

S.K.I.P

Conscious Parenting

A RESOURCE FOR SUPPORTERS OF PARENTS

Module One



Module One: This is one of a series of SKIP modules which introduce supporters of parents and caregivers to key findings from recent research on parenting practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

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Introduction to SKIP

VISION

All children in New Zealand are raised in a positive way, with parents and caregivers who feel confident about managing children's behaviour as part of a loving, nurturing relationship.

VALUES

SKIP will:

- be positive and non-judgmental
- affirm parents and caregivers' expertise and experience
- be sensitive to the complexity and stress of family life
- emphasise links between child development and behaviour
- focus on the whole child, including where they live, who they live with and their environment.

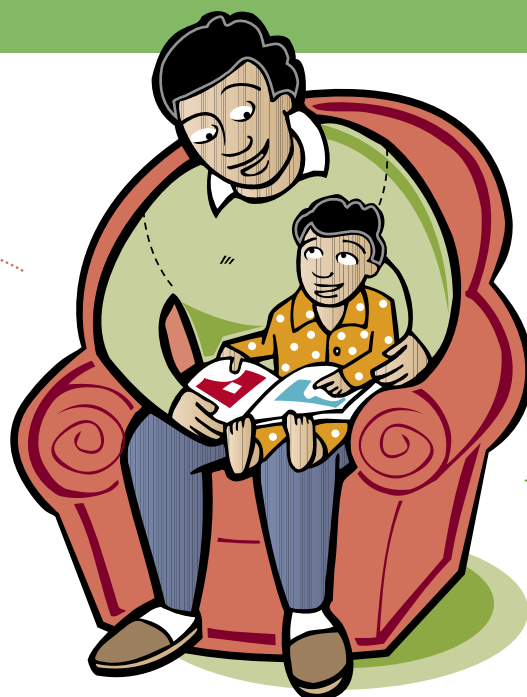
OBJECTIVES

- Increase the opportunities for communities to provide positive parenting.
- Increase the consistency and application of knowledge about effective non-physical discipline within organisations working with parents, caregivers and children.
- Increase the number of parents and caregivers who are confident, skilled and knowledgeable about using effective non-physical discipline.

SKIP supports parents and caregivers to raise children in a positive way, using effective non-physical discipline that includes love and nurture and limits and boundaries.

SKIP is doing this in three ways.

- It is supporting local community groups to promote positive parenting through a Local Initiatives Fund.
- It is working with national organisations to build capacity to support parents and caregivers.
- It has developed resources for parents and caregivers and the organisations working with them.



Introduction to SKIP Modules

Components



Research says...



