



Australian Childhood Foundation

Every Child Is Important:

What parents have told us they want in parenting education and support: how to improve primary child abuse prevention initiatives.

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The Every Child Is Important Campaign used the evocative song “Have I told you lately that I love you” as the centrepiece of integrated advertising, awareness raising and education activities aiming to prevent child abuse through affirming the significance of children in the lives of families and communities.

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Objectives of the "Every Child is Important" Campaign

- To affirm the value and significance of children to adults, families, and society as a whole
- To elicit a commitment from adults to develop safe and non-abusive relationships with children
- To encourage adults to respect children's vulnerabilities and their abilities
- To educate adults about the important needs of children

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Elements of the "Every Child is Important" Campaign

- Universal campaign targeting all parents, particularly those of children under the age of ten
- Used integrated mass media, community education and attitudes tracking strategies
- Drew resources from Commonwealth Government, corporate and philanthropic sectors
- Extended into culturally diverse communities

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Parenting Education

- Completed 11 x 2 hour parenting seminars in metropolitan and regional Victoria attracting 3000 parents
- Completed 4 x 2 hour parenting seminars in metropolitan and regional Tasmania attracting 700 parents
- Distributed 95 000 parent information booklets throughout Victoria and Tasmania
- Information was available on campaign website www.kidscount.com.au - received 4000 hits throughout the campaign

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Evaluation Strategies

- Three community attitudes surveys about children, parenting and child abuse
- Evaluation of parenting seminars through a survey of 3700 parents who have attended - 70% parents completed evaluation forms
- Preliminary evaluation of parenting booklet through a survey of organisations who have requested booklets for distribution to parents

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Parenting Seminar Evaluations - Sample

- Parents attended 16 seminars across Victoria and Tasmania
- Parents represented a cross section of socio-economic and educational levels
- 85% parents had children aged under 10 years
- 90% parents indicated the seminar would make a difference to their parenting behaviour
- 91% parents indicated they would be interested in attending future parenting seminars

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Key Themes from Evaluations

- Parents lack confidence in their parenting – 80% indicated they need affirmation about their parenting
- Seminar was experienced as affirming
- Seminar helped parents understand the areas of their parenting they wanted more support with
- Parents need support in keeping ‘in touch’ with their long term hopes and aspirations for their children, especially day to day
- Parents need support to balance and respond to the competing needs of family and work – parenting in a busy life

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Key Themes from Evaluations (cont)

- Parenting is an ongoing process of discovery and learning
- Discipline is narrowly defined by parents – managing misbehaviour
- Parents want to better understand the changing needs of their children
- Parents want a flexible range of parent support eg one-off sessions, programs that run for a number of sessions, the opportunity to seek affirmation in the absence of a clear ‘problem’, responsive to their situations

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Community Attitude Tracking

- The campaign has tracked community attitudes about parenting, children and child abuse for the past three years.
- The following conclusions are drawn from studies undertaken by Quantum Market Research, Australian Childhood Foundation and the Child Abuse and Family Violence Research Unit, Monash University.

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Key Findings

- 75% believed loving/caring parents and stable family life was the most important factor in raising happy children yet more than 1 in 5 indicated this was also the most challenging aspect of parenting
- 20% believed that 'controlling' children and children's behaviour was the most challenging aspect of parenting
- 82% of respondents believed that the discipline and punishment of children are the same thing
- 67% believed parents carry the responsibility for the prevention of child abuse

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Key Findings (cont)

- Parents feel less supported and more judged today than was the case twenty years ago
- 68% of respondents did not believe parenting came naturally
- 36% believed that they would be negatively judged if they admitted to having problems with their parenting
- 39% believed that it would be difficult for them to ask for help if they were having a problem as a parent.

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Key Findings (cont)

- Parents will use local networks of family and friends to seek support with parenting
- Doctors are perceived to have a critical support role with families
- Nearly 1 in 10 respondents did not know where they might seek assistance if needed
- Children's rights are endorsed by community in principle, but there is confusion about what it means

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Parenting needs

- The majority of parents need resources and support from time to time
- Seeking out help about parenting is still associated with some stigma
- Parents need access to information about issues at the time those issues are relevant
- Parents want access to education which helps improve relationships with their children

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Parenting Needs (cont)

- Parents want more than skills training. They want opportunities for self-reflection and to learn to change their parenting approach for themselves
- Parents of adolescents feel that they have far less resources available to them than parents of younger children

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Messages from the literature

- Parenting education policy primarily targets disadvantaged groups
- Parenting information tends to be problem focussed and oriented to behaviour management– little attention to relationship issues
 - conceptualise parenting as a skills based process rather than relationship based (McGurk 1996)
 - only some programs consider the family as a system and a variety of parent needs (Allen 1997)

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Messages from the literature (cont)

- The promotion of help seeking behaviour prior to the problem emerging is critical (Tomison 1998)
- Major issue facing support programs is how to get parents to access them (Allen 1997)
- Parenting education must affirm and build confidence not conversely result in a reliance in 'experts' for ongoing support (Allen & Schultz 1987)

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Messages from the literature (cont)

- Child rearing takes place in an unsupportive context in modern society reflecting the dominant philosophy of private parenting responsibility (Edgar 1995)
- The health promotion model emphasising well-being and protective factors has much to offer programs aimed at strengthening families and parenting capacities (Zubrick et al 2000, NSW Child Protection Council 1995)

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Where to from here?

- The dominant discourses that undermine the value of parenting and children must be rendered transparent and taken into account in the formulation of policy and programs aimed at parent education and support
 - philosophy of individualism – my child, my responsibility
 - children's rights and parent's rights
 - family/work debate
 - community attitudes towards physical punishment and the tolerance of violence

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Where to from here ? (cont)

- Universal parent education/support campaigns must be developed utilising a public health promotion model fostering protective factors and help seeking behaviour in parents and families
- Parent education/information and support must be delivered flexibly and be responsive to the competing demands and needs of families
- Parenting education/information and support will need to integrate strategies which give parents greater understanding about how to execute empathic and supportive relationships with their children

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