

smalltalk Manual





smalltalk is supported by the Victorian Government

smalltalk

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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

smalltalk 
Giving your kids a great start

Funding body | Victorian Government

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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 20 words; 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 development 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 re-directing 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 style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent shows affection to the child at incidental moments. • Parent shows pleasure in parent-child interactions. • Parent sets limits calmly and provides gentle behavioural guidance. • Parent responds calmly to the child's intense emotions to encourage the child to manage their emotions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent gives exclusive attention to the child. • Parent acknowledges the child's efforts (verbal or non-verbal) to gain attention. • Parent responds to the child's emotional cues quickly and appropriately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent stays focussed on what the child is interested in by comments or actions. • Parent does not attempt to redirect the child's attention. • Parent gives the child time to respond (verbally or non-verbally) when they are jointly engaged in an activity. • Parent minimises instructions and directions to the child when they are jointly engaged in play. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent encourages the child to initiate a 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 with the child to maintain the conversation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent talks to teach by naming and explaining things, pointing out what is important, and cueing the child what to expect in any situation. • Parent models an action and then allows the child 'to have a go' and supplies supportive feedback. • Parent encourages the child's persistence to complete a task. • Parent praises child's accomplishments.

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 your 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 learn 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 go”; “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 style="list-style-type: none"> • Every day routines are activities, such as mealtimes, bath-time, and bed-time. • Everyday routines allow consistency and predictability in children’s lives. • Everyday routines give extended opportunities for language and conversation between adults and children – describing what is happening, listening to children’s ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regular shared reading each day will advance children’s early literacy and knowing about print and books. • Shared reading is as much about conversation as the reading of the actual story. • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play allows children to explore their world. • Through play, children have opportunities to build their social, physical, communication and thinking skills. • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • If there is selective viewing and parental participation when children are using digital media, there can be positive effects on children’s learning. • Television programs can promote new vocabulary, but this is more likely when parents are present to explain, interpret and discuss the content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to build parental awareness of local community resources for children and families. • Parents need confidence so that they will access community- based activities when needed. • 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 self-esteem as a parent.

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 'EVERYDAY 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:
 - Is lots of flexibility needed for my child?
 - 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?*";
 - "*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?*"
 - "*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 re-create 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 co-operation 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.

SUPPORTING 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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FACILITATOR MANUAL

Section 1

smalltalk Content



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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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Warm and Gentle ○ Tuning In ○ Following Your Child’s Lead ○ Listening and Talking More ○ Teachable Moments 	Opportunity sheets for all five strategies
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 Play		Tipsheet on Routines
Tipsheets on Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reading and Play Ideas ○ Reading with Babies 	Posters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reading ○ Words are everywhere 	Conversation Cards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reading ○ 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	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling stressed Taking time-out for yourself Helpful thinking Sleeping better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy eating Keeping active Your plan for charging up 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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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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Tracking progress	73

What's in this section?

- *How to plan and prepare for sessions*
- *How to help families access smalltalk demonstration video clips*
- *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)
 - 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
 - one poster for the playgroup.
- Parent tipsheets on self-care and services
- A parent worksheet on “Me and My Community”
- Demonstration video clips to view

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 for the families in your group. You may also want to download the *smalltalk* parent demonstration videos to your device (i.e., phone, tablet, laptop, etc.) in case you’d like to show it to 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).

HELPING FAMILIES ACCESS *smalltalk* DEMONSTRATION VIDEO CLIPS

Families participating in *smalltalk* are able to access the demonstration video clips directly from the publicly accessible part of the *smalltalk* website at www.smalltalk.net.au. You can further support families to access these clips by sending them a link to each of the relevant videos.

We've created a list shortened video links which you can easily embed within a SMS that you might send participating families. This can be a great way to engage with and remind families about their upcoming group and to prepare them for what you're aiming to do during the next session.

Here are some sample messages you might choose to use or adapt - this one's for a parent with a toddler.

Hi, I'm looking forward to seeing you at the playgroup tomorrow. The smalltalk topic we'll be talking about is 'Tuning In'. Here's a clip of families using 'Tuning In': <http://bit.ly/TPt-i>.

Or, a family with a baby coming to the 'Listening and Talking More' session:

Hi, it's playgroup tomorrow and I'm looking forward to seeing you there. The smalltalk topic will be 'Listening and Talking More'. Here's an example of how some families do this with their baby: <http://bit.ly/B-LT>. Remember to bring some fruit to share!

Or, a message on the day to everyone enrolled:

Good morning everyone! - Following Your Child's Lead session today at playgroup - <http://bit.ly/TP-FYCL> - see you soon.

You can also use messages to reinforce participation. For example:

It was great to see you at playgroup this week. We talked about being 'Warm and Gentle', here's a clip you might be like: <http://bit.ly/TPw-g>. I look forward to hearing how you went trying it next week.

Or for those that were unable to attend, you can use a generic text:

Last week at playgroup we talked about being 'Warm and Gentle'. Here's a clip that might interest you: <http://bit.ly/TPw-g>. I look forward to hearing how you went trying it, next week.

VIDEO LINKS

TODDLERS:

Warm and Gentle	http://bit.ly/TPw-g
Tuning In	http://bit.ly/TPt-i
Following Your Child's Lead	http://bit.ly/TP-FYCL
Listening and Talking More	http://bit.ly/TP-LTM
Teachable Moments	http://bit.ly/TP-TM
Reading	http://bit.ly/TP-read
Watching TV	http://bit.ly/TP-Wtv

BABIES:

Warm and Gentle	http://bit.ly/B-wg
Tuning In	http://bit.ly/B-TI
Following Your Child's Lead	http://bit.ly/B-fycl
Listening and Talking More	http://bit.ly/B-LT
Teachable Moments	http://bit.ly/B-tm
Reading	http://bit.ly/B-sr

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 *SMALLTALK* 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 Discussing how we will work together Routines
2	Getting to know you (continued) 'Warm and Gentle' Play	
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	
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	
Which parenting strategy or strategies will be focussed on?	
What activities (play or other) will support practice of the parenting strategy/ies?	
My role 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	RCN tipsheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toddler Imagining and Creativity • Toddlers at Play <i>smalltalk</i> Parent Clips
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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Screen Time 2-5 years • Screen Time
10.	Looking after yourself			Parent tipsheet: Me and My Community Wide Awake Parenting tipsheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)	<i>smalltalk</i>
<p>Raising Children Network tipsheets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Services and Support• Victoria Services• Feeling Angry• Feeling Stressed• Language development in children: 0-8 years <p>RCN website: www.raisingchildren.net.au</p>	<p>Group posters.</p> <p>Use the poster that matches that weeks' topic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Week 2: Warm and Gentle• Week 3: Tuning In• Week 4: Following Your Child's Lead• Week 5: Listening and Talking More• Week 6: Teachable Moments• Week 7:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Reading○ Reading with Your Child• Week 8: Words are Everywhere• Week 9: Watching TV Together <p>Parent tipsheet: Routines</p>

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.

Parent	Warm and Gentle			Tuning in			Following you child's lead			Listening and talking more			Teachable moments			Reading		
	Disc	Practice		Disc	Practice		Disc	Practice		Disc	Practice		Disc	Practice		Disc	Practice	
		Session	Home		Session	Home		Session	Home		Session	Home		Session	Home		Session	Home



FACILITATOR MANUAL

Section 5

Home coaching Delivery Guide



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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*
- *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
 - 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'
- Parent clips (available on the smalltalk website www.smalltalk.net.au).

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 clips downloaded from the website.