Reflective questions



Tips for exercises



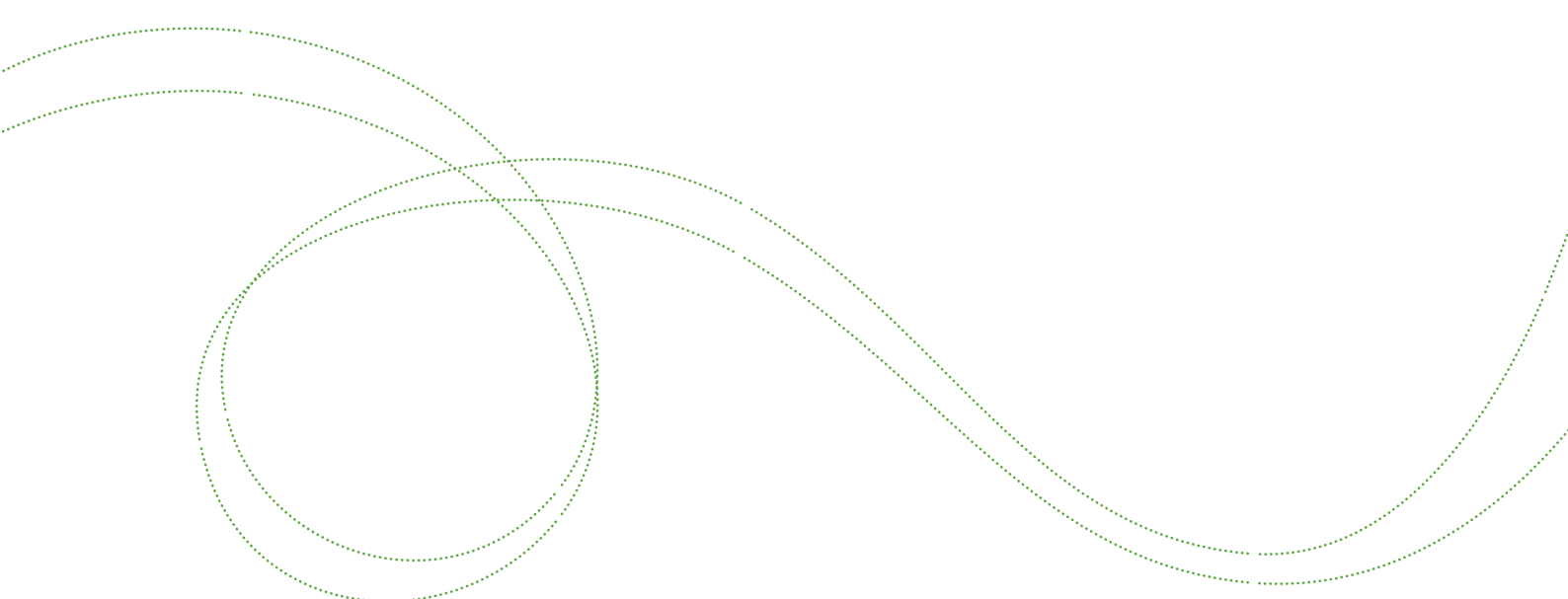
Resources

The SKIP modules have been developed for organisations supporting parents and caregivers.

The modules have been split into several sections so they can be used in a number of ways. For example:

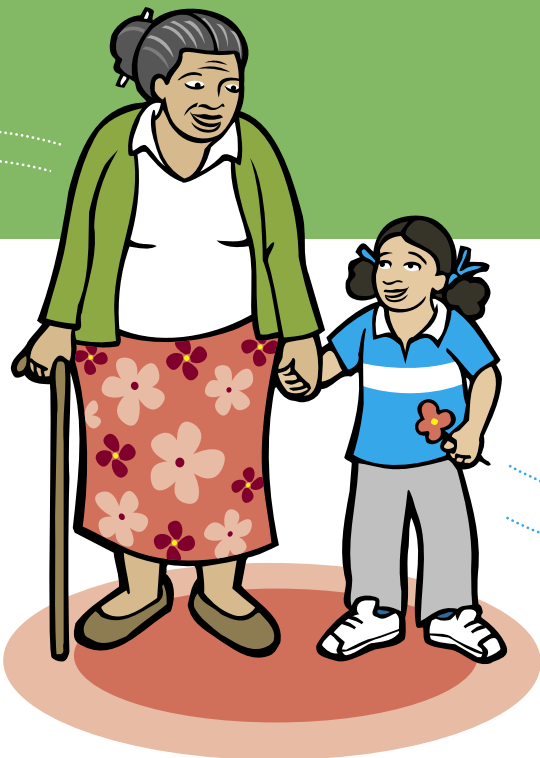
- as the the basis of staff training
- to inform or train parents
- they can be used alongside the SKIP parent pamphlets,
- sections can be used as handouts in existing training programmes
- they can be used to develop local resources.

Thank you to Jenny Hay and her colleagues from Parents Inc.



Conscious Parenting

Parenting is one of the most rewarding and challenging jobs there is. However, children do not come with a manual of instructions. Parents need support and encouragement in this valuable role.





What happens during childhood has a lifelong effect on children's happiness and success.

CIC Research Page 4

How many parents will identify with the following scenario?

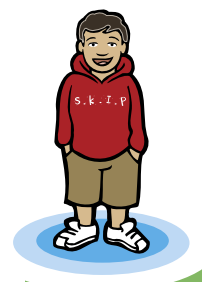
You are in the supermarket and your five-year-old son is whining for lollies. It's late, you are tired and hungry and the queue is long. Before you are even aware of it, you hear yourself using the language and tone that you had hoped you would never resort to.

"Just wait till we get home. I'm sick of your nagging and whining. How could you be so ungrateful?"

Your child looks defiant and hurt. You feel bad but justified in what you said. The part you dislike the most is that you sounded just like your dad. You never intended to follow suit!

This is a story many parents will identify with. What surprises us is that we find ourselves doing things that were done to us, even though we didn't like it when we were children.

In the video *Parent Voices* one mother shares how she responded to the cries of her son. Understanding dawned for this mother when she shared with her own mother about her violent reaction and her mother replies with "That's what used to happen to you."



Resource

Parent Voices is on DVD and video. It can be used in training, for personal viewing, or given to parents and caregivers to help them reflect on their own parenting.

What happened in parents' own childhoods is often carried through into their own families. Sometimes this is fine – but sometimes negative or destructive examples of parenting are also carried through, and parents can be horrified and ashamed that they are behaving like their own parents.

What matters is that when we care for children we have some choice about how we do it.

SKIP calls this conscious parenting.

What is conscious parenting?

Conscious parenting means becoming deliberate and intentional about what we want for the children we care for.

It's making choices about what we bring from our own families and what we choose to leave out. This pro-active style is essential in establishing healthy patterns for family functioning. It enables parents and caregivers to choose and honour what was good and respectful in their own childhood. It helps them to make choices that are good for them and the children for whom they care.

One of the challenges to conscious parenting is the belief that parenting comes naturally: that it's automatic and you should just know what to do. This belief doesn't allow us to learn from our own and others' experiences.



The Five Stages of Change



SKIP research identified five stages of becoming conscious about parenting practices.

