

THOUGHTFUL PARENTING

Keeping Children in Mind



Setting the Scene



The Australian Childhood Foundation is a national not for profit organisation that provides therapeutic services, educational programs and creative resources aimed at ensuring that all children are raised in relationships that are safe, caring and respectful.

The Foundation recognises that all parents and carers need support at some point in their lives. This is why the Foundation has developed a parenting program called Bringing Up Great Kids. It celebrates the relationships between children and their parents/carers. It provides information about how children develop. It offers opportunities for parents/carers to reflect about what is important to them in raising children, how they communicate to their children and how they learn and grow alongside their children.

The Bringing Up Great Kids program for parents has a number of different resources that are part of it. The Thoughtful Parenting Kit is made up of nine video chapters and this booklet.

It was created as part of a special collaboration with actress Nadine Gardiner and producer Cameron Barnett. Nadine has been a long time Ambassador of the Australian Childhood

Foundation. We would like to thank her, all the actors and crew who donated their time to make this all possible and the Australian Government for supporting its development.

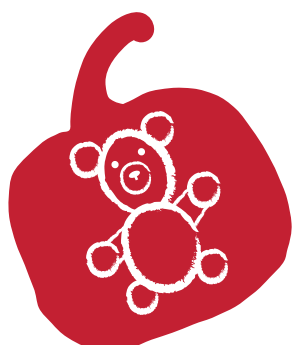
If you are a parent, you can use this booklet as a guide as you watch each of the video chapters. There are many Bringing Up Great Kids groups around Australia if you want to join other parents in exploring these ideas more. For more information about thoughtful and reflective parenting, you can visit our website www.bringingupgreatkids.org

If you are a professional who supports parents, you can use this booklet to help parents reflect on the key messages of each chapter and help conversations to start about their experiences. If you want to train to become a Bringing Up Great Kids facilitator, visit our website to find out more and register: www.professionals.childhood.org.au

Children need parents. Children flourish in relationships that understand them. Parents flourish when they have the chance to be thoughtful about their approach.

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Chapter 1: Introduction



Parenting is not an easy job. Some days, it is really rewarding. There are also those days where it can be extremely disheartening. Regardless of the kind of day parents have, it is the most important job that anyone can ever do.

For this reason the Australian Childhood Foundation has designed the Thoughtful Parenting Kit to help all of us who care for children.

The Kit gives all parents a chance to think about what is important to them about their parenting. It aims to generate discussion between parents. Each chapter explores a specific theme that is relevant to parenting – the issues, the joys and the challenges.

As parents, one of the most crucial aspects of the role is the way we are reflective and thoughtful about our children, ourselves and our parenting. When we take the time to stop, pause and think about what is going on for ourselves and our children, we are more able to stay tuned to what our children need and to respond in a way that meets both our child's needs and our own.

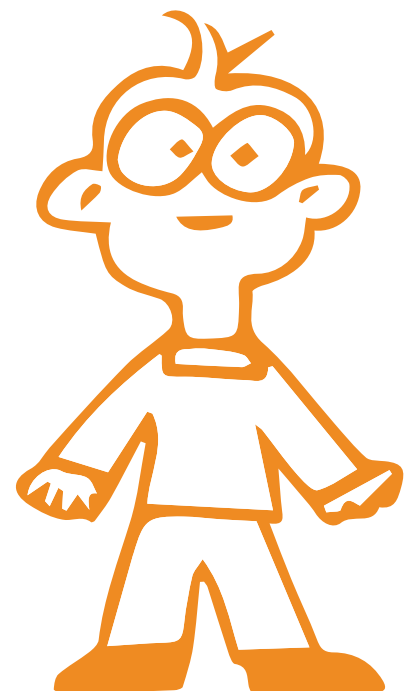
This DVD is not just for parents. Many people are involved in parenting or caring for children these days. You might be a grandparent, aunt or foster carer. This Kit is for you too.

There is a pause at the end of each chapter to give an opportunity to reflect on your own parenting or to discuss with others what you have just seen.

How to use the Thoughtful Parenting Kit

Thoughtful Parenting is divided into nine chapters.

- Chapter 1** Introduction
- Chapter 2** What is parenting about today?
- Chapter 3** What is your parenting story?
- Chapter 4** Your child's brain development
- Chapter 5** How do you tune into your child?
- Chapter 6** Balancing expectations with your child's needs
- Chapter 7** Parenting brothers and sisters
- Chapter 8** How do you enjoy your child?
- Chapter 9** Conclusion





Each chapter highlights common issues that parents and children encounter. You will see **'stop'**, **'pause'**, **'rewind'** and **'play'** icons appear on screen at different times during the video.



These icons show the parents in the video actually stopping, pausing and reflecting on what is going on for themselves and their child. The rewind and play icons then show the parents responding to the same situation in a different, more attuned way.

At the end of each chapter, there are questions for you to reflect on in relation to yourself and your own children.

The video is also designed to be watched with your partner or other parents in small groups. The questions at the end of each chapter can be used to generate discussion and share your thoughts and experiences of parenting.

Use this booklet to read along with each of the chapters you watch. It will give you more information to reflect upon and talk about.

