weekends.'

FACILITATOR 'Okay. It sounds like you both have some ideas on what to try

between now and when we meet again. Before we move on, can you

think of anything that might get in the way of doing this?'

Discussion continues.....



#### Did you notice how the facilitator.....?

- Had the parents come up with ideas she didn't tell them what to do.
- $\hfill \square$  Started with something that the parents had raised.
- ☐ Gave positive feedback on the parents' ideas.
- ☐ Talked about 'when' as well as 'what'.
- Addressed what might have been barriers to success.







## **Promoting Parenting Confidence**

Example 2	Reviewing progress and planning
LAGIIIDIE 2	Reviewina broaress and biannina

FAMILY 2 HUE and THANH (2½ YEARS OLD)

HUE 'Thanh really likes his new books. He brings them to us all the time.'

FACILITATOR 'Sounds like he wants you to look at them too.'

HUE 'Yes, he pulls my hand and wants me to sit down with him.'

FACILITATOR 'He didn't do that before, did he?'

HUE 'No, he wasn't interested.'

FACILITATOR 'So your idea of reading with him every day has worked well.'

HUE 'I can find some time each day to do this now.'

FACILITATOR 'How did you manage that?'

HUE 'When we talked about having a routine, I could see where I could fit

it in.'

FACILITATOR 'Yes, I remember us talking about that. You thought it might help.

Tell me more about what happens when you sit and read with him.

What does Thanh do?'

HUE 'He wants to turn the pages. I sometimes turn the pages for him,

because he rips them.'

FACILITATOR 'Yes, I guess that can happen with a little one who's still learning how

to do things. What else does he do with the book?'

HUE 'He points to things.'

FACILITATOR 'This is a good opportunity for Thanh to learn more about the book.

What could you do when he points?'

HUE 'I could tell him what the things are and talk about them.'

FACILITATOR 'I think Thanh would like that. Is that something you would like to try

next week?'

HUE 'Yes, I think I could.'



#### Did you notice how the facilitator....?

- Showed that she understands the point the mother is making by reflecting on what she has just been told.
- Was very specific when talking about the examples.
- ☐ Compared 'before' and 'after' in a positive way.
- ☐ Built on what the mother was doing already.
- ☐ Helped the mother come up with something new to try out.









## **Promoting Parenting Confidence**

Examp	le 3	Reinforcing Progress
-------	------	----------------------

FAMILY 3: KIRRA and BRANDON (18 MONTHS OLD)

KIRRA 'Brandon is playing peek-a-boo.'

FACILITATOR 'That's terrific. How do you think he learnt to do that?'

KIRRA 'We played with him and showed him what to do.'

FACILITATOR 'Great. Tell me more about what you did.'

KIRRA 'Well, we got his attention ... We got him to look at us.'

FACILITATOR 'How did you do that?'

KIRRA 'I got down on the floor and sat him looking at me; I said his name. I

hid my face with a book and played peek-a-boo. Then I gave him the

book and he did it too - he said "boo".'

FACILITATOR 'So, what you did worked well. What do you think made it go so

well?'

KIRRA 'Don't know.'

FACILITATOR 'Did you do anything differently from what you've done before?'

KIRRA 'I think he was interested because I got on the floor with him. And

we are starting to call his name more - we've stopped calling him

Mister. He knows his name now.'

FACILITATOR 'That's terrific - all of those things you did helped him learn. What do

you do when he does "peek-a-boo"?'

KIRRA 'We laugh and clap. I say "boo" back to him. He loves that.'

FACILITATOR 'I'm sure he does.'



#### Did you notice how the facilitator.....?

- Picked up on a comment that the parent made.
- ☐ Used this as an opportunity to build the parent's awareness.
- ☐ Used praise and gave specific feedback.
- ☐ Had the parent come up with ideas about what worked.
- ☐ Asked questions to gather more specific information.







## **Communicating with Parents**

#### What does this mean and why is it important?

The way we communicate with parents can affect how well our partnership works. Sometimes if we are rushed, we are less careful about making sure our communication is clear and supportive. Therefore, it is a good idea to be aware of the important things to focus on when communicating with parents. Here are some ideas about listening and talking with parents, and handling concerns.



#### Listening

Good listening shows parents you are interested in what they have to say.



#### Speaking

When we are clear, specific and considerate of the other person's feelings, the message is likely to be received well.



#### Raising Concerns with Parents and Listening to Parents' Concerns

Talk about concerns when they come up. Problems usually don't go away by themselves and if you leave them they may escalate and be more difficult to handle later on.

#### How to do it - Listening

	Ctan what i	vou ara daina	and aive the	naront vo	ur whole attention
ш	Stop what	you are uoing	and give the	: parent yo	ur whole attention.

- ☐ Let the parent know you are listening and interested through eye contact, nodding or saying something occasionally. This makes the parent aware that you are hearing what they are saying.
- ☐ Allow the parent to finish talking without interruption and then summarise what was said to check that you understood the concern correctly.
- ☐ When a parent pauses for a response, sometimes it is useful to wait. A second or two of silence allows time for the parent to reflect.
- ☐ Check on the feeling being expressed, as well as the content of what was said. For example, 'It seems that you were really distressed about what happened.'
- ☐ Use **open-ended questions** to get more information if you need to.

Try to understand the parent's perspective, even if you disagree with what they are saying. Put yourself in their shoes.







## **Communicating with Parents**



#### **Open-Ended Questions**

Begin with 'What', 'Why', 'Where', or 'How'. Questions that begin with these words give the person a chance to expand on what they are saying, rather than just allowing a response of 'yes' or 'no'. Open-ended questions lead to more discussion and shared understanding. For example, 'What was he doing that made you so upset?'

#### How to do it - Speaking

When we are rushed or get 'caught out', we may say things in haste that we later regret; it is okay to stop and think. If you're not confident about saying something appropriate and sensitive, tell the parent you would like some time to think about what was raised with you, and set a time to talk.
Use 'I' messages: talk about how you are feeling or about the situation, rather than focusing on what you want the parent to do about it, or blaming the parent. For example, 'I am sorry to hear that. I know that I would also be upset in that situation.'
Be specific by describing what you saw and when you saw it. If you didn't observe a problem yourself, say so. For example, 'I didn't notice that. I thought that'
Keep your comments in the present; do not bring up issues from the past. If an issue keeps being raised as a concern, then it is time to find a solution. For example, 'Yes, we have discussed that before and we didn't work out a way to handle it. We need to look at what happened this morning and work out how'

#### How to do it - Raising a concern with a parent

If you need to, think of a time when you can meet informally to discuss concerns. Think ahead and be clear about what you want to discuss.
Give the parent accurate information on what you observe.
Explain exactly what the issue is and why it might be a concern.
Check what the parent thinks about the issue, and whether they are concerned about it. Ask if they experience the same kind of issues at home.
If you can, add some knowledge about the nature of the problem. For example, 'Many little ones are tired by this time of the day. Starting something new can be exhausting for them'









## **Communicating with Parents**

## How to do it - Dealing with concerns that parents raise

	Listen carefully and make sure you have enough details to understand the concern the parent has.
	Don't jump in straight away with an explanation or justification - it is important that the parent feels that the concern has been heard and that you listened.
	Reflect the feelings that are being expressed; tell the parent what you heard them say about the situation, and the parent's feelings about it.
	Try to clarify things that are not clear. For example, ask open-ended questions or give additional information if you have it.
	Show enthusiasm about any attempt the parent makes to solve the problem. For example, 'You really tried to work that out and $\ldots$ '
	When a parent raises a concern with you, it is important not to take it personally. The fact that a parent is raising a concern with you can be seen as a positive feature of your relationship.
How	to do it - Problem solving

#### low to do it - Froblem solving

Be prepared to offer a range of suggestions if the parent asks you for a solution; however,
offering solutions is a consultative process. Ask for the parent's opinion. For example, 'Well
you could try Would that work?'

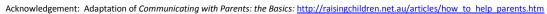
☐ Reassure the parent you are willing to help them work on the issue if they wish.

□ Brainstorming can be useful when thinking up ways to overcome concerns. Encourage the parent to evaluate the ideas and decide on the best one. For example, 'Let's try and work out some things that that you could try when ....'



Sometimes it is impossible to find a solution to every problem - don't feel you have to find a solution every time. You may be able to help by simply listening, or by finding someone else who could help.











## **Working in Partnership with Parents**

#### What does this mean and why is it important?

It is tempting to think that the quickest way to help is to tell parents what to do when they have a problem or come to you for advice. If facilitators support parents to make their own decisions, and encourage them to ask for help, parents develop confidence to keep making decisions in the future.



Facilitators can help by getting the information and tools parents need so they can deal with their own issues and make informed choices.

Q

#### To work in partnership with parents, aim to:

- Be **sensitive and responsive** to all different kinds of families.
- ☐ Take account of **what families want.**
- ☐ Be **flexible** think about what's most useful to the particular family you're working with.
- Respect that **parents are the experts about their child** and their family circumstances.
- Help families get in touch with community, formal and informal supports and resources.
- Form **strong links with child and family services** so you know where to point families when they need help.
- Recognise that **each family is different**, and understand a family's particular characteristics and needs.
- ☐ Know that all families have **strengths** that can be built on.

