

# let's start

## parent-child program



### Information for services

#### Description of Let's Start & the Indigenous Parenting and Family Research Program

The Let's Start Program is a therapeutically oriented group parenting program. It works with parents to support children's social-emotional development before and during the transition to school (for 4 to 7 year olds). Let's Start draws on a number of evidence-based approaches, including: social learning theory, attachment theory, narrative theory and systems theory. Let's Start is run by the Centre for Child Development and Education at the Menzies School of Health Research. It is part of a program of research into Indigenous families, parenting and child development.

#### About Let's Start

The Let's Start Parent-Child Program has an integrated focus on child development, parenting and parent wellbeing. Let's Start works with parents to develop their strengths and capacities in managing children's behaviour by promoting reflection on their children's needs and experience; as well as supporting them to engage with their children in collaborative play and learning.

There are two versions of the program: 'Let's Start Little Ones' for 2-4 year olds which runs for seven weeks over the school term in childcare centres in some communities; and 'Let's Start Parent-Child program' for 4-7 year olds program which runs for the duration of the school term.

The program is conducted in small groups over a school term. Parents attend weekly two hour sessions with their child. The weekly program has a multi-group structure:

- Parents' Group (one hour) – which provides opportunities for parents to talk and reflect on the challenges of parenting and the needs of their child.
- Interactive Group (one hour) – which consists of fun activities that promote collaboration and enjoyment between parents and their children.

#### Brief overview of session themes:

##### Key themes for parent's group

- Learning about what children need to develop
- Passive, aggressive and OK parenting
- Antecedents, behaviour and consequences - Cognitive Behavioural model of behaviour management
- Managing strong emotions
- Understanding how family relationships affect their children

##### Key themes for the interactive group (parents and children)

- Strengthening attachment and the parent-child relationship
- Parents practice limit-setting for challenging behaviours
- Parents learn skills for play
- Parents support children's ideas and follow their lead
- Being there- parents engage in play activity with their children
- Tracking; label feelings and encourage activity
- For the child: enjoy positive attention of their parent in a supportive environment

## Program Facilitation

- Group leaders include professionals experienced in delivering therapeutic programs with families and working collaboratively with services and agencies.
- They work with Local Implementation Officers (LIOs) who are community members with strong language, culture and community knowledge. The LIOs ensure that the program is adapted to the needs of families. LIOs receive training in Darwin and in communities to build their skills in working with parents and families.

## How we operate

### Working together in community

- We explore the most appropriate methods of engagement with community members and services based on the needs and circumstances of each community.
- Where possible, Let's Start is happy for service providers to discuss the program with parents with a view to referral to the program.

### Intake and Referral processes

- Most children are referred by pre-schools and schools. However, many parents also self-refer. This is typically initiated through the information they receive from those they know who have attended the program, or through recommendations by other services. Referrals by other agencies working with children and families – such as health centre or child safety teams are received from time to time.
- Family readiness to engage with the program is assessed by Let's Start to ensure that parents and children are able to participate in a collaborative group process.
- We work with other agencies to ensure continuity of care for children, parents and families without subjecting them to pressure from competing service demands.
- We make referrals to relevant agencies (e.g. to paediatric services or school counsellor).
- The safety and wellbeing of children and their families is our paramount concern.

## Research

As part of the research component of Let's Start, parents are asked to fill out questionnaires about parenting, wellbeing and the child's behaviour. Teachers are also asked to fill out questionnaires about the child's behaviour at school. Data collection takes place at the beginning and end of the program and six months after it finishes. We DO NOT conduct parenting assessments (or other risk assessments). The outcomes of Let's Start are concerned with child behaviour, parent self-efficacy and enhancing parent-child and family relationships.

## Confidentiality

All information pertaining to participants' involvement with and in the Let's Start program remains strictly confidential. Under some circumstances limited information shared with the Let's Start team may be divulged to third parties on the request of a parent. The circumstances of the request and informed consent of the parent to release of any information must be to the satisfaction of the Let's Start program leader. The Let's Start team are aware of the limits of client confidentiality according to legislative requirements of the Care and Protection of Children Act (2007) and will report any suspected cases of harm, abuse or neglect to the Department of Children and Families.

This program has been improved by Menzies School of Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC reference number 2011-1606). **For Further Information:** Phone (08) 8946 8435; Email [letsstart@menzies.edu.au](mailto:letsstart@menzies.edu.au)