You are welcome to copy pages of this booklet to share with other parents as you discuss the issues raised in each chapter.

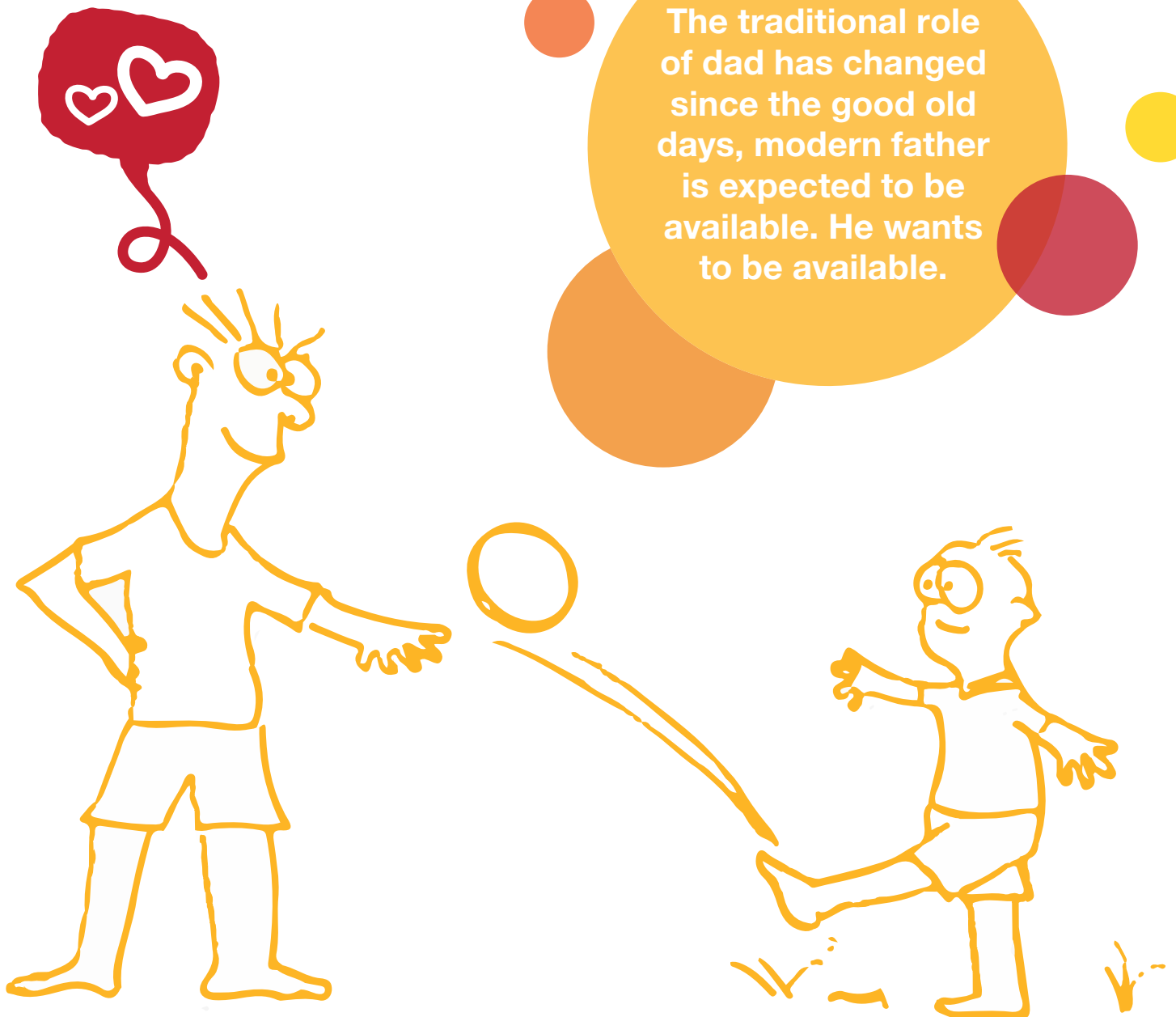
We hope you find it interesting and helpful.

Chapter 2: What is parenting about today?



Families today are busier than ever. The expectations on parents and children alike seem to be growing. As parents, we often feel the pressure of juggling increasing demands. There never seems to be enough time. It is not surprising that sometimes we can feel that we lose sight of what is important for ourselves and our children.

More so than ever before, as parents, we feel the need to 'get it right'. It is easy to feel judged. It is easy to judge ourselves. In reality, there is no such thing as a perfect parent - just as there is no such thing as the perfect child. Children and parents learn and grow together. As our children grow and develop, our parenting approach must also adapt and change.





What do you think about these common myths?

I should know all the answers.

Parenting comes naturally.

Raising my children is my job.

You don't have to know every thing. No parent has all the answers. Have reasonable expectations of yourself. Have confidence in what you do know. It's OK to say I don't know. Find out more about things you feel less confident in.

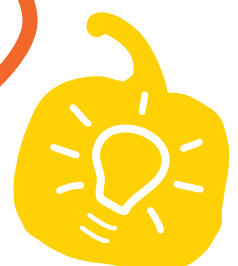
Parenting requires understanding, persistence, imagination, energy, knowledge and patience. Congratulate yourself on what you are doing well. Accept that there may be things you could do differently. Don't be too hard on yourself. Every parent makes mistakes and learns through experience.