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 clips - access to each of the session video segments on your laptop, mobile phone or tablet device once 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 CLIPS

The Home coaching clips are 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	Work on parenting strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch, discuss and engage in activities suggested by coaching clips. 	30 mins
3	Review the session and plan ahead <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For next session For practice at home Fill in ' <i>My Action Plan</i> '	10 mins

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 Discussing how we will work together Routines
2	Getting to know you (continued) 'Warm and Gentle' Play	
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	
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

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 clips <i>My Action Plan</i>
1st session	Getting to Know You Family Map
As needed	Tipsheets (see details in Parent Resources - Group): Opportunity Sheets <i>smalltalk</i> Parent tipsheets Raising Children Network tipsheets Wide Awake Parenting tipsheets



FACILITATOR MANUAL

Section 7

Stand-alone Home coaching

Delivery Guide



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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
 - 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 (www.smalltalk.net.au). 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 tote bags, 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 in 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 (www.smalltalk.net.au) 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 is 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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SECTION 8: STAND-ALONE HOME COACHING SESSION GUIDES

SESSION STRUCTURE FOR STAND-ALONE HOME COACHING

Phase	Activity	Suggested timing
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social chat • Settle child/children in planned activities • Introduce topic of today's session • Ask how parent went with previous session's strategy (after Session 3); prompt for self-feedback and provide specific praise. 	10 mins
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the relevant 'Conversation Card' to introduce the session's <i>smalltalk</i> topic. • Engage parents in conversation on their understanding of the topic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>What does it mean to them?</i> ○ <i>What it currently looks like in their home</i> ○ <i>How they could enhance it with their child</i> • Play the relevant example video segment and prompt the parent to reflect on the demonstration of <i>smalltalk</i> provided 	15 mins
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the parent to identify how they will practice the <i>smalltalk</i> strategy with their child (to be videoed) • Prompt the parent to consider what they will do to ensure they demonstrate the strategy components • Video the parent's practice of the strategy with the child • Facilitate the parent's review of their practice • Summarise the positives and praise the parent for their practise • If relevant, identify some goals for improvement in future use 	10 mins
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the parent to set a goal for practice of strategy between sessions • Encourage the completion of the 'My Action Plan' if wanted • Review the session's activities and re-affirm practice goal • Agree on a time for next session • Ask parent how they plan to 'look after themselves' this week 	10 mins

SESSION SEQUENCE FOR STAND-ALONE HOME COACHING

Session	Session Topic (<i>smalltalk</i> content)	Content delivered (and resources)
1	Introduction	<p>Overview of how the <i>smalltalk</i> home support sessions will be delivered by the facilitator.</p> <p>Introductory session video clip:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Getting to know you and your family, Family map, <i>My Action Plan</i> ○ Discussing how we will work together ○ Routines ○ Introduction to filming practice to enhance self-feedback.
2	Warm and Gentle	<p>‘Warm and gentle’ conversation card and video.</p> <p>Play (Raising Children Network resources, Stimulating Environment discussion).</p>
3	Tuning in	<p>‘Tuning in’ conversation card and video</p> <p>Opportunity sheet</p> <p>Looking after yourself (Parent tipsheets - could be delivered in any session as needed).</p>
4	Following your child’s lead	<p>‘Following your child’s lead’ conversation card and video</p> <p>Opportunity sheet</p>
5	Listening and talking more	<p>‘Listening and talking more’ conversation card and video</p> <p>Opportunity sheet</p>
6	Teachable moments	<p>‘Teachable moments’ conversation card and video</p> <p>Opportunity sheet</p>
7	Reading	<p>‘Reading’; ‘Reading with your child’; ‘Words are everywhere’ conversation cards and video</p> <p>Parent tipsheets</p>
8	Watching TV/media together	<p>‘Watching TV together’ conversation card and video</p> <p>Screen time (Raising Children Network resources)</p>
9	<p>Missed opportunities</p> <p>Summary and planning for sustaining</p>	<p>Missed opportunities video.</p> <p><i>My Action Plan</i></p>
10	Looking after yourself	<p>Could be presented as an additional session if not as part of previous session</p>

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 <i>My Action Plan</i>
1st session	Getting to Know You Family Map
As needed	Opportunity Sheets <i>Smalltalk</i> Parent tipsheets Raising Children Network tipsheets Wide Awake Parenting tipsheets



FACILITATOR MANUAL

Facilitator Resources



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Getting to know your child	135
Family map	137

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.

Parents 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.

How to do it:

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. Helpful strategies are: to build early success; set realistic between-session tasks together; plan what parents will do between sessions; review progress when you next see the parent; and reinforce successes.

Build 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.



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

Talk 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.

Review progress

When 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)?'

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.

Example 1

Building in early success, setting realistic tasks, and planning

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.
- 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.

Example 2

Reviewing progress and planning

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.

Example 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.

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

- Stop what you are doing and give the parent your 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.



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.'

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'
- 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

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

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.



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 available and supportive can mean a lot to families.
- Try not to make assumptions about what parents 'need to know'.
- Provide clear, truthful information.
- Sensitive 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 *Working with Parents* <https://raisingchildren.net.au/for-professionals/working-with-parents>



Getting to Know Your Child

Toys & Objects	Favourite	Least Favourite
		

People & Playmates	Favourite	Least Favourite
		

Activities & Games	Favourite	Least Favourite
		

Food & Drinks	Favourite	Least Favourite
		

Places	Favourite	Least Favourite
		

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 most cooperative?

When is your child least cooperative?

What frightens your child?

What calms your child?

How does your child assist/participate in the following daily routine?

Feeding

Dressing

Bathing

Toileting

What do you think helps your child learn?

What would you like to learn about your child?

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' area 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@parentingrc.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 tote bags 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.

Tips & Opportunities for Warm and Gentle



Did you know?

Being warm and gentle helps you build a bond with your child. Being warm and gentle helps make your interactions positive and happy.



Tips for being warm and gentle

Get down close to your child.

Smile and give random hugs.

Use a soft, calm voice.



Opportunities to be warm and gentle

When she's done something you like

When he wants something and can't have it

When she's done something that needs correction

When he keeps asking for things

When things are scary

When he smiles at you

When she wants to be comforted

When he's hurt

My opportunities to be warm and gentle



Key points

How you behave with your child is just as important as **what** you do with your child. When your child needs help to be more positive, you can be warm and gentle, as well as firm and consistent.



Tips & Opportunities for Tuning In



Did you know?

Children start communicating with us from the day they are born. When we give children our full attention it is easier to understand what they are communicating. This is tuning in. When we tune in we can encourage children to start the interaction.



Tips for tuning in

Get down close so you can see your child's face and they can see yours.

Watch, **wait** and listen to your child.

Show your child you are interested by giving them your full attention.

Respond immediately.



Opportunities for tuning in

Giving your child a bath

Getting your child dressed

Changing baby's nappy

At mealtimes

Going for a walk

In the car

In the doctor's waiting room

On the bus

At the park

Cooking

Hanging out the washing

Cleaning the bath

Weeding the garden

Folding washing

Relaxing outside

Having lunch

Sitting on the couch together

Looking at photos

My opportunities for tuning in



Key points

When you tune in, all your attention is on your child. It is difficult to tune in if you are doing or thinking about something else. Try to set aside some time each day when you can give your child your full attention.

Tips & Opportunities for Following Your Child's Lead



Did you know?

Following your child's lead means doing what your child wants to do. By following your child's lead you can help them stay interested in activities for longer. When your child stays longer at activities, you provide them with more opportunities to learn. Without you, they might have given up earlier.



Tips for following your child's lead

Join in and play with your child.

Copy or comment on what your child is doing or saying.

Watch, wait, listen and respond.



