

# PRINCIPLE THREE

CHILDREN ARE USUALLY BEST SUPPORTED WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES. RESPECTFUL CONNECTIONS WITH FAMILIES FOSTER PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE CHILDREN'S SAFETY, HEALTH AND WELLBEING.



My  
FAMILY  
is  
SPECIAL



# MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL

## IN THIS SECTION YOU WILL FIND

- Information about and tips for:
- Seeing each family as unique and special
- Recognising and building on strengths, skills and capabilities of children and their families
- Support for parent/s - the parent's capacity to protect and care for children mitigates effects of homelessness
- Family relationships
- Identifying/working with family issues that impact capacity to care for and protect children (domestic violence, alcohol and other drugs, mental health, )
- Relationship-based assessments
- Skills for working with families
- Tools for working with families
- A case scenario to reflect on
- Pulse check




### MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL

Children who have experienced homelessness often tell us that their families are the most important thing in their lives: they protect them from harm and help them feel safe, and they overcome challenges together as a unit. They argue that often the best way for services to support them is by providing their families with the resources, skills and opportunities to resolve their difficulties themselves. They prefer approaches that recognise and build upon their family's strengths, and most value and trust workers who work with them to deal with any interpersonal issues that they might have. Enhancing children's natural supports in this way also ensures that outcomes are more sustainable.

*I think my family is really great. We stick together no matter what.*

*(Girl, aged 9 years)*



**“ I think family's a really important issue 'cos they're the people who have to deal with you if you're in a bad mood, or help you a lot through your whole life, they support and encourage you, and comfort you when you're upset, so we really need to embrace this whole idea of a close family and it's really important, especially for young people”**

(NSW CCYP, 2008, p8)

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## 3.1 WHY CHILDREN NEED FAMILIES: A QUICK REMINDER

Families play a fundamental role in the lives of children. More than any other group of people, families can provide children with:

- a sense of belonging based on bonds of love and support
- connections with the broader community
- a foundation on which to grow and develop through positive attachment
- opportunities to develop proactive problem solving skills
- clear boundaries and expectations.

Children who have strong bonds with their families are better able to:

- feel safe and secure
- take risks and explore the world
- develop skills and abilities to cope with life's challenges.

These can protect children from:

- Poor mental health
- Engagement with juvenile justice
- Early school leaving
- Early use of alcohol and other drugs
- Homelessness

In *Finding their way home*, children shared that it was family who helped them through difficult times. In fact, many of the children we spoke to believed that they were never homeless (even when living on the streets or in unstable accommodation) because they had their families with them and instil in them a sense of hope, self value and optimism.

*We were never homeless because we had Mum. She kept us safe. She protected us. She helped us through*

(Young man, aged 12 years)

*The reason I'm so strong is because of my Mum. My Mum helped us go through lots of hard stuff ... Family's what gets you through*

(Young woman, aged 15 years)

As a worker you will probably have a very short involvement in the life of a child. Their family will have the longest and most important involvement. It is therefore vital to put resources, energy and skills into supporting families to be the best they can possibly be.

**“Each child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her.”**

(Bronfenbrenner, 1986)

Ask yourself often, ‘how is what I am doing now going to improve the quality of relationship between the parent and child and enhance their capacity to parent to the best of their ability?’



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## FAMILIES HAVE STRENGTHS

Although they often find it difficult to identify them during periods of chaos and challenge, families have an abundance of strengths and resources that can be tapped into to support children over time. Each family also knows better than anyone else what they need. They know what kind of help will support them to achieve the change they want. When people are immersed in or overwhelmed by a problem they often can't see (or they underestimate) their own capacity and ability to effect change. Workers can also get caught in that trap and catch the sense of hopelessness. At times like that it is up to workers to step outside of the picture and help families do so too – to help them gain enough distance from the problem to be able to think and act clearly and see the possibility of a better life, recognise the strengths and skills they have and to identify where they will need help from outside. Be aware that what you as a worker see is not the whole picture. Families look different to each family member and to people who are outside them.

### THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN WORKING WITH FAMILY STRENGTHS

- **HELP REVEAL AND CELEBRATE STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES:** During periods of chaos, families find it difficult to identify some of their strengths and resources. Constantly affirming these, particularly parents' capacity to parent their children can help families build esteem and confidence.
- **CELEBRATE SURVIVAL:** The mere fact that families have lasted this long needs to be recognised and celebrated. 'You show some real courage and determination to have got this far.'

- **DO WITH, NOT TO OR FOR:** Families don't normally need workers to rescue them or solve their problems. Instead, they need workers to help capture and link them to resources that they may not be aware of or that they find difficult to access.
- **SEE CHALLENGES AS OPPORTUNITIES:** Working with family strengths doesn't mean that we ignore or understate problems or difficulties – it means that we acknowledge them and support families to use their skills and capacities to overcome them.
- **CELEBRATE GROWTH:** Families can grow through the difficulties they endure. Children tell us that they are proud of their parents and are heartened by the ways that they have overcome adversity.



I think we moved into this other house that had stairs and there was this big spider once and it was that big and every morning it was on the door and we all used to be creeped out because only at night it moved and we didn't know where it was in the morning. And one time it was in Mum's room on the cupboard door and she was like 'aaargh' because it was there and she couldn't get changed. But my Mum would've if she is like she is now because she likes spiders now. She's tougher now that she's had to do stuff like leave Dad and make a new home and stuff.

(Boy, aged 9 years)

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## SOME STRENGTHS TOOLS

There are many ways you can help families to identify their strengths and remind each other of what they value in each person and what each person contributes to the family. Perhaps you can use pictures, cards or stickers (like those available from St Luke's Innovative Resources <http://www.innovativeresources.org/>) and ask each person to choose a picture or sticker that suits each family member, that shows what they like about each family member or what they bring to the family.

