smalltalk Implementation Processes

What is smalltalk?
smalltalk is an evidence-based model delivered to parents within supported playgroups. It adds additional elements to the benefits that families experience from a well-functioning supported playgroup (such as fun, play, connections with local families, community engagement). The model aims to introduce parents to a small number of parenting essentials that lead to optimal child outcomes, help parents become aware of the importance of their interactions with their children, and increase the number and types of situations in which they engage in positive interactions.

The five quality everyday interactions are: Warm and Gentle, Tuning into Children, Following your Child’s Lead, Listening and Talking More, and Teachable Moments.

smalltalk also aims to encourage parents to provide increased opportunities for their child’s learning at home by: creating routines, reading to children from birth, and supporting children’s play.

Another important element of smalltalk is the encouragement provided to parents to look after their own health and wellbeing by developing positive social support networks and seeking professional help if stressed and not coping.

In addition to its delivery within supported playgroups, smalltalk is delivered to parents during In-Home Support sessions. With the aid of a structured DVD, these sessions provide coaching to the parent or carer to use the smalltalk everyday essentials. smalltalk is a light-touch, low-intensity model that uses a parent-mediated approach and is based on the principles of working in partnership with parents. Working in partnership with parents, rather than providing advice to parents, is a key feature of smalltalk.

Recently, the Department of Education and Training (DET) introduced reforms in the supported playgroup sector. One of these reforms focused on embedding smalltalk into the existing supported playgroup system. smalltalk is now a service enhancement to the DET-funded supported playgroup platform.

What smalltalk isn’t
- smalltalk does not replace supported playgroup activities – it occurs within these activities.
- smalltalk is not parent education classes.
- smalltalk may not be suitable for all families.
- smalltalk is not a substitute for intensive family support or crisis intervention.
- smalltalk In-Home Support visits do not provide support to meet family goals beyond the scope of coaching the parent or carer in smalltalk everyday essentials using the structured DVD.

What is implementation?
Implementation science tells us of the importance of becoming ‘implementation ready’; that is, taking into account all factors that can affect implementation, and considering implementation in a stage-based manner. This recognises that it is not possible to implement a new innovation or model without making changes within the organisation and systems that the model is to be embedded in; and that implementation is a planned journey rather than a one-off occurrence.
How will *smalltalk* be implemented?

Parenting Research Centre Practice Coaches support the implementation of *smalltalk* through a number of processes:

1. Training
2. Early implementation meeting
3. Team site visit
4. Field observations
5. Ongoing coaching
6. Stakeholder feedback and input into ongoing development of the model
7. Coaching feedback

Key documents used by Practice Coaches, and Supervisors and Facilitators throughout this process are:

- Early Implementation Meeting Guide
- Coaching Service Delivery Plan
- Supported Playgroup Observation Visit Form
- Facilitator Skill Development Plan
- Core Skills Checklists
- Supported Playgroup Facilitator – *smalltalk* self-evaluation form

1. **Training**
   
   Supported playgroup Facilitators will undertake initial and on-the-job training with the Practice Coach, to ensure they can implement the *smalltalk* model with high fidelity and skill. This training is also highly recommended for Supervisors.

2. **Early implementation meeting**
   
   Supported playgroup Supervisors play an important role in the support of Facilitators, understanding how the Practice Coaches are working with Facilitators and providing input to and support of the Practice Coach role. Early in the implementation process, the supervisor and a DET Performance and Planning Advisor (PAPA) meet with a *smalltalk* Practice Coach to develop an informed understanding of *smalltalk* and the provider’s organisational and local context, and to plan for successful implementation. The focus of the conversation is to consider the elements that are understood to increase the likelihood of successful implementation of *smalltalk*. The **Early Implementation Meeting Guide** is used to guide the discussion.

3. **Team site visit**
   
   This visit is an opportunity for Practice Coaches to learn about the specific local government area (LGA) site, families and community. It’s an opportunity for supported playgroup Facilitators and Supervisors to discuss the implementation of *smalltalk* within the supported playgroup platform. The Supervisor and Facilitator should be present during the site visit.

   Practice Coaches will also highlight specifics from the training and hear about the identified goals of the Facilitator to develop core skills required to meet fidelity of the core components of *smalltalk*.

   Practice Coaches will re-visit the coaching model and work in partnership with the Supervisor and Facilitators to develop an agreement of how practice coaching will best work in the specific LGA site. This will inform the completion of the **Coaching Service Delivery Plan**.
Field observations
Prior to the field observation visit, the Facilitator will be asked to complete the Supported Playgroup Facilitator – smalltalk self-evaluation form.

The purpose of field observation sessions is to provide feedback to the supported playgroup Facilitator while they are running supported playgroups and within a family home environment when carrying out smalltalk In-Home Support. At these times, the Practice Coach will be assessing the Facilitator’s use of skills reflected in the core components of the model.

Practice Coach observations and feedback will support the Facilitator to implement the practice framework, achieve fidelity to the core components, and will help the Facilitator to build on their strengths and improve their practice skills.

The Practice Coach will utilise the Supported Playgroup Observation Visit Form to assist the Facilitator to prepare and evaluate the specific smalltalk session. This form is also used for the development of some specific, targeted learning goals for the Facilitator to develop competency skills in the core components of smalltalk.

Ongoing coaching
At least once a month, the Coach will touch base with the Facilitator to further support implementation of smalltalk. This contact may be through phone, email, observation visit or a Practice Talk Session webinar. The Facilitator and Supervisor can also contact the Practice Coach as part of ongoing coaching.

Stakeholder feedback and input into ongoing model development
The Practice Coach will collect feedback from stakeholders, including facilitators, supervisors, families, service providers and community partners. This will provide an opportunity to use data to improve the model.