Opportunities for following your child's lead

Giving your child a bath

In the doctor's waiting room

Weeding the garden

Getting your child dressed

On the bus

Folding washing

Changing baby's nappy

At the park

Relaxing outside

At mealtimes

Cooking

Having lunch

Going for a walk

Hanging out the washing

Sitting on the couch together

In the car

Cleaning the bath

Looking at photos

In the supermarket

Playing

At bedtime

My opportunities for following my child's lead



Key points

Watch your child and wait to see what they are interested in. Let your child show you what they like to do and join in and play with your child. Be silly and have fun. When your child is having fun, they will stay at the activity for longer.

Tips & Opportunities for Listening and Talking More



Did you know?

The number and variety of words children hear from birth makes a big difference to their language development. But the amount of back-and-forth conversation between your child and other people is even more important.



Tips for listening and talking more

Encourage back-and-forth conversation with your child by waiting expectantly for a response.

Ask questions and make comments about what your child is interested in.

Use a variety of words (e.g. naming, describing, action, location).

Repeat what your child says and expand by adding words, grammar and ideas.



Opportunities for listening and talking more

Giving your child a bath

In the doctor's waiting room

Weeding the garden

Getting your child dressed

On the bus

Folding washing

Changing baby's nappy

At the park

Relaxing outside

At mealtimes

Cooking

Having lunch

Going for a walk

Hanging out the washing

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. Back-and-forth conversations are really important to help develop your child's language. Keep conversations going by asking questions and making comments.

Tips & Opportunities for Teachable Moments



Did you know?

There are great benefits for children's language development when parents use lots of the many everyday opportunities to help their children learn. Children start off 'learning language', and then they use 'language to learn'. Parents are their child's first and most important 'teacher'.



Tips for teachable moments

Use everyday activities or routines as opportunities for learning.

Tune in to what your child is interested in and teach by showing, naming, describing and/or asking questions.

Remember to balance comments with questions to keep the conversation going.



Opportunities for teachable moments

Babies

When he looks with interest at something

When she points to something

When he's interested in what he's eating

When she's enjoying her bath

When he's looking at his hands, fingers, toes or knees

When she's wakeful and alert

Toddlers

In everyday activities like getting dressed

When he shows an interest in objects, pictures, words or events

When she's playing with toys

While watching TV together

When you're making lunch together

When you're out shopping together

My opportunities for teachable moments



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

- Make sharing a book a part of every day: *Read or share stories at bedtime 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: *Infants need board books and help to turn the pages, but a two year old can do it alone.*
- 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: *Use the story to engage in conversation, and to talk with your child about their ideas and experiences.*

Have fun sharing books

My opportunities for sharing books at home:



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.

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

- **Play with rhymes:** 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). Read books with rhyming words.
- **Make 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.
- **Help your child discover print at home and at the supermarket:** 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).
- **Many ways to draw and write:** 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.
- **Going to the library:** 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.

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.
- **Expand** the child's ideas so that they learn something new.



Parent Tip Sheet Shared Reading



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

Support: Let your child choose the book and show that you are looking forward to reading it by the tone of your voice.

- **Follow child's lead** - 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?'

Ask: 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?'

Expand: 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.

- **Expand on what a child says:** '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.'
- **Bring in a child's experience:** '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.

Parent Tip Sheet Routines



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.

Routines can be:

- **Daily routines** 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.

How 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.



Parent Tip Sheet

Routines



How parents benefit from routines

- When things are busy and hectic, routines can help you feel more organised and more in 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.

Types of routines

Routines 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.

Routines for Household Responsibilities:

- Tidying up.
- Caring for pets.
- Chores. For example, setting the dinner table and packing away.
- Shopping.

Routines 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.
- Observing religious events.



Think about whether a routine is right for you and your family

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?

Starting 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?
- Can you build some time to look after yourself? For example, have a rest, do 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.

Parent Tip Sheet

Routines



How to set up a new routine

- Work out the **goal** of the routine. Picture the end result.
- List the **individual steps** in the order they need to be done.
- Make sure everyone is **clear about their role** in the routine.
- Work out the **timing** of the routine. How much time does each step take? What time will you need to get everything done?
- Think about ways of **setting up the routine for success**. 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, **talk everyone through steps** 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



Council Area

Office Address: _____

Phone number: _____ Website: _____

MCH Centre

Address: _____

My MCH Nurse is: _____ Phone number: _____



Medical Information

Local Medical Centre

Address: _____

My GP: _____ Phone number: _____

Local Hospital

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Local Neighbourhood House

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Local Council Services:

(E.g. child care centre, family day care, school holiday programs, family support, counselling)

_____ Phone number: _____

_____ Phone number: _____

_____ Phone number: _____



My Favourite Places

Favourite Place to Visit:

Family-friendly Places to Eat:



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?

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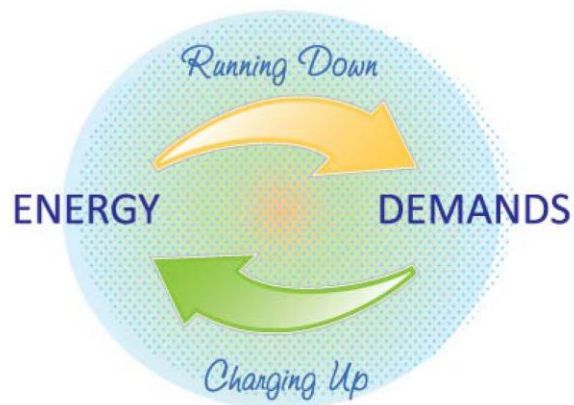
Parent Tip Sheet

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

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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?

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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.

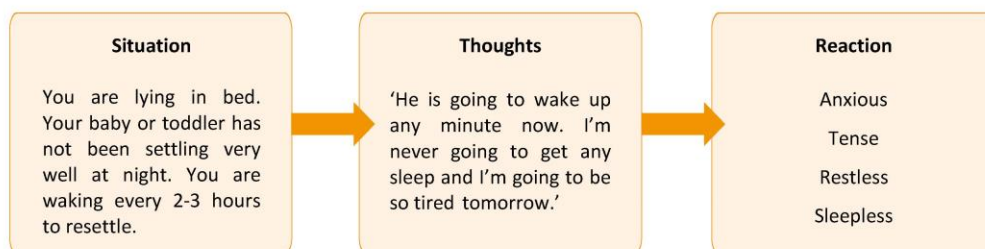
Unhelpful ways of thinking can creep in and **drain your energy**.

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.

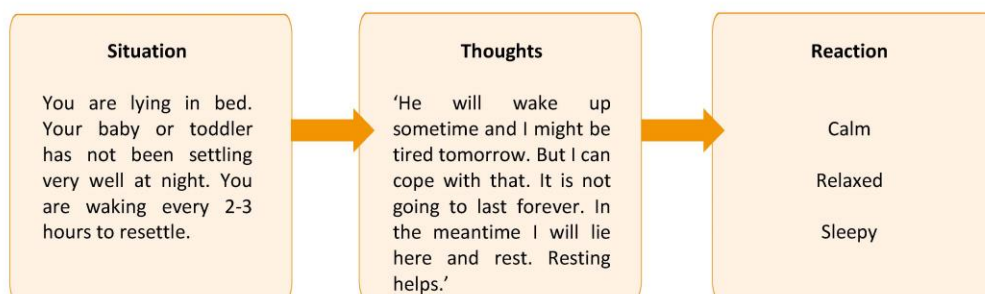
Example 1

Unhelpful Thinking



Helpful Thinking

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



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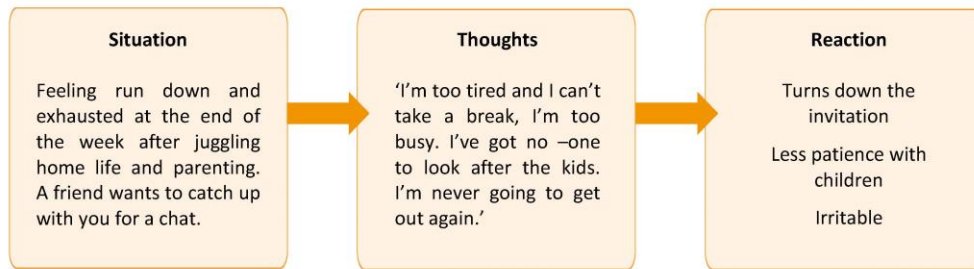
Parent Tip Sheet