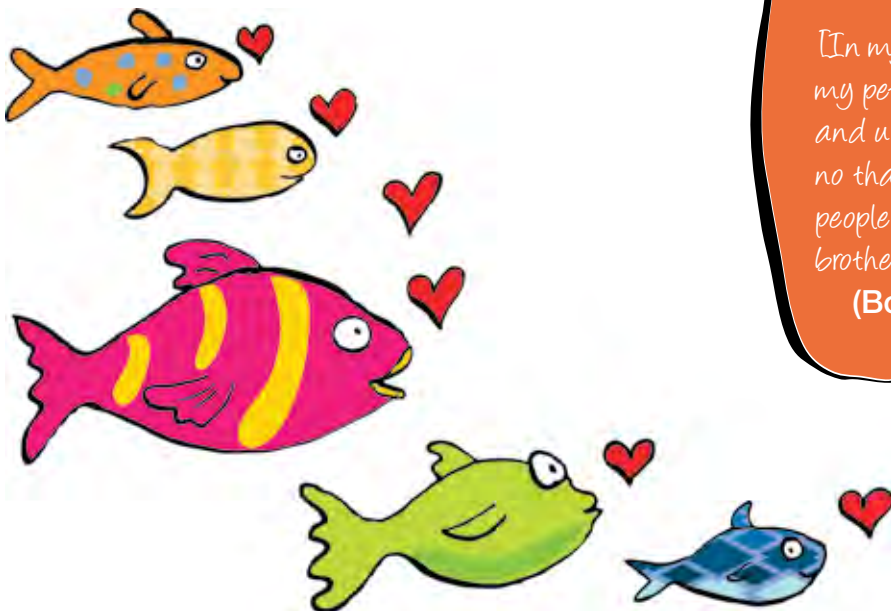
Here are a range of tools to suit different situations. Don't be afraid of using play-based children's tools with the whole family. Adults can often enjoy a chance to approach problems from a more playful, less serious perspective and it reduces fears of inadequacy around language and literacy.

## PEOPLE ARE NOT THE PROBLEM

When you work from a strengths perspective, you see the problem as the problem; the people are not the problem.

Start from the position of assuming that people have good intentions and want to do the best they possibly can for their children. What is getting in the way of that becoming a reality? How can those hurdles or barriers be overcome? Families need a sense of hope that change is possible, that they can and will be able to look after their children well.

Recognise that life is full of challenges and that sometimes these temporarily overwhelm families' abilities to cope. Idealised pictures of what a family should look like are not going to help anyone. What will help is supporting families to develop their resilience and capacity to get through the hard times and support the wellbeing of all family members, particularly children. Using people's own strengths and capacities is always going to be more effective and successful than using your own strengths as a worker to try and make change happen.



[In my family there's] My five fish, my pet Speedy, my pet Max, and Flick and um, I'm sure there's another one - no that's all of them." Do you have any people in your family? "Oh yeah - my brother, two sisters and my Mum.

(Boy, aged 9)



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## POSITIVE CHANGE HAPPENS IN FAMILIES WHEN THEY:

- are safe
- feel confident
- can recognise their capacities not just their problems.

Even when children are not able to live with their families for some reason, it is still possible to do good family-oriented work. In fact, the stronger the connection between the child and family, the better off the child will be and the more successful out-of-home care placements will be. Families can still help protect children even when they are not living with them.

## TALKING WITH FAMILIES ABOUT STRENGTHS

St Luke's Anglicare has developed heaps of tools to help families facing difficult issues to recognise and build on their strengths.

Here's one example:

Our **Scrapbook of Strengths** (45 laminated cards) provides workers with a different way of exploring family dynamics when facing significant issues. A re-focus of the conversation onto the strengths within the family, even if these seem well-hidden, may provide a richer picture of what is happening.

### QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE USEFUL TO INTRODUCE INTO ANY CONVERSATIONS WITH FAMILIES INCLUDE:

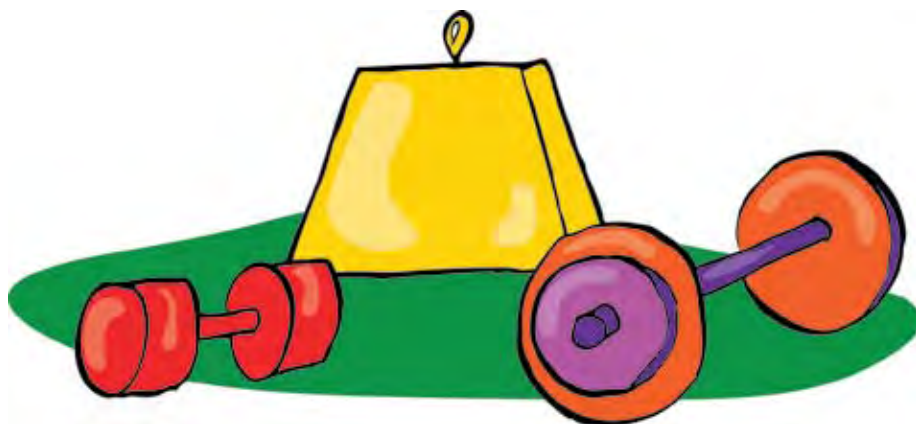
- What strengths do you think hold your family together?

- When things are going well what strengths do you think other people see?
- When problems have arisen in the past what strengths did your family use to overcome them?
- What strengths as a family do you think you need to work through the issue you are facing at present?
- Do you need to rediscover or reprioritise some strengths in your family's life?

### AVAILABLE FROM:

[www.info@innovativeresources.org](mailto:www.info@innovativeresources.org)

St Luke's Innovative Resources  
137 McCrae St  
Bendigo, Victoria 3550, AUSTRALIA





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## WHAT MAKES A FAMILY A FAMILY?