#### How to do it – helpful ways to interact with parents

Even when there's not much you can do to help, being avail	lable and supportive can mean a lot
to families.	

- Try not to make assumptions about what parents 'need to know'.
- □ Provide clear, truthful information.
- ☐ Sensitively check whether parents have understood you.
- Listen to parents carefully when they ask questions. Acknowledge that they might feel anxious that they don't know the answers.
- It's okay to say you don't know, and that you will try to find out what information they need.
- ☐ Provide support without judging.
- ☐ If there is a crisis, accept and respect parents who are confused or highly emotional. Try to remember that a crisis can happen to anybody.

Acknowledgement: Summary and adaptation of How to Help Parents: http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/how to help parents.htm











# **Getting to Know Your Child**



	II d	11 1	
	How does your child let you know what he/she likes?	How does your child let you know what he/she doesn't like?	
	When is your child	When is your child	
	most cooperative?	least cooperative?	
		•	
	What frightens your child?	What calms your child?	
	What Hightens your child!	What camis your child:	
How	does your child assist/partic	ipate in the following daily routine	?
How	does your child assist/partic	Dressing	?
How			?
How	Feeding	Dressing	?
How			?
How	Feeding	Dressing	?
How	Feeding	Dressing	?
How	Feeding	Dressing	?
How	Feeding	Dressing	?
How	Feeding	Dressing	?
How	Feeding	Dressing	?
How	Feeding  Bathing	Dressing	?
How	Feeding  Bathing  What do you think helps	Toileting  What would you like to learn	?
How	Feeding  Bathing	Dressing	?
How	Feeding  Bathing  What do you think helps	Toileting  What would you like to learn	?
How	Feeding  Bathing  What do you think helps	Toileting  What would you like to learn	?
How	Feeding  Bathing  What do you think helps	Toileting  What would you like to learn	?
How	Feeding  Bathing  What do you think helps	Toileting  What would you like to learn	?



# **Family Map worksheet**



# **FACILITATOR MANUAL**

## **Parent Resources**



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#### **ACCESSING PARENT MATERIALS**

This section is a reference copy of the material available to share and use with parents as part of their experience of *smalltalk* 

Please do not photocopy these. All these documents are available free for download from the *smalltalk* website (www.smalltalk.net.au) You will need access to the restricted 'Provider' are of the site to download them. You will have been given your login details directly following your participation in the smalltalk training. If you don't have your login, please contact us at *smalltalk@*paretingrc.org.au.

Raising Children Network (RCN) resources: RCN continuously review and update their resources, so we recommend going to www.raisingchildren.net.au to access the latest version of these materials and other relevant resources.

As mentioned at your training program, some program material, such as the Conversation Cards and the DVD of demonstration clips for parents, are only available from the Parenting Research Centre. Instructions for ordering these materials is in the 'Order Resources' tab in the Provider area of the *smalltalk* website.

# **Opportunities for Warm and Gentle**





#### Did you know?

Being warm and gentle builds your relationship with your child; your example helps your child learn positive ways to interact with others.



# Opportunities to be 'Warm and Gentle'

something and can't have it	osking for tillings	
Tickles – but not too much  When he wants	Laughing together at something funny  When he keeps asking for things	When things are scary  When he smiles at you
Tielden best webbe	<u>.</u>	correction
Random hugs	When she's done something you like	When she's done something that needs



#### **Key points**

How you behave with your child is sometimes just as important as what you do with your child. When your child needs guidance or correction you can be warm and gentle, as well as firm and consistent.





# Opportunities for Tuning In





## Did you know?

Babies start communicating with us from the day they are born. The level of full attention we give them and the way we read their signals is crucial for their development.



## Opportunities for 'Tuning In' - When babies and toddlers are:

Smiling	Excited	Affectionate
Laughing	Sad	Crying
Upset	Frustrated	Impatient
Unsure what to do	Frightened	Ready for fun
Wanting to do something	Wanting to be left alone	Wanting company
Tired	Cold	Hungry
Full	Not interested in food	
My opportunities for 'Tuni	ing In':	



## Key points

When you tune in, all of your attention is on your child. This is not a time to be thinking about other tasks, or doing other things at the same time.





# Opportunities for Following Your Child's Lead





### Did you know?

By following your child's lead you are helping him learn by keeping his attention on what he is doing. Without you, he might have given up earlier.



## Opportunities for 'Following Your Child's Lead'

	Babies	Toddlers
	Making sounds - e.g. blurting, trying to say words	Talking about something
	Smiling	Dancing
	Making gestures - e.g. waving	Singing
	Playing - e.g. stacking blocks	Playing with toys
	Reaching for objects	Looking at objects
	Trying to feed themselves	Digging in the garden
N	1y opportunities for 'Following Your	Child's Lead':
_		



### Key points

Watch what your child is interested in doing and join in. This is not a time to take over or change direction. Let your child lead you.





# **Opportunities for Listening and Talking More**





### Did you know?

Research tells us that the number and variety of words young children hear right from the start makes a big difference to their language development.

## Opportunities for 'Listening and Talking More'

Bath-time	Doctor's waiting room	Weeding the garden
Getting dressed	On the bus	Folding washing
Changing nappies	At the park	Relaxing outside
Mealtimes	While cooking	While you're having lunch
Going for a walk	Hanging washing out	Sitting on the couch together
In the car	Cleaning the bath	Looking at photos
In the supermarket	Playing	At bedtime
My opportunities for 'Listening and Talking More':		



### **Key points**

Conversations can happen anytime and anywhere. They aren't just about 'grown up' words. For example, you can make silly noises; you can copy your baby's sounds, or your toddler's talk; or you can sing with and without words. Don't forget to take turns.





## **Opportunities for Teachable Moments**





### Did you know?

Research shows great benefits for children's language development when there are frequent everyday opportunities for parents to help them to learn.



### **Opportunities for 'Teachable Moments'**

Babies	Toddlers	
When he looks with interest at something	In everyday activities like getting dressed	
When she points to something	When he shows an interest in objects, pictures, words or events	
When he's interested in what he's eating	When she's playing with toys	
When she's enjoying her bath	While watching TV together	
When he's looking at his hands, fingers, toes or knees	When you're making lunch together	
When she's wakeful and alert	When you're out shopping together	
My opportunities for 'Teachable Mor	ments':	



### **Key points**

You only need a few seconds for a teachable moment. The key is to seize these moments often through the day, **when your child is interested**.





## Opportunities for Shared Reading





### Did you know?

When young children read and write at home, it sets the stage for successful learning at school. Reading picture books and listening to stories, as well as discussions between parents and children about everyday print found on logos, labels and signs, are all important to children's later reading and writing abilities.



## Opportunities and ways to share books with children

Ш	Make sharing a book a part of every day: Reda or share stories at beatime or on the bus.
	A few minutes every day is all that is needed: Very young children can pay attention for only a
	few minutes. Over time, they will be able to listen for longer periods.
	Talk about the pictures in the book: You do not have to read the words to tell the story.
	Let children turn the pages: <i>Infants need board books and help to turn the pages, but a two year old can do it alone.</i>
	Show children the words: Run your finger along the words as you read them.
	Make the story come alive: Create voices for the story characters and use body language to tell the story.
	Make connections: Relate experiences in your family, pets, or neighbourhood to the events and characters in the story that you are reading.
	Ask questions about the story and let children ask questions too: <i>Use the story to engage in conversation, and to talk with your child about their ideas and experiences.</i>
	Have fun sharing books
ı	My opportunities for sharing books at home:
-	<del></del>
-	
-	
-	



### **Key points**

Through sharing books, young children learn that there are parts to a book (i.e. the cover, pages, and the back); that you turn pages from the front to back; that you read from top to bottom and from left to right; and that stories have structure (a beginning, a main event, and an ending). These are important skills as the basis for learning to read.

Adapted from Zero to Three, Sharing books with babies.



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# Parent Tip Sheet Shared Reading



### What do children learn through shared reading?

Shared reading is about children and parents talking about and reading books together.

Through shared reading, children learn new words. They learn about the meaning of words and print in books. They learn that:

Words are made of letters.
Letters have sounds.
Stories have structure (a beginning, middle, and an end).

You can have conversations while you're sharing a book, in which young children learn to take turns and learn that their ideas are valued.

Picture books give very young children lots of opportunities that will later help them learn to read. From about nine months, children can appreciate pictures in books and can begin to have 'conversations' about what they see.

Through shared reading, children learn about the pleasures of learning through books.



**How** we read to young children is as important as **how often** we read to them. No one can learn to play the piano by listening to someone else play. No one can learn to read just by listening to someone else read. Children need to participate.

### How do you share reading with children?

There are many ways to involve children in shared reading. Some simple principles to get children involved are:

Support the children's interest in the book.
Ask questions to get the child's ideas about the story.
<b>Expand</b> the child's ideas so that they learn something new.