Helpful Thinking



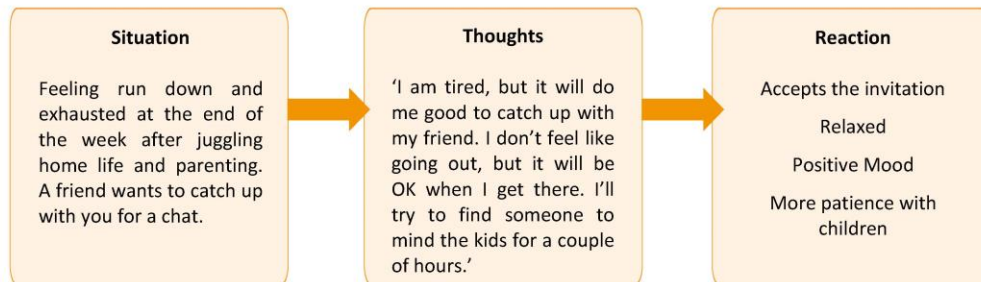
Example 2

Unhelpful Thinking



Helpful Thinking

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



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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?

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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.

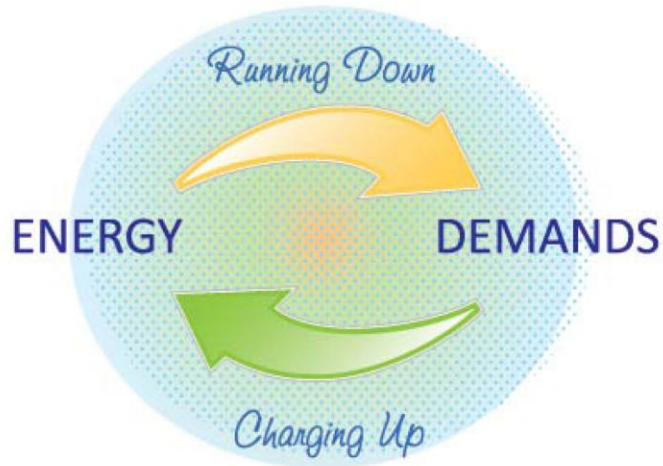
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Parent Tip Sheet

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?

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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.



Here are some things to consider in making 'taking time out' happen for you:

- Give yourself permission to take time off
- It's OK to have 'time out' more than once a day
- Plan for it - make a time for it to happen
- Variety is important. Think about different ways you can have time out both at home and out of the house.
- You can enjoy taking time out on your own or with the family
- Think about how you can overcome the barriers to taking time out for yourself such as not having time, or not having someone you can call on for babysitting.

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Page 1 of 2

Parent Tip Sheet Taking Time Out for Yourself



Please write down:

One or two things that you like to do:

What gets in the way of taking time out for you?

What can you do to make it happen?

Who can help?

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Page 2 of 2

Parent tipsheets (Raising Children Network)

When accessing this manual electronically, click on the title and this will take you to the raising children network website

[Anger and anger management for parents](#)

[Communicating well with children](#)

[Healthy screen time and quality media choices 2-5.](#)

[Language development in children: 0-8 years](#)

[Imagining Creating and play: toddlers](#)

[Services and support: an overview](#)

[Screen Time](#)

[Stress and stress management: grown ups](#)

[Toddlers at Play](#)

[Victoria services](#)



Anger and anger management for parents

Everyone feels angry sometimes – anger is normal. But if you find yourself getting angry a lot or you have trouble controlling yourself when you’re angry, it’s good to have some anger management techniques ready to go.

Anger and parents: what you need to know

Anger is a **normal human emotion**, and it’s normal to feel angry when you’re a parent. All parents feel angry at some stage.

Anger can be a **good thing** too. Sometimes it can give you the energy to get something done or to stand up for what you believe in. Feeling angry and managing your anger in positive and healthy ways can also give you the chance to set a good example for your children. For example, when you take a few deep breaths or walk away rather than exploding, you show your children how to behave.

But **anger can be negative**, especially if it happens a lot or it gets out of control. Losing your temper when you’re angry can make problems worse and lead to conflict with others. When you don’t give yourself time to calm down, you might say or do unhelpful things that can’t be taken back.

Being around a lot of conflict and yelling is frightening for children.



If you’re finding it hard to control yourself when you’re angry, it might help to talk to a health professional. You could start by seeing your GP, who can help you make an anger management plan. If you’re so angry that [you feel you might hurt your child](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-life/domestic-family-violence/when-you-might-hurt-your-child) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-life/domestic-family-violence/when-you-might-hurt-your-child>), seek help immediately. Call Lifeline on 131 114 or a [parenting hotline](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/helplines) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/helplines>).

Why parents feel angry sometimes

As a parent, you're probably **balancing many different demands** including work, family time, household chores, children's activities and social activities. When you're busy and tired, it's easy to lose patience and feel angry when children don't cooperate or things don't go to plan.

Sometimes you might feel **angry or frustrated with your partner**, if you have one, when you don't agree about parenting, discipline and who does what household chores. These sorts of disagreements can even lead to conflict, especially if you're feeling undermined or unsupported.

Sometimes **your child's anger or frustration can make you feel angry**. For example, if your child is angry and speaks rudely to you or won't do as you ask, you might feel yourself getting angry too. You might find yourself attacking back in the moment and regretting it later.

And there are **other factors** that can make you more likely to feel angry – like illness, stress at work, financial difficulties, lack of sleep and not enough time for yourself. You might sometimes feel you're being pushed to the limit.

For some people, parenting can also raise unresolved anger or other difficult **emotions from their own childhood**. If you experienced trauma, abuse or neglect as a child, you might be more likely to overreact in some situations or have trouble controlling yourself when you're angry.



Newborns and babies have very weak neck muscles to support their large, heavy heads. Violently shaking a baby – or hitting, kicking or throwing a baby – can result in death, disability or serious injury.

Recognising signs of anger

It might feel as though you just explode with anger without warning, but your body actually gives you early signs of anger. When you can recognise these signs, you can also take steps to stop your anger getting out of control.

Early signs of anger include:

- faster heart
- churning stomach
- agitation – that is, feeling tense or cranky
- faster breathing
- tensing shoulders

- clenching jaw and hands
- sweating.

Negative thinking

Negative thinking is very common when you're angry, but it can make your anger worse.

For example, you might have had a hard day at work and feel stressed. When you pick your children up from school, they start arguing in the back seat, which makes you feel frustrated as well as stressed. Once you get home, they refuse to take out their lunch boxes and put their bags away so you feel angry as well as frustrated.

Here are some negative thoughts that you might have in this situation:

- 'No-one ever helps me – I have to do everything myself.'
- 'You children are so naughty.'
- 'If you behaved better, I wouldn't feel so angry.'
- 'Why do you want to upset me?'

If you notice thoughts like these, it's **a sign that you need to stop and do something to calm down** before you lose your temper and explode with anger.

Simple anger management ideas

Step 1: identify your anger

The first step to managing your anger is to notice the early signs. It's really important to know and say that you're angry, even if it's just to yourself. For example, 'This is making me angry' or 'I can feel myself getting angry here'.

Step 2: try to calm down

Once you notice the early signs of anger, you can do a few things to start calming down. Here are some ideas:

- Take a big breath and sigh. Try to slow your breathing.
- Do something that soothes you, like listening to some music, flicking through a magazine or just looking out the window.
- Go outside for a run or walk.
- Take a warm shower.
- Go somewhere quiet for a few minutes.

