

## Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC)



EMPOWERING  
PARENTS  
EMPOWERING  
COMMUNITIES

### What is EPEC?

High quality parenting programs are a proven way of intervening early to optimise children's chances in life, and Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) delivers a carefully structured program in a uniquely effective way. Parents talk to other parents as a first choice when seeking information, and communication is more credible when presented by 'someone like me'.

EPEC is a community-based program training local parents to run parenting groups (in pairs) through early years and parenting focused services. Parent facilitators trained to work in the EPEC program are employed, supported and supervised by a specially trained practitioner within a local community organisation.

Developed and tested by the UK Centre for Parent and Child Support, EPEC encompasses the best of current theoretical and practical knowledge and provides an alternative model to practitioner-led parenting interventions. The basic course for all parents with children aged 2-12 is "Being a Parent", with 8 x 2.5 hour sessions delivered according to a structured manual which employs attachment, social learning, structural, relational and cognitive behavioural theory. Childcare is provided for children up to age 5. After completing BAP, parents who are interested (about one fifth in recent trials) can continue to become parent facilitators through a 10-day course. Parent Facilitators' learning throughout EPEC can be assessed and accredited against national VET competency units. Parent Facilitators also receive payment when facilitating.

Peer led parenting interventions are uncommon in the Australian context with the vast majority of parenting focused programs facilitated by practitioners. A UK randomised control trial found that EPEC significantly reduced children's behavioural problems, and improved the competencies of parents in a population that was considered to be disengaged from services. This trial and other UK research has shown peer-led parenting training groups have a much higher retention rate than conventional parenting group formats for disengaged parents (Day et al, 2012a; Hutchings et al, 2007; Scott et al, 2001). Following these promising results, EPEC was piloted and evaluated in Tasmania between 2011 and 2014. The Tasmanian evaluation found "parents and parent [peer] facilitators have reported increases in social, human and identity capital, and communities involved with EPEC demonstrated increased social capacity around parenting skills" (Winter, 2013 p.38). Parents who completed the Being a Parent Course, the entry level of EPEC training, reported better listening and more thinking in their dealings with children, a more optimistic outlook on life, and improved parent-child relations.

Parents who continued to the next level of EPEC training, Peer Facilitator Training, reported increased confidence, optimism, educational and employment pathways, and improved ability to manage the challenges of daily life (Winter, 2013).

## What is unique about EPEC?

EPEC is not just another parenting program facilitated by professionals. It is an intervention facilitated by parents that requires practitioners, and services, to embrace a culture of practice that includes parents as co-workers, co-reflectors and co-learners in partnership with professional workers. The program brings practitioners and parents together as partners in a culture of shared practice. EPEC is a model that challenges traditional hierarchical service constructs and levels the playing field to enable community members to work alongside practitioners in the co-delivery of a parenting intervention. The dynamic of local parents working within the system, alongside practitioners, spans the boundary between services and families disengaged from the system. The active involvement of parent facilitators in EPEC gives credibility to the system in the eyes of families that have previously found services difficult to access.

Regular reflective supervision with parent facilitators, facilitated by practitioners, nurtures a respectful culture of shared learning and discovery. This models and reinforces for parent participants the ongoing nature of learning for professionals and parents. Through practitioner observations and reflective supervision meetings, parent facilitators and the EPEC practitioners, unfold a more nuanced understanding of their own discoveries in relation to the impact of parenting behaviours on their children and their relationship with them.

When EPEC is provided through a service platform that encourages ongoing social and service focused interactions with each other (playgroups, other programs), parent participants, and practitioners continue to informally reflect on and practice key concepts and language that arise from the BAP program. These encounters serve to keep learning alive and practiced in participants parenting.

## What is required to set up an EPEC site?

EPEC is provided in local communities through partner agencies called 'community partners'.

Community partners, who enter into a licence agreement with the Centre for Parent & Child support (EPEC authors in the UK), must be locally credible services with a history of supporting families in the focus community. Community partners must be able to demonstrate:

- A practice culture of partnership and strength based approaches to working with families
- A commitment to community development
- An ability to support parents to transition from being service recipients to co-workers in the delivery of EPEC
- A capacity to employ parent facilitators and provide relevant employee supervision and support for para-professionals.

It is expected that community partners will assume responsibility for sustaining EPEC beyond the initial implementation phase. Community partners will be provided with appropriate levels of ongoing support from MCRI to enable program development that adheres to the EPEC author's quality benchmarks.

