

# Keeping children safe

**Jennifer Tung**

“Keeping Children Safe” is a six-session course that discusses Child Protection in the context of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and guides parents in the best ways to ensure their own children remain safe. It is suitable for caregivers of children of all ages.

The course examines the five types of abuse: physical, neglect, emotional, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. In each session there is a positive parenting section with strategies that parents can use to develop their own behaviour management skills. Protective behaviours are also discussed and are based on the child protection material that is taught in public schools. Parents are usually particularly interested in this section, as they are keen to know what their children are being taught and like to have activities they can do with their children at home.

## History and context

“Keeping Children Safe” was launched on 6 November 2001 by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Gillian Calvert who heartily endorsed the initiative. Parent groups have been run in three locations in NSW: Ermington, Shalvey and Wentworthville. One Train the Trainer has been run in Moree where more than one third of the participants were Aboriginal workers.

The program is suitable for all parents and caregivers including those who may struggle with low literacy, mild intellectual disability, difficulty managing their own or their children’s behaviour, those who have faced abuse in their own or children’s lives abuse or neglect from themselves and/or others.

## Feedback from group facilitators

Facilitating the groups is a great experience as parent reactions to the course are so positive. However it is necessary to have two leaders facilitating the program because of the sensitive nature of the issues that are discussed. At one centre, during the session on sexual abuse, the emotional tension in the room was high, escalated by the fact that over one third of the participants had personal experience with sexual abuse. The

Train the Trainer program also requires two leaders as it may bring up issues or memories for many people.

## Participant responses

Parents had very positive comments to make about the program. Some felt it would be suitable to be run in hospitals, pre-schools and elsewhere in the community.

Some of the comments made by parents are below:

- “The group has made me aware of all the different abuses, it has allowed me to overcome some of my fears and taught me that I as a parent can teach my children how to also be aware and to get help if needed.”
- “I learnt different ways to discipline children and to ask them how they are feeling and what is happening.”
- “I learnt how to keep my child safe.”
- “It made me more aware of what I say to my kids.”
- “I enjoyed learning how to be a better parent, listening to other people.”
- “It opened my eyes a lot.”

Based on pre and post evaluations completed by two of the groups there was a notable increase in parents knowledge of abuse and neglect and the New South Wales Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and also in how comfortable they feel talking with their children about safety issues. Most parents stated that they now have the knowledge to protect their children more adequately.

A groupwork manual is available for purchase from UnitingCare Burnside for \$60 (including GST and postage). This is all that is needed to run the course, however, for those in New South Wales, Train the Trainer in “Keeping Children Safe” will be run in various locations around the state. This course provides tips on running the course effectively and enhances group leadership skills. Assistance in running “Keeping Children Safe” groups for families in your NSW community may also be available from Burnside.

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For further information or to purchase the manual, please contact **Jennifer Tung**, Project Worker, Keeping Children Safe, Family Work Program, Western Sydney, UnitingCare Burnside. Phone: (02) 9768 6866, Fax: (02) 9630 0664. Or PO Box 6866, Parramatta. Via email: jtung@burnside.org.au