Signs that you're calming down include your heart rate slowing down and your muscles relaxing.

Step 3: reflect on the situation

If you feel you've calmed down, it might be a good idea to reflect back on the situation, and think about what has just happened. This can help you learn from the experience, and handle similar situations better in the future. Ask yourself:

- 'How important is this? Why was I so upset about it?'
- 'How do I want to sort out this situation?'
- 'Do I need to do something about this, or can I just let it go?'



It's a great idea to tell your children or your partner how you're feeling and what you're doing about it. It shows them a better way to manage their anger too. For example, 'I'm feeling angry. I need to go outside for a minute to calm down before we talk about this'.

Setting a good example for your children

Saying sorry for getting angry sends the message that anger isn't OK. But it is OK to feel angry – it's just not OK to yell.

So it's better to **say sorry for yelling or losing your temper**. This shows your children that it's OK to feel angry sometimes. The important thing is to find healthy ways of handling anger.

What to do when you don't manage anger well

There'll always be times when you don't manage anger well and you yell or say things you regret. This is normal.

When this happens, it's a good idea to take a moment to work out what to say to your children or your partner. Here are some ideas:

- 'I'm sorry for losing my temper. Next time I'll take myself away to calm down earlier.'
- 'I'm sorry I yelled. Can we talk about what just happened?'
- 'I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that, even though I was angry. I should have walked away and calmed down before we talked about it.'



Emotions build up when you're tired and stressed. [Looking after yourself](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/parenting/looking-after-yourself) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/parenting/looking-after-yourself>), can help you feel calmer

and better able to solve problems with your children as well as your partner, family and friends.

Acknowledgements

This article was developed in collaboration with Rosalie Pattenden.

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Siegel, J., & Hartzell, M. (2004). *Parenting from the inside out: How deeper self-understanding can help you raise children who thrive*. New York: Penguin Group.

O'Brien, K., & Mosco, J. (2012). Positive parent-child relationships. In S. Roffey (Ed.), *Positive relationships* (pp. 91-107). Houten: Springer Netherlands.

External links

- [1800RESPECT National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service \(https://www.1800respect.org.au/\)](https://www.1800respect.org.au/)
- [MensLine Australia \(http://www.mensline.org.au/\)](http://www.mensline.org.au/)
- [Beyond Blue \(http://www.beyondblue.org.au/\)](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/)

Last updated or reviewed

28-03-2017



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.

References

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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?** Good-quality 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

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/play-learning/screen-time-healthy-screen-use/healthy-screen-time-2-5-years>

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 [movie reviews \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/movie-reviews\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/movie-reviews) or [reviews on Common Sense Media \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/c/common-sense-media-reviews\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/c/common-sense-media-reviews). Use [Australian Classification \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/a/australian-classification-classification-categories-explained\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/a/australian-classification-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 [Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/a/australian-government-department-of-health-australia-s-physical-activity-and-sedentary-behaviour-guidelines) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/a/australian-government-department-of-health-australia-s-physical-activity-and-sedentary-behaviour-guidelines>) 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.

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

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/play-learning/screen-time-healthy-screen-use/healthy-screen-time-2-5-years>



Language development in children: 0-8 years

Language development in children is amazing, and it's a development that many parents really look forward to. The secret to helping your child learn language is very simple: talk together lots and listen lots.

Language development in children: what you need to know

Language development is a critical part of your child's overall development.

It supports your child's ability to communicate, and express and understand feelings. It also supports thinking and problem-solving, and developing and maintaining relationships. Learning to understand, use and enjoy language is the critical first step in literacy, and the basis for learning to read and write.



In their first 12 months, babies develop many of the foundations that underpin speech and language development. And they keep developing language skills at an amazing rate in the first three years of life.

How to encourage your child's early language development

The best way to encourage your child's speech and language development is to **do lots of talking together** about things that interest your child. It's all about following your child's lead as he shows you what he's interested in by waving, pointing, babbling or using words.

Talking with your child

Talk to your baby and treat her as a talker, beginning in her first year. When you finish talking, give her a turn and wait for her to respond – she will! And when your child starts babbling, copy your baby and babble back. You'll probably find that she babbles back to you again. This keeps the talking going and is great fun.

Responding to your child

As your baby grows up and starts to use gestures, you can respond to his attempts to communicate. For example, if your child shakes his head, respond as if he's saying 'No'. If he points to a toy, respond as if your child is saying, 'Can I have that?' or 'I like that'.

When your child starts using words, you can **repeat and build on what your child says**. For example, if she says, 'Apple,' you can say, 'You want a red apple?'

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-development-0-8>

When you tune in and respond to your child, it encourages him to communicate. You'll be amazed at how much he has to say, even before his words develop.

Everyday talking

Talking about what's happening in your daily life together is a great way to increase the number of words your child hears. You can talk about things that make sense to her, like what she's seeing or doing – the key is to use lots of different words and in different contexts. For example, you can talk to your child about an orange tree and about cutting up an orange for lunch. This helps your child learn the meaning and function of words in her world.

It doesn't matter if your child doesn't understand, because his understanding will grow as he develops.

From the time your child starts telling stories, encourage her to **talk about things in the past and in the future**. For example, at the end of the day, you could talk about plans for the next day, by making a shopping list together or deciding what to take on a visit to grandma. Or when you come home from an outing together, you could talk about it.

Reading with your baby

Read and share lots of books (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/reading-storytelling>) with your child, and read more complex books as he grows. Reading lets your child hear words in different contexts, which helps him learn the meaning and function of words.

Linking what's in the book to what's happening in your child's life is a good way to get your child talking. You can also encourage talking by chatting about interesting pictures in the books you read with your child.

When you read aloud with your child, you can point to words as you say them. This shows your child the link between written and spoken words, and helps her learn that words are distinct parts of language. These are important concepts for [developing literacy](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/developing-literacy) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/developing-literacy>).

Your local library is a great source of new books.



If your family speaks two languages, you can encourage your child's language development in both languages – for example, English and Spanish. [Bilingual children](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/bilingualism-multilingualism/raising-bilingual-children-tips) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/bilingualism-multilingualism/raising-bilingual-children-tips>) can achieve language development milestones at a similar rate to children who speak one language.

Language development: the first eight years

Here are just a few of the important things your child might achieve in language development between three months and eight years.

3-12 months

In this period, your baby will most likely coo and laugh, play with sounds and begin to communicate with gestures like waving. Babbling is an important developmental stage during the first year.

Babbling is often followed by the 'jargon phase' where your child might sound like he's talking or having a conversation. At this stage, though, this 'speech' doesn't mean anything. First words often start by around 12 months.

You might hear babbling, jargon and new words together as your child gets closer to saying her first words.

If your baby isn't babbling and isn't using gestures by 12 months, talk to your GP or child and family health nurse or another health professional.

Find out more about [language development from 3-12 months](https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/development/language-development/language-3-12-months) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/development/language-development/language-3-12-months>).

12-18 months

At this age, children often say their first words with meaning. For example, when your child says 'Dada', he's calling for his dad. In the next few months, your baby will keep adding more words to his vocabulary. He can understand more than he can say and can follow simple instructions too. For example, your baby can understand you when you say 'No' – although he won't always obey!

18 months to 2 years

In her second year, your toddler's vocabulary has grown and she'll start to put two words together into short 'sentences'. She'll understand much of what you say to her, and you can understand what she says to you (most of the time!).

Language development varies hugely, but if your baby doesn't have some words by around 18 months, talk to your GP or child and family health nurse or another health professional.

Find out more about [language development from 1-2 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-development-1-2-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-development-1-2-years>).