There are as many different ways of being a family as there are families. Families are fundamentally about protection, provision, connection and belonging. People in a family often share some common goals and values and have a long-term commitment to each other, which means that over time they develop history, memories and shared experiences together. As a service working with families you may need to take a very broad view of family in order to find ways to meet children's needs for protection, provision, connection and belonging. This broad view can include parents, step-parents, siblings, cousins, extended family, pets, peers, siblings' peers, other significant supportive and stable adults and community members, neighbours, carers, community 'elders', friends' families and, in some instances, workers. While parent-child relationships are the main focus of this guide, it is important to remember that there are many other potentially significant 'family' members.

### Pets

Many of the children in the *Finding their way home* project identified their pets as members of their families and felt that they were not 'at home' until they had their pets living with them. It appeared that this was not only about children wanting to have an animal companion but also because it represented some stability for children who associated having pets with staying somewhere permanent:

*Having a pet means that you're going to stay there for a while cos you can't have pets if it's only a short-term thing. Kids know that because they're pretty smart. That's why I always wanted a dog.*

(Young man, aged 14)

**If we are only interested in family problems, that's all we are going to see. If we are interested in family strengths, we look for them and they become the foundation on which we work with families and support them to grow and develop and handle the changes that life throws at them.**

A number of the younger children also felt that their pets gave them support and were friends to them when they felt alone. Many valued the fact that they could talk to their pets about anything and that they cheered them up when they were sad:

*If you have an animal you can talk to the animal and they will always just listen and not say things like 'you're ugly' and stuff.*

(Boy, aged 11)

*[My dog] will go get the ball and he'll bring it over to you to play. You roll the ball to him and he rolls it back. Sometimes you play tug-a-war with the socks. And then you feel better.*

(Girl, aged 6)

Many children recalled the sadness they felt when they had to leave their pets behind, but were excited about being able to have animals when their families found somewhere stable to live. 'Home', for many children, was a place where they could have pets.

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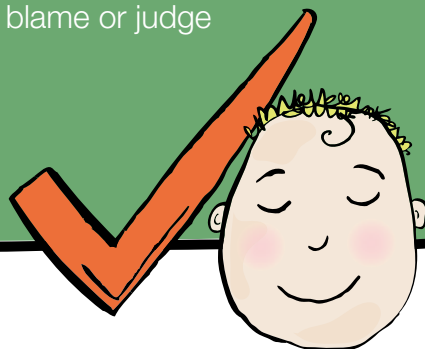


## RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE

What skills do workers need to be able to help families to use their strengths, look at what is stopping them, understand it and overcome it?

**St Luke's Anglicare talked to families who have used their services and asked them what good family work means. They felt that good workers:**

- genuinely listen
- try to understand
- help you feel normal
- don't tell you what to do
- help you identify your goals
- don't plan things for you
- get clear about what you want and help you look at the options
- assume parents are doing the best they can
- don't jump to conclusions
- come to help
- are not intimidating, they go with you to do things if you need them
- explain things
- don't walk in and take over
- don't hide things from you or tiptoe around hard things
- explain confidentiality, what they can and can't do
- share knowledge about what resources are available so families can access them for themselves
- follow up
- are professional but human
- don't blame or judge





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## RELATIONSHIP BASED PRACTICE MEANS SEEING FAMILIES AS PARTNERS

Strengths- and relationship-based practice challenges us to see families as experts in their own lives and encourages us to work with them as partners with assets rather than cases to be fixed. Moore & Larkin have developed a typology of family involvement that can be helpful for teams to consider. In thinking about your level of family-centredness, consider:

- Where do we currently see ourselves in relation to our work with families?
- How would we like to work with families?
- What are some of the things we might do to help us move from where we are to where we would like to be?

MODEL	CHARACTERISTICS
PROFESSIONALLY CENTRED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families are seen mostly as deficient and incapable of healthy functioning without professional interventions</li> <li>• Professionals see themselves as experts who determine family needs</li> <li>• Families' views and opinions are given little or no credence</li> <li>• Interventions are implemented by professionals, with families being passive participants in the intervention process</li> </ul>
FAMILY ALLIED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families are seen as minimally capable of independently effecting changes in their lives</li> <li>• Families are viewed as agents and professionals for carrying out professionally prescribed recommendations and courses of action</li> <li>• Professionals enlist families to implement intervention under their guidance and tutelage</li> </ul>
FAMILY FOCUSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families are seen as capable of making choices among options professionals deem important for healthy functioning</li> <li>• Professionals provide advice and encouragement to families on the basis of their choices and decisions</li> <li>• Interventions focus on monitoring family use of professionally valued services</li> </ul>
FAMILY CENTRED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families are viewed as fully capable of making informed choices and acting on their own choices</li> <li>• Professionals view themselves as agents of families, who strengthen existing skills and promote the acquisition of new skills</li> <li>• Interventions emphasise capacity-building resources and support</li> </ul>

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## RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE AND ASSESSING FAMILY NEEDS

When working with children and families, the quality of your relationship is a very important determinant of how effective your assistance is going to be. Remember to put yourself in their shoes; asking for help requires a huge amount of courage and when families come to your service they may be feeling very vulnerable and exposed. Engaging families in constructive work requires respect, honesty, clarity and a preparedness to tackle difficult issues while keeping the best interests of the child in the centre and drawing out the strengths and skills of the family.

When you are assessing a family's needs, it is important to approach them first and foremost as people. Build a trusting and safe relationship that communicates with families that you are listening and interested in what they say they need (not just what you think they need) and that you start from the assumption that they are doing the best they can in difficult circumstances. Your initial contact with families is likely to be purely about crisis intervention. So assessment will need to take place over time. Remember that the assessment process is a tool to help you understand needs, and help families and children identify goals and take steps towards meeting those goals. Assessments should facilitate the relationship, not create an intimidating barrier.