Parenting is a community activity. Many people play a significant role in children's lives. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, friends, teachers and neighbours all contribute to and support family life. We are better able to look after our children when we're looking after ourselves and feeling good about who we are as a parent. Look after yourself as well as your children.

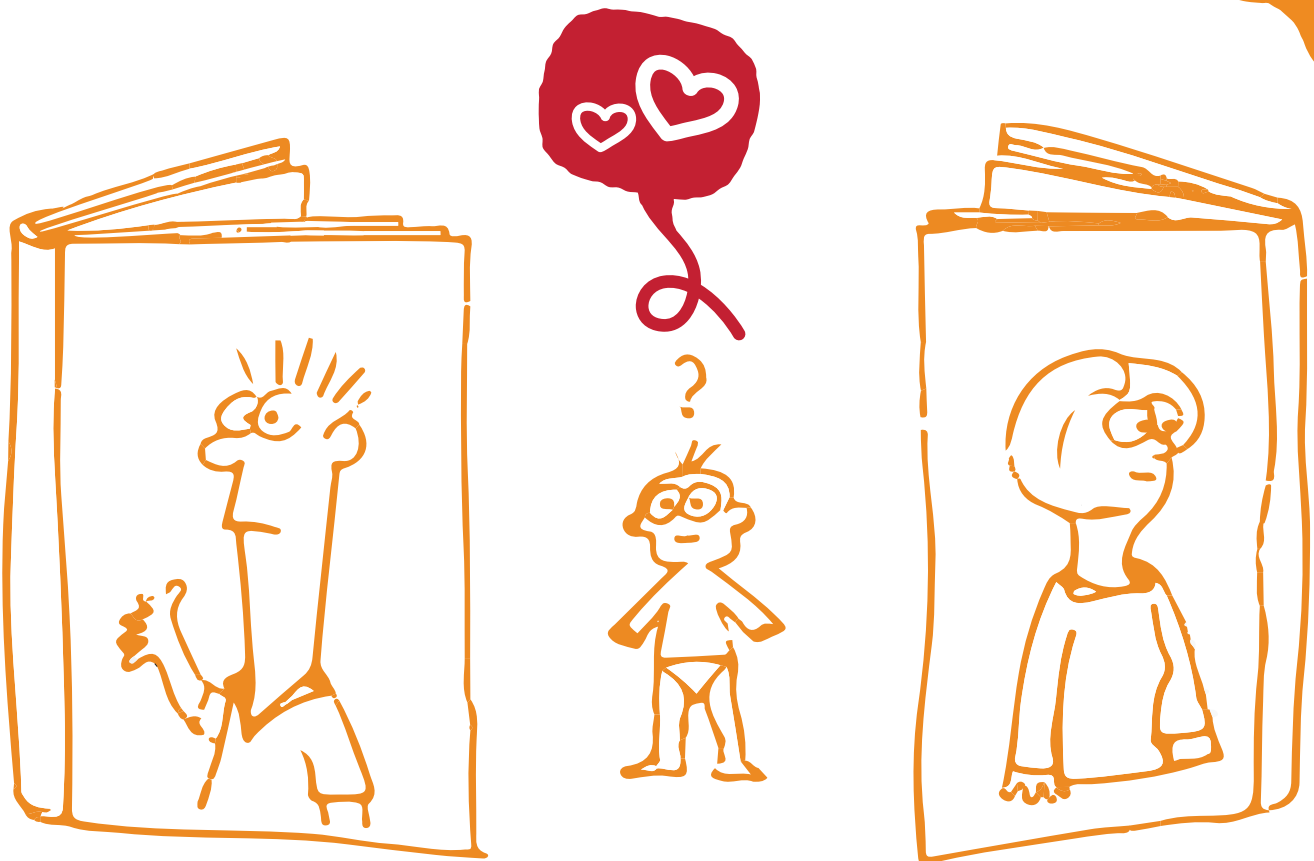
After you have watched this chapter, reflect on the following questions:

How do you think the roles of mums and dads have changed over time?

Does the world seem a less safe place than was the case when you were a child?



Chapter 3: What is your parenting story?



How we were parented has a powerful influence on the way we parent our own children. Some parenting practices get passed down from one generation to the next without us considering whether they actually meet our current needs or the needs of our children.

What ideas about parenting and children did your parents pass onto you? What values, attitudes and beliefs are important to you? Where did they come from? Which of these would you like to pass on to your children?

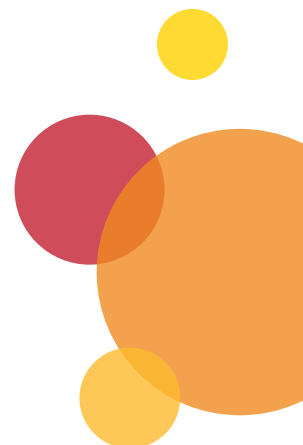
Have you ever heard yourself saying the same things to your children that were said to you?