2-3 years

Your child can speak in longer, more complex sentences now, and is getting better at saying words correctly. He might play and talk at the same time. Strangers can probably understand most of what he says by the time he's three.

Find out more about [language development from 2-3 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-2-3-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-2-3-years>).

3-5 years

You can expect longer, more abstract and more complex conversations now. For example, your child might say things like, 'Will I grow into a watermelon because I swallowed the watermelon seed?'

Your child will probably also want to talk about a wide range of topics, and her vocabulary will keep growing. She might show that she understands the basic rules of grammar, as she experiments with more complex sentences that have words like 'because', 'if', 'so' or 'when'. And you can look forward to some entertaining stories too.

Find out more about [language development from 3-4 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/language-development/language-3-4-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/language-development/language-3-4-years>) and [language development from 4-5 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/language-development/language-4-5-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/language-development/language-4-5-years>).

5-8 years

During the early school years, your child will learn more words and start to understand how the sounds within language work together. He'll also become a better storyteller, as he learns to put words together in different ways and build different types of sentences. These skills also let him share ideas and opinions. By eight years, he'll be able to have adult-like conversations.

Find out more about [language development from 5-8 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/development/language-development/language-5-8-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/development/language-development/language-5-8-years>).



Children grow and develop at different rates, and there's a big range of 'normal' in development. But you know your child best. If you have any concerns about your child's language development, ask your [child and family health nurse](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/child-family-health-nurse) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/child-family-health-nurse>), [GP](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/general-practitioner) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/general-practitioner>) or [paediatrician](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health->

[reference/paediatrician](#)) or see a [speech pathologist](#) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/speech-pathologist>).

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<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-development-0-8>



Imagining, creating and play: toddlers

Your toddler is exploring the world in imaginative and creative ways. Here are play ideas and creative activities to support and boost toddler imagination and creativity.

About toddler play and imagination

Your toddler is like a little scientist – observing, making connections, testing ideas and solving problems. He uses his imagination and creativity to experiment and better understand himself and the world he lives in.

Your child **learns through play**.

What to expect as your toddler's imagination grows

Dressing up and pretend play start at around 15-18 months. Your toddler will enjoy pretending to be a grown-up, using props like old clothes and hats. For example, she might imagine she's driving a bus or serving in a shop.

Your toddler learns by **copying what others do** – especially you or older children. For example, by the time your toddler is two years old he might pretend to cook dinner using leaves and grass he's found in the backyard. Or he might say things like 'You be baby, I'm mum' or 'I go to work, bye bye'.

At the same time, your toddler will also start creating her own **pretend play stories and games**. These might be from books you've read together or experiences she's had, like seeing a monkey at the zoo.

Music of all sorts can have your toddler imagining fantastic things like flying or floating in space. And he'll express himself by singing, dancing and moving to his favourite songs and rhymes.

At this age, your toddler will probably also enjoy **messy play**. Digging sand, building with mud or squeezing paint between fingers and toes will all be popular activities.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/play-toddler-development/imagining-play-toddlers>

Your toddler might enjoy **playing and splashing in the bath** too. She might test what her toys can do by pouring water from one to another, dunking them underwater – or using them to empty the bath! Remember to always supervise your child around water. Toddlers are naturally curious and often fearless, so they're at particular risk of drowning.



You'll see your child expressing his imagination and ideas in all kinds of creative ways. Find out what to expect from [toddler creative development](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/creative-development/toddler-creative-development) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/creative-development/toddler-creative-development>), and get some ideas for [creative activities to do with your toddler](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/creative-development/toddler-creative-activities) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/creative-development/toddler-creative-activities>).

Play ideas and creative activities to encourage toddler imagination

Play, especially [open-ended play](#), allows your toddler to decide what to do and how to do it. You can try the following activities to encourage your toddler to put her imagination into action. It's good to **follow your toddler's lead** with most of these activities:

- [Read books](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/reading-with-toddlers) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/reading-with-toddlers>) and tell stories together about wonderful places and creatures. Talk about the stories with your toddler or ask him what he thinks might happen next.
- Recite nursery rhymes using our [Baby Karaoke](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/baby-karaoke) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/baby-karaoke>) and encourage your toddler to make up her own actions to songs.
- Look up! Describe the different things you see in the sky – the moon, stars and clouds are fascinating to your toddler.
- Make some sounds and rhythms with homemade or bought musical instruments. You can also borrow CDs from your local library or search online for different styles of music. Perhaps try [Kinderling Kids Radio](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/k/kinderling-kids-radio) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/k/kinderling-kids-radio>), which plays a range of family-friendly songs.
- Scribble with crayons and paper, and let your toddler draw from his imagination. Give your toddler time to [play outdoors](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/outdoor-play/outdoor-play) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/outdoor-play/outdoor-play>). This could be a walk in the park, on the beach or anywhere with new sights and sounds that will inspire your toddler.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/play-toddler-development/imagining-play-toddlers>

- Set up water play. A bucket of water with bubbles and a few plastic cups are all your toddler needs. Always supervise your toddler for [safe fun with water](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/safety/bath-water-safety/water-safety) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/safety/bath-water-safety/water-safety>).
- Set up a special play space within your home. This can be as simple as draping a table cloth over two chairs or cutting an opening into the side of a large cardboard box. Add some dress-up clothes or a pile of blocks to encourage your toddler to come up with stories and games.



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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External links

Toy Libraries Australia (<http://www.toylibraries.org.au/>)

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/play-toddler-development/imagining-play-toddlers>



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 you need to
- show other people that they are valued and needed. Many people actually like being asked for help – it makes them feel they're special to you.

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](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support>).

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](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/law-money) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/law-money>) and [government links and resources](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/government) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/government>).

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](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/mental-health-services) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/mental-health-services>), [child and parent disability](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/disability-services-family) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/disability-services-family>), [multicultural issues](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/multicultural) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/multicultural>), and [Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/aboriginal-services) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/aboriginal-services>).

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](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/parenting-and-family-support-organisations) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/parenting-and-family-support-organisations>)

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/about-services-support/services-support>

[families/parent-family-services](#)).

- [child health and wellbeing centres and organisations](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/child-health-services) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/child-health-services>).
- parenting groups and playgroups
- 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 behaviour
- 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](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-life/domestic-family-violence/family-violence-what-is-it-) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-life/domestic-family-violence/family-violence-what-is-it->).



To make a start, check out our [professional links page](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/professional-resources) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/professional-resources>), call your local parent advice line, visit your community health centre, or speak with your child and family health nurse or GP.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/about-services-support/services-support>



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 family 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-links/h/healthychildren-org-family-media-plan) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/h/healthychildren-org-family-media-plan>). 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](#)

[media \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/play-learning/media/media-benefits\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/play-learning/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.

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

You can **reduce this risk** by taking some practical [internet safety precautions](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) 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) (http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/media_influences_teenagers.html) and their behaviour – for example, children can copy or be influenced by negative behaviour, stereotypical 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 [media literacy](https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/media/media-literacy) (https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/media/media-literacy), so that she can understand and question media messages.



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

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



Stress and stress management: grown-ups

Stress is a normal reaction to changes and challenges, like those that come with being a parent. Some stress can be healthy, but too much can be overwhelming. If stress is an issue for you, it's good to know some stress management techniques.

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 having 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 can actually help you deal with stressful situations. For example, they might give you the adrenaline rush you need to get to the bus on time.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/stress-grown-ups>

But if you keep going at this speed, 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 or using drugs
- finding it hard to be tolerant with your partner or 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 like 'I'm never going to get out of this mess'
- feeling that you're not managing practical everyday things, like 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:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/stress-grown-ups>

- Challenge unhelpful thoughts about things that cause you stress. For example, your child cries 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?' or '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 cry in the supermarket. But perhaps you could change the situation so the crying is less likely to happen. Would your child cry less if you went shopping at a different time of day, perhaps after he's had a nap?
- 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' or '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 more than you can handle.

