



Informing the National Framework 3rd Action Plan: Analysis of Initiatives with Community Awareness Raising Messages About Parenting

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The project

Commissioned by DSS July – Nov 2016

- Analysis of existing Australian initiatives with community awareness raising messages about the role of parenting in providing children with safe, supportive environments
- First 1000 days (conception - 2 years)

Project goal

Inform the development and dissemination of messages to raise community awareness of parenting and contribute to creating safe environments for children.

Project

- Identify and assess universal initiatives with community awareness raising messages about parenting practices
- Identify initiatives with messages that aimed to promote the health, wellbeing, development, learning and safety of children in the first 1000 days, and/or improve parent-child relationships

Methodology

- Identify relevant Australian initiatives: via stakeholder consultation and an online search
- Collate information about the initiatives
- Assess the initiatives in the context of the project
- Undertake a rapid evidence assessment (REA) to identify studies testing the effectiveness of messaging and communication with parents
- Identify evidence-informed ways of undertaking community awareness raising activities.

Identifying the relevant initiatives

What existing initiatives communicate with parents?

Of the relevant Australian initiatives, 125 met the inclusion criteria.

These initiatives were assessed against rating criteria for comparison.

This was reduced to a shortlist of 14

Examples of shortlisted initiatives

- Better Health Channel
- Health Direct
- Kinderling
- Love Talk Sing Read Play
- My Health, Learning and Development
- Raising Children Network.

Rapid evidence assessment

What is the existing evidence about the effectiveness of messaging to parents and communicating about the first 1000 days?

Identify studies to aid assessment of shortlisted initiatives and inform community awareness raising initiatives.

Database searches - 53 papers that met the REA inclusion criteria.

All but two found a positive effect for communicating/messaging with parents in areas such as **building parent knowledge, confidence and behaviour.**

Findings from the REA

While this type of messaging/communicating with parents appears to be effective for improving outcomes, our analyses did **not reveal any clear patterns regarding which communication channels or messages were more effective or resulted in better evidence for improving parents or child outcomes.**

To supplement the database searches, we also sourced evidence-informed reports and papers containing information about strategies for messaging and communicating with parents.

Using the evidence-informed reports and the studies identified by the REA, a series of characteristics of messages were identified.

Attributes of initiatives

Credibility	Delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use evidence-based messaging• Provide information from a credible source• Up-to-date information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Combine different strategies/modes for the delivering messages• Encourage engagement and active learning• Use visuals• Ensure information is easy to find & navigate
Diversity	Tone
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cater for different ages and stages• Cater for diversity• Gender inclusive• Cater for a range of different caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plain language• Don't patronise• Convey a message of parents as partners with government agencies• Use empathy and create connection• Use encouraging and non-judgemental tone• Avoid talking about problems without advancing solutions.

Attributes of initiatives (cont)

Content

- Focus on positive new habits
- Build on parent self-efficacy
- Emphasise parenting as a learned skill and build on understanding of how skills develop
- Explain and advance contextual influences on parenting
- Advance thinking about the need for parental support
- Include practical tips and strategies.

Responding to the Action Plan

Activities to raise community awareness will need to:

- Capture the attention of parents and the wider community
- Deliver messages that are understandable and credible
- Deliver messages that influence the beliefs and understanding of the audience
- Establish a context that leads towards the desired goals

Context of the implications

Evidence about key messages and channels is inconclusive

There are characteristics likely to advance messages and community awareness, and those likely to detract.

Some implications

Developing messages

- Use empirically tested values to build understanding and help to increase public support for issues
- Apply a positive reasonable tone
- Use metaphors
- Trustworthy messenger
- Reflect diversity & cultural inclusiveness

Some Implications

Messaging about parenting

- Parenting skills can be learnt and that they play a key role in child development
- 2-way nature of parenting
- Build recognition of how parents enable child development

Some implications

Communication channels

- Use existing initiatives
- Use multiple communication channels to deliver messages
- Monitor and/or trial initiatives that use mobile phones for messaging

Campaign development

- Develop core campaign messages – then differential for distinct audiences
- Develop a long-term commitment to the dissemination of messages to help ensure that messages are established, reinforced and endure over time

Conclusion

Communicating about parenting and early childhood development is complex.

Effective messaging needs to build an understanding of – and change attitudes towards – parenting practices and the nature of child wellbeing and development.

Messaging needs to stimulate a recognition of the need for action and the motivation to engage in action.

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