



CONVERSATION STARTERS

TRAINING MANUAL

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CONTENTS

SECTION 1	1
Development of the manual	1
How to use this manual	3
SECTION 2	5
Why engage with families?.....	5
The child within the context of the family.....	5
SECTION 3: FACILITATOR NOTES.....	17
Some ways of understanding families.....	17
Approaches to building effective relationships	18
Responding to different situations	24
SECTION 4: SESSION EXERCISES.....	26
Some ways of understanding families.....	26
Approaches to building effective relationships	27
Responding to different situations	32
SECTION 5: RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS.....	35
REFERENCES.....	47

SECTION 1

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MANUAL

This manual was developed during the course of the REACH Conversation Starters project and is the result of the project team facilitating and refining activities and exercises in response to participant feedback.

REACH Conversation Starters

This FaHCSIA funded project is facilitated by Parenting Australia, Jesuit Social Services and aimed to identify families who did not access professional services in key transition phases in a family's life and explore why. These stages are:

- Becoming a parent for the first time.
- Families using early childhood services for the first time.
- Families with children transitioning to primary school.
- Families with children transitioning to secondary school.

The project began by interviewing three separate groups:

- 1) **Professional services**, about accessing parents that did not use their service.
- 2) **Community service providers** (i.e. shopping centres, sporting groups and libraries), about their current practice and level of comfort when interacting with families.
- 3) **Families**, about what professional services they did or did not use and why.

Interview Results

Families shared the strong message that it was the professional's behaviour that made them feel comfortable or uncomfortable attending services. Survey results indicate that 27 % of parents interviewed attended services because of the staff's attitude and that 52 % felt it was the staff's behaviour that made them feel welcome. One parent explained why she chose a particular kindergarten for her child; "Friendly staff is a high priority – teachers always relate to children well, some kindergartens now realise that it is a family thing so they must relate to parents as well." Reasons given for parents not utilising services included:

- Feeling judged about their parenting skills.
- Not being listened to.
- Not being respected.
- Being spoken to inappropriately.

Community service providers echoed this with one centre manager explaining, "All retailers know the importance of building rapport with customers and providing good customer service in reference to encouraging the return of these customers to their shop".

Many professionals expressed a high level of discomfort when working with families, avoided families if they could, where others believed it was not their job to engage families. Many discussed the difficulty of adding yet another role to their already stretched timeframe and lack of resources.

The overwhelming themes that have come out of the project are:

1. Parents only attend services where they feel valued and listened to.
2. All workers are struggling with their relationships with the many different types of family groups.
3. Many teachers do not see the relevance of working with families and are often afraid to engage with them.
4. Schools and teachers are not supported or resourced to understand the worth and importance of working in partnership with parents.

Based on what parents are saying, it is suggested that services need to be there for the family's needs rather than the professionals needs. This involves using the Hilton Davis 'Partnership' approach rather than the 'Expert' approach where professionals acknowledge that parents are equal and have important knowledge about their own child and skills in caring for their child. (See Hilton Davis model p19 - 21)

Key project beliefs

- Services that are open to listening to families and value and use this information, when caring for children, are the most successful in building equitable relationships with families.
- Professionals who values and respects parents are likely to have a more positive direct impact on the parent child relationship.
- Using inclusive and respectful language will foster better partnerships between professionals and families.

"Conversation Starters" are opening phrases and sentences that encourage and allow a conversation to begin with a parent in many different situations. The REACH "Conversation Starters" project is happy for the "Conversation Starters" that are produced from this project to be included in the training manual. Hopefully these will assist readers of the training manual to begin building relationships with families experiencing difficult situations.

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

Introduction

This manual is intended for those who work with teachers and early childhood professionals.

We recommend that the facilitators should have received some training in group work and have knowledge of child and adolescent development.

The information and exercises contained in the manual can be used as a guide and the use of extra or other relevant material is encouraged.

The backgrounds, expertise and experience of the participants will affect the way information is received, listening and adapting to their needs is important. Flexibility in the way sessions are delivered with participants discussing and problem solving issues acts as a model for ways to work with parents and families.

Our Beliefs

In offering this training manual our beliefs are:

- Teachers and carers bring their own valuable knowledge and experience to the training group and sharing this creates an atmosphere where they learn from each other.
- The foundation of this manual is to explain a better understanding of family functioning especially with those families who have experienced a range of disadvantages.
- Working effectively and respectfully with parents and families empowers them and helps build optimism and hope.
- Engaging positively with parents increases the wellbeing of children and provides an optimum setting in which learning can take place.
- Listening to others and sharing ideas and experiences models ways to feel connected and supported and helps build community.
- A strong attachment to school, kindergarten, childcare etc, can provide stability in an otherwise unstable world, offering an opportunity to establishing relationships, maintaining friendships, providing positive and enjoyable learning opportunities and ultimately building resilience and hope.

Why this Training?

Contemporary society has become much more technological and complex. The media accelerates the flow of information and can be deeply pessimistic. Young people know more about the adult world and global problems and this can be overwhelming, leading to a loss of hope. Parents are confronted and often confused by books and information offering solutions to problems of raising their children. Choosing the appropriate strategy can be difficult for many parents often leaving them feeling powerless and unsure about their role.

Parents and families seek help from people who interact with their children. As well as experiencing a fast moving, technological society there are an increased number of migrants with different life styles living in Australia. The settings in which we care and teach our children operate in a middle class system and this may be very

unfamiliar to our newly arrived and disadvantaged families. Bridging the gap between these families and schools is vital. Teachers and early childhood professionals are faced with many unfamiliar family situations often with little support or training of how best to assist and help these families and children.

Facilitators

An authentic, collaborative and flexible approach is key to achieving positive outcomes. Successful facilitation involves an attitude of respect, a willingness to experiment with different approaches and a sense of humour.

As a facilitator, you are more likely to achieve a successful outcome by:

- Setting up a welcoming environment.
- Listening actively.
- Putting people at ease and allowing each person to be heard.
- Sharing ideas and empowering participants.
- Being a positive role model.
- Posing hypothetical questions, eliciting opinions and encouraging ongoing discussion.
- Summarising and clarifying while at the same time keeping things moving,
- Suggesting other supports and resources when appropriate.

Goals

When participants have completed the training they can expect to:

- Understand the circumstances and needs of more diverse and disadvantaged families.
- Feel more confident to work with these families.
- Be more able to assist these families.
- Have a better understand of their role in developing the resilience and optimism of children and families they work with.
- Feel less stressed and enjoy their work more.

Session Outline

- Pre session evaluation
- Introduction
- Warm Up
- Exercises – philosophy
- Discussion
- Exercises
- Discussion
- Close
- Post session evaluation

The above session outline is suggested as it allows a balance between structure and flexibility in the group. This outline was developed by Constance Jenkin in her parenting manual *Planning Happy Families: A Kit for Leaders (1988)* PACE Jenkin, C. and Bretherton, D. (1994) ACER

SECTION 2

WHY ENGAGE WITH FAMILIES?

Research clearly shows that there are many positive outcomes for children in schools, early childhood settings when parents and professionals have a positive relationship.

Having a relationship means that parents feel supported and if problems arise they can be directed to the appropriate service before any family situation becomes a crisis that could threaten the child's capacity to function in school or in an early childhood setting.

A positive relationship between a parent and teacher can result in parents and professionals following up strategies in the classroom and at home. A relationship with parents will lead to greater knowledge of the child and the circumstances of their home life leading to appropriate curriculum being developed.

Children learn in the context of relationships and positive relationships between professionals and parents enhance the social and emotional wellbeing of children. The closer the parent is to the education of the child the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement (Kasting 1994 pg 186). The teacher who sees the child in the context of the family is better able to respond and encourage the growth of the whole child, socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically.

Families, community and schools are in a position to meet the needs of the whole child. Building satisfying relationships with parents can lead to calmer and happier classrooms and a more satisfying professional life.

THE CHILD WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE FAMILY

Within the family life cycle there are transition phases that have been identified as times that may be challenging for families. Transition periods mean change and change can create stress. Some families are optimistic about change and a small amount of stress can be motivating. However for many, re evaluating life and making decisions can be very difficult.

Four of the key transition stages are the birth of the first child, entering the early childhood stage, starting primary school and starting secondary school. Professionals who work with families are in a key position to have a positive influence on the wellbeing of the children and families and there is a need to remembering that transition can be challenging.

Although the child is the focus for teachers and early childhood professionals it is important to understand the impact families have on children and in some cases help to explain some childhood behaviours.

