



Western Cape  
Government

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# **Guidelines for quality and responsive parenting programmes in the Western Cape**

Programme design, implementation, management and MEL

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## Background and context-setting

The document outlines the guidelines for the design, implementation and management of quality programmes and services aiming to strengthen families in the Western Cape, with an emphasis on parenting programmes delivered across the life course. This focus is aligned to the Safety priority of the Provincial Strategic Implementation Plan (PSIP) of the Western Cape Government (WCG).

The objective of the guidelines is for parenting programmes to be evidence-informed and responsive to the local context.

These guidelines were co-developed with the parenting sector, comprising NPO implementers, the research community and government officials active in the family strengthening environment. A set of values and principles were developed by the sector over a series of workshops, which then informed the guidelines.

The adoption of guidelines across programmes creates the opportunity to bring the below shared vision, which was developed with the parenting sector, to life:

*Families in the Western Cape help design effective family strengthening interventions that support them to thrive, become self-reliant, and agents of cohesion in their communities. Families across the province access all the services that they need when they need them. Services are delivered by a multi-stakeholder network of actors that is co-ordinated and overseen by government. Actors regularly communicate, share, and adjust their responses based on a centralised MEL system.*

The core values informing the guidelines and the delivery of family strengthening services are those of trust, respect, compassion and adaptation.

The intended users of this document are individuals and organisations designing, delivering, monitoring and/or evaluating parenting programmes in the Western Cape, whether they are inside or outside government.

Below are definitions of key concepts most relevant to the guidelines:

**Evidence-based intervention** – An evidence-based intervention is an intervention that has been tested in a research setting, has been rigorously evaluated and has demonstrated to achieve statistically and practically meaningful improvements in one or several outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

**Evidence-informed intervention** – An evidence-informed intervention is an intervention that has been designed, implemented and/or improved using available evidence of what has worked in similar settings.

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<sup>1</sup> Flay B and others, (2005) "Standards of Evidence: Criteria for Efficacy, Effectiveness and Dissemination", Prevention Science, Vol. 6, No. 3, P. 151.

**Facilitator** – A facilitator is a person delivering a parenting programme to parents or caregivers. The primary role of a facilitator is to ensure that the programme is effectively delivered to parents or caregivers, and that the programme goals and objectives are achieved.

**Family** – A family is a group of people living together and functioning as a single household, which will provide for the needs and protection of children and all its members. A well-functioning family provides members with appropriate levels of emotional, social, spiritual and material support that is sustained throughout life. It also represents the cradle from which values and norms are transmitted and preserved.<sup>2</sup>

**Implementing organisation** - An implementing organisation of a parenting programme is a government or non-government institution responsible for delivering a programme to programme participants. The individuals delivering the programmes are their facilitators. The responsibilities of an implementing organisation may include designing and planning the programme content and delivery, providing training and support to facilitators, delivering the programme, monitoring and evaluating the programme's effectiveness, and / or communicating with programme stakeholders.

**Parenting programme** – Parenting programmes are programmes delivered over several sessions to support parents and primary caregivers to develop a greater understanding of child growth and development, infant and young child nutrition, build positive relationships between children and caregivers, interact and engage with children in a manner that is appropriate to their own context and culture, provide mental health support and / or learn skills to deal with challenging behaviour, in order to raise children to their full potential. They can be offered at any moment of the child's life.

**Parent** – Any person who provides care or support for a child or youth in a home or family context.<sup>3</sup>

**Positive parenting** – Positive parenting is warm, consistent parenting where parents have good relationships with their children, use non-violent forms of discipline and exercise supervision over their children as appropriate to their developmental stage.

**Primary caregiver** – A primary caregiver is a person older than 16 years, whether or not related to a child, who takes primary responsibility for meeting the daily care needs of that child.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence & Femicide (2020).

<sup>3</sup> I Wessels, Parenting programmes in South Africa: Investigating design and evaluation practices, (2012) UCT Masters Thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004.

# 1. Programme content and delivery

## 1.1. Evidence informs programme content and delivery

To ensure that parenting programmes are of quality, impactful, relevant and responsive to the local context, implementing organisations continuously explore evidence-based programme components to inform and adapt their own programme content and delivery model.

The main purpose of evidence-informed programmes is to promote the development of positive parent-child relationships. Key components include:

- The conduct of implementing organisations and facilitators creates a welcoming physical environment, is warm, non-judgemental, and creates a safe space for parents and caregivers;
- Parenting programme content is rich and at least includes the following components:
  - Building self-esteem of children and caregivers (including praise and parental self-care);
  - Understanding child growth and development;
  - Building communication skills (which include listening, empathic responses, and assertiveness);
  - Identifying and managing emotions;
  - Quality time;
  - Non-violent discipline;
  - Limit setting;
- Programmes can also include additional components such as:
  - Problem solving;
  - Rules and routines;
  - Parental anger management.
- Implementing organisations base their interventions on theories of physical and psychosocial stages of child development, bonding, attachment, and psychosocial support, among others.