# Parent Tip Sheet Shared Reading



### Ways to do SAE (Support, Ask and Expand):

•	<b>Support:</b> Let your child choose the book and show that you are looking forward to reading it by the tone of your voice.		
	<b>Follow child's lead</b> - If the child is looking at the picture of the bulldozer, say 'Wow, that's a big bulldozer. Where have you seen one like that?'		
	Take turns - 'Can you turn this page and I will turn the next one?'		
<b>Ask:</b> Children's responses to your questions about the stories and pictures in a book may surprise you. They know a lot. By asking questions you let a child know that you are interested in their ideas.			
	Use 'wh' questions  (what, why, where, when, who) - 'I wonder why the boy looked inside the box? What do you think he will find?'		
	Ask for more information - 'Ah, that's interesting. Have you seen one of those before?'		
<b>Expand:</b> You can label and expand on whatever a child shows interest in while you are reading and talk about a child's experiences about that event or character.			
	<b>Expand on what a child says:</b> 'What is this?' The child says, 'Truck.' And you could say, 'That's right. It is a red fire truck. Can you say "fire truck"?'		
	Introduce new words and ideas: If you are talking about a dog in a picture, you might say, 'That dog is called a Dalmatian. He has lots of spots. Our dog is a Labrador. Labradors look a lot different.'		
	<b>Bring in a child's experience:</b> 'Do you remember the day we went to the football? Do you remember the policeman who was riding the horse near the entrance to the football ground?' And let the child take the conversation from there.		





# Parent Tip Sheet Shared Reading





### Making shared reading of books work

Read some pages of the book and then have a conversation about the pictures and the story every now and again.

- □ Don't push children with too many questions and too many different ideas.
- ☐ Allow lots of time for children to express their ideas.
- ☐ Wait for children's to respond to questions.

Make book reading a fun time for you and your child.





## Opportunities for Language and Literacy at Home





### Did you know?

Parents can help children to develop an interest in language, sounds and rhymes, words and letters, reading and writing. You can use different activities that are part of your everyday routines.

### Opportunities for language and literacy at home

Ш	Little Star'); repeat nursery rhymes (Jack and Jill). Make up silly rhymes to use during routines (Go to bed and cover up your head). Read books with rhyming words.
	<i>Make a picture book with your child:</i> Cut paper into same sized pieces; staple or tie the pages together with wool; put a picture of someone or something that your child likes on every page (family, pets, toys) using photos or pictures from magazines.
	<i>Help your child discover print at home and at the supermarket</i> : Point out the pictures and words on: food packaging, clothing, signs on buildings and shops, road signs; family photo albums, junk mail, magazines and newspapers; things that your child touches often (clothes, t-shirts, toys and crayons).
	<b>Many ways to draw and write:</b> Have a supply of crayons and markers and scrap paper; scribble and draw pictures, shapes and patterns; use finger paint; draw in the sand, on steamy car windows or with foam in the bathtub.
	<b>Going to the library:</b> It's never too early to go to the library with your child or toddler. Find books, magazines, music and videos; check out the children's books, and books on tape; listen to stories; find out what happens in your community.
	Have a space and place for reading and writing materials: A shelf or box with favourite books, rhyming books and alphabet books with pictures, and books which reflect your child's interests.





# Opportunities for Language and Literacy at Home



My opportunities for language and literacy at home:				



### **Key points**

Early literacy skills develop in everyday settings, through positive and fun activities with literacy materials and other people.







### What is a routine?

Routines are how families organise themselves so they can get things done, spend time together and have fun. Whether your household is easy-going or super organised, every family has its own ways of doing things. So setting up a routine should reflect how your family operates.

Rou	itines can be:
	<b>Daily routines</b> for getting ready in the morning, bath time, bedtime and mealtimes greetings and goodbyes.
	Weekly routines for housework like washing, cleaning and shopping.
	Yearly routines involving holidays and family get-togethers.
Ho	w children benefit from routines

### ☐ Children feel safer and more secure when their home life is predictable.

Routines can include fun, play or time with parents. Reading a story before bed, for
example, can be a special time a child spends with a family member.

- □ Daily routines help set our body clocks for example, bedtime routines help children's bodies to 'know' when it's time to sleep.
- Routines are a way of teaching your child ways to stay healthy, like time to brush teeth, wash hands after toileting and time to exercise.
- ☐ If your child needs to take medicine regularly, having a routine for this will make it more likely that you and your child will remember.

### When routines are helpful

Maintaining normal daily routines as much as possible can make it easier for children to deal with the stress of events such as the birth of a new child, parents separating, or the illness or death of a family member.

When major disruptions occur, like bushfires or floods, parents are often advised to get children back into their regular routines as soon as they can.







### **How parents benefit from routines**

	control, which will make you feel less stressed.
	A routine will help you complete regular daily tasks efficiently.
	Routines take effort, but once established they will let you do things on 'auto pilot' so
	you can think about other things while you work.
Тур	pes of routines
Rou	utines for Daily Living:
	Getting ready in the morning.
	Going to bed at night.
	Eating meals.
	Hygiene and health. For example, brushing teeth and washing hands.
Rou	utines for Household Responsibilities:
	Tidying up.
	Caring for pets.
	Chores. For example, setting the dinner table and packing away.
	Shopping.
Rou	utines for Interacting and Fun:
	Greetings and goodbyes.
	Eating meals together.
	Regular play and talk times with a parent each day.
	Special one-on-one time with a parent.
	Special weekly meals (such as pancakes on Sunday).
	Family days (family activity).
	Family DVD nights.
	Story time (book reading).





**Routines for Social, Cultural and Religious Activities** 



	Regular 'play dates'.				
	Regular contact with your extended family and friends.				
	National/state/local celebration days, annual fetes and outings.				
	Saying prayers.				
	Think about whether a routine is right for you and your family				
	Think about whether a routine is right for you and your failing				
	Try writing down what you do on a typical day.				
	☐ Which things do you do regularly with your family? Look at each of these				
	and ask yourself whether life would be easier and more enjoyable if it				
	ran more smoothly.				
	☐ Could children and other family members be involved more?				
	☐ Are there things you would like to do regularly but aren't doing?				
	Are there things you would like to do regularly but aren't doing:				
Starti	ing a new routine can be a bit tricky, because it means changing the ways				
your	family works now. Here are some things to think about:				
	How will your new routine make life easier/better/less stressful?				
	Can you build fun or play into daily tasks that you do with your children?				
	something you enjoy - even for a few minutes.				
	Can you make a new routine part of an old one? For example, you might get your				
	child to take a new medicine just before he brushes his teeth?				

☐ Can you make the routine without constantly having to remind everyone? For example, could you use the end of a television show to signal the beginning of a

bedtime routine? Simple lists, or even post-it notes, can be good reminders.







### How to set up a new routine

Work out the <b>goal</b> of the routine. Picture the end result.
List the <b>individual steps</b> in the order they need to be done.
Make sure everyone is <b>clear about their role</b> in the routine.
Work out the <b>timing</b> of the routine. How much time does each step take? What time
will you need to get everything done?
Think about ways of <b>setting up the routine for success</b> . Can you get rid of anything
that will get in the way? For example, turning off the TV during the morning routine. $ \\$
Before you start, <b>talk everyone through steps</b> of the routine. Be prepared to do this
more than once if needed.



If you are feeling like you can't find time in the day to do the things you want with your children or for yourself, then a new routine might help.





## Parent Tip Sheet Mobile Phones and Devices



### Mobile phones and devices and children's development

For many people, mobile phones and devices are an important part of everyday life. Mobile phones and devices can help keep people connected, learn new things and find their way around.

Some parents wonder how their use of mobile phones and devices affects their children's development. Your relationship with your child is foundational to your child's development. If you have a loving, stable and responsive relationship with your child, and your child has lots of opportunities to interact with you, your mobile phone use is unlikely to be harmful to your relationship with your child.

But it's worth being aware of the times when using a mobile phone or device makes it difficult to see or pay attention to other things that are happening. These might be times that you miss out on opportunities to notice and interact with your child.

Some parents let their children use mobile phones or devices while they're doing other things, like housework or talking on the phone. This can be helpful, but online activity can't replace the back-and-forth interactions and conversations children have with their caregivers.



Physical and social activities are important for children's development. And children learn best from interactive, hands-on experiences with people who care about them. Being distracted by a mobile phone or device might make you miss out on opportunities to have the back-and-forth conversations and other interactions that help your child learn.





## Parent Tip Sheet Mobile Phones and Devices



### Useful ideas for managing mobile phones and devices

- Choose a time when your mobile phones or devices are always turned off. This might be when you are having lunch or dinner, or when you are playing a game with your child
- Choose a time to spend on your mobile phone or device when your child is less likely to need your attention, such as when your child is asleep or in care.
- Remember, children are always watching what we do as parents and copying our actions. You can model good mobile phone or device use – for example, by putting your phone down and making eye contact with your child when she initiates a conversation with you.
- Apps are available that can help you track your time on your device. This can help you to take breaks from your device and start conversations with your child.



Mobile phones and devices can be helpful in many situations. It's also good to be aware of the times when using a mobile phone or device makes it difficult to interact with or have a conversation with your child.