As teachers and early childhood professionals we are influenced by our own experience as children and by the values and culture of our own families. The family we grew up in influences our behaviour. If we experienced a structured, well resourced, loving family it may be difficult to understand families who are chaotic, poor and casual about their affection to their children.

Children are raised according to family culture and beliefs. Within their own culture these children may not feel different but when they interact in an Australian setting both parent and child may feel challenged and stressed to accommodate the new experience.

Professionals play an important role in assisting children and families feel connected and valued in a community. We have listed and discussed a number of family situations that may need extra support and understanding.

Families Living in Poverty

Research (Payne, 2005) has accessed the knowledge and observations of family workers that are continuously involved with people from impoverished backgrounds. This information has highlighted a number of consistent differences between those from and impoverished backgrounds and those from middle class backgrounds, with families from wealthy backgrounds being different again. One of these consistent differences is in the communication styles adopted by people from different classes.

All language exists within five registers, with most existing within just three of those five. These are 1) Formal register, containing the sentence structure and word choice used at school or work, 2) Consultative register, still maintaining formal sentence structure but less direct, more like language used in a structured conversation and 3) Casual register, the language used with friends existing of between 400 and 800 words, the choice of words is less specific and this register depends on verbal assists such as hand gestures facial expression etc. The ability to use formal register is a skill of the middle and wealthy class, family's from more impoverished backgrounds often don't have access to formal register they communicate predominantly in a casual register. Further, the pattern in which language is presented or organized differs between these registers. When using formal register the presentation of information is direct pattern, the speaker gets straight to the point. However, when using a casual register the speaker talks around the issue for some time before indicating what the key issue is. (Payne, 2005)

Teachers have been educated in a middle class system therefore we can assume that they have learnt the rules of communicating as the middle class does, or have always used them, we can also assume that there will be a mismatch between the way teachers communicate and the way parents from an impoverished background communicate. Teachers can be misconstrued as rude for getting straight to the point

and parents may be met with frustration or distrust for going around in circles before getting to the point.

The nature and structure of language is only one area highlighted by Payne (2005), this research also indicated that there are hidden rules amongst classes that inform our way of behaving and how we prioritise things such as how money is spent, how we view food and the value placed on education. Such rules assist people to survive in the class that they most predominantly live in but their hidden nature also make moving from one class to another, or operating in a system of a foreign class, extremely difficult. It is this difference in prioritising that the REACH Conversation Starters project has witnessed creates tension between professionals and parents. For example in impoverished families money is to be used, it is for spending while you have it – before you give it to some one more needy or it is taken away, food is for filling hungry stomachs, feeling full is the priority not quality of the food which is the case in middle class. These two rules explain one teacher's frustration that a family at her school 'irresponsibly' spent their money on McDonalds for dinner.

Child behaviours

There are a number of signs that a child is living in an impoverished environment, many of which teachers are already aware of. These include lack of school lunch or extra materials that other children may have, and the need for assistance to pay for fees, school uniforms and excursions. In some states in Australia children are allocated a Educational Maintenance allowance when they qualify as being particularly impoverished.

In addition children's behaviour can indicate their conceptualisation of being impoverished. Ridge (2003) in the 'Listening to Children' study confirmed that 'children were keenly aware of the impact of poverty on their lives and the lives of their parents' (p: 8) and that their urge to protect their parents from knowing about negative experiences associated with this is particularly strong. As such children and young people often engage in self denial of needs and wants, moderation of demands and self exclusion from costly social activities.

Families Who Have Experienced Loss and Grief

Grieving does not only take place when someone dies, it is often associated with loss in general. We grieve every time we lose something. It can happen over the relatively insignificant loss of a valued possession, as well as over more significant events.

Each person experiences grief differently. No two people experience grief in the same way although there are common reactions. The duration and intensity will differ for each person. It may feel like three steps forward, six steps back, two steps forward, one step back. It is often the case that people experience strong emotions, for example, anger or sadness and other feelings associated with the situation or person. Some people argue that it is vital that we recognize and come to understand

our individual style of grieving in order that we can form new relationships and adapt to life changes.

The parent may be experiencing similar feelings as the child in the grieving process. It is important to acknowledge that these feelings are understandable and be available to listen to parents if possible or find an appropriate person to be with them. Be open to discuss what is happening with the child at every convenient time because the parent may need support and reassurance. Offer suitable reading matter to the parent and encourage open discussion about their feelings with their child.

Child Behaviour

Children who are grieving can express their feelings in a number of ways ranging from acting out violently to withdrawing. Mood swings may occur and 'out of the blue' a child may change from being happy to suddenly being sad and withdrawn. Children may have weeks of seemingly normal behaviour and then suddenly change and become uncooperative and aggressive. Listen and comfort the children who have experienced loss. Talk openly about feelings and provide materials that will allow them to express their feelings in a non- verbal way. Painting, drawing and 'pretend play materials' can be useful mediums through which children can express their feelings.

Families with refugee experiences

Many people migrate to Australia who have experienced refugee trauma related to experiences in their countries of origin or during their journey to Australia. There are many causes of war related trauma - removal of physical and emotional safety, displacement, separation from family, physical injury, abuse, exploitation, torture, violence, rape, being forced to witness killings, and deprivation of education, nutrition and the opportunity to play. Most refugees spend time in refugee camps where they were often denied secure accommodation, safety from abuse, and opportunities for education and health care. Conditions in refugee camps may have rendered parents incapable of adequately providing food, shelter and protection for the family.

The impact of war and human rights violations on young survivors depends on the nature and extent of the trauma, the age of the child, and the care and support available. The consequences of trauma can be far reaching. They affect their feelings, their capacity to form relationships, their ability to learn, their future moral development and adjustment to life as adults.

Basic units of human civilisation - such as trust - have often been destroyed. Identity, religious and cultural values, political ideologies can also undergo enormous change. There are profound consequences for relationships, the individual may fear losing attachment figures and manifest clinging behaviours and jealousy. They may avoid close relationships.

Refugees have faced losses of many kinds, their friends, their homes and places of safety, their homeland and part of themselves and they are at risk of developing ongoing depression. Guilt, shame, anxiety and terror can persist for a long time after a traumatic event. This can be manifested by pessimistic moods, sleep disturbance, appetite problems, poor concentration, feelings of hopelessness, social withdrawal, drug and alcohol abuse, and promiscuity. With the pressure of anxiety and tension children and young people may become irritable, unable to tolerate frustration, and show reduced control over impulsive behaviour. They may experience psychosomatic symptoms such as stomach-aches and headaches. Past trauma affects their integration within a wider community, and the ability to cope with change. Family conflict and difficulties at school can lead them into sub-cultures. Many youth workers point out instability in family lives, an increasing presence on the streets, an involvement in drug trafficking and use, and a growing representation in the criminal justice system.

In responding to these effects it is helpful to consider the signs of trauma and what may be some of the recovery goals.

- a) Anxiety is a common reaction and the key goal is restoring safety and trust.
- b) Grief and loss is common and experiencing and restoring a sense of love and connection is important.
- c) Guilt and shame are common reactions and rebuilding personal pride and self-efficacy is a recovery goal.
- d) Anger and aggression are often felt and expressed and a sense of understanding and impulse control is necessary to recovery.

Child Behaviour

Trauma affects children in different ways depending on their temperament and how resilient they are. Trauma affects every aspect of the development of a child's mind and learning capacity as well as their body, spirit and relationship with others.

These children are often insecure and in order to feel that they belong seek attention in any form. As a consequence of long lasting pain caused by grief and loss, abandonment and neglect, physical or sexual abuse, persistent anxiety and fear or terror of the future, their behaviour can be unpredictable. These behaviours may include withdrawal leading to depression, lying, cheating, stealing and acting aggressively to others.

The behaviour of these children can be stressful as they test boundaries to see if you like so many others will abandon them.

A safe consistent, and nurturing environment in which to grow will be a resource for them as adults. A safe, consistent, and nurturing environment permits the

development of attachments between children and parent- figures, attachments that represent affective bonds that can endure over time.

The parents of these children will have experienced trauma in their own lives and may be suffering themselves and unable to help their own children.

Being aware that these parents need support and never judging them can be the beginning of a just relationship that will benefit the child. Giving positive feedback to these parents about their child is essential, negative comments drives parents away. Disregard minor problems that might arise but explain in a constructive manner why certain issues need to be discussed together with a parent. Encourage the parents to be involved in any way with the school and build their self-esteem. Be welcoming and patient.