Key evidence-informed programme delivery models include:

- Discussion-based: where participants actively participate in all sessions;

- Delivered in small group settings (i.e. maximum of 25 participants in a group) to learn from and exchange ideas and strategies with other caregivers. Parenting programmes that are part of the First Thousand Days basket of support can primarily be delivered through one-on-one home visits;
- Inclusive of other family support services such as individual or family sessions. These are essential to complement parenting programmes and will be offered in the setting most adequate for the need of the caregivers and children;
- Primarily delivered over several sessions, with at least 6 sessions in total;
- Incorporate role play where caregivers are given an opportunity to practice new skills and strategies;
- Incorporate feedback to parents and caregivers on what they have practiced in each session, to encourage and guide them;
- Facilitators encourage the family to problem-solve together, including their children. Where families need extra support, organisations will aim to be available to facilitate and mediate to enable the family to set goals and problem-solve together, including the children where possible;
- Positive Parenting awareness raising campaigns complement parenting programmes. Such campaigns will at least provide evidence-based information on positive parenting and referrals to parenting programmes.

## **1.2. Local context informs programme content and delivery**

To ensure that parenting programmes are of quality, impactful, relevant and responsive to the local context, implementing organisations continuously inform and adapt their own programme content and delivery model by local best practices to be culturally appropriate.

Local best practice incorporates experiential learning on the community and participants' context and needs. This should inform programme content and delivery models.

## **1.3. Innovation in programme content and delivery**

Implementers seek innovative ways to engage with various materials and resources to ensure that their programmes adequately respond to participants and frontline workers. This includes exploring and assessing hybrid delivery models of both in-person and online sessions.

## **1.4. Programme content promotes positive parenting**

All parenting programmes actively promote positive parenting.

## **1.5. Content and delivery are trauma-informed and include pockets of lightness**

Implementing organisations acknowledge the structural trauma that affects the South African nation and how it impacts individual and community relationships, including in the family.

Evidence has shown that intentionally designed and trauma-informed content delivery has a positive impact on parenting skills and improving communication with children.

Therefore, pockets of lightness are incorporated into programme delivery and content. Pockets of lightness and fun in parenting programmes can contribute to unpacking and resolving trauma faced by participants.

## **1.6. Do no harm**

Implementing organisations ensure that their programme respects the dignity of participants and their families and promotes human and children's rights.

## **1.7. Principles for recruitment and retention**

Recruitment of parents and caregivers differs greatly across different communities and organisations. It is important to consider the best approach to recruiting parents in differing contexts.

Retention in parenting programmes is influenced by many factors that are both within and out of the control of organisations. A number of mechanisms can be put in place to retain participants:

- The creation of a warm welcoming environment that feels safe for parents and caregivers and feels free of judgement.
- Incentives. Implementing organisations identify incentives that are suitable to their context and resources. Possible incentives include snacks when attending a session, transport, childminding, recognition, and a sense of belonging.
- Ensure that participants know, before the programme begins, why they are attending the programme, where and when the sessions will be delivered, what will be covered and what will be expected of them during and between the sessions, and how the programme will be delivered.
- Implementing organisations follow up with participants that have missed a session (or more), whether by phone call text, WhatsApp or home visit, to

understand their nonattendance and assist in facilitating their reintegration into future sessions.

## **1.8. All primary caregivers are targeted and include children where appropriate**

To ensure that diversity is achieved, programmes are open to all types of families and not discriminate based on gender, religious identity, socio-economic background or sexual orientation.

Although programmes are predominately aimed at primary caregivers to improve their parenting skills, programmes also include children where appropriate. It is particularly important to include teenagers in parenting programmes attended by their primary caregivers.

## **2. Staff training and support**

### **2.1. Organisations train and coach their staff, and transfer knowledge**

Families benefit from programmes that recruit and retain trained staff who continuously learn and improve their skills. In order to foster a culture of lifelong learning, implementing organisations provide training, coaching and supervision on a regular basis.

Implementing organisations actively seek to recruit staff who are committed to and personally adopt a positive approach to parenting.

In addition, organisations train their staff on positive parenting, the organisation's bespoke programme content and delivery approach and the cultural context of the community in which the programme is delivered. Facilitators are trained and competent to adapt in action and maximise the therapeutic benefit of the intervention.

Families benefit from staff who are patient, understand how to listen effectively without judgement, and welcome families from all walks of life. Therefore, implementing organisations train their staff on a trauma-informed approach, internalising the principles of inclusivity, active listening and facilitation.