We all do and say things at times that are not consistent with the parent we want to be. Taking the time to reflect on your parenting helps you to stay in touch with your hopes and guides you to be the parent you want to be for your children.

In this chapter, the idea of 'Stop', 'Pause', 'Rewind' and 'Play' is used as a way of giving the parents shown in the video a chance to be more mindful in how they respond to their child's needs and 'rewind' to do things differently.

Life does not give us these 'rewind' moments but thinking in a 'Stop, Pause, Play' way can give all of us a chance to step back and be more mindful about how we interact with our children.

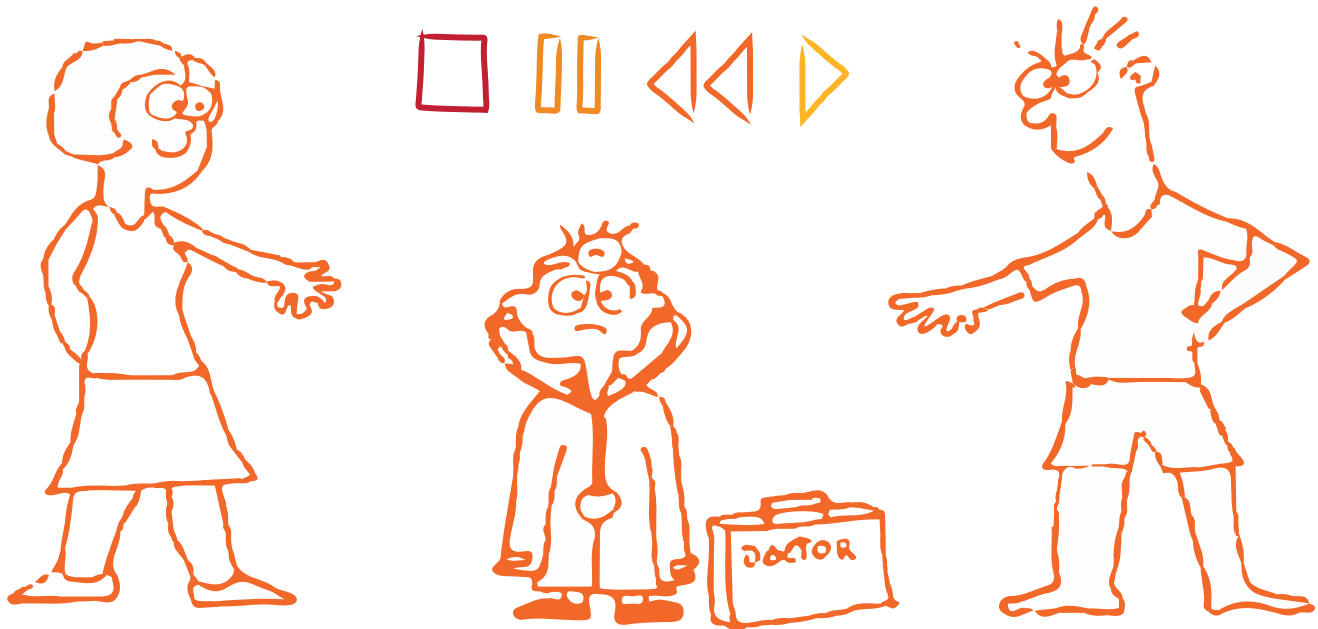
Using the concept of 'Stop, Pause, Play' in challenging moments with our children enables us to calm ourselves down before reacting to their behaviour.



Chapter 3: What is your parenting story?



Try this exercise to put 'Stop, Pause, Play' into action.



The most effective way of calming down is to concentrate on breathing, especially focussing on your breath as it goes out. In a standing position (stop) breathe in and (pause) breathe slowly out, releasing your breath all the way to the bottom of your lungs. After several such breaths, you will find that your heart rate has slowed down, your breathing is deeper and you will feel calmer. When you are in this calm state (play), you will probably be better able to respond in a thoughtful or considered way rather than in a reactive, stressed way.

You will also be more likely to stay connected to what is going on for your children. You will be more aware of their experience of the situation and how they might be feeling. Using 'Stop, Pause, Play' is a stepping stone to thoughtful parenting.

After you have watched this chapter reflect on the following questions:

Where do your ideas about parenting come from?

What do you notice about yourself as a parent?



Chapter 4: Your child's brain development



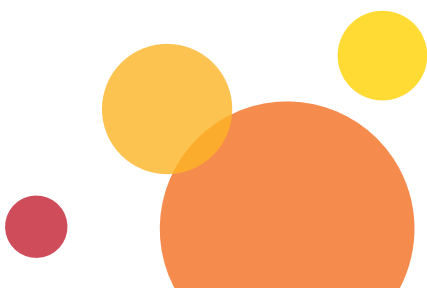
Children's brains are amazing things. They are growing and changing constantly. Imagine if we could see into the brains of children as they respond to the world around them. Knowing more about a child's developing brain is a good way for us to understand how children think, feel and behave. This enables us to respond more appropriately and mindfully.

