



ROYAL
CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL



MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICE

ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE PROGRAMS

Groupwork interventions for
infants, children and their
parents

Edited by
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Introduction

This collection of papers celebrates 10 years of group work undertaken by the Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health Service (RCH MHS) in Melbourne. This is work undertaken specifically to address the impact of family violence on infants and children. Commencing in 1996 and in collaboration with Melton Community Health Centre, the RCH MHS co-developed the 'parkas' (parents accepting responsibility – kids are safe) group work intervention. 'parkas' was run collaboratively by RCH MHS and Melton Community Health Centre until early 2000, when differing service demands prevented this partnership from continuing. The RCH MHS team continued to not only run 'parkas', but developed a further two group work interventions - 'just for kids' (jfk) and the 'Peek a Boo Club' - under the banner of Addressing Family Violence Programs (AFVP), sitting within a team known as the Community Group Program.

Through these chapters we invite you to share our journey. We record the origins of these three separate service delivery programs, their inter-relatedness and their distinctiveness. We explore the theory, practice and principles upon which we base our work. We also offer some insight into how we bring this work to life and how this work brings life to us. We wander through landscapes that are creative, frightening, challenging and personal. And we end with where we start; the challenge of knowing that it is important to make a difference, and that it is imperative to address family violence.

Chapter One introduces the theoretical frameworks; the knowledge base and practice principles we believe are integral to informing how we think about and carry out this work.

Chapter Two introduces our very first child/mother group work intervention ‘parkas’, outlining the model developed, some of the variations we have played with over the years and our work with fathers.

Chapter Three introduces ‘just for kids’ (jfk), a program developed to retain our focus on meeting and holding the needs of children while paving the way for some mothers to engage with the possibility of entering into the ‘parkas’ program.

Chapter Four introduces our very latest program, the ‘Peek a Boo Club’, a group work program for infants and mothers affected by family violence.

Chapter Five explores activities we have found useful in enabling children to form healing narratives about their experiences of living with family violence.

Chapter Six enters the creative and imaginative world of one jfk group in particular, following their journey into both treacherous and tremendous landscapes.

Chapter Seven describes activities within the ‘Peek a Boo Club’, which are baby led and can increase the positive attachment within the mother/child dyad through mutual pleasure and enjoyment.

Chapter Eight bites; in words, in intent and in emotion. A story told directly by the children themselves.

Chapter Nine takes us into the grim world of these children’s reality. It tells the tale of a princess, a prince and an evil villain, first enacted as a play within one of our ‘parkas’ groups and then captured in words by one of the facilitators of this group.

Chapter Ten enters the personal world of a professional. Touched by the stories of children told over many years of facilitating our AFVP, this is a creative attempt to capture the emotions and symbols conveyed by the children, in all their hope and in all their despair.

Chapter Eleven tells the story of two infants involved in a 'Peek a Boo Club'. The writer shares her observation of their journey, as well as her own.

Chapter Twelve is written directly to fathers. It encourages an appreciation of their own past, and how the choices they make in relation to their child's present directly influences what will be their child's and their own future.

Chapter Thirteen explores the different dimensions of group work and the importance of building your interventions on a foundation of good practice principles that promote growth.

Chapter Fourteen speaks to the shared yet unique journey that groups take. Working from an 'extended' developmental perspective, it explores the differing, and mostly, non-sequential stages that groups move through.

Chapter Fifteen saves the best till last. How do we evaluate what we do, how do we know if we make a difference and just what sort of difference are we intending to make?

This collection of papers is not an exhaustive attempt to capture the different work of individuals on the AFVP team, nor an attempt to homogenise the diversity of offerings provided by the personalities, perspectives and professionals within the team. This book is what we hope will be the first in a series, exploring our group work interventions in the area of family violence. We hope we have captured the progressive nature of this work, and our attempts to reconcile the complexities which this work constantly throws our way, both for our client group and ourselves as professionals.

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