Gravitas

STAGE ONE: Unaware

STAGE TWO: Becoming Aware

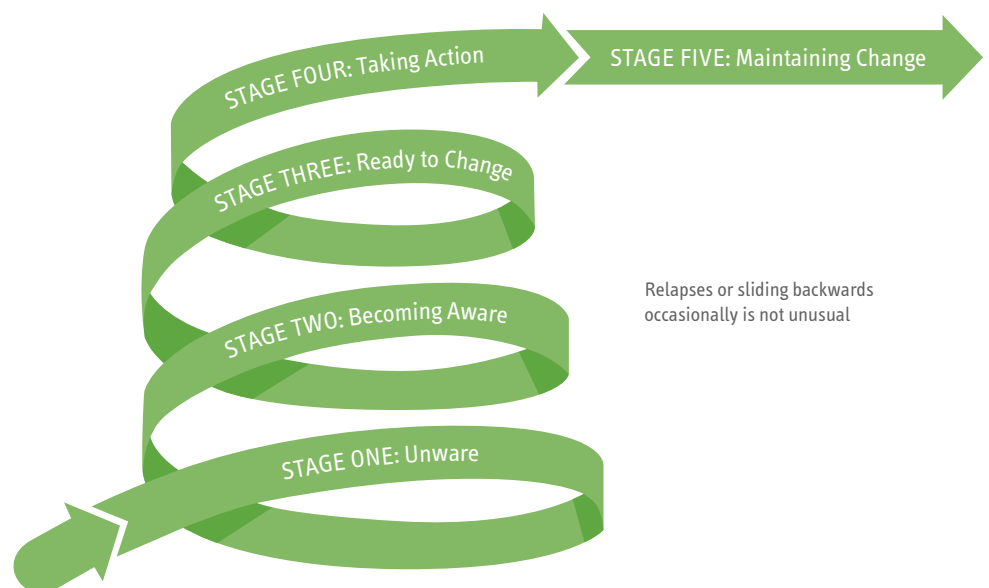
STAGE THREE: Ready to Change

STAGE FOUR: Taking Action

STAGE FIVE: Maintaining Change

These stages form spirals of learning. We move through the stages at different times, in different ways, on different matters. There is nothing neat or tidy about it. Ideally, we are continually identifying areas in our parenting that we have not been aware of and making decisions about what we want to keep and what we want to change.

Familiarity with this spiral of learning is a prompt to us to keep on learning and changing what we do as a result of what we learn. When we've found something that works, we'll add it to our practice, then start thinking about another area of our parenting that could be changed.



STAGE ONE: Unaware

Taking parenting for granted, reacting instinctively, repeating own experiences, probably resistant to change.

When we're at this stage as a parent or caregiver, we probably take parenting for granted. We'll do what 'comes naturally'. We'll tend to be instinctive which often equates to being reactive. We don't reflect on our behaviour towards our children or understand our reactions to them. We tend to repeat our own experiences of parenting. Another name for this stage is pre-contemplation.

At this stage, we'll often be resistant to making changes in our practice. Readiness to change involves becoming aware of a particular behaviour.

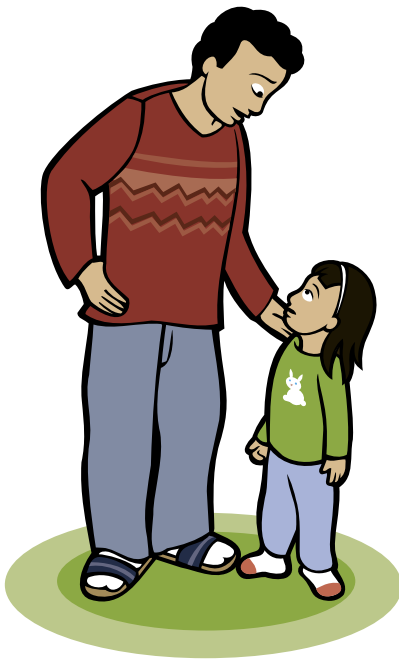
Some parents and caregivers will have pressures on them that need to be addressed before they are open to considering their parenting practices.

How can we support parents and caregivers to start thinking about their parenting practices?

SKIP research suggests the following methods may lead to change:

- education (e.g. learning that physical discipline can be harmful)
- awareness and consciousness raising (learning to reflect on how they were disciplined and how this affects their relationships with their children)
- up-to-date information (learning that physical discipline is not used as commonly as they thought).

Gravitas



Working with parents and caregivers

- Address the immediate concerns of the parent or caregiver.
- Listen and observe carefully watch out for 'windows of opportunities' – moments when a parent expresses dissatisfaction with the outcome of a particular parenting strategy or a concern about their own behaviour.
If this occurs, sympathise with the person and use your own experience to suggest something different. Talk about the desired outcome.
- Use any opportunity to expose parents to discussions about parenting, situations where they can observe other models of parenting and make use of TV or newspaper items e.g. "Did you see that item about ... what did you think of it?"
- Pick up on the results of any positive parenting actions, for example, the parent may nod or smile at a child who comes when they're called. If the child looks happy to have received the smile, point out how nice it is to see the child's response.