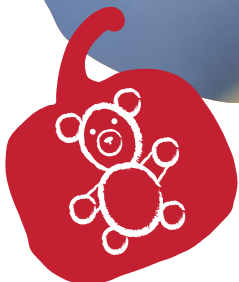
Young children have limited ability to think and be reasoned with – they can't link their feelings, thoughts and behaviour together. The sections of the brain responsible for these areas are not 'switched on' in early childhood. What is 'switched on' is the emotional centre of the brain.

Understanding how children's brains develop gives us insight into the questions we often ask about our children:



As well as understanding your child's brain development, imagine how interesting it is to know more about what is happening in your own brain and why you respond to your child's behaviour in the way you do. When you are tired, stressed or anxious, the emotional centre of your brain gets in the way of thinking logically. Using 'Stop, Pause, Play' to calm yourself down enables you to be able to reason and think clearly before responding to your child.





Your child's developing brain

By the time babies are born all parts of their little bodies are fully formed except their brains. The human brain takes time to develop. By birth, the brain has developed the main functions necessary for life – breathing, keeping a steady heartbeat, sucking and sleeping. The rest of the brain takes years to develop.

Young brains are very sensitive to experience. Early experiences and the environments in which children live have a very strong influence on the development of children's brains. Supportive, caring and consistent relationships between children and their parents are the key to healthy brain development. Healthy brains grow when children are interacting with people who love them.

There are four major brain centres as shown in the diagram over leaf.



Chapter 4: Your child's brain development



The Brain Stem is the first to develop and is responsible for the basic functions which keep us alive such as our hearts beating and breathing. The Brain Stem is fully developed by birth.

The Motor Centre is connected to the Brain Stem. This is responsible for movement and develops over the first few years of life. It starts when babies gain head control and continues to mature as they sit, crawl and walk. Over the next few years they learn to skip, kick a ball, ride bikes, draw, and even eat with cutlery.

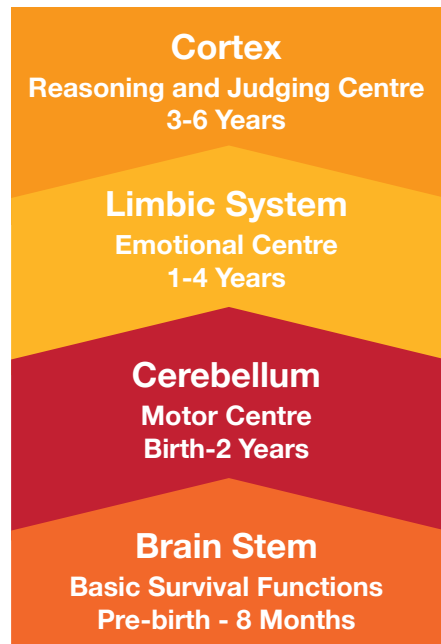
The Limbic System is the emotional centre of the brain and rules the lives of children up to four years of age. During the Toddler years, the Limbic System goes through a period of rapid development. This explains bursts of emotional behaviour and tantrums. Toddlers need our help to support and manage their feelings. Young children feel and act at the same time. They don't really have the chance to think before they act. Thinking and being able to know what to do, and when, develops later when their cortex matures.

The Cortex or thinking part of the brain is the last part to develop. This is the part responsible for reasoning and planning. It is only when it has come on line that children learn to think before they act. In order for the thinking part of the brain to grow and mature, children need every thing to be repeated before it can be stored and used.

In an emotional state, children hear very little of what is said to them. The thinking part of their brain is switched off. They are reacting to how they feel. They are not able to be reasoned with or easily follow anything their parents are asking them to do.

Sometimes it's hard, as parents, to stay calm when we are struggling with our children's behaviour. At these times the thinking part of our brain is switched off too. If parents stay calm and keep the thinking part of their brain switched on then children can practice that too. When calm, the thinking parts of children's brains start to come back on line.





After you have watched this chapter reflect on the following questions:



How does understanding more about brain development help you understand your child?

How will this understanding influence your parenting approach?

Chapter 5: How do you tune into your child?



Tuning into your children requires you first to understand their cues – what are they telling you they need? Babies and children communicate using both verbal and non-verbal strategies. They communicate using their faces and bodies. They communicate with cries, words, their behaviours and their actions.

Children are also very sensitive to how you communicate with them. In the first 2 years of life, children are particularly attuned to the emotional aspects of communication. Babies and toddlers pay more attention to the expression on your face and the tone of your voice than to the words you say to them. They are also sensitive to the way you move, the gestures you make, and the way you hold and touch them. Seeing frightened or frightening faces, and hearing loud angry voices, are particularly distressing for young children.

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Chapter 5: How do you tune into your child?



Here are some ideas to help you tune into your child:

- Be aware of your child's emotional cues and feelings.
- Talk with children about feelings - naming feelings and helping children identify what happens in their body. Labelling emotions calms big feelings.
- Empathise with children when they have strong feelings. Empathy is calming.
- Help your child to regulate their feelings. Babies and young children cannot manage their feelings on their own. When we help them to calm down, they gradually develop the ability to do this for themselves.
- Think about the meaning behind your children's behaviour and what they might be trying to 'tell' you.
- Remember that when children 'act out' they are not doing something to us, they are needing something from us. The child is saying, 'I need you. I don't know what to do with this feeling on my own.'
- Get to know your children well so that you can predict their reactions to particular situations.
- Understand and label your own emotions and know how comfortable you feel about feelings yourself. We need to be comfortable with our own emotions, in order to make our children feel comfortable with theirs.