# Parent Tip Sheet Me and My Community



Office Address:	Mark attack
Phone number:	Website:
MCH Centre	
Address:	
My MCH Nurse is:	Phone number:
Medical Information	
Local Medical Centre	
Address:	
	Phone number:
Local Hospital	
Address:	
Phone number:	
Phone number:	
Local Council Services:	
Local Council Services: (E.g. child care centre, family day care	
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Local Council Services: (E.g. child care centre, family day care counselling)  My Favourite Places	e, school holiday programs, family suppor Phone number: Phone number:





# Parent Tip Sheet Me and My Community



My Local Library
Community Library
□ Location:
□ Opening Hours:
Toy Library
□ Location:
☐ Opening Hours:
Nearest Centrelink office
Address:
Phone number:
Nearest Medicare office
Address:
Phone number:
Kindergarten
Address:
Contact Person: Phone number:
Private Charles
Primary School
Address: Phone number:
Contact Person Phone number
My Community Events for 2011:
(E.g. festivals, school fetes, celebrations, concerts).
Other Important Information
E.g. bushfire helpline.
o. 2.2





## Parent Tip Sheet Sleeping Better and Resting



### **Sleeping Better and Resting**

**Sleeping better is one way for you to look after yourself**. It is common to have problems sleeping well from time to time, particularly if you're feeling stressed.

Parents' sleep is often determined by the needs of our babies and children. However, there are still some things you can do to **improve the time that you do have to rest** or sleep.



### Here are some things to try to improve your rest time and sleep quality

- Establish a regular bedtime routine.
- Find ways to switch off and wind down before bed. For example, reading a book, listening to some gentle music, or practicing relaxation skills such as deep breathing.
- Try and wake and get up at the same time every day.
- Exercise regularly during the day. For example, go for a walk with the children.
- Avoid caffeine close to bedtime. This includes coffee, tea, soft-drinks, or chocolate.
- Be restful. It can be difficult to wind down after a long day, or to switch
  your mind off to sleep. Rather than get worried and frustrated about not
  falling asleep, remind yourself that it is ok that you are warm and restful in
  bed.
- Nap during the day when you can.

### Think about your sleep and rest:

- 1. Write down one thing that you can do to sleep better OR get more time for rest.
- 2. How can you make it happen?





## Parent Tip Sheet Saving Energy



### **Saving Energy**

As well as identifying ways to 'charge up your batteries' regularly, it is important to find ways to deal with the demands that are running you down. When we are exhausted or stressed, it's easy to feel overwhelmed with everything we need to get through. It can also be difficult to think clearly about **strategies to save energy.** 

Some of our demands cannot be put off, such as caring for your children, getting meals for the families, or attending medical or other appointments. However, some tasks can be reorganised, or let go for the moment to save energy, like some household tasks. It might be possible to organise someone else to help with some of the workload to save some of your energy.



### Tips for Saving Energy

There are many ways you can save energy. These include:

- □ Prioritising
- ☐ Problem-solving
- □ Getting support





## Parent Tip Sheet Keeping Active



### **Keeping Active**

When we are tired or stressed, being active feels like the last thing that we want to do. However, **regular physical activity** actually **increases your energy** levels.

It doesn't have to be high intensity physical activity. Even a walk with your baby or toddler is enough. If it is hard for you to get out to the park or gym, then there are lots of activities you can do at or from home. This may include stretching, exercises from a Yoga or Pilates DVD or book. Your local library may have DVDs or books on exercise.



### Keeping active is important. Try to:

- · Include some activity every day, make it part of your routine
- Start small, even 5 minutes will add up over the day!
- Explore some activities that you can easily do from home, like yoga or stretching.

### Think about your exercise and activity

- 1. Write down one thing that you can do to keep active.
- 2. How can you make it happen?





## **Parent Tip Sheet Helpful Thinking**



### **Helpful Thinking**

How we think about things and what we say to ourselves can affect how we feel and how we cope with situations. Sometimes it's hard to stay positive. For example, when you're tired or stressed.

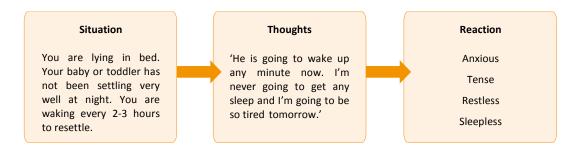
Unhelpful ways of thinking can creep in and drain your energy.

Even when faced with challenges, realistic and helpful thinking can energise you.

Here are some examples of how unhelpful and helpful thinking can affect how you react to situations.

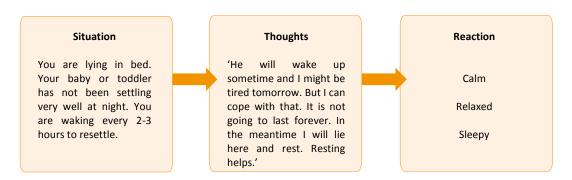
### **Example 1**

### **Unhelpful Thinking**



### Helpful Thinking

In the same situation, changing how you think about the situation can lead to better reactions.



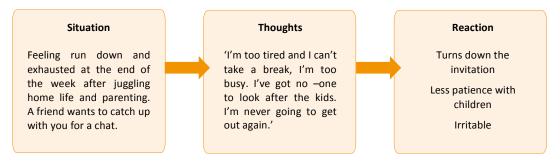


## Parent Tip Sheet Helpful Thinking



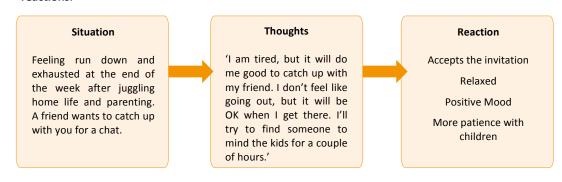
### Example 2

### **Unhelpful Thinking**



### Helpful Thinking

In the same situation, changing how you think about the situation can lead to better reactions.



 $\label{lem:convergence} \mbox{Adapted with permission from `Wide Awake Parenting'- copyright Parenting Research Centre.}$ 





# Parent Tip Sheet Healthy Eating



### **Healthy Eating**

One way that you can look after yourself is to **eat well** and make **healthy choices** about your meals.

When we are tired or stressed, we often go for quick fixes. Many parents skip meals during the day because they are too busy.

Eating well and eating regularly is a great way to **nourish yourself** and provide a **much needed boost** when parenting is busy and demanding.



### Try these suggestions for regular, healthy eating:

- Make healthy choices at the supermarket and at meal times
- Establish regular eating routines:
  - 1. Always eat breakfast
  - 2. Eat regular meals and one or two nutritious snacks during the day
- Try and eat together as a family at mealtimes
- Eat at the table, not in front of the television
- Allow enough time to eat in a relaxed way, not rushed

### Think about your eating habits:

- 1. Write down one thing that you can do to eat well.
- 2. How can you make it happen?

 $\label{lem:convergence} \mbox{Adapted with permission from 'Wide Awake Parenting'- copyright Parenting Research Centre.}$ 





## **Parent Tip Sheet Charging Your Batteries**



Making a plan is the key to managing fatigue and stress. When you have a clear goal about what you want to do, and a plan about how you are going to make it happen, you will be more likely to do it.

On the next page is a space for you to write a plan for 'Charging Your Batteries' this week. To write your plan, think about the following:

- 1. Write down one thing you can do more of or do differently.
- 2. Think about what you need to do to make it happen.

Here are some examples of goals and plans to 'charge your batteries'.

Strategy	Example Goals	Possible Plans
Taking time out for self	To catch up with friends weekly	Organise a regular time with friends to catch up without the kids. Negotiate a time with a family member to look after the kids.
Helpful thinking	To practice helpful self-talk at a stressful time (e.g. getting reading in the mornings)	Try to be more aware of when I am getting stressed in the mornings. Take some time (not in the morning) to identify what my unhelpful thoughts are. Ask myself some questions to challenge and change this unhelpful thinking into more helpful things I can say to myself in the mornings. Put these on the fridge in the morning. Remind myself to look at them.
Sleeping better	To go to bed at 10pm every night	Do relaxing activities and be restful from 9pm. Begin bedtime routine (brush teeth etc) at 9.30pm. Be in bed by 10pm.
Keeping Active	To go for a 30 minute walk at least 3 times a week	At the beginning of the week, think about what days will be best to go for a walk.
Healthy eating	To eat a healthy lunch every day	Go shopping to make sure I have things for a quick healthy lunch.





# Parent Tip Sheet Charging Your Batteries



Your Plan for 'Charging Your Batteries'



**YOUR GOAL** 

For

**Charging Up** 

☐ What do you need to put in place to make it happen?





## Parent Tip Sheet Taking Time Out for Yourself



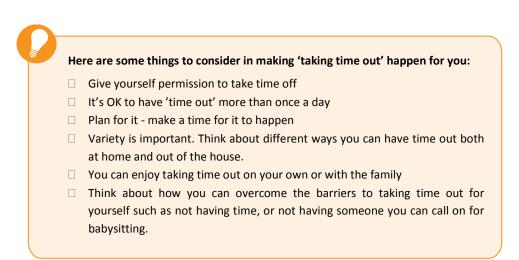
### Taking time out for yourself

Taking a break is an important part of looking after yourself.

Many parents find it difficult to take a break. Some are unsure about leaving their children with others, or feel guilty about taking time off. Sometimes just finding time in a busy day can be a challenge. However, even a few minutes every now and again might help you 'charge your batteries'.

Everyone is different in how they like to take a break. Some people like to sit and read, or go for a walk, while others may like to catch up with friends or go shopping. **Taking time out for yourself is most effective when it is enjoyable and relaxing, and something you look forward to.** 

Many parents agree that taking a break is important, but making it happen can be a challenge.