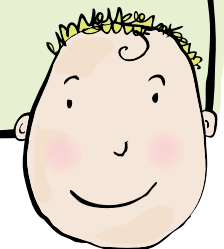
**TIP:** For a useful family-safety and family-goals assessment tool go to: [www.signsofsafety.net](http://www.signsofsafety.net) (Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning form)

## SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH FAMILIES

- Each family is unique and services are respectful of what makes a family unique (cultural background, family history, socio-economic background, values and beliefs)
- Parents know their children better than anyone else and want the best for their children
- Workers focus on children's and families' strengths, what they want and how they can contribute to achieving their own goals
- Families are supported to work out what their strengths are and where they may need help
- Families are supported to be involved in planning, putting plans into action and evaluating plans for their children
- Families' needs and priorities change over time
- Families can make choices about what services they want and will use
- Services work in a way that is empowering for families so families can access the resources they need when they need them to get things done

### FOR MORE INFO ON FAMILY WORK GO TO:

[www.novita.org.au](http://www.novita.org.au) or  
[www.novita.org.au/library/Factsheet-Family\\_Centred\\_Practice.pdf](http://www.novita.org.au/library/Factsheet-Family_Centred_Practice.pdf)



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## UNDERSTANDING ISSUES AFFECTING FAMILIES

There are many different pathways into family homelessness and many challenges that families face during the homeless experience. However, there are often some common threads. In a Melbourne study, researchers found that:

### Homelessness is usually the result of many cumulative factors

“Often no one single calamity led to a family becoming homeless. Often they had experienced some extended time of unstable or unsuitable accommodation. It was less common for families to demonstrate that their current homelessness was a result of a crisis situation ie that they had come to the hotel from previously stable accommodation that had suddenly ‘gone wrong’.”

### High level of mobility

“There was a high level of mobility amongst these families. They moved an average of 4.9 times in the past six months prior to their stay in the private hotel.

The dominant reason for families moving during the past six months was that their accommodation was, or had become, inadequate. This included constant and on-going problems (such as sleeping on the lounge at a friend’s or relative’s place); recent events in the dwelling such as abuse, drugs, or family conflict; or changes to the family itself (such as having a baby).”



### Emergency accommodation is often the first experience of formal assistance

“The most common forms of accommodation used by families in the six months prior to the latest hotel stay were: doubling up and hotel (emergency) accommodation.

In many instances, arrival at the emergency accommodation service was the first time families had sought assistance despite experiencing a long period (1-2 years) of unstable and unsuitable accommodation .”

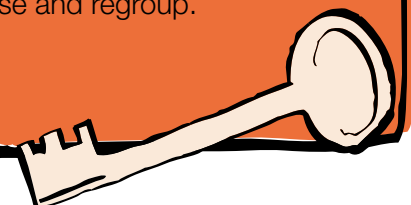
## SECONDARY RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In addition, Bartholomew identified a number of secondary *risk factors*, which include:

- a lack (or sudden decrease) in income
- a recent change in family structure
- a large family
- domestic violence
- family conflict
- any event with leads to further marginalisation

On the other hand some factors will protect otherwise vulnerable families from sliding into homelessness. *Secondary protective factors* include:

- strong social networks
- being within reach of these networks
- cohesiveness of the family unit
- knowledge of resources available
- access to services
- facility for some level of economic recovery
- time to organise and regroup.



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We also know that families affected by family violence, parental mental health and/or alcohol or other drug use are more likely to end up homeless and to experience greater difficulties in finding their way out of the homeless experience. This is not to say that these factors necessarily cause homelessness, but there is evidence that they make the whole period more difficult and can prolong the homeless experience.

It is vital, then, that services working with homeless families recognise and respond to these factors while providing assistance, and consider them when planning for their transition out of the service. We have provided a snapshot of the key factors and some ideas on where ongoing support might be sought

## FAMILY VIOLENCE AND HOMELESSNESS

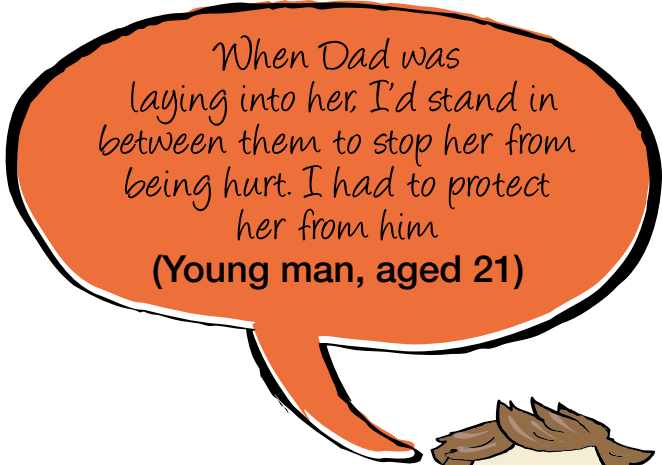
In 2003–4 two-thirds of children in family homelessness services were accompanying a parent or guardian who was escaping domestic violence. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare comments that:

“There is no one pathway into homelessness for all women affected by domestic and family violence. However, we do know from the research on domestic and family violence and homelessness that it is concern for safety that leads most women (and their children) into homelessness. Women experiencing domestic and family violence generally reach what is known as a crisis point or tipping point in their lives – a point where they fear for their own safety or that of their children and which necessitates them leaving their home for safer accommodation. For some women this point is reached quickly and follows one (major) incident of violence. For others it may take years for them to make the decision to flee the violence and leave home, and this decision may follow changes in the frequency of violence against them or escalation in the intensity of abuse. It may also follow re-direction of violence to their children, or sexual abuse (or repeated sexual abuse) against themselves or a child.”