- 1 If you are a parent think about times when you reacted to children rather than acting consciously towards them. What helped you become aware of your own practice?
- 2 If you are not a parent, think about how you interact with children. Have you considered how you do this or are your interactions instinctive?



STAGE TWO: Becoming Aware

Becoming aware of how you parent, thinking about why you're doing what you do, looking for some short-term alternatives for when things go wrong.

The second step towards conscious parenting is becoming aware that change is possible – taking time to think about your own parenting experiences and how you care for children. Another name for this stage is the contemplation stage.

Usually this stage begins with a trigger – watching a TV news item on child abuse, overhearing a discussion about parenting, or becoming concerned about your behaviour or a child's behaviour. The trigger creates an opportunity for us to think about why we parent the way we do.



Reflective questions for parent support workers: Before working with parents and caregivers, do these exercises for yourself (if you haven't already). It is difficult to support someone to become conscious of their own practices if you have not done this yourself.

Our own parents

We can assist parents and caregivers in their journey by asking questions about the families they came from. We can help parents identify and categorise what they did and didn't like and why.

- What did you appreciate about what your parents did for you?
- What memories do you have from your family?
- What are some of the good things that you would like to repeat in your family?
- What are the aspects of your childhood that you don't want to see repeated?
- What kind of parent would you like to be? Why?
- What are some things you'd like to do differently?

The feelings that parents are left with will alert them to whether they want to follow suit or adopt a different way.

For some, this will raise difficult memories, but they can be used positively as they plan for the future. Making sense of our own childhoods is vital in the parenting journey. It is in that process that parenting becomes more conscious.

The experiences of your parents

Some parents have found it helpful to spend time with their own parents talking about what it was like for them when they were growing up in an earlier generation. This offers the opportunity to see what our parents faced, the difficulties and challenges they had which in turn makes it easier for us to understand why our parents functioned the way they did.

- Did they feel listened to?
- What was the atmosphere in their family like?
- How did they know what the rules were?
- How were they disciplined?
- When they were disciplined, did they understand the reasons?
- When they were disciplined, did they feel their dignity was still intact?
- What freedoms and responsibilities did they have?
- What did they do for fun in the family?
- Were there any special traditions or celebrations?

What do parents want for their children?



Parents are generally united in their desire to achieve the best possible outcomes for their children through their parenting.

Gravitas

Parents and caregivers are looking for practical ways of connecting with children and providing a framework of good memories.





Suggest that parents and caregivers create a list of simple and pleasurable activities that encourage them to enjoy their children and do things together. The list can be attached to the fridge with a SKIP magnet as a reminder of possibilities. You could write each one on a card and distribute them as group discussion starters.

- Read a story
- Play a game on the floor
- Make them laugh
- Have some cuddles
- Share a family meal
- Go for a walk
- Have an ice-cream together
- Spend time in the library
- Teach them something new
- Do some cooking with them
- Sing a song with them
- Plant flowers together
- Have a silly game
- Include children in family outings, fono and hui
- Honour children for an achievement
- Display one of their pictures
- Have an overnight camp out with them
- Praise them in front of others
- Spend ten minutes focused on their activity
- Show them something you treasure
- Go through a photo album
- Take a photo
- Write something in a diary for them when they're older.

Resource

SKIP fridge magnets are attractive small magnets with short messages on them.

Hopes and dreams

From here, encourage parents to look to the future. Parents have dreams and hopes for their children that they may have internalised but not yet spoken of. Most parents want the very best for their children but are unsure of how to achieve it.



Working with parents and caregivers

Use thought-provoking questions to help clarify issues for parents and caregivers:

- What kind of relationship do you want with your children?
- What sort of person do you want your child to grow into?
- What type of vision do you have for your family's future?
- What picture would you like your child to have of their upbringing?

STAGE THREE: Ready for change

Ready to recognise your own patterns and parenting style, wanting to make changes, open to examples and ideas from others, setting some goals.



There is no one model which is the best for influencing all parents. Models which are based on the realities of family lives, treat parents as equals and partners, and recognise the strengths and skills that parents have, rather than try to fix up what is wrong with them, are more likely to be effective.

CIC 2004: 27

We can use the analogy of a road journey to demonstrate the steps needed to bring about change. The first requirement is to know where you are. Becoming aware of what they want for their children helps parents determine where they want to go. The broad analysis of parenting strengths and styles that follows can really help parents work out where they are as parents. With this information, they can make choices about the route they want to follow. For example, parents who have a tendency to set rigid rules without giving reasons to their children, may use this insight into their parenting style to see other possibilities for achieving the best for children in their care.

Identifying parenting styles

Describe the three main styles of parenting and explain that although every parent/caregiver is unique (we have different genes, backgrounds, stresses and reasons for behaving the way we do) we usually have no difficulty in recognising that our parenting style fits into one or a combination of the following three broad categories: authoritarian, permissive, or authoritative.