# Parent Tip Sheet Taking Time Out for Yourself



Please write down:	
One or two things that you like to do:	
What are in the core of talking time and for one	
What gets in the way of taking time out for you?	
What can you do to make it happen?	
Who can help?	







# Healthy screen time and quality media choices: 2-5 years

Screen time is a part of life for many preschoolers. If your child uses screens, it's important to think about what educational and other benefits your child is getting from screen time. It's also important to help your child develop healthy screen time habits. At this age, you still have a big role in managing your child's overall screen time.

#### Screen time for preschoolers

Screen time for preschoolers is about choosing quality programs and apps and developing healthy screen habits.

Child development experts also recommend **limiting children's daily screen time**. Screen time limits can help lower the risks of screen time for your child, which include physical, developmental, safety and other risks.

The most recent guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) say that children aged 2-5 years should have no more than an hour a day of screen time with an adult watching or playing with them.

When you help your young child combine good-quality media choices with healthy screen habits and screen time limits, he'll be set up to make the most of screen time now and in the future.

#### Why screen time quality is important

Screens are a part of life for many preschoolers.

If you're thinking about whether your child should watch TV or play on your phone, here's a key question to ask: Is this program, video or app good quality? Goodquality media can support your child's learning, especially if it ties in with her interests or sparks her imagination.

For example, a five-year-old can get a lot out of spending 30 minutes creating an artwork on a screen because this develops his imaginative use of shape and colour. It's much better than if he spends 30 minutes watching online animations that advertise and sell toys.

#### Choosing good-quality apps and games for preschoolers

#### Good-quality apps or games for preschoolers:

- encourage creativity for example, by getting children to draw pictures, create stories or make simple choices about which characters to be
- encourage problem-solving for example, by getting children to work out the most appropriate clothes to dress online characters in for rainy weather
- develop communication skills for example, by encouraging children to learn other languages
- develop social skills for example, by encouraging children to take turns in games
- build on interests for example, by getting children to build with virtual blocks if they like playing with blocks.

#### Other practical things to think about include:

- age range it's a good idea to check that the age range for an app or game matches your child's age
- advertising be wary of apps that feature movie characters or popular products, because these apps are often designed to promote movies and products
- privacy settings check the terms and conditions to see whether and how apps collect data, and make sure you're comfortable with what data will be collected and what it will be used for.

## Choosing good-quality TV programs, movies and videos for preschoolers

Good-quality TV programs, movies and videos for preschoolers:

- have positive messages about relationships, family and life avoid those that make violence or bad attitudes look good
- inspire new off-screen play ideas for children after they've finished watching
- have good stories like those that involve characters treating each other fairly avoid programs that are just about selling promotional toys, apps and gear
- are age appropriate for example, the stories and themes of some movies are too mature and complex for young children to fully understand.



Online reviews can help you decide whether a movie, app or game is high quality and has educational benefits. Try our <u>movie reviews</u> (<a href="https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/movie-reviews">https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/movie-reviews</a>) or <u>reviews on Common Sense Media</u>

(https://raisingchildren.net.au/ media/external-links/c/commonsense-media-reviews). Use <u>Australian Classification</u>
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/ media/external-links/a/australianclassification-classification-categories-explained) to find out what different age classifications mean.

#### Healthy screen time habits for preschoolers

Developing healthy screen time habits is an important part of making the most of screen time. If your child develops healthy screen time habits while she's young, these habits will help her make better choices about how to use her free time when she's older.

Here's how you can get started on these habits with your preschooler.

#### Role-modelling healthy screen time habits

Your child learns screen time habits from you. This means you can model healthy screen habits by using screens in the way you want your child to use them – for example, by switching your phone off during dinner, or turning the TV off when you've finished watching a program.

You can also set a good example by not always using technology to keep your child entertained in situations like long car journeys or while waiting at the hairdressers. Try mixing it up with things like playing 'I spy' or drawing. When you know you're going to be in these situations, you could try packing an activity bag with puzzles, books, drawing materials and so on.

Playing on a device in boring situations will usually distract your child, but it can mean your child misses an opportunity to learn social skills like how to act in public, or how to manage boredom in creative ways. It can also mean your child ends up relying too much on technology for something to do.

#### Teaching your child about quality screen time

Preschoolers can start learning about what makes a good TV program, movie, app and game. If your child wants to get a new app or watch a TV program, you can look at it together to see whether it's good quality and safe.

And if you play or watch with your child, you can start getting him in the habit of thinking about what's on the screen rather than just passively watching. For example, you can sit with your child while he plays an app and ask questions like 'How do you play this game?' and 'What happens when you move there?'. Or if you're watching TV together, you could ask 'What would happen if you did what that person did?'.

#### Balancing screen time with other activities

Screen time can be a fun, learning experience for your child. But it's important to balance screen time with other activities that are good for your child's development. These include physically active play, creative play like solving puzzles and drawing, and conversation with family and friends.

You can find this balance for your child by:

- setting screen time limits according to the age of your child and your family's daily or weekly routine. For example, you might give your child more screen time on the weekend, or extra time to video-chat with a relative who lives overseas
- switching off the TV, computer and mobile phones at family mealtimes. This
  helps even very young children learn about socialising, talking with others and
  using table manners
- setting rules like no watching TV or playing on the tablet until your child has finished her chores
- encouraging your child to play outside, draw and play creative games like puzzles.



Check out <u>Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour</u>
<u>Guidelines (https://raisingchildren.net.au/ media/external-links/a/australian-government-department-of-health-australia-s-physical-activity-and-sedentary-behaviour-guidelines)</u> for helpful tips on screen time and how to balance it with physical activity.

#### Managing screen time

One of the best ways to manage screen time is to give your child some choices. For example, you could give your child a list of games and programs and let him decide how he wants to use his screen time. This teaches your child to think, plan and make choices about electronic media use.

It can help to have a way of marking when it's time to finish screen time – for example, when it's dinner time or bath time, or the end of the program. If you give your child a warning when it's almost time to stop, she'll be more likely to cooperate. It'll also help if you make time to help your child save what she's doing.



If your child is playing on a device alone, make sure you've checked the safety settings. Also check in on your child regularly when he's online – for example, ask him about what he's playing or watching. This also sends the message that you're interested in what he's doing.

#### Acknowledgements

This article was developed in collaboration with Dr Joanne Orlando, Senior Lecturer, Early Childhood Education, Western Sydney University, and consultant on children and technology at Switch: navigating the digital age.

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#### **External links**

 Office of the eSafety Commissioner – iParent (https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent)

#### Last updated or reviewed

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### Screen time

Screen time is the time you spend each day using devices with screens, like TVs, video consoles, smartphones and tablets. There are benefits and risks to using these devices, so a healthy family lifestyle includes limits on daily screen time.

#### What is screen time?

Screen time is the time you spend watching TV or DVDs, using computers, playing video or hand-held computer games, or using tablets or smartphones.

Screen time can be:

- interactive for example, playing video games, communicating via Skype, or using online tools to draw pictures
- not interactive for example, sitting still and watching movies, TV programs or YouTube videos
- educational for example, doing maths homework online
- · recreational for example, playing games or watching videos for fun.

#### Screen time guidelines

Child development experts recommend **limiting children's daily screen time**. This is because real-life interactions with you and others are much better for your child's wellbeing, learning and development.

The latest guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggest that:

- children under 18 months should avoid screen time, other than video-chatting
- children aged 18 months to 2 years can watch or use high-quality programs or apps if adults watch or play with them to help them understand what they're seeing
- children aged 2-5 years should have no more than one hour a day of screen time with adults watching or playing with them

https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/play-learning/screen-time-healthy-screen-use/screen-time

 children aged 6 years and older should have consistent limits on the time they spend on electronic media and the types of media they use.

#### What do screen time limits mean for your child?

Screen time limits are about making sure your child enjoys lots of healthy, fun activities – both with and without screens.

Limits mean looking at the time your child spends on screens and making sure it doesn't get in the way of sleep and activities that are good for her development. These activities include things like physical play, reading, creative play like drawing, and social time with family and friends.

Limits don't mean you should stop your child from watching TV or playing video games because he uses screens at school or for homework.



These guidelines aim to help you manage your family's media use in a screen-filled world. The AAP suggests a good way to do this is by creating a family media plan

(https://raisingchildren.net.au/ media/external-

<u>links/h/healthychildren-org-family-media-plan</u>). Your plan could cover things like screen-free areas in your house, screen-free times, and programs and apps that are OK for your children to use.

#### Benefits of screen time

Television, movies, video games and the internet can be a positive influence on your child. This is especially when:

- you get involved when your child is using them and help your child make good choices about what games to play or things to watch
- you get involved and talk with your child about what's going on in the game or program so she understands it
- your child uses good-quality content on screens for example, playing a video game that involves solving creative puzzles to progress to higher levels
- using screens gives your child new ideas for traditional play for example, playing Minecraft might get your child interested in designing buildings on paper
- using screens helps your child learn new skills for example, doing a video about a school excursion might help your child learn video-editing skills.



How do you know whether a TV show, movie, app or video game is good quality? Our article on how your child can benefit from

https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/play-learning/screen-time-healthy-screen-use/screen-time

media (https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/playlearning/media/media-benefits) explains.