Families in Perpetual Crisis

It seems as though some families live in a continual stream of crises surviving from one chaotic situation to the next. Professionals often sense that rather than being random or the result of bad luck, this series of crises serve a specific function and have become part of the family's way of being. In many circumstances this is true.

We know that some abuse and trauma is intergenerational and that more than one type of abuse often occurs within an abusive family environment. Imagine how a person, or family, would begin to cope with multiple layers of abuse, grief or trauma. In such situations dealing with the grief directly is far too overwhelming and instead a family, or individual, develops patterns of coping that distract them from having to do so. For some families one pattern is to manipulate the environment, either actively or by being inactive, to create an ever flowing stream of less traumatic crises. Average, day to day crises are manageable and work well to distract the family from the despair that they feel as a result of the initial trauma. After some practice of responding in this way, living in perpetual crisis becomes the dominant family pattern.

One other dominant family pattern that is useful to such families is keeping secrets. We see the family pattern of keeping secrets in families where abuse is occurring and explain it as the victim's fear of the aggressor or the result of a long process of grooming but it is also even more complex than this. Childhood trauma/ abuse can result in family members feeling alone and worthless. Maintaining the family, the only place where you have received a familiar level of care and attention becomes paramount, even though the family is dysfunctional or damaging. Maintaining the current, known situation, is safer than the unknown brought about by change. Individuals within such a family system are well schooled at hiding the real source of their grief from the outside world and as a result can be distracted from the true source themselves.

Child behaviours

Family members are locked into constantly balancing their life so that they (and others) never get close to the real pain. To do so they act out in ways that create them momentary anxiety, gain the attention of professionals who ease that anxiety and return them to the status quo. This cycle continues and as a result an intergenerational pattern of acting out is established. Workers can be caught up in this cycle, responding to a stream of situational crises and never really responding to the acute despair felt by the family. In most circumstances professionals are aware of this at some level, an incredibly frustrating and dispirited situation to be in.

Firstly when working with children it is useful to be aware of any indicators of child abuse (see later section). Particularly in relation to children in cycles of perpetual crises it is likely that they act out just when you think everything is going well, often this will seem as though there is no antecedent. Alternatively, they can also have a long history of acting out.

Families in violent situations

It is important to appreciate the crisis that families are in when there has been exposure to violence. There are many myths about violence in the home including that children, especially young children, are not affected by violence that they have witnessed. It is now known that violence in the home affects everyone – including children who are witness to violence. Parents, however, may not want to believe that their children have been affected by the violence and may not be receptive to hearing from professionals that the children may have been showing their feelings through inappropriate behaviour.

If a parent has left a violent situation they may find caring for the children alone overwhelming especially if they previously felt powerless to make decisions about parenting. Being unsupported when the children's behaviour deteriorates may cause a parent to internalise that they are "bad" or "incapable". These messages are reinforced by children's worsening behaviour that often occurs when their lives change after they are removed from a violent situation.

Professionals need to understand the situation the family is in and keep communication channels open so that parents can approach professionals for assistance.

Child behaviours

There may be some rebellion and regression in the children's behaviour when the primary care give tries to set some limits, routines and consistency in the family. Contact with the other parent may be occurring that could be unsettling for the children. If there are different rules and messages from each parent it will add confusion and more disruptions to the child's life.

Children can become very angry through this process, they may be angry with the primary care giving parent for taking them away from their other parent. They may be new at the school or early childhood service and removed from their friends, community, extended family and other supports. As children act out their feelings through their behaviour, they will be showing a range of behaviours from severe aggression to complete withdrawal.

Professionals working with the children need to know the circumstances in the family, and how to work with the child, giving them the assistance and support they need as they go through this difficult time. Professionals may need to report the situation to the appropriate government department if the child is at risk of child abuse or neglect.

Families with drug and alcohol issues

Parents who have drug and alcohol issues often find it difficult to see the child's perspective, they will be more focussed on having their own needs met.

Professionals have their best chance of engaging with these families if they communicate in an open, friendly way focusing on the parent and gauging during the conversation whether or not the parent will be able to cope with a conversation about the child.

Child behaviours

Characteristics that are common to children whose parent(s) have drug and alcohol issues include:

- Parents are often unable to give their children the time, attention and direction that they need. Neglect of children can result in children missing school or arriving late, without lunch and inadequately dressed.
- Children can take on the parenting role, looking after parents and other siblings. Children may find it difficult to know how to be children if they are parentified because their own parents have passed on this responsibility.
- Living in a household that does not have a routine or a consistent approach towards behaviour and/or other uncertainties (such as temporary accommodation) can result in children finding routines and rules difficult to follow. Children may also have difficulty following through on long-term school projects and completing homework tasks. They may be inconsistent and erratic in school attendance and academic expectations.

These children will need understanding and acceptance with professionals providing as much consistency in routines and encouragement about their attendance and their work. There may be circumstances where the relevant government departments need to be contacted in relation to concerns about the wellbeing and safety of the child.

Families who have experienced child abuse and neglect

All states and territories in Australia have statutory responsibility for the care and protection of children and young people residing in that particular state or territory. As such, there are discrepancies between states and territories about mandate, roles and responsibilities for Statutory Child Welfare. Legislation is individual to the state and territory although there are protocols and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that exist to facilitate communication between jurisdictions about children under statutory care and protection. The Government Department responsible for the care and protection of children and young people in Victoria is the Department of Human Services (DHS) Professionals and concerned adults can call Child Protection within the Department or Child First agency.

Child behaviours

Children who are victims of child abuse and neglect need professionals who will contact the relevant government department, if necessary, to keep them safe. Abused and neglected children will act out their feelings of fear, confusion, and mistrust through their behaviours. These behaviours may often be extreme and it is important to remember that these children need to feel safe and secure in the school or early childhood setting. Setting routines and keeping responses to the children's behaviours consistent may help the child to feel contained. These children need love, respect and understanding not punitive punishment, exclusion and humiliation.

Families parenting a child with “additional needs”

“Additional needs” in a child is defined as anything extra that deviates from “normal” child development. In this situation it means that the child and family will need extra support.

The parents have many needs and may have feelings of loss and grief about their child with additional needs. They may be trying to balance caring for this child with other children in the family as well as managing their own adult relationship. Families who have children with a disability lead very stressful lives. Inevitably, the needs of the child with a disability supersede all those of other family members. The child with a disability is often involved with several forms of treatment and therapy and parents attend hospital sessions, which could include physiotherapy, occupational and speech therapy. Each of these therapists expect work to be done with the child at home, perhaps not being aware of the other children and family needs.

The family may rely on the school of early childhood service for their emotional support as well as advice and guidance. Professionals involved with families who have children with additional needs benefit from understanding the family dynamics and other professionals involved with the family. This enables the professional to support the family so that the child is given the best possible learning environment.

Child behaviours

Children with additional needs may behave differently from other children because of their condition. It is, however, important that these children are treated the same as everyone else where rules, routines and limit setting are concerned so that they do not feel different. As much as possible the child needs to feel included, loved and respected along with all the other children in a group.

The siblings of children with additional needs require special consideration. Through guilt families may try to compensate for children with a disability by allowing them to do as they please. They may not put in place the normal rules for positive behaviour and the child's behaviour can become out of control adding further distress to the family and resentment from siblings. Depending on the type of disability, siblings may be embarrassed by them and not want to bring their friends home.

Children flourish from the positive role modelling of the professional who demonstrates how to treat the child with additional needs, the way they are spoken to and the general attitude towards them. As much as possible children with additional needs benefit from participating in the same activities as the other children.

Families where one or more parents have a mental health issues

Parents with a mental illness often have low self-esteem and confidence in their parenting abilities. Professionals can increase self-esteem and confidence by a sensitive, inclusive and respectful approach in their relationship with parents who have a mental illness.

Parents may struggle in their understanding of their child's requirements and may not be as interested in their child's educational progress as professionals would like them to be. It is important for the child that the professional makes time to have general conversations with the parent.

Child behaviours

A child whose parents have a mental illness may have taken on some of the parenting role and responsibilities (including caring for siblings) in the home and may present as tired, disinterested and unprepared. This child will benefit from a safe and nurturing environment where their behaviour is understood in the context of the family and reasonable limits and routines are set so the child has the best possible chance of success

Older children can become isolated with little time for themselves and need a chance to relax and have time to enjoy a social life with their peers.

Families who are in Blended or Step Families

This family constellation can be called a stepfamily or blended family. It is a complex entity, with many aspects that have to be considered. These include the original

biological family, the new relationship, the previous relationship, and the children, if any, of each of the relationships.