Generally, however, families who have experienced domestic or family violence have often lived in prolonged traumatic and unstable environments prior to becoming homeless. Some parents share that living on the streets or in temporary accommodation is safer and less confronting than living with an abusive partner. Other parents, however, share that when services do not consider children’s safety they can be a cold and hostile environment.

“I took off – back to the abuse. I was there for 3 weeks but it was awful. I went back to the abusive relationship because it seemed better for me and the kids. I felt as vulnerable and unsafe as when I was in that relationship”

(Parent)



When Dad was laying into her, I'd stand in between them to stop her from being hurt. I had to protect her from him

(Young man, aged 21)

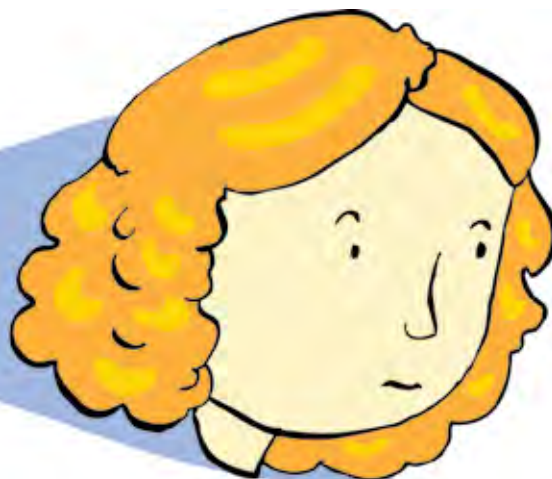


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## IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE

- **CHILDREN MAY FEEL RESPONSIBLE:** sometimes children believe that their abusive parent used violence because of things that the child had done or said. They need to know that this is not the case and that it was not OK for their parent to hurt them or others in their families.
- **CHILDREN MIGHT SEE THEMSELVES AS PROTECTORS:** often children (particularly young men) tell us that during periods of family violence it was their role to keep their families safe and that this continued even when housed in homelessness services. Children who assume these roles can often feel quite distressed when they are not in control and when they are not informed about how their families are being protected.
- **SAFETY CONCERNS:** families can continue to be at risk even when living in alternative accommodation. Safety plans need to be developed and fears allayed where possible.
- **RECONNECTING:** families who are escaping family violence often disconnect themselves from important networks of support. Providing opportunities for them to safely reconnect or to establish new formal and informal support is essential.

It is important to note that women who experienced abuse during childhood are one-and-a-half times more likely to experience violence in adulthood and that the risk of sexual violence in adulthood doubles for women who were abused as a child. As such, workers need to be aware that their clients can have long and pervasive histories of pain and violence and that these need to be taken into account when identifying and responding to need.



## SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

- The Domestic Violence Crisis Service of the ACT is a service for families experiencing and escaping domestic and family violence. Workers are able to assist families and help them seek information and support. They have a number of helpful resources available on their website at [www.dvcs.org.au](http://www.dvcs.org.au)
- Penrith Women's Health Centre has developed a resource for workers to discuss issues of domestic and family violence with women who have an intellectual disability. It's available online at [www.whnsw.asn.au](http://www.whnsw.asn.au)
- *Bursting the bubble* was developed by the Domestic Violence Resource Centre in Victoria and helps young people think and talk about issues related to safety and family relationships. It's online at [www.burstingthebubble.com](http://www.burstingthebubble.com)
- *Family Violence hurts kids too* is a resource for parents and other adults talking to children about their experiences of family violence. It can be downloaded at [www.dvirc.org.au](http://www.dvirc.org.au)



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## PARENTAL MENTAL ILL HEALTH

Mental ill health and homelessness have a complex and significant relationship. Mental ill health and a lack of appropriate supports can lead to family homelessness. In one Australian study, 75% of homeless people surveyed had at least one mental disorder and 93% at least one extreme trauma. Parents with mental ill health sometimes are reluctant to seek support for fear of child removal or because they are not able to access treatment when they cannot find others to care for their children. This can lead to unemployment, poverty and social isolation.

Additionally, the experience of homelessness can, itself, cause stress, anxiety and depression and reduce parents' and families' capacity to deal with the challenges they encounter. Homelessness has shown to lead to low self-esteem, social isolation, and the exacerbation or development of specific mental-health disorders such as schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. It appears that the longer someone is homeless the more likely they are to experience one of these conditions.

### Some important things to note about parental mental ill health

- **PARENTS' COPING PROTECTS CHILDREN:** during periods of homelessness a parent's ability to cope with challenges will often determine their children's ability to cope.

Parents who are stressed, anxious or depressed will often have children who are experiencing similar issues, and vice versa. Supporting parents to build their resilience will often have a flow-on effect.

- **PARENTS' MENTAL ILL HEALTH CAN REDUCE THEIR CAPACITY TO PARENT:** sometimes parents who are experiencing depression, anxiety or a mental disorder are unable to provide for their children or protect them from harm. By identifying difficulties and helping parents manage their mental health, workers can help them be more aware of their children's needs and respond effectively.

## SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

The Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association (AICAFMHA) has developed an excellent website for those working with children of parents with a mental illness and their families. It's online at [www.copmi.net.au](http://www.copmi.net.au) and includes links to a significant number of child-friendly resources, books, activities and fact sheets for children and young people.

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Carers Australia recognises children with parents who have a mental illness as being young carers. They have a number of services and supports on offer and a website at [www.youngcarers.net.au](http://www.youngcarers.net.au), which includes a series of fact sheets and links to information and support. The Young Carer Support Plan is particularly helpful in helping families think about long term support.