Facilitators show that they are trustworthy by doing what they say they will do, being on time, and maintaining confidentiality.

### **2.2. Organisations provide psycho-social support to their**

## **implementing staff**

Implementing organisations provide their facilitators with regular psycho-social support. This is because attending or facilitating a programme can trigger past and present trauma, which must be unpacked.

Psycho-social support should be provided on a regular basis and not only ad-hoc or at the request of the staff.

Psycho-social support can take the form of a trauma-informed work environment, clinical interventions or peer-to-peer support in individual or group settings.

### **2.3. There is a reasonable staff to participant ratio**

Implementing organisations ensure that there is a reasonable staff to participant ratio and ensure that no facilitator is overburdened.

Where possible, there is a Facilitator and co-facilitator approach to group work. The co-Facilitator could be a trusted community member who volunteers their time and experience.

## **3. Management and governance**

### **3.1. Implementers have strong governance mechanisms in place**

Implementers are registered and compliant entities in South Africa. All organisations have child protection and safeguarding policies in place, that are activated when required.

### **3.2. Implementers promote healthy families to tackle the stigma associated with parenting programmes**

All stakeholders advocate for healthy families and promote seeking support in navigating all parenting journeys, no matter a caregiver's socio-economic background, race, sexual orientation, or child's behaviour.

Implementing organisations create awareness about the benefits of parenting programmes and other family support services to create thriving families and communities.

This will contribute to normalising parenting challenges and to de-stigmatising access to parenting programmes.

### 3.3. Finances

Implementing organisations operate in a resource-constrained environment, and programmes ensure that their programmes and services are efficient and cost-effective. A parenting programmes costing model has been developed and can guide funding models.<sup>5</sup>

As the government deepens evidence-informed resource allocation, evidence-informed primary and early intervention violence prevention programmes that reduce exposure to and experience of violence by children and between caregivers is prioritised.

## 4. Conditions for referral pathways

### 4.1. Organisations actively seek to collaborate and develop clear referral pathways

Implementing organisations ensure that facilitators clearly understand the limits of their expertise, that they do not offer or provide psychosocial support if they are not qualified to do so and are aware of when and how to activate referrals when the need arises.

Therefore, implementing organisations promote collaboration with other services to ensure that the family is holistically supported. They do so by progressively developing clear and responsive referral pathways.

Referral pathways ideally encompass clear roles and responsibilities of the referring and receiving organisation to ensure mutual accountability. This includes:

- Clear mutual expectations between referring and receiving organisation from the beginning of the relationship;
- A clear explanation by the referring organisation of what a family can expect of the receiving organisation;
- Feedback and follow-ups between the receiving and the referring organisation on what support was provided to ensure continuity of care and support to families as part of a holistic service.

### 4.2. Organisations check the quality of the organisations they

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<sup>5</sup> C Abdoll and L Ragwala, “Costing the scale up of parenting programmes in South Africa”, ISS Research Report, October 2021, available at <https://issafrica.org/research/books-and-other-publications/costing-the-scale-up-of-parenting-programmes-in-south-africa> (accessed 13 March 2023).

## **refer to**

Referring organisations do a basic compliance check of receiving organisations before referring to ensure that the service is trustworthy, effective, and professional.

### **4.3. Referral pathways seek to address the multitude of challenges faced by participants, while prioritising psycho-social support**

Psycho-social support to programme participants should be directly provided or should be facilitated through referrals.

Psycho-social support is aimed at addressing the root of the challenging behaviour, including adverse life events, as unresolved trauma can lead to risky and destructive behaviour patterns.

## **5. Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)**

### **5.1. Organisations have a Theory of Change**

Implementing organisations seek to develop a clear and explicit Theory of Change for their entire service offering, inclusive of their parenting programmes.

### **5.2. Organisations track the delivery of their programmes**

Implementing organisations track at least the following information: their participants' demographics (including their town or suburb), their participants' children's demographics, attendance and referrals.

### **5.3. Organisations embrace a culture of learning and reflection**

Implementing organisations seek regular feedback from participants, their families, facilitators and managers to assess whether programmes are still relevant and responsive to the needs of the participants and their community, without losing the essence or core content of the programme. These learnings are then used to adapt programme content, on which the staff is trained.

Implementing organisations capture these learnings in writing to create a body of knowledge on experiential learning from local implementation and share learnings with others.

#### **5.4. Organisations seek to understand the impact of their programme on their participants and communities**

Implementing organisations regularly seek support from the research community, monitoring, evaluation and learning experts, government, and other sector stakeholders to assess the impact of their programme.

At a minimum, implementers seek to determine the number and percentage of participants displaying an improved parent-child relationship after completing the programme.

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