After you have watched this chapter reflect on the following questions:

How does your child experience you when you are in tune with him/her?

How does your child show what they need through their behaviour, feelings and play?



Chapter 6: Balancing expectations with your child's needs



Have you ever felt like you are a juggler in a circus, trying to keep all the balls in the air to get everything done? At times we can feel pressured, unsupported or overwhelmed by the many demands upon us.

In the midst of everything, it's easy to have unrealistic expectations of our children's ability to keep up with us, to understand things from our perspective or to do things on their own whilst we get on with something else.

Children don't see the world the way adults do. They don't share the responsibilities and worries of the adult world. Sometimes it's easy to lose sight of the need to balance what our children need from us with the expectations we have of them.

- Make time to go at your child's pace, explore the world and answer their questions.
- Remember that children are still learning and need you to help them understand their world and the people in it. It's often a confusing place.
- As your children grow and develop, support and encourage them as they exercise more independence and build the confidence to try new things.
- Stand in your children's shoes and try to imagine things from their point of view.
- Have realistic expectations of your children and support them to develop new skills.
- Be organized and give children enough warning that you need them to start or stop doing something.
- Take the time to explain to children what is going to happen next and why.

It may feel like these strategies may take more time - but in the long run it will be easier and meet the needs of both you and your children.

Chapter 6: Balancing expectations with your child's needs



Looking after yourself helps you look after your child

Parenting can be like running a marathon. Good marathon runners do a lot of preparation, take good care of themselves, and have a team of support people along the way. You need to take care of yourself in order to look after your child.

Do things that help you to relax. Listen to music, read a book, go for a walk – even if it is only for ten minutes. Reflect on where your stress and feelings are coming from and identify small, achievable steps to address the causes. Give yourself permission not to be perfect. Try to make some special time for yourself. Talk to your partner, family or friends about your concerns and worries.



After you have watched this chapter reflect on the following questions:

How do you show support and encouragement to your children when they are learning new skills?

How do you stay mindful of balancing your own needs whilst having realistic expectations of your child?



Brothers and sisters can be the best of friends and sometimes act as if they are the worst of enemies. Their feelings for each other vary and can change over time along with each child's age and stage of development. Brothers and sisters can squabble, tease and tell on each other. This is normal and one way children learn how to get on with others.

It is normal for brothers and sisters to think and behave differently. Children will often argue over something they feel is not fair. It's natural for siblings in a family to argue and disagree. Over time, children learn that their point of view is not the only one and that they are not always right.

The introduction of a new baby into a family can upset the dynamics of the family. This can be a time when the older child needs more attention and reassurance about your love for her.

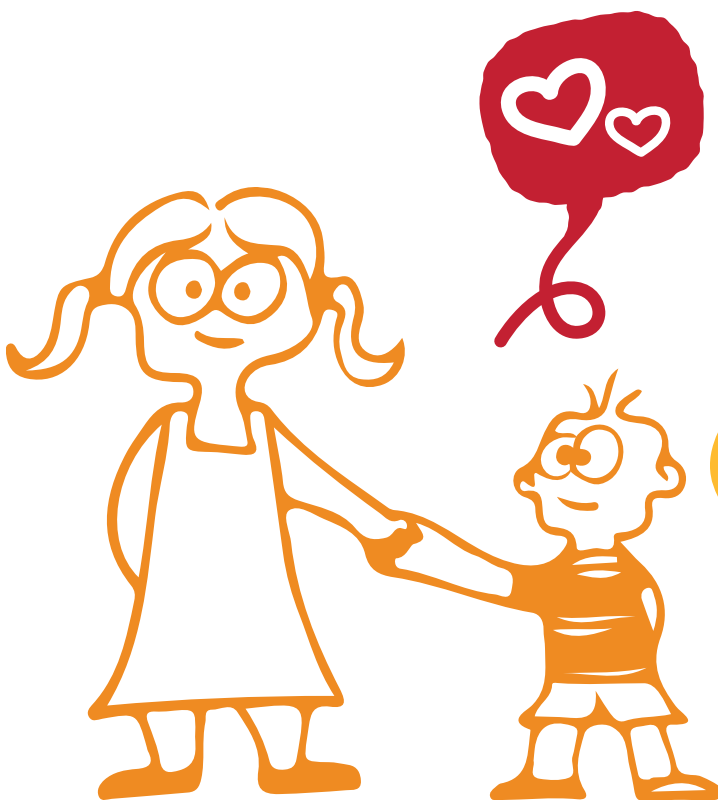


Chapter 7: Parenting brothers and sisters



- Sometimes it is not possible to treat children in the same way all the time. Parents need to respond to each child's age, personalities and the specific circumstances.
- Value and respect each child's individuality, needs and rights. Avoid negative comparisons.
- Promote respectful relationships by having family rules that apply to everyone.
- Acknowledge and praise times when children are getting on well together.
- Allow each child to pursue his or her own interests.
- Have realistic expectations about how long young children can play together.
- Spend time with each child as well as with all the children together.
- Allow children space to sort out their own arguments, ensuring that the conflict is kept to a manageable level. Ask children if they need your help to sort things out. Step in when the conflict becomes unmanageable for children. Look for solutions.
- Encourage children to think about how other children feel.
- Help children to understand that not everything can or should be shared.