Authoritarian

This style is characterised by strict rules which are rigidly enforced, along with unquestioning obedience and respect for authority. Methods of discipline tend to be harsh and punitive. Other words for this unbending style are "Sergeant Major" or "brick wall" parents.

Parents often find themselves in this groove because they want their children to learn important family values and to succeed in life. Of course there's nothing wrong with that! The important thing here is *how* they go about this task.

Very often it can seem that the parents give instructions and orders (followed by lots of reminders). Their children are either listening or ignoring them, and the latter is likely to result in punishment.

Authoritarian parents usually insist on receiving respect at all times from their children – but it may be optional for parents to show it in return! Children of authoritarian parents tend to be dependent, easily led, have low self-esteem and eventually are more likely to reject their parents and their values.

The downside of the authoritarian style is that children may be:

- encouraged to be increasingly passive (the parents do all of their thinking for them)
- deprived of the opportunity (through working things out for themselves) to learn how capable they really are
- slower to build their self confidence
- deprived of the learning that comes from failing sometimes, and thereby their resourcefulness is reduced
- likely to feel conditionally loved
- likely to build a self-belief that they are not trustworthy or capable
- experiencing an increased level of anxiety
- uncomfortable or unsure in their independent behaviour
- likely to believe that the smaller must respect the bigger, but not necessarily the other way around
- frustrated in striving for independence if they are over-supervised
- rebellious and ultimately contemptuous of authority they experience as harsh and unfair.

Eventually many of the features of this style are used by the child back to the parent. We call it “parenting” when the grown-ups do it – but tantrums when our little children do it, and rebellion when our teens do it!



Permissive

This style is characterised by a lack of boundaries and limits. Permissive parents often avoid conflict at all costs and will back down if it looks like the child is getting upset. These parents prefer to rescue their children and do the thinking for them, hoping that it will improve the relationship. This style often results in children feeling insecure and abandoned.

Parents may find themselves parenting this way just because they were parented with the authoritarian style and wish to do it differently. They want to avoid the shouting and the aggressive atmosphere they knew, and they love their kids and want them to be happy.

Permissive parents are trying hard to show respect for their children – but it seems that the children have the option as to whether or not they will return the respect. Parents often give in to their kids' demands, just to keep the peace.

Other names for this style are "jellyfish" or "helicopter" parents.

The downside of the permissive style is that children may be:

- limited in their learning about tolerating frustration
- insecure and overly dependent
- slower to develop their problem solving ability and persistence
- hampered in their decision making progress
- obstructed in their learning about their influence on the behaviour of others
- slowed in their progress of learning to respect the rights of others
- deprived of the satisfaction of achieving by themselves, if parents step in and give their children everything they want
- hindered in their learning about accountability for actions.



Authoritative

This style is characterised by firm setting and sticking to limits, but authoritative parents are able to allow children more freedom in their behaviour while still setting clear standards of behaviour. Authoritative parents and caregivers will use reason and will listen to the views of children; they are sensitive to children's needs and views; they use praise and are clear in their expectations of children.

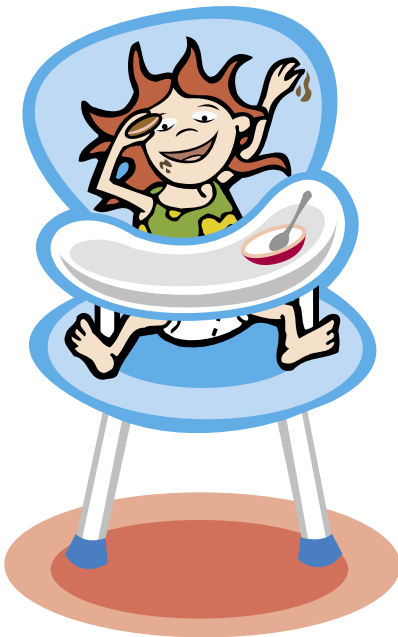
This style of parent is also called a "parent coach" or "backbone parent". Children of authoritative parents tend to be secure, responsible, self-disciplined, and function with a healthy self-esteem.

Parents using this style are guided by mutual respect. If respect is flowing in both directions then there are never unhelpful or unhealthy side effects.

Is there a downside to authoritative parenting?

The good news is that the research shows that this set of tools produces children who:

- are self motivated
- have developed internal discipline
- can communicate their wants and needs clearly
- have good self esteem
- know what they want and how to get it
- respect others.



Resource

Barbara Coloroso has defined these parenting styles extensively in her book *Kids are Worth it*.

Find the best fit

Obviously it is too simplistic to think that we only fit into one style. Many parents will operate in more than one style depending on other factors like fatigue, the amount of support they are getting and the level of stress they are experiencing. However, parents and caregivers, with a little assistance, readily identify the best fit: the patterns of behaviour they naturally lean towards and can then make progress towards a style that has better outcomes for their children.

Using the road map analogy again, we find ourselves at different places on the map, in different vehicles, going at different speeds. This makes it impossible to give prescriptive “one-size-fits-all” parenting advice.

If a parent finds themselves backing down and fearful of rejection from their children, it can help if they see how children thrive on knowing there are appropriate boundaries that will be consistently upheld.