- **CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW THAT THEIR PARENT IS OK:** children often worry about their parents and need to know that they and their families are safe. Children who have witnessed bouts of depression or dissociative states need to know what is happening for their parent and how their condition is being managed. They need to know that it's not their fault and that other adults are there to support them.
- **ONGOING SUPPORT MAY BE NECESSARY:** families affected by mental ill health often need to be connected to assistance throughout their homelessness experience and beyond. Ensuring that they are housed in suitable locations where formal and informal networks are available is vital to ensuring recovery.

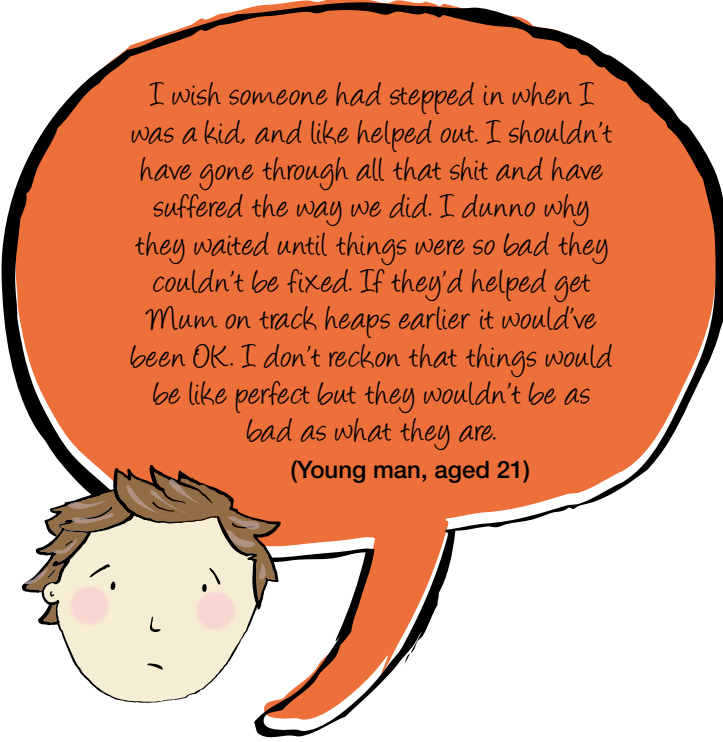




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## PARENTAL ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG (AOD) USE

Alcohol and other drug (AOD) use can affect families at different points in the homeless experience. For some, a family member's AOD use can cause the loss of employment and/or the ability to pay rent, leading to homelessness. For others, the homeless experience (which often is marked by mental ill health, chaos and trauma) can lead family members to take AOD as a way of coping. Using AOD is often not permitted in accommodation services, which can lead families to be evicted from programs, leading to another period of homelessness. Parents who are attempting to abstain from use can also cut themselves off from their local support networks (including leaving stable accommodation) to resist temptation, which, itself, can lead to periods of homelessness. In each situation, the challenges are vast and complex!



*I wish someone had stepped in when I was a kid, and like helped out. I shouldn't have gone through all that shit and have suffered the way we did. I dunno why they waited until things were so bad they couldn't be fixed. If they'd helped get Mum on track heaps earlier it would've been OK. I don't reckon that things would be like perfect but they wouldn't be as bad as what they are.*

(Young man, aged 21)

## Important things to note about AOD use

- **THINKING ABOUT THE KIDS:** AOD use can significantly reduce parents' ability to care for their children. This is not always the case but, when intoxicated, parents might not be able to meet children's safety and welfare needs.
- **CHILDREN'S CONCERNS:** Children tell us that they are often scared about their parent's AOD use and can't talk to them about their fears. This can cause great amounts of stress and anxiety for children.
- **EARLY INTERVENTION:** Children from families where a parent is using AOD are at risk of experimenting with drugs early in life. They need positive adults around them to challenge their use and to help them develop other coping mechanisms.
- **AOD MAY POINT TO OTHER ISSUES:** Often parents use AOD to cope with underlying issues such as anxiety, depression, unresolved guilt, loss and grief. To provide holistic support, the system needs to identify and respond to these key needs and develop their skills to deal with these difficulties.
- **SAFETY:** Children can be exposed to unsafe people, places and situations when their parents are using AOD. Providing support to parents can help build their awareness about their situation, while protecting the children.
- **CONSIDERING HOUSING OPTIONS:** Parents who are abstaining from AOD tell us that they often do not feel confident living in communities where there are other people using or dealing. Identifying these challenges and planning for placement in safer neighbourhoods is imperative.
- **CONNECTING COMMUNITIES:** Families who have dislocated themselves from risk-filled communities need to create new networks of support. As we'll see in Guide 6 'Who Else Matters', parents need positive peers to help them raise their children, and need to be provided with encouragement, advice and resources to be the parent that they want to be.

# MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL

## MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

Often families experience a number of challenges at once. A mixture of family violence and mental ill health, for example, might lead to homelessness, while the homeless experience might lead to mental ill health, AOD use and social isolation. Often no one factor can be considered in isolation as each can cause, exacerbate and prolong the others. A broad, systematic response is required to help families manage these challenges and to find stability.

## CULTURE AND FAMILIES

Australia is home to people from more than 200 different cultural backgrounds, speaking more than 300 heart languages. A family's socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and religious background will have a significant impact on their values, practices and beliefs around parenting, roles and how families work. In your work you will need to be able to engage and work constructively with families from a very diverse range of backgrounds. To do so, it is important to keep in mind the principles already covered in this guide (eg that families know what they need, they have strengths and they have good intentions). You can also get specialist help from a range of services, as listed below.

The National SAAP Case Management Group has identified core principles for working with children and families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) children and families. In summary they recommend:

1

**Families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds:** Always use professional interpreters or specialist support services for parents and families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Children should never be asked to interpret for parents as it places them in a very difficult position, sometimes interpreting information that is not appropriate for them to be privy to, or which they cannot fully understand. It also sets up adult expectations of the child and potentially undermines a parent's caring role and authority. If parents and children are able to speak English well, it does not mean that they do not have cultural needs.