After you have watched this chapter reflect on the following questions:



In what ways are your children similar or different?

How do you respond to your children as a result of their similarities and differences?



Chapter 8: How do you enjoy your children?



As a parent you probably spend much of your time trying to be a good parent, doing whatever you can for your child whilst balancing the needs and demands of a busy life. Increasingly you might be feeling more like a manager - managing a household, managing time, managing a job and managing children's behaviour.

It is sometimes easy to lose sight of what is important. Make sure you take the time out to reflect on the ways your child contributes to your life rather than on what else you can or should be doing for your child.

Children thrive when we enjoy and celebrate them as they grow. Our delight lets a child know that he or she is loved for who he/she is, not just what they can do. This provides a foundation for healthy self-esteem. One of the greatest gifts you can give yourself is time with your children. Take some time each day to laugh, cry, play, dream, wonder and explore with them.



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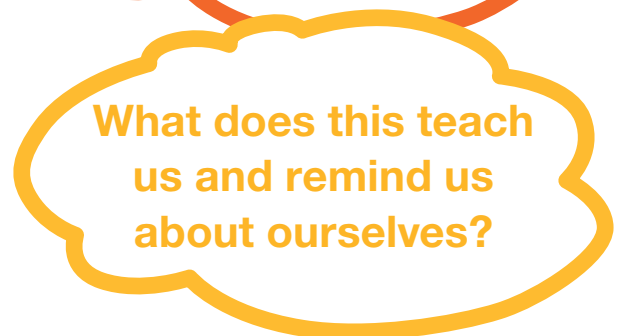
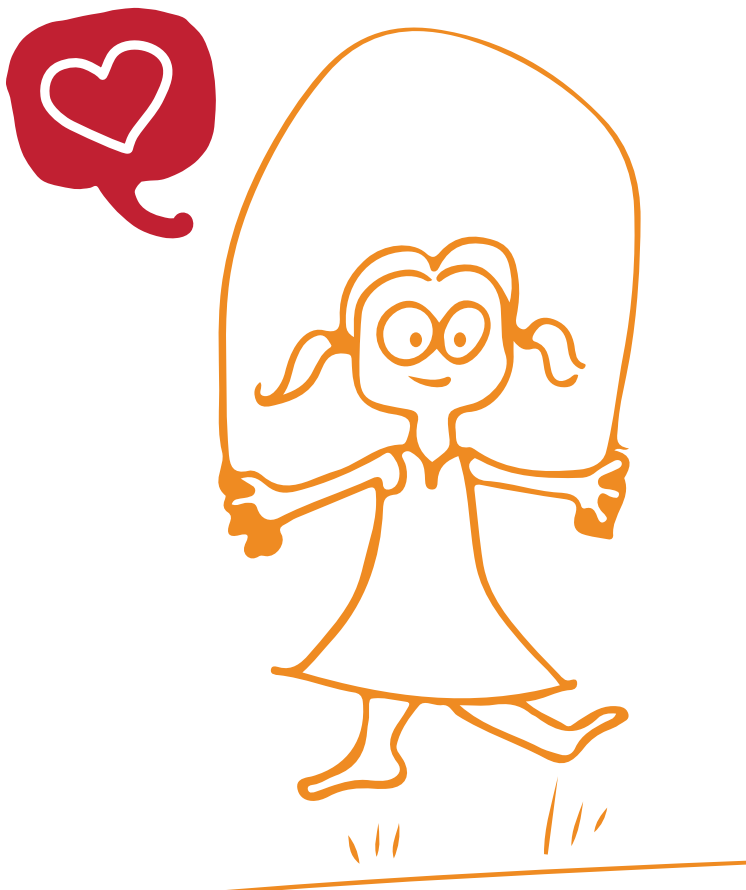
Chapter 8: How do you enjoy your children?



Children give so much to enrich the lives of the adults around them:

- Unconditional love and admiration just for being you.
- Trust that you are the strongest, wisest and bravest person in the world.
- The chance to be a hero.
- The chance to be a child again through sharing in the magic and wonder of their emerging world.
- The chance to experience an intensity of emotion and range of strengths and skills that may otherwise have remained hidden from you.
- The chance to reflect on your own values, attitudes and assumptions about the world.
- The chance to re-experience the joy and pleasure to be found in children's play.
- The chance to share in their fun and their laughter.
- The chance to revisit your own childhood.
- The chance to take time out from being a grown up.

After you have watched this chapter reflect on the following questions:



Chapter 9: Conclusion



There is no recipe for parenting. It's normal to sometimes question yourself and how best to parent your children.