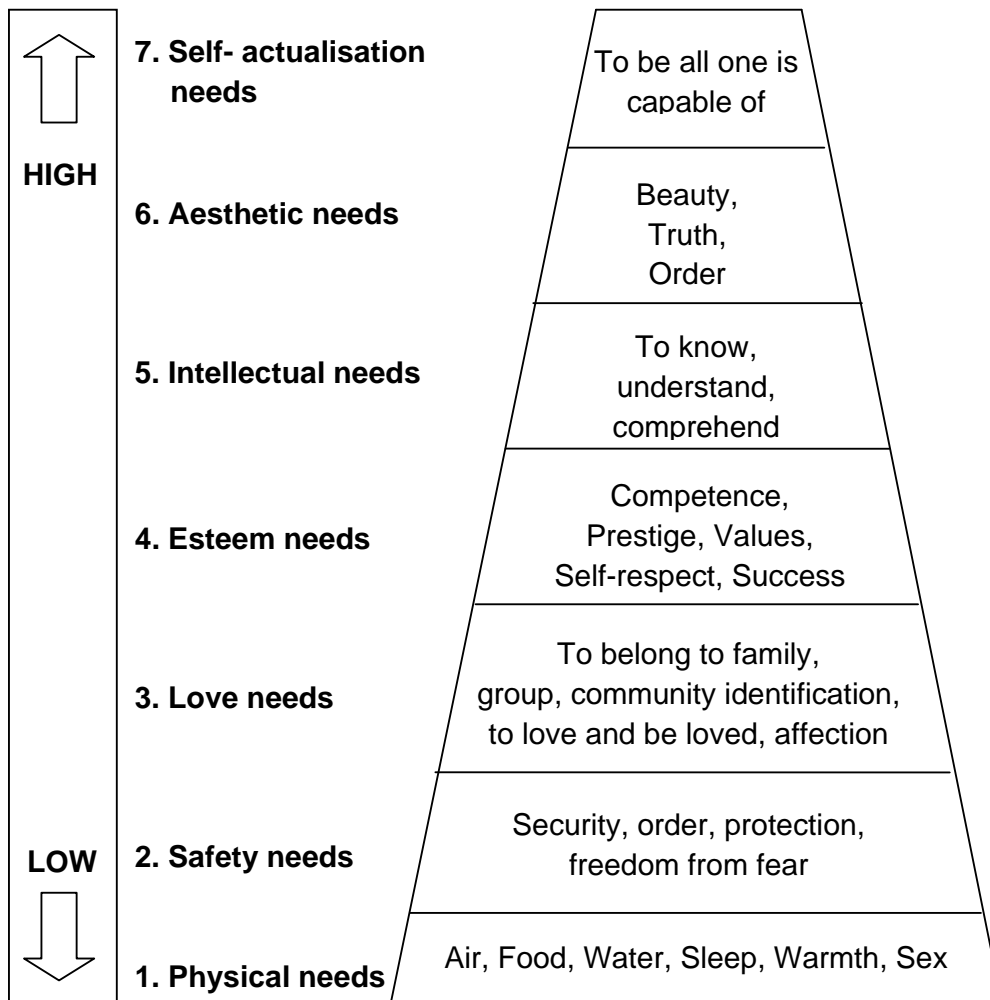
Biological and step- parents may come to the school or early childhood service with a variety of strong and conflicting feelings. It is possible that some families will bring intense levels of feelings such as grief, distress, anger and frustration to a situation and this should be managed sensitively and effectively. Being honest and understanding how everyone is feeling as well as providing for the needs of the children will be critical if the professional wants to engage with the family.

Child behaviours

Children in newly formed step- families may act out their feelings of anger, fear and insecurity, through their behaviour. Any anti social behaviour should be seen in the light of the new circumstances. The children may need to change schools or early childhood service because of the new family situation. It is important that teachers understand the role of loss, grief and pain that children may be experiencing when dealing with the children and their behaviour.

DIAGRAM OF NEEDS HIERARCHY (after Maslow)

Stephens D. (2000) *The Maslow Business Reader*, New York. Wiley.



Professionals may find Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs useful in thinking about how much they can expect families will be able to engaged with their child's attendance, participation and learning in the school or early childhood setting. If parents are struggling with violence, disability, illness, trauma, financial concerns or the threat of homelessness they will not be able to fully participate in their child's educational experience.

Maslow' theory is that people have to have their needs met at each level before they can go onto the next. Parents who are fully able to be engaged and participate in their child's educational experiences will be the families who have, at least, the three lowest levels of the hierarchy well mastered and resourced and are in a space to be able to concentrate and give time to their children.

Professionals need to recognise the families where these lower level needs have not been met and how that will impact on the child's ability to participate fully in the educational setting and the level of support (or not) that the parents are able to give.

Professionals can recognise that all parents do the best they can for their children but some parents are just not able to what professionals feel they should be able to. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs helps our understanding of why families are unable to participate to the level professionals can expect

SECTION 3: FACILITATOR NOTES

SOME WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING FAMILIES

The family we grew up in influences our perception of the world. If we experienced a structured, well resourced, loving family it may be difficult to understand families who are chaotic, poor and casual about affection.

Families have different styles of interacting and researcher Diana Baumrind has identified three main styles are discussed below.

Style 1 Parents who are more controlling

These parents tend to be firm, punitive and generally unsympathetic to their children's needs. They believe in their own authority and value children's obedience. They often attempt to tightly restrict and rigidly control family members' behaviours, using harsh punishment or manipulation. Children are seen as needing discipline to comply with the high standards of their parents. Authoritarian or controlling parents are usually quite sparing of their praise for their children and emphasise mistakes. They tend to restrict their children's emotional development and independence.

Children of authoritarian parents or controlling parents tend to be distrustful of others and unfriendly. They are somewhat withdrawn in their relationships and they often have low self-esteem. They seem to fall into two main groups. One group is fearful and follows rules obediently without question. The other group rejects their parents' constraints and rebels, leading separate and sometimes secret lives with a new value system. This group often adopts the new belief system with a rigidity reminiscent of their parents.

Style 2 Parents who have few controls or limits

These parents tend to give their children a great deal of freedom, possibly more than they can handle. This style lacks structure and discipline and allows the children to make their own decisions about most things. Permissive parents give into their children's requests and demands, even when they are inappropriate.

Children of permissive parent or 'or do what you like' parents tend to be impulsive, aggressive and disobedient. They can be dependent and seek assistance for minor problems. They are often not able to recognise their own limitations, having little sense of danger or of personal safety issues. They can also be unaware of, and somewhat thoughtless about, the needs of others, to the point of being self-centred.

Style 3 Parents who are firm but fair

These parents tend to adopt a straightforward, direct and honest communication style. They develop warm and close relationships with their children and encourage and support their responsibility and reasoning. These parents explain their reasoning

when making decisions for their children, establish clear limits and encourage their children to be independent. They celebrate their children's attempts to do things for themselves. There is clear parental responsibility and authority for making decisions and setting limits, while ensuring their children are consulted and listened to.

Children of authoritative or respectful, nurturing parents seem to be more flexible, well adapted and successful. These children engage parents in robust conversation, as they are free to speak and express their point of view. They are often not seen as obedient because they are permitted to say 'no'. The opportunity to think for themselves, express their opinions and listen to different points of view helps them become good negotiators. These children are encouraged to develop a sense of self and identity and are generally cooperative, friendly and relatively independent. They can accept responsibility, focus on a goal and be creative when solving problems. These children are free to make mistakes that are not life threatening and are encouraged to learn from their experiences. They are less likely to misuse drugs or alcohol.

It is important to understand that all parents do not adopt one style of parenting consistently. Parenting styles change depending on a particular situation, age or temperament of the child. However, most parents adopt one style of parenting in most situations and in extreme circumstances are locked in to a rigid belief that there is only one style suitable to meet the needs of all children

APPROACHES TO BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

It is important to build relationships with parents to understand the child's environment and experience of the world. It is from the family environment that the child learns how to approach a situation, manage their behaviour, resolve conflict and interact with others. To understand the child and be able to respond appropriately to their behaviour we need to understand the context in which they are raised. We cannot change a family's behaviour but by understanding their system and engaging with them in a constructive way the child will benefit.

There are many ways of communicating with families from newsletter and notices to a friendly 'chat'. Communicating verbally between people involves speaking, listening and body language and messages are passed on through all three areas at the one time. The way professionals communicate with families can enhance a relationship or build barriers.