2

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families:** Acknowledge that there are many different kinds of A&TSI families and many different ways of bringing up children. Some guidelines to assist non-A&TSI workers to understand some important cultural perspectives are listed below, however, it is also very important to be aware of the diversity within and between families.

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL

In addition, Dr Merridy Mailin suggests that "... affiliation is a highly valued attribute for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Families. This is evident by children:

- knowing who they are in terms of family and heritage;
- knowing their obligations to immediate family and kin; and
- caring for each other, particularly younger kin both physically in terms of food, clothing and safety, and emotionally, in terms of love and caring".



Further, many A&TSI families value autonomy in their children. This is demonstrated by a high priority being placed upon:

- independence and self reliance;
- the ability to stand on their own two feet from as young an age as possible;
- the ability to defend themselves when threatened;
- the ability to sort out their own disputes without going to adults; and
- being uncompaining and able to laugh at themselves.

For more information download the SAAP Case Management Resource Kit from [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au)



## Services:



For families from Refugee backgrounds and asylum seekers: Companion House Assisting Survivors of Torture and Trauma [www.companionhouse.org.au](http://www.companionhouse.org.au) or 62477227

.....  
Families from a migrant or refugee background: Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services of the ACT (MARSS) [www.mrccanberra.org.au](http://www.mrccanberra.org.au) or 62488577

.....  
Translating and Interpreting Service (24 hours, 7 days per week) 131450

.....  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families: Winnunga Nimmitjyah [www.winnunga.org.au](http://www.winnunga.org.au) or 62846222

.....  
For any other services contact the Citizens Advice Bureau [www.citizensadvice.org.au](http://www.citizensadvice.org.au) or 62487988

# MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL

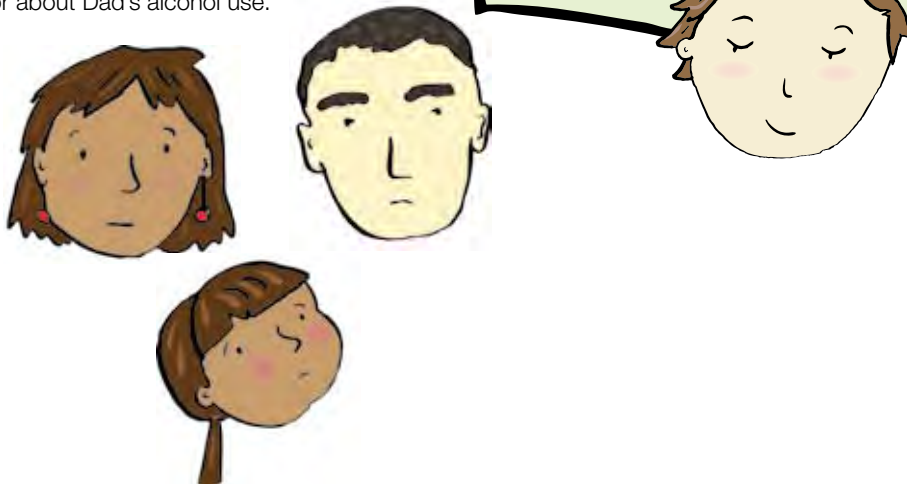
3.7

## CASE SCENARIO

### THE HUGHES FAMILY

Barry Hughes and his children, Crystal (4), Joby (6) and Kylie (8), have been homeless for six months since Barry and his wife split up and he was made redundant at work. Barry spends a lot of time with the children, making sure that they are being provided for and that they know he loves them deeply. Each night he and the kids have dinner together and then he helps Kylie and Joby with their homework. Although he tries to remain positive about his situation, Barry admits that he has been suffering from depression and sometimes drinks 'a bit' to keep a handle on his feelings. This is mainly because he's finding it tough and he doesn't want to 'go off at the kids', which is something he sometimes does when he knows that he's not coping. He is incredibly anxious about his children and believes that he has been a failure as a parent, even though he has always provided them with food and some shelter even in the most difficult of circumstances. The children are aware of his anxiety so don't want to tell him about how they are feeling. Kylie and Joby have decided among themselves that their Mum left because they had been naughty and that Dad had given up his job to look after them. That's why, they believe, they became homeless in the first place. Both of the kids are anxious about Dad's drinking because one of their friends told them that parents who drink lose their kids. They're not keen on talking to workers at your service about this stuff because they're worried they might be removed if people find out that they caused their family's homelessness or about Dad's alcohol use.

- What are some of the Hughes family's strengths and resources?
- How might you find other strengths and resources that might not be as apparent?
- What are some of the things that the Hughes family need?
- What are some of the things that might affect Barry's ability to parent and what might he need to support him?
- How might your service help the family to talk about their situation?
- What things might you do to let the children know that it is OK for them to talk to staff about their concerns?
- How might you help identify and reinforce the Hughes family's strengths through your interactions?
- What tools or assessment activities could you use to help the Hughes family identify the strengths of each family member and the family as a whole?



# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL

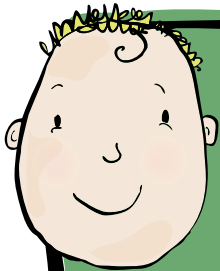


## PULSE CHECK “MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL”

### PULSE CHECKS ARE HERE TO HELP ORGANISATIONS BY:

- promoting discussion;
- identifying strengths and any gaps that need action; and
- helping to set priorities

The pulse check can be used whether you have already developed child-safe policies and practices or are just starting out. It is not exhaustive - you will find that as you discuss it you may think of other areas that need attention in your organisation.