To enable efficient and effective program implementation and development, community partners will be required to make the following contributions:

<b>Resourcing</b>	Assume responsibility for the financial and personnel resourcing necessary to implement and maintain the EPEC program. These costs vary according to scale.
<b>Staffing</b>	<p>Staff members who are appropriately qualified and committed to the implementation and development of a peer-led parenting intervention. These practitioners will be flexible, adaptable, and demonstrate a capacity to enable parents to work alongside them as team members.</p> <p>Community partners are also asked to nominate a representative from management who can invest time in familiarising themselves with EPEC, support the EPEC practitioners in the development of the program, and ensure all reporting and quality assurance measures are achieved.</p>
<b>Induction &amp; training</b>	<p>Practitioners who will manage the EPEC program are required to undertake an initial training / induction, facilitated by MCRI. This training equips them with the tools and knowledge to develop the EPEC site, attract parents to the program, and deliver the preliminary implementation BAP courses.</p> <p>The same practitioners receive further training prior to facilitating the first parent facilitator course.</p>
<b>Physical space</b>	Access to training facilities that would be deemed appropriate for the delivery of adult learning with kitchen, toilets, and an adjoining space in which children can be provided with adjunct care (whilst parents participate in the program).
<b>Supervision</b>	Once parents are trained and employed as EPEC facilitators, the EPEC practitioners provide ongoing oversight of the program including observation of the BAP sessions and reflective supervision of the parent facilitators.
<b>Insurance</b>	All activity that comprise the EPEC program must be covered by relevant insurance cover.
<b>Adjunct Care</b>	<p>Parents participating in or delivering EPEC training should be provided with appropriate, high quality adjunct care for all children under school entry age.</p> <p>Given the nature of the intervention, it is not appropriate for babies older than a few months to be present during BAP sessions.</p>
<b>Catering</b>	All training delivered as part of EPEC requires access to appropriate refreshments for the comfort of participants.

## EPEC implementation

MCRI supports community partners to implement and sustain EPEC in each site. EPEC employs a tiered strategy which builds the capacity of community partner organisations to improve parenting skills and confidence, and empower parents to play a more active role in their local communities.

Implementing a new EPEC site involves the following steps:

- MCRI delivers practitioner training to staff who will coordinate EPEC at the new site (approximately five days depending on skills and experience of practitioners). The practitioners must be experienced in working from a strengths-based framework with families experiencing complex needs and have experience in the facilitation of adult training. The initial training focuses on familiarising participants with the content of the 'Being a Parent' (BAP) course, strategies for the facilitation of BAP and setting up an EPEC hub
- The group of trained practitioners will then deliver the first practitioner-led 'Being a Parent' courses to groups of 6-12 parents.
- MCRI provides ongoing support and quality review processes throughout the implementation phase.
- The EPEC practitioners will undertake an additional three-day training delivered by MCRI to enable them to coordinate and facilitate the first parent facilitator training.
- Parents who have participated in the BAP courses can apply to become parent facilitators. Successful applicants will go on to complete the 60 hour (10 day) Peer Facilitator training, enabling those parents to deliver Being a Parent courses to other parents in their local communities.
- The EPEC licence agreement provides for ongoing review and support of progress at the local level conducted by MCRI in Australia.

The four tiers of EPEC training are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Four tiers of EPEC training**

Training	Participants	Description
EPEC trainers – MCRI	Skilled trainers with experience in the role of EPEC supervisor/mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trains and mentors/supervises Practitioner Facilitators</li> <li>• Has undertaken 5 days of Practitioner Facilitator training and trained in the Family Partnership Model</li> <li>• Supervision and certification from UK CPCS</li> </ul>
Practitioner training	Practitioners (i.e. family service workers) employed at EPEC hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 days of Practitioner Facilitator training</li> <li>• 3 days of EPEC Supervision training</li> </ul>
Being a Parent	Parents with children aged two to 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 x 2.5 hour sessions delivered according to a structured manual and based on attachment, social learning, structural, relational and behavioural therapy</li> <li>• Adjunct care for children under school age is provided and courses are held in community facilities, encouraging service entry points</li> <li>• Accredited against Australian VET competency units</li> </ul>
Peer Facilitator Training	Parents who have completed the Being a Parent course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60 hours of training (10 days)</li> <li>• Learning takes place through direct teaching, discussion in large and small groups, role play, reading and research and facilitation skills practice</li> </ul>