Tips for exercises

Working with parents and caregivers

- Support parents to identify their parenting style.
- Stress that no style is bad but the authoritative or democratic style has been shown to be the most effective.
- Stress that we all use a mixture of styles and that is fine.
- Work with parents to identify one practice they would like to change.



STAGE FOUR: Taking Action

Making positive changes, recognising the things that make a difference, working towards goals, able to reflect on and assess what you're doing.

Parents and caregivers function better when they have a clear idea of what to do to achieve their aims. Here is a job description for authoritative parenting.

Authoritative parents and caregivers show the following skills and abilities:

- Parents guide children. They show children how to do things and if a child gets it wrong, they are happy to show them again.
- Parents are role models. Children take more note of what we do than what we say. An instruction like, "Talk to your brother nicely", will be evaluated against how we talk to them.
- Parents encourage their children. When a task is hard for a child, they use encouraging words like "You have made a good start. Well done."
- Parents inspire their children. "You can do it!" "You've got what it takes." This helps children feel capable.
- Parents love unconditionally. They love their children for who they are, not for what they want them to be. If their child doesn't do something well, they are not shamed or blamed for it.
- Parents have fun with their children. They know fun is the secret ingredient in families who enjoy each other. They have time to get down on the floor with them, go to the park with them and read stories to them.
- Parents know they get it wrong sometimes and can say sorry. This models responsibility and empathy, and helps children learn to say sorry themselves.

If parents are helped to see that these qualities in a parent produce good outcomes in children, they are more likely to consciously journey towards becoming more of an authoritative parent – more of the time.



- 1 How can you use this job description with parents you work with?
- 2 What are examples of authoritative parenting that you can think of – in your own parenting experience if you are a parent? In the parenting of those you work with? Make a list so you become more aware of the positive parenting that is happening even in quite negative environments.
- 3 In what ways is your work environment authoritative rather than authoritarian or permissive?



Working with parents and caregivers

- Acknowledge that parents may have unmet needs and that these will affect their ability to meet their children's needs. Caring for children often brings our unmet needs to the surface and this can be a catalyst to getting help – it can be a great opportunity for growth and healing. It would be more appropriate to suggest that these be explored in another setting.
- Encourage parents to identify one practice they want to change. Help them to work out how they are going to change it and then set targets. For example, they may want to stop yelling at their child. They will need to plan to try and stop before they yell, take three breaths and work out a different response. Work out typical situations and how they could respond differently.
- Encourage parents to identify things they are doing well. They could record these in a notebook, discuss them with a friend, or simply give themselves a positive message: "Didn't I handle that well! Now I know what to do next time." Some parents might like to give themselves stars every time they remember to praise or encourage their child, where they explain the reason for a disciplinary action or where they apologise to a child. When they collect 20 stars they could give themselves a treat.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to say more positive things than negative things to their children each day. Try putting 10 coins in one pocket at the start of the day and transferring one to an opposite pocket every time you say something positive to a child. All coins need to be in the opposite pocket by the end of the day.
- Remember that there may be other adults or older children in the family who don't like the changes a parent is making. Work with parents to help them come up with ways to handle negativity ("That's not fair – you never did that when you were little!"). This could include showing the negative adults parts of the SKIP video or establishing some informal support networks.



STAGE FIVE: Maintaining Change

Internalising new thinking and practices, reflecting and adapting as you go, seeing the big picture and keeping the long term goals in mind.

Parenting practices seldom change overnight. Most things take time and go back and forward. We need to be practical about this and not try to make changes we cannot maintain – or think we've failed because we didn't manage to apply our new plan immediately.

Change takes time

Let parents know that change takes time. It usually takes a series of steps.

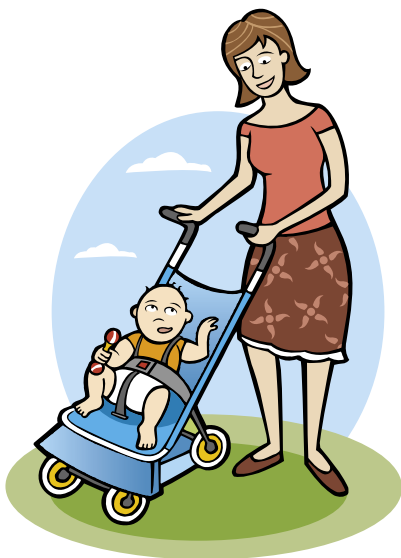
First, parents and caregivers need to:

- decide on a change
- practise
- assess effects.

Next, encourage parents and caregivers to:

- reflect on the changed practice or a failure to change the practice
- make further attempts
- see the big picture and not be distracted or put off by small failures.

Ensure that parents have the support to be successful in their attempts to change. Check there are adequate support systems in place, adequate knowledge of alternative ways of doing something, and a realistic picture of how much time and effort will be required. Help them to work out ways to overcome any resistance or opposition to change they may have from other adults in the family.



Learning is a cyclical process

Simply understanding that there is a progression is very helpful to parents. Though the length of time to achieve real change may seem daunting, understanding the reality of the process prevents disappointment when results are not instantaneous.

New ideas, new ways of talking to our children, and a new focus on supporting children rather than punishing them can all meet with resistance, not only from the parent but also from members of the close and wider family. The new ideas may conflict with cultural standards and society in general. This resistance to change usually subsides in the face of the undeniable benefits.

However, making changes in parenting practices takes time and effort. You need to be aware of:

- the range of parenting contexts and experiences that exist
- the likely difficulties of effecting change in these contexts
- the time and energy to implement positive parenting strategies
- the stress that making changes can bring
- the time parents and caregivers will need to absorb and integrate positive parenting practices into their lives.

Parents wanting to make changes will benefit from being aware of these factors.

Reflective questions

- 1 A parent wants to find a way of managing a two-year-old's tantrums. Think about the difficulties a parent may face in changing their reactions to a child's tantrums. Consider the environment, the reactions of the child, the pressures the parent may be under and the possibility of failures.
- 2 Think of times when you have tried to make a change in your own behaviour and it hasn't worked. What difficulties did you face? What strategies did you need to address the difficulties?



Empathy and understanding

For all those working with parents to support and strengthen their role, it is important to acknowledge the challenges and complexities of parenting. An understanding, non-judgemental and empathetic approach is vital to secure trust and to help a parent make change. The research describes the state of “self efficacy” that is essential to progress:

“Self efficacy is about parents and caregivers having the confidence and belief that they can successfully undertake desired actions and behaviour. Self efficacy may be enhanced through persuasion, modelling and successfully experiencing new behaviours.

Strategies that will build self efficacy include:

- working from existing strengths/competencies
- using persuasion and encouragement
- using role models
- encouraging observational learning
- giving high levels of feedback and acknowledging changes achieved
- working at establishing the desired behaviour as the accepted social norm.”

Adapted from Gravitas



Think about your last three interactions with parents or caregivers. What judgements did you make? How could you have avoided making judgements? Work out what you could say and/or do in each situation you identified that would be supportive of the parent or caregiver while encouraging change.

Rather than presenting 'don't do' messages, ... [add] to the existing skills, knowledge and appropriate practices already undertaken by parents.

Gravitas

Identifying parents' strengths

Parents need to know what they are doing well and this should be acknowledged so that they are able to believe in themselves as their child's first and most important teacher.

Support systems can help transition parents through these phases in order for change to become lasting and effective.

One tactic is to suggest to parents they make themselves a variety of cards that identify their current strengths and give them options for new areas that they would like to incorporate into their family.

These cards could be called "Our Family's Strengths" or "Characteristics of Strong Families". Examples are listed below:

- We celebrate each other's successes.
- Home is a safe place.
- We accept that each person is different.
- We play together.
- We eat our meals together.
- We have fun in this family.
- We speak to each respectfully.
- We communicate our love to each other.
- We can say sorry.
- We take care of our bodies.
- We keep trying even when it is hard.
- We give each other hugs.
- We support each other in the good and the bad times.
- We speak positively to each other.
- We share our problems.



These cards could also be used to help parents explore their past and their plans for the future. The following questions could be asked individually or in group sessions.

- Which cards most represent what you experienced as a child?
- Which cards express your family now?
- Which cards would you like to express your family in the next year?
- Are there times when your family faces strife? Which strengths are most useful then?
- Which cards would you like to learn more about?
- Is there a card that reminds you of something that happened in your family?

Support and Encouragement



Simply providing information about alternatives without attending to the wider factors likely to support successful implementation (e.g. skill enhancement, creating a supportive social environment, reducing parental stressors) will be unlikely to lead to significant and lasting behaviour change.

Gravitas

Everyone needs support and encouragement when making changes. Anyone working with parents who are making changes needs to watch carefully for any sign of change and encourage parents to do the same.

Using other discipline methods

Parents want positive, effective, simple and dignified methods of getting reasonable compliance from their children. They want to know what works, and help to identify what is unsuccessful and counterproductive.

Parents are likely to let go of a belief or way of doing something only when they are convinced they have a better alternative.

Toolbox 0-5 Facilitator Guide

Because of the huge variety of personalities, family dynamics and scenarios it is important to offer parents a range of solutions that can be used in a variety of whānau, families and situations. With a “smorgasbord” of strategies available, whānau, parents and caregivers can choose a technique which suits the temperament of children, the culture of their whānau or family and the style in which the parent or caregiver is keen to function.

Key providers and parents should know some of the proven, effective strategies such as Time Out or The Thinking Chair. Note that these and other strategies need to be used very carefully: it's easy for a stressed parent or caregiver to overdo a strategy (for example, using time out too often or for too long) and lose any benefits it may have had.

When parents say that they have tried a particular strategy and that it has not worked, what has often happened is that they have lacked the support or the stamina they needed to be consistent, or they have not fully understood how to use that particular strategy. These parents can be greatly helped to use a strategy more effectively by learning in a group situation, or one on one, where support to try new techniques is given and the outcomes are subsequently shared and reflected on.