Making a plan and having some [family routines](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-life/routines-rituals-relationships/family-routines) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-life/routines-rituals-relationships/family-routines>) 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. You might also think about asking for some help from family or friends.

Stay 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 social media 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 get to **sleep**, don't watch television, check your emails or use social media before going to bed. If you're lying awake at night, get out of bed and read something non-stimulating until you feel sleepy. You could also 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 magazines, 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 partner and 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 local or online courses.



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?

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/stress-grown-ups>

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 another health professional 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 [breathing](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/breathing-exercises) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/breathing-exercises>), [muscle relaxation](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/muscle-relaxation-techniques) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/muscle-relaxation-techniques>) and [mindfulness](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/mindfulness) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/looking-after-yourself/anger-anxiety-stress/mindfulness>). You can also search online for stress management and relaxation apps, books, CDs, YouTube videos and so on.

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External links

- [Reach Out – Stress and anxiety](http://au.reachout.com/Tough-Times/Somethings-not-right/Stress-and-anxiety) (<http://au.reachout.com/Tough-Times/Somethings-not-right/Stress-and-anxiety>)

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Toddlers at play

Your toddler is keen to explore, experience and learn about the world. She does this through play and interactions with others. You can help your toddler learn and develop with our toddler play ideas and toddler games.

What to expect from toddler play

Toddlers are full of energy – they run, reach for things and busily explore the world around them. Opening and closing drawers, turning containers upside down to check their contents, squishing toast inside a book, and hiding things in all sorts of places – this is all normal behaviour and shows that your toddler is keen to figure out how things work and what they do.

Unstructured play is important at this age. This is play that just happens, depending on what takes your child's interest. For example, sometimes your child might feel like doing something active, like jumping, running and dancing. Other times he might enjoy quiet activities like drawing, reading or sorting blocks.

Structured music or gym classes can be fun, but your child doesn't need them. Your child just needs time to play – and a [safe home environment](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/safety/home-pets/home-safety) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/safety/home-pets/home-safety>) to explore and play in.

Sometimes **your child will want to take charge** with toddler games. This is great whenever it's safe and practical, because it teaches your child about making decisions and lets her use her imagination. When your child is leading the play, you can ask questions that encourage her to tell you about what she's doing – for example, 'What are you making in that pot?'

Your toddler's play will probably vary in pace and focus. Sometimes he'll look at something quickly and move on. Other times he'll stop and explore an object. This means that simple activities with a toddler – like collecting the mail – might take a bit longer than you think.

By the time your toddler is three, she might be enjoying '**pretend**' games like dress ups and playing house. This type of [imaginative and creative play](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/play-toddler-development/imagining-play-toddlers) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/play-toddler-development/imagining-play-toddlers>) helps your toddler express and explore complex emotions like frustration, sadness and anger.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/getting-play-started/toddlers-at-play>

You might notice that your toddler wants to play the same game or read the same book again and again. Repeating games and activities is how toddlers master skills and understand what to expect in certain situations.



Most two-year-olds don't understand [how to share](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/playing-with-others/sharing) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/playing-with-others/sharing>), or take turns. By three, your child might understand what sharing is but will probably still find it hard to do. Your encouragement and plenty of practice will help your child start developing these skills.

Toddler play ideas and toddler games

Play is not only fun – it's also [how children learn](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/learning-ideas/learning-baby-to-preschool) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/learning-ideas/learning-baby-to-preschool>). You're still the best toy for your toddler to play with – and the best toddler games still have you playing a very important part.

Here are some tips for toddler play:

- **Sing songs** and nursery rhymes: your toddler will enjoy singing with you, especially songs and nursery rhymes that involve actions and touch.
- **Read with your toddler every day** (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/reading-with-toddlers>): pop-up and lift-the-flap books are fun and full of surprises. Let your child choose favourite books to read. You can also point out some words as you say them, ask your toddler to repeat words with you, or ask questions like 'What happens next?'
- **Give your child things to draw with:** your toddler will enjoy scribbling with crayons, pencils, paints or chalk. You can expect him to put any pens within reach into his mouth too, so it's a good idea to choose safe, non-toxic pencils and paints.
- **Try messy play:** for example, playing with water, sand or mud lets your toddler explore new textures and sensations. Let your child empty and fill containers, pour and scoop. Remember that constant supervision is the only way to [keep your child safe around water](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/safety/bath-water-safety/water-safety) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/safety/bath-water-safety/water-safety>).
- **Go outside with your child:** [outdoor play](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/outdoor-play/outdoor-play) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/outdoor-play/outdoor-play>), like pottering in the garden or park, offers endless play possibilities. It also gives your child the chance to be active in varying ways like climbing, running, swinging, leaping or rolling.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/getting-play-started/toddlers-at-play>

- **Give your child opportunities for pretend play:** create an exciting play space like a bedsheet over chairs or a tower of boxes. Some simple props like old scarves, handbags or clothes can give your toddler ideas to make up stories or pretend games.

Screen time

Screen time (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/screen-time-media/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, like lots of face-to-face creative play or physically active time with you and other carers.

The most recent screen time guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) say that:

- children under 18 months should have no screen time other than video-chatting
- children aged 18 months to 2 years can watch or use high-quality programs or apps if you 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.



How do you [choose the right toys for your child](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/getting-play-started/choosing-toys) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/getting-play-started/choosing-toys>)? Children don't need many toys to play, and toys don't need to be fancy or flashy. Some of the best toys for children are 'open-ended' or recycled – for example, cardboard boxes, pieces of material and old clothes.

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<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/getting-play-started/toddlers-at-play>



Victoria: services

This page has information about a range of child, family and parent services and support organisations in Victoria.

Have you just had a new baby?

[Maternal and Child Health Service](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-maternal-and-child-health-services) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-maternal-and-child-health-services>).

The Maternal and Child Health Service provides free health checks for children between birth and school age. To find your nearest Maternal and Child Health Centre, contact [your local council](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-environment-land-water-and-planning-find-your-council) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-environment-land-water-and-planning-find-your-council>) or use the [Victorian early childhood service and school directory](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-find-an-early-childhood-service-or-school) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-find-an-early-childhood-service-or-school>).

There is also a **Maternal and Child Health line**, with qualified nurses who can give you information, support and advice on child health, nutrition, breastfeeding, maternal and family health, and parenting:

- **Phone:** 132 229 (local call)
- **Hours:** 24 hours, 7 days

[Australian Breastfeeding Association – Breastfeeding helpline](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/a/australian-breastfeeding-association-breastfeeding-helpline) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/a/australian-breastfeeding-association-breastfeeding-helpline>).

If you're breastfeeding and need help, trained volunteer counsellors can give you reassurance, information and advice about breastfeeding and overcoming common hurdles to breastfeeding.

- **Phone:** 1800 MUM 2 MUM (1800 686 268)
- **Hours:** 24 hours, 7 days

Are you finding parenting harder than you thought?

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/local-services/vic-services>

Parentline Victoria (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-parentline-victoria>)

This is a telephone counselling service for parents and carers of children aged 0-18 years. Professional counsellors can help you with issues relating to parenting and relationships, from settling, feeding and tantrums to separation and family violence. Parentline can also provide contact details for community services:

- **Phone:** 132 289 (local call)
- **Hours:** 8 am-midnight, 7 days

Early parenting centres

These centres can help families with children aged 0-3 years who are having problems with feeding, settling, early childhood routines and so on. When you call a centre, a worker will speak with you about your needs and let you know what the centre can offer. Families can stay at a centre or attend a day stay program.