STEP 1: go through the indicators and list how your service acts on each one

STEP 2: each person rates how well the service does this

STEP 3: brainstorm things that could be done to improve how the service acts on each area



# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL

	INDICATORS	HOW WE DO THIS list how this is currently done	1---2---3---4---5 NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS (rate the service by circling a number)	THINGS WE COULD DO (list or brainstorm ideas)
<p><b>CHILD AND FAMILY</b> Supports are provided to enhance family relationships. Children are supported to share their needs and views with their family members.</p>	<p><b>a.</b> In this service families are recognised as central to the wellbeing of children</p> <p><b>b.</b> Children are supported to share their needs and views using safe, non-threatening and child-friendly methods</p> <p><b>c.</b> Children's safety needs are recognised and addressed with families</p>			



\*For more information on child friendly methods see Guide 4 'Make it fun!'



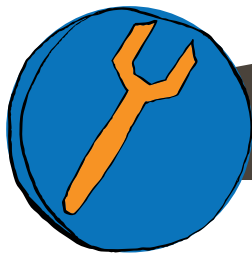
# My FAMILY is SPECIAL

PROGRAM/ ORGANISATION	INDICATORS	HOW WE DO THIS list how this is currently done	1----2----3----4----5 NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS (rate the service by circling a number)	THINGS WE COULD DO (list or brainstorm ideas)
<p>Supports and services are provided in a way that recognises families' strengths and resources and engages these in the support of children and young people</p>	<p><b>The service takes a strengths-based approach to working with families as evidenced by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a.</b> Assuming that people have good intentions and families are doing the best they can</li> <li><b>b.</b> Actively encouraging families to be involved in planning for, caring for and keeping their children safe</li> <li><b>c.</b> Children's safety needs are recognised and addressed with families</li> <li><b>d.</b> Assessments are designed to assess strengths as well as challenges</li> <li><b>e.</b> Families actively participate in assessment and planning processes and have a high level of ownership of them</li> </ul>			

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL

<p><b>SYSTEM:</b> Issues that may affect the families' capacity to provide for children are identified. Support (which may include assertive linking) is provided to help parents overcome these challenges</p>	<p><b>INDICATORS</b></p> <p>Assessment processes identify issues that may affect families' capacity to provide for children, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Experiences and circumstances leading up to homelessness</li> <li>b. Drug and alcohol misuse</li> <li>c. Mental health issues</li> <li>d. Domestic violence</li> <li>e. Other serious life stressors (loss, separation, unemployment, illness...)</li> </ul> <p>Families are supported to discuss these issues, understand the impact on all family members and then set goals and make plans to deal with them</p> <p>Families are actively linked to resources and supports that they identify will support them to meet their goals</p> <p>People's informal networks of support are recognised and families are assisted to strengthen, re-build or maintain these networks</p>	<p><b>HOW WE DO THIS</b> list how this is currently done</p>	<p>1---2---3---4---5 <b>NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS</b> (rate the service by circling a number)</p>	<p><b>THINGS WE COULD DO</b> (list or brainstorm ideas)</p>

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3A OUR STRENGTHS

This activity is based on work completed by the Telethon Institute for Child Health WA as part of the *Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2005*

### LINKED TO:

- Sections 2.11, 3.2 & 3.3



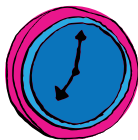
### WHY?

- To help families identify and celebrate strengths
- To help families identify and plan ways of building on strengths
- To help families get a sense of hope and change for the future



### WHO WITH?

- Family members



### TIME?

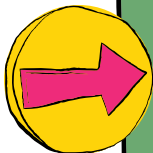
- 20mins+



### YOU'LL NEED?

- Copies of the template for all family members or an A3 photocopy

# MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL



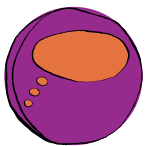
## WHAT TO DO:

- As individuals, get families to consider where they think they are on the continuum.
- Ask them to answer thinking about how things are for their family right now. Indicate with a colour dot or by writing “here and now” on their individual form.
- Repeat the questions, asking them to answer thinking about how they want things to be in their family in one year’s time.
- In the box below, ask family members to write or draw images that represent their family’s strengths and areas for growth.
- Have family members put their sheets on the floor or up on the wall.
- Allow families opportunities to look all together at the similarities and differences between each person’s perceptions and work with families around prioritising their common goals.



## SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

- Do the same first three steps as above but then have family members use coloured dots to indicate where they are and where they want to be. This can provide a visual sorting of answers.



.....

## TO THINK ABOUT:

- This activity can be repeated on a number of different occasions – identify and celebrate the progress that has been made and identify, together, ways of redressing any steps backward.



## HAZARD ZONES:

- This is an activity which focuses on strengths and opportunities. Facilitators should gently ask family members who focus on problems or weaknesses to think more about what they are doing well and what opportunities are on the horizon to ensure that the positive nature of the exercise is maintained.

# Our strengths

	Quite a lot	Sometimes	Not Often	Not much
The way we get on together helps us cope with hard times.				
We like to remember people's birthdays and celebrate special events.				
It is easy for us to talk to each other about important things.				
We are always there for each other.				
We know our family will survive whatever happens.				
We manage money carefully and make good decisions.				
Our family has a lot in common in the interests we have and the things we do together.				
Everyone in our family is accepted for who they are.				
We have good support from our relatives and friends.				
We have family traditions and customs we want to pass onto our children.				

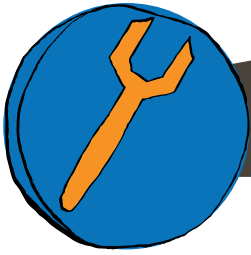


**The things I am most proud of about my family**



**The things I'd like us to build on as a family**

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3B: ALL TIED UP

This activity is based on work completed by the Telethon Institute for Child Health WA as part of the *Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2005*

### LINKED TO:

- