

## Working in partnership with Aboriginal organisations

**Warren Cann**  
Executive Director

## Overview

- About the Parenting Research Centre
- Parenting
- Culture and parenting
- Parenting support (collaborative practice)
- Applying principles of collaborative practice to interagency partnership
- Two examples of projects we are doing with Aboriginal organisations
- Early learnings

## Parenting Research Centre

Helping parents raise  
happy healthy children  
through....

## Mission (cont.)

- Seeking and sharing scientific **knowledge** of effective parenting
- Developing research-based **solutions** practical solutions to contemporary parenting challenges
- Building the **capacity** of the community to support parents

## Activities

- Researching parenting (e.g., fatigue)
- Developing and disseminating parenting information, programs and strategies (e.g., Signposts, Raising Children Network website)
- Coordinating and supporting parenting support initiatives (e.g., MyTime)
- Supporting policy makers and service providers to utilise parenting research (e.g., Healthy Start)

## Our history working with the indigenous community

- 2007:** Growing children up strong: collecting and sharing evidence based practice (SNAICC and Australian Centre for Child Protection)
- 2007:** Developing a curriculum for the Aboriginal In Home Visiting Program
- 2007:** Adapting the Signposts program for Aboriginal families (VACSAL)
- 2007:** Consulting with Cape York Institute on parenting support in Welfare Reform project
- 2008:** Parenting Information for Aboriginal families (SNAICC)
- 2008:** Parenting support through Aboriginal Play Groups (QLD)

## Defining 'parenting'

### Parenting (verb) – raising children

## Parenting: Basic assumptions

- Individuals fulfilling parenting role are the primary architects of their children's world
- Effective parenting is critical for optimal development in children
- Parenting mediates the effects of social adversity on children
- The style and nature of parenting is multi-determined (history, culture, environment and context are important)
- Parenting occurs in a reciprocal context.

### Parenting (cont.)

- Parenting changes over the generations (in response to changing environment)
- Parents' greatest influence is through daily interactions
- Diverse parenting practices associated with good outcomes (context dependent)
- Parenting is learned and parents are learners
- Parents are powerful change agents.

## Culture and parenting

### Culture influences:

- Structure of families and patterns of care giving
- Involvement of extended family members in the task of parenting (e.g., role of grandparents).
- Expectations of children (way behaviour is viewed)
- How parents explain and respond to child behaviour
- Explanation of problems in child development and behaviour
- Parental goals and values
- Selection of parenting approaches

## Diversity and universality

- Most research has sought out differences
- Universality of parenting under emphasised
- We have in common essential and universal tasks
  - need to protect
  - Nourish
  - Nurture
  - Educate
  - Socialise

### Cultural influence in parenting

Who does the parenting  
Values and goals

- Modelling
- Instruction/teaching
- Affection
- Punishment

Socialisation practices

## **Culture and parenting support**

- Whether help will be sought
- From whom help will be sought
- Beliefs about the desirability or possibility of change.
- Acceptance and validity of parenting strategies.

## **Caveats on our knowledge of how culture impacts on parenting**

Research confounded culture with:

- minority status
- immigration process
- socio-economic factors
- personal experience
- educational level
- Experience of discrimination and oppression

**Cultures have evolved parenting practices to prepare children for full and successful participation in their social environment**

**There is no valid basis for cross-cultural comparison (i.e., which way is better?)**

**No culture requires parenting remediation**

## **Traditional Aboriginal parenting practices**

- Huge gap in our scientific knowledge (preserved in oral language and tradition)
- Role of extended family ("nannas" or "aunties"), shared decision making, family obligations important
- Mobility: in WA Aboriginal children are estimated to have lived in an average of 3.2 homes by six years of age (Silburn et al., 2006 cited in Walker and Shepard, 2008).
- Significant diversity within Aboriginal community

## **Adversity**

- Socioeconomic disadvantage (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2003)
  - Lower income
  - Lower life expectancy
  - Higher unemployment
  - Poor housing (lower home ownership)
  - Overcrowding
- Generation of trauma, stress, child separation policies, loss of homeland, unresolved grief (e.g., Stanley et al., 2003)
- Alcohol, drugs and family violence

## **Parenting 'education' and support**

- Relatively new phenomena
- Parenting education is stigmatised (few parents participate in formal parenting education; 10%)
- Most parents prefer/rely on informal supports (partners, family, friends)
- Most parenting programs not based on traditional/observed parenting practices

<b>STEP</b>	Adlerian psychotherapy
<b>Positive Parenting Program (Triple P)</b>	Social learning theory; cognitive behavioural therapy
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>	Client Centred Therapy – Carl Rogers

### Parenting strategies: Signposts

- Labelled praise
- Planned ignoring
- Specific instructions
- Rules (written)
- Behaviour charts
- Family meetings
- Problem solving steps
- Time out
- Planned Activities Training

### Intervention strategies

- Behaviour recording
- Functional analysis (working out triggers and consequences of behaviour)
- Writing objectives
- Role playing parenting strategies
- Homework assignments

### Risks in cross cultural parenting support

- Negative perceptions and assumptions about a different cultural group (different = deviant)
- Imposing culturally determined values and beliefs on parents
- Overgeneralising cultural knowledge (not taking into account within group variation and acculturation)
- Assuming negative parenting practices are cultural

### Risks in cross-cultural support (cont.)

- Mislabelling parenting approaches that arise in response to social adversity as cultural (minority status, racial discrimination, isolation, history of oppression)
- Miscommunication (facial expressions, eye contact, choice of topic, tone of voice and degree of self-disclosure)
- A new kind of cultural imperialism (deciding who gets access to what information).

### The 'myth of cultural competence'

- Culture is pervasive
- Practitioner cannot be truly competent in another person's culture
- Starting point is acknowledging this incompetence

## Core competencies in cross cultural parenting support

- Learning from the parent
- Acknowledging uniqueness of each 'family culture'
- Recognising culturally influenced parenting approaches serve a valued function
- Adopting an open, curious, respectful and accepting stance
- Self-awareness
- Identifying and challenging personal assumptions
- Checking meaning of communications

## Collaborative approach

- Relationship built on the basis of respect and acceptance (Miller & Rollnick, 1991) (rejects confrontation, coercion and manipulation)
- Assumes the parent is an active agent in their life (O'Hanlon & Beadle, 1997)
- Begins by finding something that the parent wants to work on (Madsen, 1999) and is consistent with the parent's core values and desired future.

26

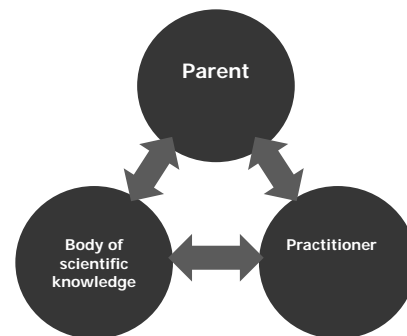
## Collaborative approach (cont.)

- Highlights strengths and resources rather than deficits
- Does not give advice on how to do anything unless authorised to do so (Madsen, 1999)
- Does not make parent's decisions (does not tell parents what to do)
- Emphasises choice and maximises parent control (Webster-Stratton & Herbert, 1994).

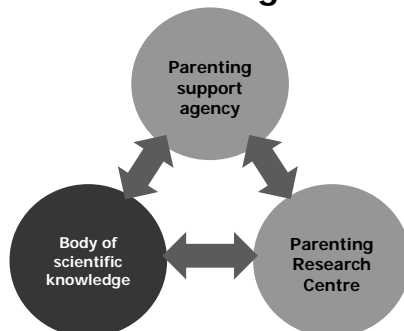
27

## Model of collaborative parenting support practice

(Acknowledge: Prof Mark Dadds)



## Collaborative capacity building



## Role of 'Engineer'

- Involvement does not imply client deficit
- Brings a set of specialist knowledge, skills and methodology
- Designs product to client's specification
- Collaboration and challenge
- Client who makes key decisions (informed).

## Guiding principles

(See SNAICC 2006; and Walker & Shepherd, 2008)

- Supporting family decision making
- Developing capacity in the collective
- Aboriginal control
- Incorporating an Aboriginal world view to develop Aboriginal solutions
- Cultural security and respect
- Localisation

## Signposts

- Parenting children who have a disability
- Focus on behaviour management, stress management and family communication
- Initial pilot, Statewide roll out involving 3,000 parents (25 families identified themselves as Aboriginal)
- Evidence building for effectiveness (see Hudson et al., 2008)
- Adapted for typically developing children

## Signposts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Phase 1)

- VACSAL and NMIT engaged by DHS to adapt Signposts for indigenous families
- Revised program manuals and group materials

## Modifications

- **Delivery** (co-facilitation by a facilitator from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, an additional module to talk about cultural approaches to child rearing practices)
- **Communication** (indirect, avoiding leading questions, listening, the intrusive "why")
- **Cultural appropriateness** (cultural protocols and etiquette, practitioner alerts to content that may not be culturally appropriate, provision of more culturally appropriate examples, advice on disability)

## Piloting the program

- Partnership VACSAL, NMIT and PRC
- Reference Group (including VACCA)
- Focus testing with VACCA carers
- Indigenous workers trained and will pilot program
- Participants are parents of Aboriginal children who have sought information about child behaviour management

## Aboriginal In Home Visiting Program

- Established late 2006
- Located in 5 areas across Victoria
- Linked to Koori Maternity Services
- Delivered by community controlled Aboriginal Cooperatives
- Supported by VACCHO (KMS) and VAEAI (Home Visiting)
- Provide home visiting and group programs to parents of children 0-2 from birth of baby

## Our approach

- Working directly with service providers
- Coordinating closely with Aboriginal peak agencies
- Visits to sites
- Marshalling and sharing the evidence (literature review)
- Workshop to identify core content and key approaches to practice (mapped areas program needed to address)
- Second workshop to refine approach
- Continued consultation to refine draft program

## Our approach (cont.)

- Being educated by agencies and workers about context, strengths and needs of families and workers
- Skilled 'secretariat': capturing and documenting current effective practice and collaboratively designing new elements
- Facilitating sharing between services
- Linking services to other resources
- Recognise program development as an iterative process
- Project will produce 'draft' program

## Challenges

- PRC is engaged by a third party (not everyone agrees we should be involved)
- Building collaboration in a context where we have been imposed
- Staffing mobility
- Workforce qualifications
- Demands and workloads on Aboriginal agencies and staff (*"watch how much you lean on us – there are not many of us to go round."*)
- Issue of ownership (ideas and language)

## Learnings

- Common ground of parenting
- Respecting cultural routines and traditions within community (need for time)
- Problem of the 'after thought'
- Don't treat Aboriginal parents as stupid
- Don't lower your expectations ("expect best and better than that")
- Warning off 'white knight' syndrome
- Need for *genuine* partnership (actions speak louder than words)
- Many modifications made to Signposts as a result of our partnerships with Aboriginal agencies would be helpful to all parents.