Below is the Hilton Davis model of communication that introduces three different ways of communicating and the impact of these styles on the relationship between professionals and families.

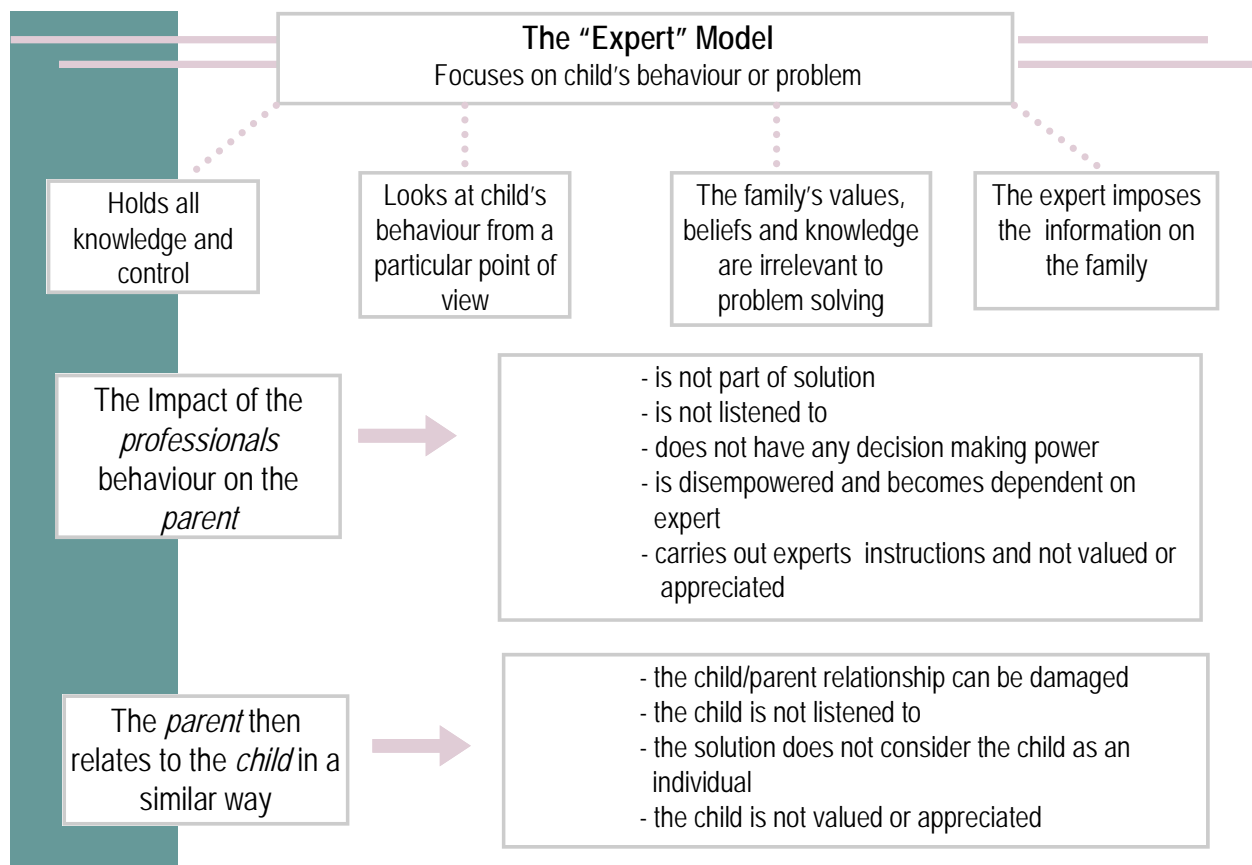
The Hilton Davis Model

Expert Model:

In this model the professional holds all the power and disempowers the parent.

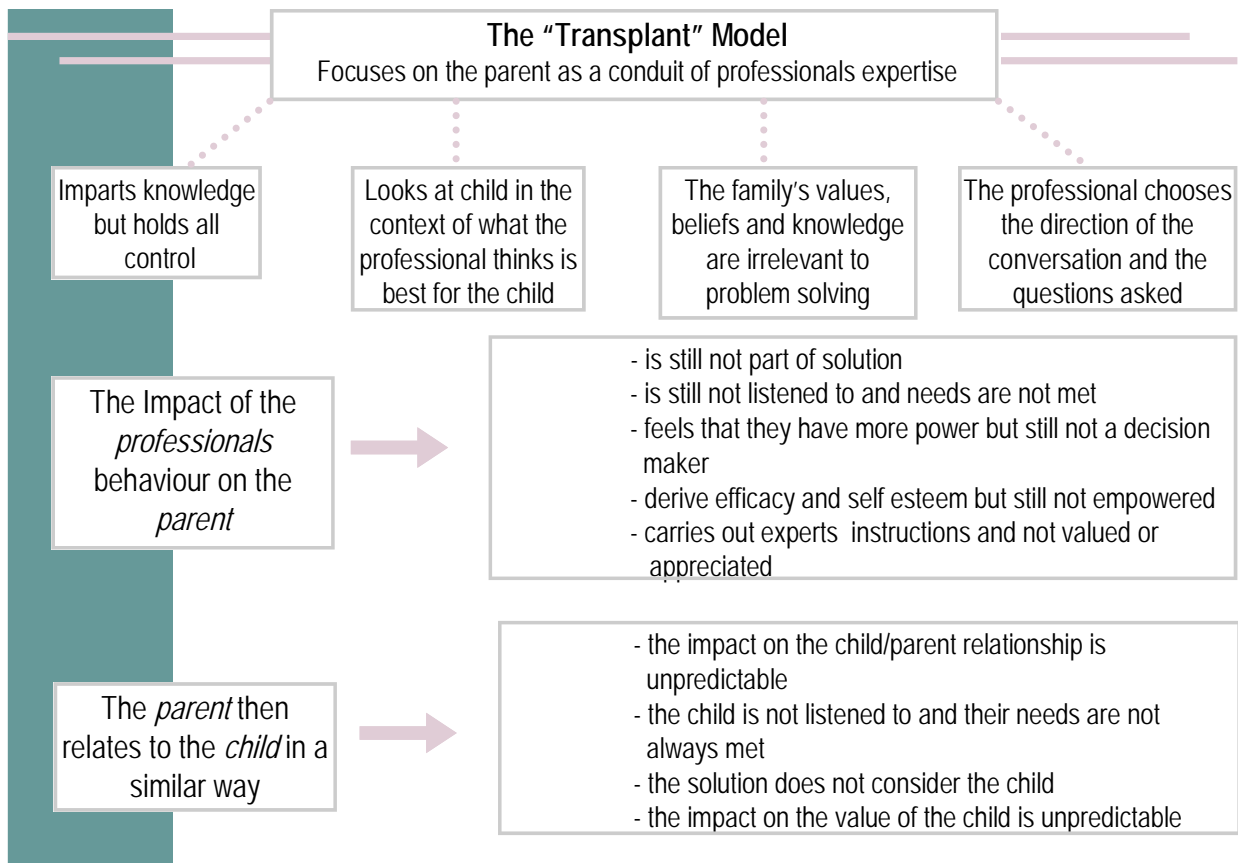
The professional is in total control of the intervention and only their knowledge is valued or included and this has negative outcomes for the parent and the child.

- The professional feels in a comfortable place and believes their role is to impart knowledge, make diagnoses, decide on a treatment plan/response and execute it. The major danger is that the professional may only see the child/family within the context of the problem or from a specific theoretical framework and miss vital information about the family and the current situation.
- Some professions get stuck on their preferred theoretical model and do not think more broadly.