Coaching feedback
Service providers will be asked to provide feedback on coaching. This feedback can include:

- timeliness of the coaching
- helpfulness
- usefulness in improving smalltalk skill development
- clarity of communication
- engagement skills
- promptness of feedback
- quality of feedback
- impact on outcomes with families.

Practice coaching

What is practice coaching?
Practice coaching is a process by which the coach creates structured, focused interaction with learners and uses appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the learner, making a positive impact on the organisation.

Practice coaching and supervision
Practice coaching does not include activities or responsibilities as part of line management or administrative supervision. It refers to embedding the smalltalk model – what it is, when to use it, where to use it, why use it,
and how to do it; and anything else related to the content and how supported playgroup Facilitators and Supervisors work with families engaged in smalltalk.

Regular supervision is also expected for all supported playgroup Facilitators and will be delivered by the employing agency within their existing policy and procedures.

**Why use practice coaching in implementation?**

Practice coaching is one of several recognised implementation components. It supports the Facilitator to acquire skills and proficiency, with the aim of ensuring the model is implemented with fidelity and achieves positive outcomes for children and families. Coaching is considered a ‘training plus’ feature. Coaches support behaviour change at the change at the facilitator, supervisor, manager and agency levels.

Training and coaching are the principal methods for facilitating behavioural change at the practitioner and supervisory levels. Most skills needed by successful practitioners can be introduced in training but really are learned on the job with the help of a Practice Coach.

**What are the aims of practice coaching in smalltalk implementation?**

In smalltalk implementation, coaching has two main purposes:

1. **Quality Assurance.** Coaching is a quality assurance mechanism whose purpose is to improve the Facilitator’s ability to deliver smalltalk, as specified by the model, within DET-funded supported playgroups.
2. **Outcomes for families.** Coaching, along with other implementation support, is designed to achieve positive child and family outcomes for the target population.

**How does practice coaching support smalltalk implementation?**

The Practice Coach supports the Facilitator to develop skill in use of the model with families. The Practice Coach also supports competent smalltalk delivery and on-going professional development.

The Practice Coach works with the Facilitator during implementation, focussing on the following core skills:

- Recognising that parents are the experts on their children and they have strengths which can be identified
- Working in partnership with parents acknowledges that parents have an important contribution to make that is equal to the contribution of staff involved
- Using open-ended conversation techniques for delivery of content
- Creating opportunities to practise skill
- Utilising conversation cards, opportunity sheets and In-Home Support DVD
- Setting concrete goals with the family through this partnering process
- Developing parent skills and confidence
- Committing to ongoing development of skills and knowledge for self and taking a proactive approach to continually improving skills and abilities.

The Practice Coach also works with the Supervisor in effective delivery of supervisory skills and knowledge in implementing the smalltalk model. This ensures the Facilitator’s goals are aligned with the service provider’s goals. The coach will work with the Supervisor to plan for adequate Facilitator time to attend coaching sessions and subsequent practice and planning discussions. The Coach will provide additional resources and support as needed.

**How will the Parenting Research Centre support smalltalk implementation with practice coaching?**

Critical features of practice coaching in smalltalk implementation:
1. **Clear expectations.** The service provider and the Practice Coach develop and agree to a **Coaching Service Delivery Plan** that considers organisational context and the preferences of the individual Facilitators.

2. **Accountability.** Both the service provider and the Practice Coach are held accountable to what has been agreed on prior to engaging in coaching. The service provider and the Practice Coach make use of data to assess the impact of, and to continue to improve, the coaching component of implementation. Performance assessment data (e.g. conversations, observations, documents) as well as client outcome and process data are utilized to promote provider and consultant accountability and assess effectiveness of coaching.

3. **Expertise of coaches in the model.** Coaches are at an expert level of proficiency in the practice model intended to be delivered, for example: (1) coaches need a thorough and expert understanding of the principles and research that support the practice framework; and (2) coaches are able to demonstrate the skills required to effectively deliver each component of the practice model.

4. **Expertise of coaches as trainers.** Coaches demonstrate a superior ability to engage a diverse range of workers and supervisors, and an ability to assess and plan for worker skill development as adherent to the practice model.

5. **Feedback.** Coaching is designed to develop and maintain staff competency and adherence to the *smalltalk* model. Importantly, coaches provide targeted and timely feedback to practitioners designed to promote skill development in real-life application. Coaches demonstrate an ability to detect both helpful and unhelpful patterns in worker behaviour. Coaches use multiple methods to assess worker skill proficiency and promoting skill development of practitioners in their implementation of *smalltalk* in the field.

6. **Frequency.** Coaches give regular, ongoing coaching, which is more beneficial than time-limited consultation.

7. **Multiple sources of information.** Coaching utilizes multiple sources of information from which to assess worker skill, plan worker development and monitor worker progress; these are typically observation of live work, review of written work, and information from other sources.

A Practice Coach will:

- Ensure all supported playgroup Facilitators receive the initial *smalltalk* training
- Be present at the early implementation meeting
- Develop a **Skill Development Plan** with each Facilitator. Support the Supervisor and Facilitator to develop an action plan to achieve the Skill Development Plan
- Undertake field observations:
  - Supported playgroup setting – at least one on-site (face-to-face)
  - In-Home Support setting – at least one on-site (face-to-face)
- Revise and update the Skill Development Plan on a regular basis (during coaching sessions as part of field observation or follow-up) to ensure that Facilitators are achieving goals and advancing skills
- Assess on-going training needs with the Facilitators and Supervisor on a regular basis. Provide Facilitators with resources for specific training needs as identified
- Provide targeted skill-based training in team format directed to improve individual and team performance in delivery of *smalltalk*
- Assess adherence to *smalltalk* model and practices through the use of **Core Skills Checklists**.