There are three early parenting centres in Melbourne:

O'Connell Family Centre (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/m/mercy-health-o-connell-family-centre>) in Canterbury

- **Phone:** (03) 8416 7600
- **Hours:** 9 am-5 pm, Monday-Friday

Queen Elizabeth Centre (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/q/queen-elizabeth-centre>) in Noble Park

- **Phone:** (03) 9549 2777
- **Hours:** 9 am-5 pm, Monday-Friday

Tweddle Child and Family Health Service (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/t/tweddle-child-and-family-health-service>) in Footscray

- **Phone:** (03) 9689 1577
- **Hours:** 8.30 am-5 pm, Monday-Friday

Regional parenting services

These services provide parenting information and education. Parenting groups are run in easily accessible venues like schools, preschools and neighbourhood houses.

You can read more information about [city and regional parenting services in Victoria](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-family-and-parenting-services) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-family-and-parenting-services>).

Do you need to find care for your child?

There are four options for child care in Australia:

- home-based care, which is having your child cared for by a friend, relative or nanny in your home
- family day care with a small group of children in an approved carer's home
- centre-based care, in a child care centre with trained staff and a structured program
- occasional care, which is short-term, centre-based care.

Child care is mainly designed for children aged up to five years, but it can also include before-school, after-school and holiday care for primary school-age children.

[MyChild](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/m/mychild) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/m/mychild>)

This Australian Government website has information about different types of child care and about government assistance to help with fees. You can search for a child care service near you.

You can also get information from the Child Care Access Hotline:

- **Phone:** 1800 670 305 (free call)
- **TTY service:** 133 677, then ask for 1800 670 305 (for hearing-impaired or speech-impaired callers)
- **Hours:** 8 am-6 pm, Monday-Friday



You can read more in our articles on [getting started with child care](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/work-child-care/planning-starting-child-care/starting-child-care) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/work-child-care/planning-starting-child-care/starting-child-care>), [child care types](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/work-child-care/types-of-child-care/child-care-types) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/work-child-care/types-of-child-care/child-care-types>) and [child care costs and Australian Government assistance](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/work-child-care/planning-starting-child-care/child-care-costs) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/work-child-care/planning-starting-child-care/child-care-costs>). You can also find out more about [good-quality child care](#)

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/work-child-care/understanding-child-care/national-quality-framework>).

Do you want help finding playgroups?

Playgroups are a great way for small children to practise getting along with others and to try new ways to play. They're good for parents too, with lots of support and social contact in a relaxed, welcoming environment. For more information contact [Playgroup Victoria](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/p/playgroup-victoria) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/p/playgroup-victoria>):

- **Phone:** 1800 171 882 (free call)

Is your child ready for kindergarten?

The Victorian Government funds one year of kindergarten in the year before children start school. Kindergarten programs focus on learning and socialising skills to help get children ready for school.

To find kindergartens near you, contact [your local council](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-environment-land-water-and-planning-find-your-council) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-environment-land-water-and-planning-find-your-council>) or use the [Victorian early childhood service and school directory](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-find-an-early-childhood-service-or-school) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-education-and-training-find-an-early-childhood-service-or-school>).

Are things worrying you at home and you want someone to talk to?

[Relationships Australia – Victoria](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/r/relationships-australia-victoria) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/r/relationships-australia-victoria>)

Relationships Australia offers counselling, education programs, [mediation services](#) and other help for families and couples:

- **Phone:** 1300 364 277 (cost of a local call)
- **Hours:** 9 am-5 pm, Monday-Friday

[Women's Information and Referral Exchange \(WIRE\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/w/women-s-information-and-referral-exchange-wire-)

(<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/w/women-s-information-and-referral-exchange-wire->)

This is a free information and support service for women. You can contact WIRE for advice or information about anything from family relationships and legal issues to housing and homelessness, mental health, finding work or study options:

- **Phone:** 1300 134 130 (cost of a local call)
- **Hours:** 9 am-5 pm, Monday-Friday

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/local-services/vic-services>

Does someone in your family have special needs?

[Department of Human Services – Disability](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-human-services-disability)

(<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/v/victorian-government-department-of-human-services-disability>)

This government department provides services for people with disability in Victoria. Contact the **Intake and Response Service** to find out what supports are available to you:

- **Phone:** 1800 783 783
- **TTY:** 1800 008 149

[National Disability Insurance Scheme](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/n/national-disability-insurance-scheme)

(<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/n/national-disability-insurance-scheme>)

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a national scheme to support people with permanent and significant disability. It's being introduced gradually and will replace the current disability support system. You can find out more about how to get ready for the [NDIS in Victoria](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/n/national-disability-insurance-scheme-ndis-in-victoria)

(<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/n/national-disability-insurance-scheme-ndis-in-victoria>), and when it will be available in your area.



Find more links to [child and parent disability services](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/disability-services-family)

(<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/disability-services-family>).

Are you looking for parenting services in your state?

[Infexchange Service Seeker](https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/i/infexchange-service-seeker) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/media/external-links/i/infexchange-service-seeker>)

This is a directory of community services in Australia. Search for 'parenting' to find parenting support and other services in your area.



Find more links to [parent and family services](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/parent-family-services)

(<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/parent-family-services>).

Last updated or reviewed

12-01-2017



My Action Plan

Date ___ / ___ / ___

What we talked about today (tick)

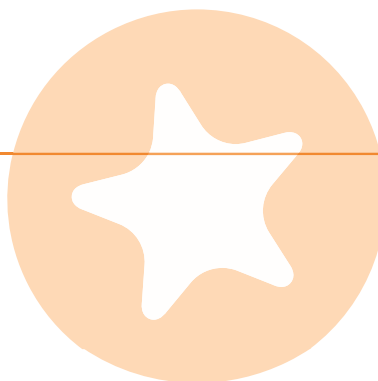
- Warm and gentle
- Tuning in
- Listening and talking more
- Teachable moments
- Following your child's lead
- Play
- Routines
- Exploring books and reading
- Other topics



What I'm going to try

When will I do this?

What will I need?



Who else will be involved?

Date ____ / ____ / ____

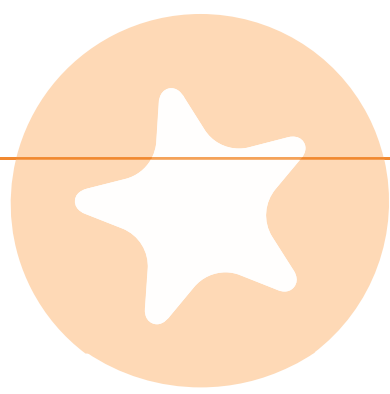
What we talked about today (tick)

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What I'm going to try

When will I do this?



What will I need?

Who else will be involved?

Date ____ / ____ / ____

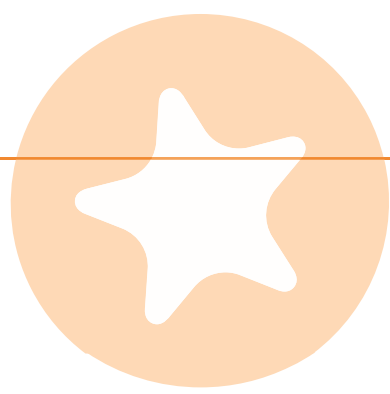
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Date ___ / ___ / ___

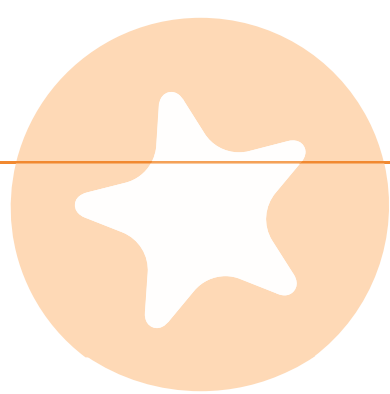
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