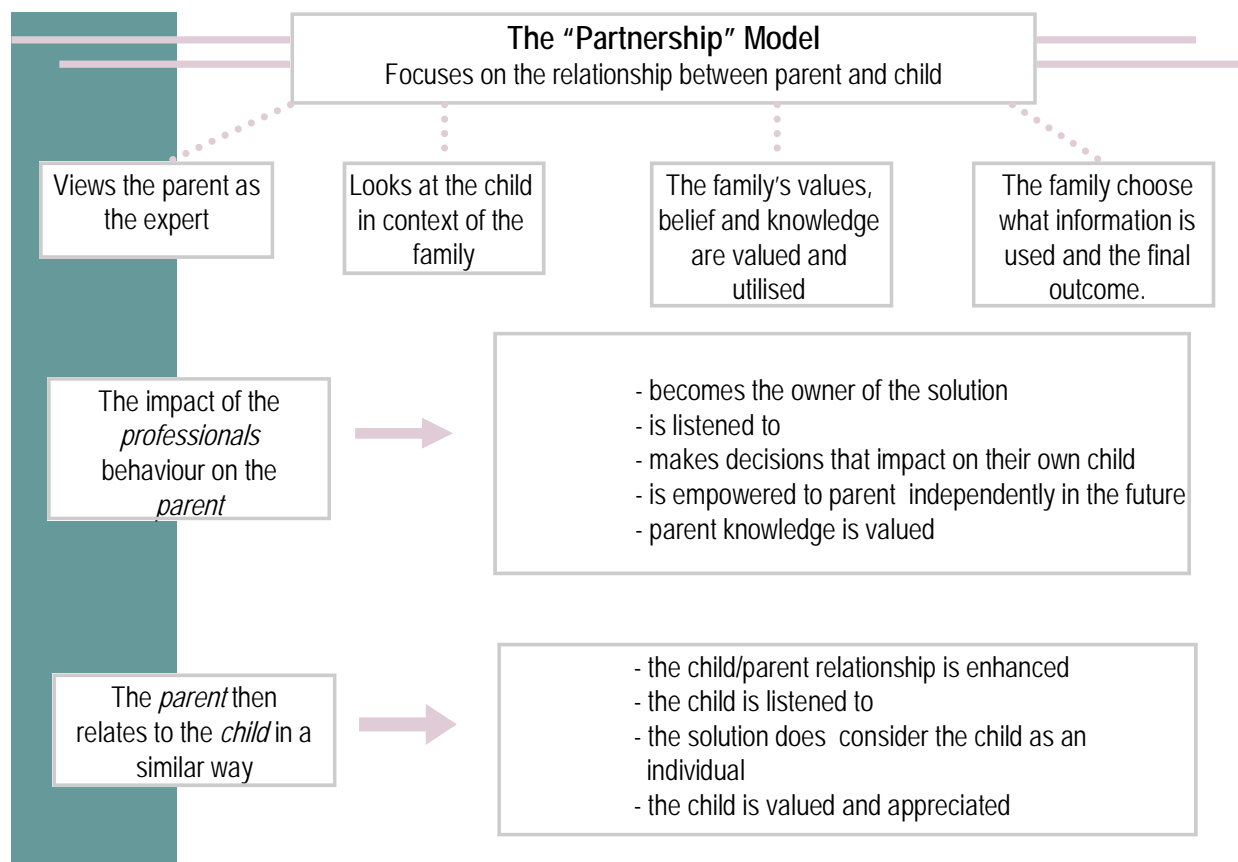
Transplant model:

- The professional is still in control of the intervention and only the professional's knowledge is valued. This is a negative outcome for the parent and child.
- The professional's role is to get a good description of the situation, make diagnoses, decide on a treatment, plan a response and get the parent to execute it, hence the name.
- This is comfortable for the professional however it is a very demanding and unnatural place for the parent to be in.



Partnership model:

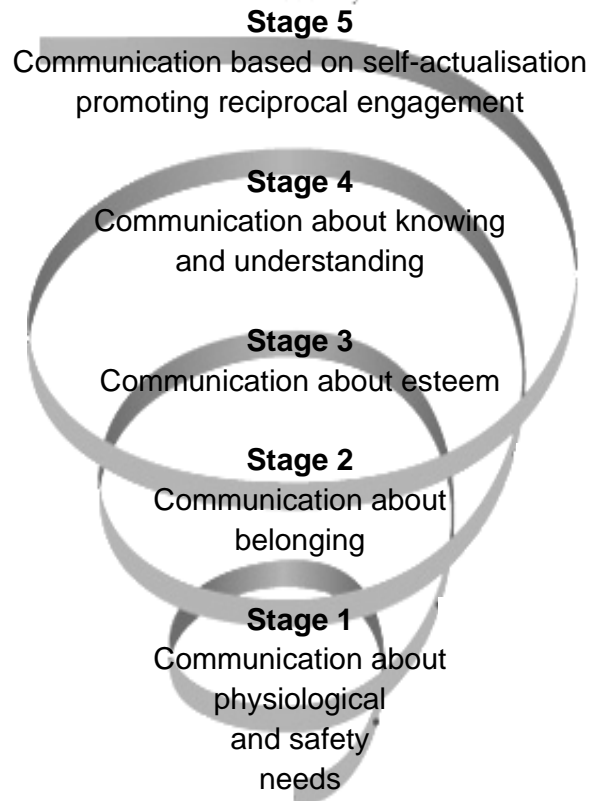
- All parties are in control of the intervention, all knowledge is shared and valued and this has a positive effect on the parent and child and is comfortable for the family.
- In this model the role of the professional is to listen to parents about their aims, expectations, current situations and resources. From this discussion a number of options to be tried by the parent are suggested and evaluated. The parent decides what strategies are appropriate for their family, and they are the expert on this topic.
- The professional's skill and knowledge lies in their ability to ask appropriate questions and negotiate/facilitate discussions that reach a conclusion or decision that the family feels able to execute.
- Teachers and early childhood professionals are often taught to believe that they are the experts who hold all the knowledge and solutions to problems. This belief is unrealistic and does not acknowledge the family as a source of creative problem solving.



Model of Communication Accretion Spiral

Roslyn Elliott has designed a Model of Communication Accretion Spiral that has 5 stages that follow a cyclical process when extends over time. It allows professional staff to gather information and knowledge relating to the care and education of the child. It also recognises that parent's may want to communication with those caring and educating their children but may not know how to initiate these interactions, the communication spiral provides a step-by-step process to achieve an equitable relationship.

MODEL OF COMMUNICATION ACCRETION SPIRAL (Elliot 2003)



First stage

Communication about physiological and safety needs.

This stage is identified as the beginning of the process and the hoped for outcome would be that both families and professionals are feeling at ease with each other. It is important for professional staff to outline how communication can occur and how families can contribute to the learning environment and make decisions about the children.

A good starting point of conversation is the child's physical safety. Safety in the playground and in the educational environment will be of paramount concern to the parent. This situation provides an opportunity to show empathy to the parent and so sets down foundations for a respectful and trusting relationship.

Second stage

Communication about belonging.

This stage recognises that everyone needs to feel connected and parents need to feel connected to the child's learning environment. Communicating with families about the child in the learning environment and the home environment takes the relationship to a more personal level. The professional is interested in all aspects of the child's world to plan appropriately for them. The objective is for both parties to become more informed and knowledgeable about the child within each other's context.

Third Stage

Communication to build the child's self esteem.

Good communication between professionals and families is essential for children and young people's self esteem. This stage emphasises shared individual information about the child from both home and service contexts.

Fourth Stage

Communication where families know what is going on in their child's learning environment. Professionals need to reach out and connect to parents to promote meaningful communication and invite them into their child's learning environment.

Fifth Stage

A truthful, respectful and honest relationship between professionals and families is developed. This communication is based on self-actualisation promoting reciprocal engagement. This is when professionals and parents communicate and establish relationships built on mutual respect, honesty, trust and recognition of each others' valuable role in the learning process.

Conversation Starters

The project identified the difficulties that professionals have in initiating conversations that build relationships with families. Misunderstandings by many teachers about what constitutes engagement with families has been recognised in both the early childhood and school settings. Many professionals believe that providing a newsletter or a sausage sizzle is all they need to do to engage families. This project has established that parents feel engaged by the way they are spoken to, made to feel welcome, the friendly environment and the general caring atmosphere of the school or centre.

The way we communicate varies with each family and it is important to understand the need to adapt how we communicate when, for example, working with a highly educated or a more disadvantaged family. This does not mean we do not treat each family with the same courtesy and respect but speaks more about the 'style'.

People who come from an environment of low socio economic status communicate differently and 'dance' around a topic before making their point. This does not always match the way conversations occur in formal settings. "Teachers want to get right to the point; parents, particularly those from poverty, need to beat around the bush first. When teachers cut the conversation and get right to the point, parents view that as being rude and non – caring." (A framework for understanding poverty, Ruby K. Payne, page: 30).

Accompanying this manual are lists of possible "conversation starters" for different situations from everyday greetings, essential to building trusting and respectful relationships with families. There are also examples of "conversation starters" that may assist in engaging with families when the situation is more fragile and the conversation needs to be careful and respectful.

RESPONDING TO DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

Respectful communication that is based on listening as well as talking is the essence to working through difficult situations with families.