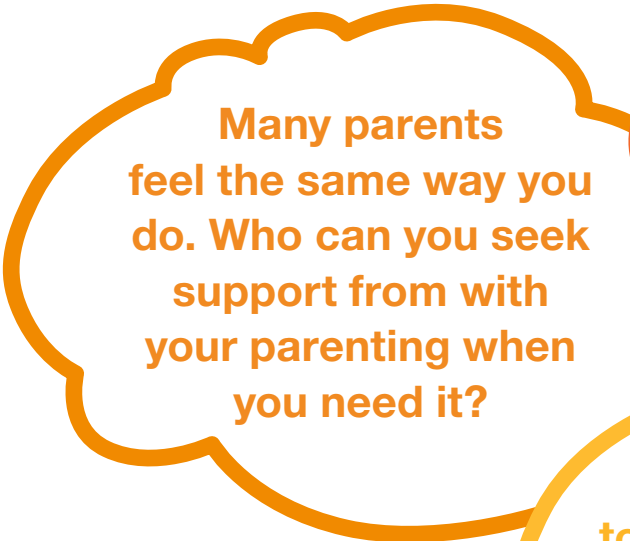
The more we understand ourselves and our children the better able are we to parent and support them.

Think about significant things that happened to you as a child and reflect on how they have influenced your life and relationships.


Try walking in your child's shoes for a while and understand his or her experience of the world. How does it feel to be so small when everyone is so big? What is it like to be unable to find the words to say how you feel?

Parenting requires a willingness to reflect on what we are doing and change the things we are not happy with. Parenting is not always an easy job. Remember that you are not alone. All parents feel like you do at some stage in their parenting. We all need support and assistance in our parenting at different times.

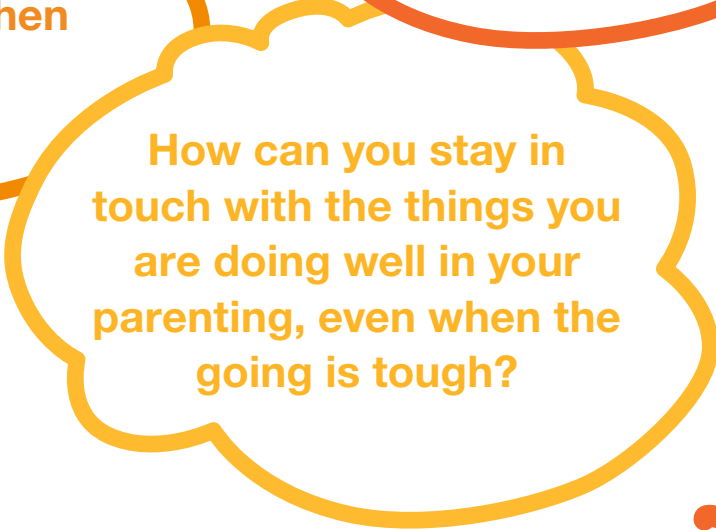
After you have watched this chapter reflect on the following questions:



Many parents feel the same way you do. Who can you seek support from with your parenting when you need it?



What are you taking away from this DVD into your parenting?



How can you stay in touch with the things you are doing well in your parenting, even when the going is tough?



Acknowledgements



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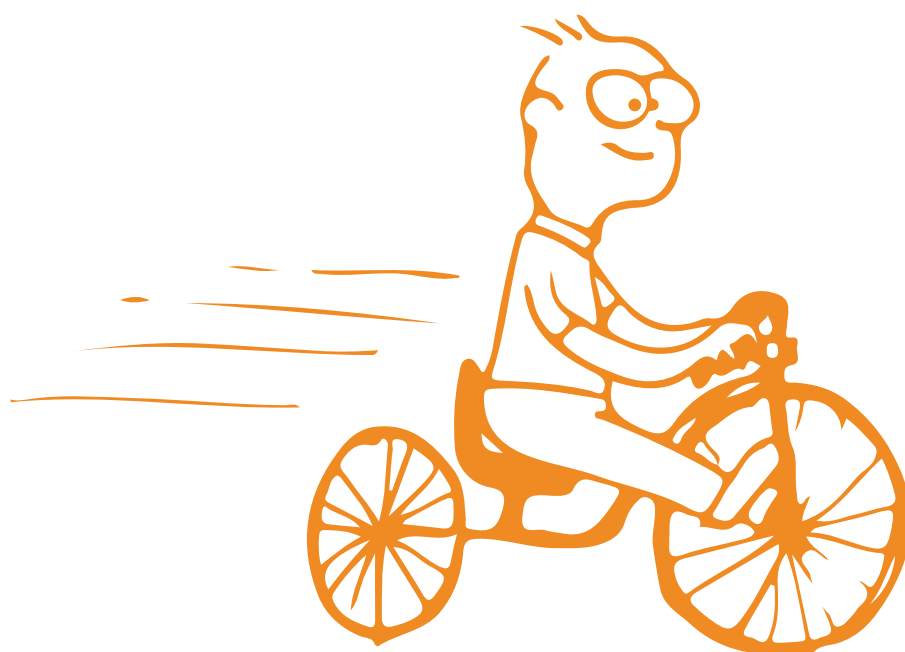
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**For more information about parenting
visit bringingupgreatkids.org**

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