#### Risks of screen time

Screen time can have physical, developmental, safety and other risks. If you reduce the amount of time your child spends using screens, you can reduce the risks for your child.

#### Physical problems

Using screens can cause physical problems. For example:

- Looking at a screen intensely can cause sore, irritated and dry eyes, headaches and fatigue.
- Looking down at a device can make your child's neck and spine uncomfortable.
- Being inactive for long periods using a screen can lead to a less active lifestyle, which could lead to obesity.

You can reduce these risks by encouraging your child to:

- · regularly look away from the screen into the distance
- · keep his neck upright when he's using a phone or tablet
- · take regular breaks to get up and move around
- · make physical activity part of his daily life.

#### Development issues

Too much screen time can have an impact on children's language development and social skills. This is because children need real-life interactions to develop these skills. Too much screen time can also affect older children's development – for example, it can affect their ability to have conversations, maintain eye contact, pay attention in school or read body language.

Too much screen time can also result in children missing out on developing a wide range of interests, and the friends and learning associated with these interests.

You can **reduce this risk** by making sure your child balances time spent using screens with other activities.

#### Safety

Your child could encounter dangerous material or people on the internet.

You can **reduce this risk** by taking some practical <u>internet safety precautions</u> (<a href="https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/safety/personal-safety/internet-safety-6-8-years">https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/safety/personal-safety/internet-safety-6-8-years</a>) like checking the privacy settings on apps that your child uses. You can also help your child learn how to use the internet safely, responsibly and enjoyably – for example, by talking to your child about not sharing personal details online.

#### Media messages

Screen-based media can influence children

(http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/media influences teenagers.html) and their behaviour – for example, children can copy or be influenced by negative behaviour, sterotypical representations of gender, violent imagery or coarse language they see in advertising and other media.

You can reduce this risk by helping your child develop <u>media literacy</u>. (<a href="https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/media/media-literacy">https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/media/media-literacy</a>), so that she can understand and question media messages.



Check out <u>Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour</u>
<u>Guidelines (https://raisingchildren.net.au/\_media/external-links/a/australian-government-department-of-health-australia-s-physical-activity-and-sedentary-behaviour-guidelines)</u> for helpful tips on screen time and how to balance it with physical activity.

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Home / Toddlers / Play & learning / Play ideas

### Toddlers at play

Your toddler is a robust little individual determined to explore, experience and learn about the world. He does this through play and interactions with others. You can help with our toddler play ideas and toddler games.

#### What to expect from toddler play

Your toddler wants time to look at and try everything she sees. She's in awe of the world, fascinated by everything from cracks in the cement to other people's front yards, leaves on trees and aeroplanes overhead. That's why a walk to the letter box can sometimes take an hour!

At this stage, the word 'no' is bound to be met with opposition – your toddler can't understand why you won't let him do exactly what he wants, and he'll let you know with confidence and volume. He doesn't understand that you're often just trying to keep him safe, and he doesn't want anything to get in the way of his quest to find out how things work.

Your toddler might be overwhelmed by new emotions, including frustration. Your reassurance, love and support are vital. Also, with all the noise, confidence and activity that go with this age, it can be easy to forget that your toddler is still very much a baby.

Play is most valuable for your toddler when she gets the chance to lead. If you let your child take the reins with toddler games, whenever it's safe and practical, she'll benefit from learning to make decisions and drawing on her imagination.





Even though you're taking a back seat, you can help your toddler learn about language and concepts by providing a running commentary – for example, "Oh, you're riding your horse to the shops, are you?"



Repetition in play is extremely important for children, and your toddler will repeat things over and over. For example, she might spend ages putting things into containers, tipping them out, putting them back in, and then tipping them out again. This repetition is how your toddler masters skills and understands what to expect in certain situations.

#### Toddler play ideas and toddler games

You're still the best toy for your toddler – and the best toddler games still feature you playing a strong supporting role.

- Your toddler will enjoy singing with you and he won't care if you're singing out of tune!
- Reading expands your toddler's knowledge of words and helps her learn to talk. The best
  picture books are the ones you can read over and over. Pop-up and lift-the-flap books are fun
  and full of surprises. Let your child choose favourite books to read. As you're reading, ask
  questions such as 'What happens next?' Or get your child to join in with the story and repeat
  words.
- Your toddler will enjoy scribbling on paper and on the walls, floor, fridge, your good books and the dog – with crayons, pencils and paints. You can expect him to put any pens within reach into his mouth too.
- Toddlers generally love playing with water emptying and filling containers, playing with the

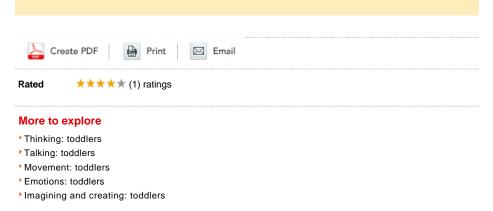
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hose, pouring water from a teapot into a cup or enjoying bath toys. Constant supervision is the only way to keep your child safe around water.

- Messy play that lets your toddler explore new textures and sensations will delight her.
- Outdoor play, such as pottering in the garden or park, will provide endless play possibilities.
- By the time your toddler is three, dress-ups, playing house, climbing and running are all likely to be favourite activities.
- Your toddler wants to see how things work. He'll open and close drawers, turn containers upside
  down to check out their contents, put toast in the DVD player, and post all sorts of objects into
  all sorts of holes to see what happens.



Speak to your child and family health nurse or GP if, by 18-24 months, your toddler isn't interested in different kinds of play, exploring different objects and toys, and sharing toys when playing with you.



Last updated or reviewed

08-08-2014



Home / Toddlers / Play & learning / Play Ideas

### Imagining and creating: toddlers

Your toddler is exploring the world through play and creativity. Here are play ideas and creative activities to boost toddler imagination.

#### About toddler play and imagination

Your toddler is like a little scientist – experimenting, observing, testing, trying out ideas and working out big questions about herself and the world she lives in.

All types of play – on his own or with others, unstructured and structured – are vital to your toddler's learning. They all boost his imagination and creativity.

#### What to expect with your toddler's imagination

Your child has lots of creative thoughts and ideas, and is keen to express them all through play. Your toddler will probably enjoy:

- messy play
- singing aloud to songs and rhymes
- making 'music' and dancing
- pretend play and copying the behaviour of grown-ups and older children.

Your toddler is a **keen little mimic** who uses imitation to learn from others. By the age of two years, your toddler will probably be babbling into the phone, cooking up a dinner of leaves and grass in the backyard, and copying the actions of other people.

Dressing up and pretend play start around 15 months. Your child might start playing house or marching around the backyard as a firefighter. If you provide plenty of props, such as old clothes and hats, your toddler will probably enjoy playing at being a grown-up.

You might start to see a preference for a particular colour – choosing the blue crayon or the orange pants. Your child might also prefer one type of art, whether it's clay or playdough or painting.

Music of all sorts can have your toddler imagining fantastic things like flying or floating in space.

Moving and singing along to favourite songs, splashing or pouring water, digging sand, and squeiching paint between fingers and toes will all be popular play activities.

Your toddler will also want to 'help' you around the house and at the shops, and will feel very proud of being a good helper. Your toddler can start to help with cooking – always with your supervision, of course. Any mess that happens is all part of the fun and learning.

The bath can be a great place for exploring water. Your child will enjoy pouring water from one container to another, seeing what happens when boats are filled with water, and experiencing how it feels when water splashes in your face. If your toddler is playing around water, always make sure you're there to supervise. Toddlers are naturally inquisitive and often fearless, so they're particularly at risk of drowning.

#### Play ideas and creative activities for toddlers

Imagination and creativity grow best with new experiences and with lots of time and space to explore. It's important to let children do their own thing at this age, as long as they're safe.





There are lots of ways you can encourage your toddler's imagination to blossom:

- Tell stories and <u>read books</u>, particularly books with pictures of wonderful landscapes and creatures, and fun, silly or enthralling storylines. Encourage your toddler to contribute to the story – get her to add a new ending, for example, or ask her what comes next.
- <u>Play outdoors</u> or walk in the park, in the sunshine, on the beach or anywhere with new sights
  and sounds. Collecting fallen leaves, searching for insects or other tiny creatures and looking at
  different coloured stones can be a lot of fun.
- Recite nursery rhymes using our <u>Baby Karaoke</u>. Do some actions for extra fun and learning.
- Play dress-ups with old clothes, handbags and hats.
- Play with musical instruments or listen to music.
- Set up water play from 12 months. A bucket of water with bubbles and a few plastic cups are all
  your toddler needs. Always supervise your child for safe fun with water.
- Scribble with crayons and paper.
- Give your child toys such as blocks and cardboard boxes for open-ended play.
- Steer clear of screens if you can. It's best for children under the age of two years to have no
  screen time. Children aged 2-5 years should have no more than one hour a day.



All children develop at their own pace. If you're concerned about any aspect of your child's play development, it's a good idea to talk with your child and family health nurse or GP.



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#### More to explore

- ▶ Why play is important
- Toddler creative and artistic development: what to expect
- Encouraging toddlers' creative and artistic development
- Movement: toddlers
- Cooking with kids

#### Last updated or reviewed

18-08-2014



### Communicating well with children: tips

Good communication with children involves listening well and talking in ways that encourage your child to listen to you. It's like any other skill – you get better with practice.