Below are some basic but very useful communication skills that can be used at any time with families. These skills are explained more fully in many publications obtainable from good bookstores.

Active or Reflective Listening

When there is a need to address a difficult situation professionals are often likely to talk 'at' a parent and give advice rather than spending a large proportion of time listening to them. Taking time to actively listen to families can:

- Provide invaluable information where other dimensions of the situation can be explored and shared.
- Enable the family to feel part of the discussion.
- Empower the family to become part of the solution.

Listening in a respectful way is often called 'active listening' and it is a way of responding that allows others to freely express their ideas and feelings without interruption. Active listening focuses intently on what is said and the body language of the speaker. How a message is delivered gives clues about the person's feelings, as well as the events of a situation?

Active listening is listening with the heart and with respect. By listening in this way a space to explore events and reaction to them is created. Active listening builds relationships as it lets others know that you care and respect them. Building good relationships helps to establish a sound foundation for discussing differences and resolving conflicts.

Active listening can be very difficult especially for teachers who have been trained to believe that they alone hold all the knowledge and should teach it to their students.

This does not encourage open two- way communication. An expressed concern about active listening is the time it takes. However, the time spent listening can be very productive in that it might prevent problems from escalating and lead to sound lasting solutions.

Reflecting Emotions

When people are given the opportunity to name their feelings they feel heard, those listening give the impression that they are walking along beside them rather than opposing them. Many people are better at making decisions once their feelings have been acknowledged, thus reducing conflict situations.

To be able to respond empathically to another persons' feelings you need to be open, non- judging, non- preaching, non- analysing, trusting and being completely tuned in to the other person.

Assertion

Being assertive involves speaking and behaving toward another person where conflict or difficult issues have arisen in a way that allow both people to leave the conversation feeling satisfied about what has taken place. "I" statements express how you have been affected by another persons words or behaviour and allows the other person to take responsibility for what they have done. An assertive response lets others know how their comments or behaviour has affected you. An assertive message has three parts to it and usually starts with "I felt, when (what happened) and then lastly what you would like to happen. This message does not put down or attack.

Problem Solving

Defining goals and establishing a plan

To begin problem solving the parent should be involved with defining the problem and establishing common goals within the context to the early childhood setting or school.

Asking questions

Seeking input from the parent indicates that their knowledge and opinion is valued. This empowers them and recognises their ability to give information and be an active member of the conversation rather than solely the receiver of information and instructions.

Some questions that may be helpful to parents are, ' What do you think could change things? What might the next step be? How could we move forward from here? How do you think your husband/mother/friend would go about solving this problem? Would it help you if... ? If I had a problem I would try these solutions, what do you think? Using an inclusive problem solving strategy gives a more holistic view of the child or young person and provides the opportunity to view them within the context of the family. This is one way of building 'positive relationships through knowing and valuing each student' (Principals of Learning and Teaching).

APPROACHES TO BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

1. Introductory exercise to consider how a whole agency/centre/school approach might operate.

When thinking about building effective relationships with families there are several areas in which changes can be made.

What changes could you make under these headings?

Your own approach to families (personal/professional/attitude).

The environment in which you work i.e. classroom, centre room.

Practice changes that could be made throughout your work place (see case study – attachment 1).

2. Forming a philosophy on how you see parents in your work setting is a useful way of understanding your own attitude about parents.

A philosophy can start with “I believe” and can be a statement about your beliefs about families.

What is your philosophy on working with families?

What does engaging parents mean to you?

How would you go about engaging parents effectively?

In small groups discuss the following questions:

What do you see is your role as a teacher/early childhood professional?

Why is it important to have a relationship with parents?

What does working in an effective partnership mean to you?

What sort of relationship with parents benefits the child’s optimum learning?

In large group discuss what a shared approach or philosophy for the agency, centre or school could be.

The Hilton Davis Model

Hilton Davis uses his model to highlight three different communication styles of which only one allows for an equitable relationship with families.

Questions

Which style do you mostly use in your work with families?

What influences you to work this way?

What part of this is informed by organisational structures?

Share three different approaches with the staff and see what it is that they value from this model.

In small groups, go over three models, discuss what parts of these models the groups value and share the results with the large group.

In small working groups discuss the following questions:

When are you most likely to act as an expert, transplanter, partner?

What influences you to work this way? (see attachment 2)

Using the columns below give examples of situations that fit under each heading. Under the no compromise heading give examples of the conversations with parents explaining the situation. (see attachment 3 for enlargement)

No compromise, (because of philosophy, policies or regulations)	Shared decision making with parents	Parent's Decisions
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Model of Communication Accretion Spiral

Activity

Using the Model of Communication Accretion Spiral and the lists of "Conversation Starters":

What are the likely conversation starters at each level?

What kind of situations arise at each level that you would need to have conversation about?

Empathy

One of the skills that Ros Elliot refers to in her model is the skill of empathy – you begin by listening to what the family says about their child in the home situation until you are able to try to walk in the shoes of the parent and you have an idea of what it might be like to be that parent.

The following case studies can be used to assist participants increase their skills of empathy.

Case Scenarios:

1. A mother comes to you after class. She asks you if you have noticed anyone hassling her son because he has come home the last three days with a torn t-shirt. She speaks quickly in soft tones and her hands are shaking.

How could you reflect feeling?

2. Angela is constantly getting into fights at school. Her parents are called to the school for a meeting. You describe the latest incident in which Angela is caught pushing someone in the hallway. Her father starts yelling, saying that the other girl was messing around with Angela's bags and that Angela has just being blamed for everything.

How could you reflect feeling?

3. At parent teacher interviews you discuss the progress of Sebastian with his father. Sebastian is good at his work, however he spends a lot of time talking with his friends, which means he doesn't get things finished. You feel that he could concentrate more and say this to his father. Sebastian's father shrugs and states, "It's only primary school".

How could you respond to the feeling in this statement and not the content?

Case Studies:

Freddy is a grade three student that regularly neglects to do his homework. When you ask Freddy why he doesn't do his homework he shrugs and replies "I dunno" After school on Tuesday you catch Freddy's father, Harry, before he rushes off, as he usually does. You ask if he could help Freddy get his homework done. Harry blushes, perhaps embarrassed by his son's reluctance to do the right thing, but he assures you that he will help. On Wednesday Freddy returns to school and his homework is still not done. You ask Freddy whether his dad spoke to him about it. Freddy replies "kind of".

What could be happening when Freddy gets home?

On Tuesday evening Harry walked home with him with out talking. When they got home Freddy was sent to his room and told that he had to stay there until his homework was done. Harry then retreated to the shed for a couple of beers.

What is going on for Harry?

What is happening for you?

Conversation Starters

1a) Activity.

In small groups, using prompts from the “Conversation Starters” to start a conversation.

Were the prompts useful?

What happened?

Which prompts did you find useful?

1b) Activity

How do you start a conversation with a family?

What do you say?

How do you say it?

Group Discussion:

Q. What are some of the barriers to starting conversations with parents? (Handout)

Q. What are some of the difficult situations that the group has experienced with parents?

Group Discussion:

What is the journey for families at your organisation?

What are the opportunities for conversations?

Activity:

Teachers in a school wanted to organise a social function for parents so they decided on a sausage sizzle, worked out the day and date, advertised the event on the notice board and in the newsletter. They purchased the sausages, bread and sauce and planned the space where the event would be held.

The continuum below outlines levels of parent participation. Think about the activity above and what level of parent participation occurred.

If the sausage sizzle had been well thought out to include effective partnerships with parents what would be different?

If the families were to have control of the sausage sizzle what would be different?

What role would the staff play?

Continuum

Non _____ Effective _____ Parent
participation partnerships control

Conversation starters assist us to:

- Engage with families
- Build effective relationships
- Build relationships
- Have general conversations
- Discuss sensitive issues

Situations where conversation starters may be helpful

- First contact with families, where they approach you about the service or enrolment
- Orientation to the centre or school
- Daily contact with parents
- Social functions
- Parent/teacher interviews
- Transition to another room or school
- Talking to parents about difficulties with child

Activity: In small groups plan possible conversations in the above situations remembering to listen to the families.

Opportunities to build relationships with parents in schools or early childhood centres

- Parent support group meetings
- Parent teacher interviews
- Open days
- Orientations (see attachment 4)
- Daily interactions
- Transition meetings (see attachment 5)
- Parent inform nights
- School events
- Talking to parents about difficulties with student

RESPONDING TO DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

Empathy:

Activity: Use any of these examples to invite discussion.

How would you feel if you were a parent when:

You have had a hard day at work and when you come to collect your child, you are told that she had bitten three children during the day?

Your child's caregiver is at her wits end with your child and that she is ready to give up?

The caregiver does not listen to you or your requests are rejected as out of hand?

You return at the end of the day and your child is sitting by himself, has a wet nappy, and is distressed?

You go to a parent and staff social occasion where it feels as if everyone except you knows someone or no one is from your cultural background or speaks your language?

Stonehouse, A. (1994) How does it feel? Childcare from a parent's perspective, Canberra, Australian Early Childhood Association.

Active Listening

Activity

Think of someone that you could talk to with confidence and know that you can trust them so that you feel free to talk about anything.

1. Make a list of the reasons why you chose this person – what skills does this person have?
2. Make a list of their possible responses if you shared an important story with them.

Assertion

"I" statements can be used to state your feelings about behaviour and the 'formula' looks like this:

"I feel...when you...because..."

1. State your feelings about the behaviour - "I feel..."
2. Describe the behaviour - "When..."
3. State why you feel that way - "Because..."

For example, “I feel worried when you don’t do your homework because you might fall behind”.

“I” Statements are a good way of being empathic and assertive.

Examples of “I” statements to express understanding of the emotions of others:

- “I can hear that you’re...”
- “I understand that you’re...”
- “I can see how that would be...”
- “I can see how that would make you feel...”
- “I sense that you’re...”

Activity: Think of situations where you could use one of the above sentences

Group Discussion

Write up a situation and act out using the “I” statement guide above.

Activity

Alex is a year eight student who did well in year 7 but his grades have dropped dramatically this year. His science teacher is frustrated because he has not been doing homework and he believes Alex’s parents can support him more. Alex’s year level coordinator and science teacher have set up a meeting with Alex’s mother.

- Parents recently separated, 6 months ago – no contact arranged with father yet as it is still in court negotiations.
- Mother working three nights per week.
- Elder sister taking care of Alex but is also doing year 12. Their relationship can vary from reasonable to very bad.

In small groups act out possible interview scenarios – try to be imaginative when thinking through what might be going on for the family

Activity

Marisella, a year 10 student, is constantly getting into arguments with her Japanese teacher. The year level coordinator believed that this was mostly due to a personality clash and considered changing Marisella to another Japanese class. However, two days ago Marisella got into an argument with a teacher in the school grounds during lunch and tipped a bin over in anger. A meeting has been called with Marisella’s parents

In small groups act out possible interview scenarios – try to be imaginative when thinking through what might be going on for the family

Case study

Malcolm is a grade prep child and is great kid with a lot of personality. His mum brings him to and from school; she chats regularly and tells you that Malcolm's dad is no longer on the scene and that she and Malcolm moved in with her parents and brother who has Cerebral Palsy. Clearly Malcolm loves spending time with his uncle, he talks about him all the time and they seem to be great mates.

After a couple of months at school Malcolm develops a limp. You chat to his mum about it she seems a bit short and dismissive at first but reluctantly agrees to get him checked out. A number of doctors and specialists are consulted but none of them can find any physical cause. Malcolm has started to receive negative attention from some older children and the bright bubbly kid you knew is becoming withdrawn in class. You'd like to do something to work out this mystery?

What is the first thing you would do?

What could be happening for Malcolm?

What could be happening for his mum?

SECTION 5: RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS

SCHOOL AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

A CASE STUDY

Community setting

School A is situated in a rural setting. Some time ago the town's major employer of unskilled workers closed down, leaving the area an unemployment rate of 10% in adults and over 50% youth unemployment. The depressed economic state of the area added to stress in families and was visible as the children began to act out in school. Many of the middle class families left the area and the majority of students now come from families experiencing intergenerational poverty.

School Setting

School A is a '**Like School 7**'. This school noticed the escalation in violence in the schoolyard. A great deal of time was spent putting out 'scrub fires' and not enough time actually teaching. Students were not at the expected levels of learning when leaving primary school for secondary school. Lunchtime detentions for violence were extremely high. School interactions with parents were hostile. Most parents had not had a good experience of school themselves and approached the school defensively, viewing the school as the opposition rather than a support.

What was done

The assistant principal decided that something needed to change and after trying some programs that did not succeed, surveyed the students to determine why. The students informed the assistant principal that they were bored during lunchtime. Based on the findings she set up a lunchtime links program that engaged community recreation facilities to provide activities for student during lunchtime. She started the lunchtime links program and involved community recreation facilities. Parents were also engaged to supervise programs, giving them the opportunity to participate in activities with their children that they would not have had previously.

In addition to this program a number of others groups were organized including a kinder to prep transition program, breakfast club and parents 'cuppa and craft' group. Underlying each of these programs and the positive day-to-day interactions with families an inclusive and accepting attitude is well established in the school. Teachers are gently encouraged to reinforce this attitude and not speak negatively about families. Students and teachers have input into the decision making about new programs.

Outcomes

- The lunchtime links program meant that teachers and parents were able to build relationships in a non-threatening way.
- When the School introduced a new reading program that requires daily support from parents they had a large group of parents that felt comfortable to assist.
- 100% of students are now leaving the school able to read and write.
- Lunchtime detentions dropped from over 200 students to 4 students per term before being abolished altogether.
- A community of parents now look out for each other so that they can support each other and the school does not spend as much time responding to parent problems.
- Teachers no longer have to deal with high levels of conflict from parents.
- Teachers can spend more time teaching.
- The school environment is more welcoming, friendly and peaceful, a nicer place for staff, students and parents to be.

Attachment 2

Expert	Transplanter	Partner

Attachment 3

No compromise, (because of philosophy, policies or regulations)	Shared decision making with parents	Parent's Decisions

Attachment 4

ORIENTATION

PUT TOGETHER AN ORIENTATION FORM THAT WILL BE FILLED IN BY PARENTS AND STAFF TOGETHER

Some points to consider:

- How is information gathered about a child's needs, routines and preferences on an ongoing basis?
- Information is briefly gathered about key family events that may influence the child's behaviour such as?
- Information is kept confidential.
- Information about the child's interests is exchanged.
- Information about the family's specific child care practices is gathered.
- Worker actively seeks parents requests in relation to their child's care.

Attachment 5

TRANSITION

You have accepted a child into your centre.

What are the steps that you will take to ensure that there is a smooth transition for the family, child and the centre?

General Outline

Consider the list of barriers that we have identified that could stop us working in partnership with families.

For each barrier – consider what you would do in the transition process to ensure that:

- barrier is eradicated
- barrier is reduced
- compromise is reached

Attachment 6

BARRIERS TO WORKING WITH FAMILIES IN PARTNERSHIP

- Child rearing practices
- Cultural differences
- Impacts of religious beliefs
- Diet
- Language barriers
- Personality of family members
- Appearing not interested. Is this lack of confidence? Ability?
- Shyness?
- Overprotective parent
- Previous impressions, beliefs “baggage” families bring to Centre
- Parents faith (lack of) in you
- Beliefs/attitudes towards Centre? Staff?
- Different beliefs
- Different attitudes
- Personality clashes
- Difference in generations/genders
- Busy schedule/time issues

Pre training questionnaire

**REACH Conversation Starters
Professional Development**

Location of Workshop _____

Date of Workshop _____

Workshop Participant's Position/Role _____

Organisation Represented _____

1. Describe your role.

2. Do you believe there are benefits **to** (in) working with families?

3. How often do you:

	Not at all	A couple of times a year	Once a month	Once a week	More than once a week
a) Speak to a parent about learning/academic achievement of child/young person?					
b) Speak to a parent about their child/young person's behaviour or social functioning?					
c) Speak to a parent about their child/young person's health and safety?					
d) Speak to a parent about their child/young person's emotional well-being?					
e) Speak to a parent in a general conversation?					

4. How confident do you feel engaging and working with families?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not
Confident

Very
Confident

5. Are you aware of any community groups or organisations that link with your workplace?

Please list.

6. What family/parent focused programs or activities exist in your workplace currently?

7. Other Comments:

Post Training Evaluation

**REACH Conversation Starters
Professional Development**

Respondents Position/Role _____

Organisation Represented _____

1. Reflect on your role after the training

2. Do you believe there are benefits to working with families?

3. What actions or strategies, outlined in the workshop, do you anticipate using in the future?

4. Do you anticipate making any other changes to your work practice?

5. How confident do you feel engaging and working with families?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not
Confident

Very
Confident

6. Other Comments:

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