

The Forgotten Parent

strengthening relationships between kids in care and their parents

Introduction

An emerging need and a dramatic increase in referrals over the past five years to parent education courses is for parents whose children who are in Out of Home Care. It is also apparent that those parents do not “sit well” in generic parenting groups. Their needs are vastly different from the wider community and anecdotal evidence suggests that little improvement is made in their parenting skills within this context.

How Do We Do It?

My Kids and Me is a 6 week psycho educational course with an additional 7th session where a Legal Aid Solicitor talks to the group.

Participants can be self referred or by their caseworkers. We assess each participant prior to the course to ensure there is a level of motivation to change, no untreated psychiatric illness and that drugs and alcohol are managed enough not to be an issue within the context of the group.

We **always** have two facilitators so that if necessary one can continue with the content and one can support participants if necessary. That helps keep everyone safe.

We run the course during the day; two hours per session with a break in the middle

We try to have about 10 people in each course

We have NO powerpoints

We have lots of discussion, process and creative activities

We don't “teach” parenting, we talk about relationships

We model positive communication

We challenge beliefs and discuss values

We encourage participants to share their “seeds of wisdom”

We make no promises and take no sides

We celebrate the small changes and the big insights

Course Outline

Session 1	How Did We Get Here
Session 2	What's it Like For You
Session 3	Looking After Yourself
Session 4	Talking and Listening
Session 5	Understanding the Legal System
Session 6	What's it Like For Your Kids
Session 7	Where to Now

My Kids and Me

Is a parenting program with a difference...

It has been written by a team of professionally qualified and experienced parent educators, counsellors and out of home care workers specifically for parents whose children are not living with them. They might be in kinship care or a foster placement and court orders may be for a permanent placement or for restoration.

The Process of Change

Change happens when trust is built. My Kids and Me Facilitators:

**Listen
Don't Judge
Question
Teach skills
Challenge**

Respect

Is the key to this program...

In facilitating this program over four years, feedback from both parents and facilitators overwhelmingly speak of an environment both within the wider community and within the professional system where the parents we work with in this program are not heard and have not felt respected.

When a parent (whose own experiences may include; childhood abuse, domestic and family violence, a history of drugs and alcohol, jail or homelessness) feels respected by the professionals they have been referred to – change happens!

Details

The course started in 2006 as a pilot project in partnership with the NSW Department of Community Services. Since then the course has evolved into its current format and involves a partnership between CatholicCare Sydney and CatholicCare Wollongong.

The course's main aims are to assist parents to recognise and understand how their life experiences have influenced their decisions and choices, how their behaviour impacts upon the people around them, particularly their children and to understand that even if their children are not restored to their care they have an important role to play in their children's lives. The course is highly experiential and continually challenges parents to look at themselves and their situations differently.

Eight courses have run in Sydney with a total of 60 participants. Of the 40 participants who provided information, 3 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 9 were born in a country other than Australia and 4 participants did not speak English as their main language. Courses have been run in Sydney's Inner West and South West and Nowra.

Overwhelmingly participants have been positive about the impact of the course.

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