#### Good communication with children: the basics

Good communication with children is about:

- encouraging them to talk to you so they can tell you what they're feeling and thinking
- being able to really listen and respond in a sensitive way to all kinds of things not just nice things or good news, but also anger, embarrassment, sadness and fear
- focusing on body language and tone as well as words so you can really understand what children are saying
- taking into account what children of different ages can understand and how long they can pay attention in a conversation.

Communicating well with children **Improves your bond** with them, and encourages them to listen to you.



Some children need a lot of encouragement and positive feedback to get talking. Others will be desperate to talk with you when you're busy doing something else. This might mean stopping what you're doing to listen.

#### Top tips to improve communication with your child

You can improve your communication with your child by showing her you value her thoughts and feelings, and helping her to express them. For example:

Set aside time for talking and listening to each other. Family meals can be
a great time to do this.

- Talk about everyday things as you go through your day. If you and your child
  are used to having lots of communication, it can make it easier to talk when big
  or tricky issues come up.
- Be open to talking about all kinds of feelings, including anger, joy, frustration, fear and anxiety. This helps your child develop a 'feelings vocabulary'. Talking about feeling angry is different from getting angry, though. Learning the difference is an important step for a child learning to communicate.
- Tune in to what your child's body language is telling you, and try to respond to non-verbal messages too – for example, 'You're very quiet this afternoon. Did something happen at school?'.
- Work together to solve problems. For example, if your child likes to change his
  clothes several times a day, you could agree that he puts away the clothes he's
  no longer wearing. And remember that you might not always be able to resolve
  an issue straight away, but you can come back to it later.
- Emphasise the importance of honesty by encouraging and supporting your child to tell the truth – and praising her when she does. And by being honest yourself!



Be available and willing to listen. Often you can't predict when your child will start talking about something important to him.

#### How to listen when talking with your child

When your child has something important to say, or has strong feelings or a problem, it's important for her to feel that you're really listening. Try these tips for active listening:

- Build on what your child is telling you and show your interest by saying things like 'Tell me more about ...', 'Really!' and 'Go on ...'. This sends your child the message that what he has to say is important to you.
- Watch your child's facial expressions and body language. Listening isn't just about hearing words, but also about trying to understand what's behind those words
- To let your child know you're listening, and to make sure you've really understood the important messages she's telling you, repeat back what your child has said and make lots of eye contact.
- Try not to jump in, cut your child off, or put words in his mouth even when he says something that sounds ridiculous or wrong or is having trouble finding

the words.

- Don't rush into problem-solving. Your child might just want you to listen, and to feel that her feelings and point of view matter to someone.
- Prompt your child to tell you how he feels about things for example, 'It
  sounds like you felt left out when Felix wanted to play with those other kids at
  lunch'. Be prepared to get this wrong, and ask him to help you understand.



When you show your child how to be a good listener, you help her develop her listening skills too.

#### How to encourage your child to listen

Children often need some help learning to listen, as well as some gentle reminders about letting other people talk. Here are some ideas to help with your child's listening skills:

- Let your child finish talking and then respond. This sets a good example of listening for your child.
- Use language and ideas that your child will understand. It can be hard for your child to keep paying attention if he doesn't understand what you're talking about.
- Make any instructions and requests
   (https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/behaviour/behaviour-management-tips-tools/requests-instructions) simple and clear to match your child's age and ability.
- Avoid criticism and blame. If you're angry about something your child has
  done, try to explain why you want her not to do it again. Appeal to her sense of
  empathy.
- Be a good role model. Your child learns how to communicate by watching you
  carefully. When you talk with your child (and others) in a respectful way, this
  gives a powerful message about positive communication.

#### Deferences

Faber, A., & Mazlish, E. (2012). How to talk so kids will listen and how to listen so kids will talk. New York: Simon and Schuster.

https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddiers/connecting-communicating/communicating/communicating-weil-with-children

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Home / Grown-ups / Looking after yourself / Your wellbeing

### Feeling angry as a parent

Although parents usually look forward to parenting as something that will be mostly happy, there are times when all parents feel very angry with their children or even that they don't like their children.

#### When you're angry

It is important to think about when these times happen, so you can make sure that your children are safe. It is also important to try to work out and deal with whatever is causing your anger, for your own sake as well as for your children.





If you sometimes feel very angry and your child is in danger of being hurt, put your child somewhere safe and then take a break yourself until you can manage your feelings.

#### What causes anger?

There are times in all parents' lives when they feel very angry. Parenting is rewarding but not always easy. Anger might also stem from circumstances outside the family home, like conditions at paid work. Most of the time parents manage to handle it OK, but sometimes the anger can be close to getting out of control.

Anger is always a mixture of feelings. It can come from being depressed or powerless, feeling guilty, feeling disappointed, feeling frustrated, not feeling valued and useful, or just from plain tiredness. If you can, think about which feelings are mixed up with your anger. It will help you to understand what is causing it. Then you need to try to do something about the cause.

If you find yourself feeling angry a lot of the time, it is usually because something is going wrong in your life, not because you are a bad parent or there is something wrong with you. You might need to get help to find out what the matter is and to change it.

#### What you can do when you are angry

- Sometimes anger is caused by what you are saying to yourself. For example, if your child has a tantrum and you say to yourself, 'Why should I take this I've got to show this child who's boss', you will feel angry and perhaps punish the child. If you say to yourself, 'I can see my child is so upset that he can't manage his feelings at the moment', you are more likely to be able to keep calm and to help your child learn to manage his feelings.
- Get to know your own body's signals for when anger is building up and act before it gets out of control. It's better to act before you have a big explosion.
- Work out when you are most likely to lose your temper, and plan to do something different at those times to stop this happening. For example, when you first get home from work, do something physical or something that relaxes you.
- Think about what is most relaxing for you personally. This is different for different people. It
  might be having a cup of tea or a bath, reading a book, going for a walk, listening to music, or
  whatever helps you unwind.
- Get some space. Go outside for a walk or a run. If you have very young children and no-one to mind them, take them with you.
- Take a break. If possible get someone to mind the children for a while and take some time out for you.
- Talk about your feelings to another adult who understands. Ring a friend.



Home / Grown-ups / Looking after yourself / Your wellbeing

### Stress and stress management: grown-ups

Stress is a normal reaction to changes and challenges, such as those that come with being a parent. Some stress can be healthy, but too much can be overwhelming. That's why it's good to have some stress management techniques up your sleeve.

#### Stress: what you need to know

Stress is a normal part of life, something that everybody experiences.

Some stress can be helpful, giving you the motivation and focus to face challenges and get things done.

But too much stress can be overwhelming, making it difficult to cope with everyday tasks. If you have too much stress, you might end up getting sick or not being able to look after your children and enjoy everyday family life.

#### What causes stress?

Changes in your life, even positive ones, can be stressful, especially if you think you can't cope. For example, having a baby is a life-changing – and stressful – event for many people.

Feeling uncertain, not having control over your environment, and feeling that you have too much to do and not enough time to do it are also big causes of stress. It's easy to see how a new baby might create this kind of stress in your life, or a toddler who has public tantrums, or a teenage child who's pushing the boundaries.

And then there are the everyday hassles – for example, getting yourself and the children out the door and off to school and work on time.

#### Signs that you might be stressed

If you're stressed, your body will probably let you know. In a stressful moment, your heart rate might go up, your breathing might get faster, and your muscles might tense up.

Sometimes these short-term stress reactions will actually help you deal with the stressful situation. For example, it might give you the adrenaline rush you need to get to the bus on time.

But if you keep revving at this level, your body will get exhausted. You might end up with headaches, sleep problems, digestive problems or the feeling that you just can't cope. This obviously isn't good for your health and wellbeing.

So it's important to watch out for signs of stress. You might be stressed if you're:

- worrying about absolutely everything
- drinking too much alcohol, smoking too much or using drugs
- finding it hard to be tolerant with your children
- having trouble sleeping
- not feeling well perhaps you have headaches or other aches and pains
- not wanting to get out of bed in the morning
- having thoughts such as 'I'm never going to get out of this mess'
- feeling that you're not managing practical everyday things, such as family routines and finances.

#### Simple stress management tips

Get to know what makes you stressed

If you know what your stress triggers are, it can be easier to deal with stress. You might be able to avoid stressful situations, or prepare yourself. A useful exercise is to write down what makes you feel stressed.

For example, your child crying for a long time might be very stressful for you. If it's important for you to be on time, you might find it stressful when you can see the clock ticking but your children are moving slowly. If you love a clean and tidy house but no longer have one, this could be stressful.

#### Positive thinking and self-talk

Unhelpful thinking makes it harder to deal with stressful things – for example, in a stressful situation you might think, 'What's wrong with me? I can't get things together' or 'I'm a loser'.

But you can change unhelpful thinking into realistic helpful thinking and positive self-talk, which are good ways to deal with stress. They increase your positive feelings and therefore your ability to cope with stressful situations.