Working with parents and caregivers

Introduce the idea that everyone needs to become aware of parenting possibilities

Many parents find it difficult to acknowledge that all is not well within their family. Many have the notion that everyone should innately possess all the parenting skills they need and believe there is a stigma associated with asking for help. It is very encouraging for these people to learn that parenting is a challenge for all parents, and every parent grapples with a sense of inadequacy at times.





Parents can feel reluctant to seek parenting assistance so it will be important that any stigma attached to doing this is reduced. Reluctance to seek support may in part reflect the extent to which society assumes parents have sufficient parenting skills and the extent to which parenting can be an 'unconscious' activity.

Gravitas

Offer options for support

Encourage parents to seek help, get good resources, go to courses, talk to friends and generally bring parenting out into the arena where it is more widely accepted that all parents need encouragement, upskilling, ongoing follow-up and support.

Other sources of support are mentors, whānau, churches, family and social networks, role models from television, ideas from books and magazines as well as courses that parents can attend.

Support the valuing of parenting

The role of a parent is a valuable and challenging one. It deserves focus, time and energy. As we are able to lift the profile of the incredibly important role parents play, we help to shift parents' and societies' concept of this vital role.

Connect parents

Parenting in isolation is very hard work. When parents formally or informally get together, they are able to discuss the challenges and issues they face. This is enormously helpful in allowing parents to see that other parents face difficulties as well. It also helps parents problem solve and share strategies that have worked for them.

Suggest opportunities through early childhood education

Attending an early childhood learning environment can offer significant support to a parent. As one mother says, "I found Playcentre just became so important to me – learning how to deal with things in a different way."

Identify parent resources

Making available a range of parenting resources can give parents information that supports and strengthens them, and can even give them specialist advice for difficult problems that might not be available from their normal networks.

Identify parenting courses

Parenting courses assist parents in a number of ways. They offer opportunities for parents to form relationships and connections with others. Courses also give a platform for discussions that many parents find invaluable for gaining new insights into their own parenting.

One parent reported on the six week course she attended:

I believe this course is especially useful for empowering adults without disempowering children by encouraging healthy, fun relationships within families so the need to misbehave disappears. It also provides various practical strategies that may be employed in difficult situations. The course will have positive effects wherever its principles are taken on board.

Courses also offer an understanding of developmental stages in children, what needs children have and how they can be met, how to discipline effectively and with dignity and how to create a childhood of good memories.

Different parenting courses are available in different areas. Examples are Toolbox Parenting Groups, new mothers support groups, Barnardos and Parent Centre courses and Playcentre.

There are specific courses for parents in need of help with anger management, lone parenting etc. As well as interactive small group courses, larger seminars such as Parents Inc. Hot Tips seminars can give parents a wide range of new ideas and encouragement. Some men especially would be unlikely to seek one-on-one help or attend a 'touchy feely' small group course but can cope with the anonymity of being in a 'crowd'. Large seminars can often be the first step to change, by making parents aware that there are other options and that change is possible.

The strength of courses and seminars is seen when they provide follow up support and reinforcement.

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A Final Word...

Conscious parenting is about making thoughtful and intentional decisions on what outcomes we want for children and we can do to support them to achieve these outcomes. It is about the atmosphere and feeling we want to create.

Conscious parenting is about choosing what we do and don't want to do and what we will do instead. It is having an awareness of our family of origin and the imprint that it has had on us. Then it is about creating a new imprint that is unique to our family, our culture and what we want for our family. It uses the positives from the past, it's free from the negative things that have not worked in the past and it's full of ideas, ideals, choices and practical solutions that are positive, empowering and achievable!

There are some key questions that will empower parents and caregivers on this journey.

- What do you remember about your own childhood?
- What do you intend to repeat or delete from your family of origin?
- What experiences do you want your children to have?
- What do you want your children to say about you when they grow up and leave home?
- Who are your role models?
- Who are the role models of your children?
- What kind of parent do you want to be?
- What can you use to help you progress towards your goals?

As supportive agencies and professionals, our job is to lead, guide, encourage and support them to become the parent they want to be.

Contacts, Resources and References

Contacts

SKIP has a range of pamphlets for parents and resources for trainers. For more information email skipinfo@msd.govt.nz

Resources

- *SKIP resources – for example, SKIP pamphlets, badges and fridge magnets.*
- *Parenting magazines e.g. Parents Inc, Treasures.*
- *'Kids are worth it' by Barbara Coloroso.*
- *'Of course I love you, NOW GO TO YOUR ROOM!' by Diane Levy.*
- *'Toddler Taming' by Dr Christopher Green.*

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References

The Discipline and Guidance of Children: A Summary | Research, Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago and the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

SKIP Research Report, Gravitas Research and Strategy and Ministry of Social Development.

Kids Are Worth It, Barbara Coloroso, Somerville House.

Conscious
Parenting