To put realistic thinking and self-talk into action, try the following:

- Challenge unhelpful thoughts about things that cause you stress. For example, your child screams in the supermarket. You think, 'Everyone will think I'm a bad parent'. But you could ask yourself, 'How do I know that people will think this?' 'Would I think this about someone else?' 'What can I do to deal with this problem?'
- Be realistic about what you can do. For example, it might be too much to expect your child never to scream in the supermarket. But perhaps you could change the situation so the screaming is less likely to happen. Might your child scream less if you went shopping at a different time of day, perhaps after a nap when he's well rested and better able to cope, for example?
- Develop positive self-talk statements that help you. For example, you could say to yourself,
   'The shopping won't take much longer I can get through it', 'People are minding their own
   business they're not looking at us', 'Who cares what other people think?', 'I can do this', 'I will
   stay calm'.
- Know your limits and choose your battles. If you feel irritated or find an experience
  overwhelming it might be best to try to avoid the source of stress if possible. For example, try
  online shopping if supermarket shopping is too hard for you and your child.



The more you practise positive self-talk, the more automatic it will become in your life. Start practising in one situation that causes you stress, and then move on to another one.

#### Focus on what's essential

Stress often means you're trying to do too much, so try setting realistic goals for your day. You could also avoid taking on any more than you can handle.

Making a plan and having some <u>family routines</u> can help you feel more on top of things and take your stress down a notch or two.

And if you have some large tasks to deal with, they might be more manageable if you break them down into smaller chunks.

#### Stav connected with others

Talking things over with your partner or a friend can help you keep things in perspective. If you find it hard to talk, you could try using a diary to record your thoughts and feelings.

Spending some time with friends can be a real help too. Even meeting for a quick coffee can be enough, because sharing worries can help you feel supported and better able to cope.

If you have limited time, connecting with other parents through online parent forums or even emailing friends can help you stay in touch with like-minded people.

#### Make physical and emotional health a priority

Avoid stimulants like cigarettes and caffeine and depressants like alcohol if you can.

Look after your **physical health** by eating well, getting some exercise, and making time for rest. Sometimes a brisk walk around the block or a quick nap can change your mood. If you find it hard to sleep, don't watch television, check your emails or read in bed.

Instead, get out of bed, and read something non-stimulating until you feel sleepy or try doing some guided meditation to help you relax. Then go back to bed and try getting back to sleep. If stress or worry about a problem is keeping you up, it might be useful to write down your worries and look at them the next day.

If you're working long hours, think about whether there are ways you could cut down or make work more flexible.

It can be easy to forget **time for yourself**. Make a list of things that you enjoy, whether that's reading a magazine, watching television, gardening, shopping and so on. Try to do one thing on the list every day, or every couple of days, and especially on the weekend. Having fun with your family might also be on your list.

Be aware that you might not be able to 'give to others' if you're under stress yourself. It's important to give to yourself at these times. This might mean that you need to slow down your social life for a while.

Part of making time for yourself might be learning to **say no**. If you find this hard, you could look into an assertiveness course. Assertiveness courses can help you with techniques to set boundaries and say no without feeling guilty. Search online to find online courses or courses in your area.



Humour does wonders to melt away stress. Seeing the funny side of things will make you feel much better. Smiling and laughing is one of the best relaxation techniques, and enjoying yourself can really help your stress levels. Try talking with a friend who makes you laugh, or watching a funny TV show. Did you know that you can't feel anxious while you're experiencing joy?

#### If stress continues

If you're still feeling very stressed every day, it might be helpful to talk to a health professional. You could start by seeing your GP, who can help you make a plan for managing stress. This might include referring you to someone for some specialist support.

Stress is often the result of trouble with time management or other problems. Working out what the issues are with a professional and looking at solutions can be a big help.



You can find more stress management techniques in our articles on <a href="breakthing">breathing</a>, <a href="mailto:muscle">muscle</a> <a href="mailto:muscle">relaxation</a> and <a href="mailto:mindfulness">mindfulness</a>. You can also search online for stress management and relaxation apps, books, CDs and so on.



#### More to explore

- Parents: looking after yourself
- ▶ Positive parenting
- Dealing with anxiety: tips for parents
- Healthy eating and exercise for parents
- Autism spectrum disorder and family stress
- Making the daily switch from work to home

#### Web links

▶ Reach Out - Stress and anxiety

in parenting website

Home / Grown-ups / Services & support / About services & support

### Services and support: an overview

All parents need support. It can come from your family and friends, health and child care professionals, and information and community resources. Often, the first steps in getting support are asking for it, and accepting it when it's offered.

#### Why support is important

Parents who seek and accept support:

- are more relaxed and healthier. This means they're better able to look after their children
- set a good example for their children. Getting support teaches children that you don't have to do it alone. It's OK to ask for help when
- show other people that they are valued and needed. Many people actually like being asked for help - it makes them feel they're special

Giving others support is a great way of creating a support community. When you offer or ask for help, others feel that they can ask you for help in return.



Find local help and support in our Services & Support section, or use our My Neighbourhood tool. Connect with parents in similar situations around Australia in our parenting forums.



#### Parenting Hotlines

ACT: (02) 6287 3833

NSW: 1300 130 052

These state-based hotlines offer free parenting advice.

NT: 1300 301 300 QLD: 1300 301 300 SA: 1300 364 100 TAS: 1300 808 178 VIC: 132 289 WA: 1800 654 432

#### Australia-wide:

Pregnancy, Birth and

Baby

is a free 24-hour helpline offering information, advice and counselling about all aspects of pregnancy, childbirth and your baby's first year: 1800 882 436.

Find more helplines

#### Types of support

All parents need three kinds of support.

#### Practical support

This is help with the day-to-day realities of parenting and functioning as a family. Examples of this kind of support include money, babysitters, help in case of emergencies, assistance with transport, help with household tasks, and people to have fun with.

People who could provide this kind of support could include your extended family, friends, teachers, principals, coaches, club leaders, neighbours, religious leaders, parents of your children's friends, and so on.

If you need to look outside your community for practical support, try our legal and financial links and government links and resources.

#### Personal support

This is support for you as a person. You often get it from your adult friendships and relationships. The most valuable personal support comes from people who are available, willing to listen and share ideas and advice, and talk things over in positive and non-judgmental ways.

It can be particularly helpful to find someone who is in the same position as you and who shares things in common. You might find good friends through first-time parent groups or through your kindergarten or school



If you have particular support needs, try our links and resources listings for mental health,

child and parent disability, multicultural issues, and Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders.



#### Information support

Because parenting involves learning on the job, getting good information is critical for every parent.

Whether you're wondering about breastfeeding, changes to your body, managing your time or your child's latest developments, you can **look to other parents and friends**. You can check your local library for recommended books.

Sometimes different people will give your different advice. So consider any new ideas and ask yourself: does this sound right? What will work best for me and my child? If the topic is one of serious concern, think about who is giving the advice and whether they're qualified.

There are many sources of information on raising children. This website is a good start. Information and support is also available from:

- parenting and family support organisations
- child health and wellbeing centres and organisations
- parenting groups and play groups
- schools
- babysitting clubs
- libraries
- government departments.



Develop relationships with people you can trust, including parents you admire and trained professionals you can speak to about health or social welfare concerns. This can begin before you become a parent.

#### When you need professional help

Support from people in your social network is crucial in the long term. But there will be times when you need more formal support. It's always best to **check with a professional** if you:

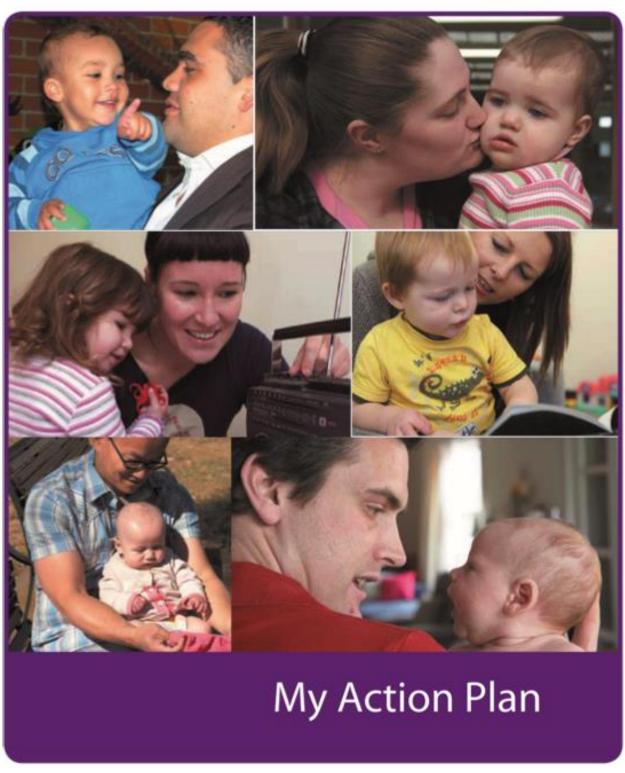
- have a serious concern or are worried about any aspect of your child's health, development or hebayiour.
- have tried strategies suggested on this website or in books and are still having trouble
- are having persistent feelings of depression, anger or resentment towards your child
- are frequently fighting with your partner, having fights that aren't resolved, or if there is violence in your relationship.



To make a start, check out our <u>professional links page</u>, call your local parent advice line, visit your community health centre, or speak with your maternal and child health nurse or GP.











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Warm and gentle	
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Listening and talking more	
Teachable moments	
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What I'm going to try
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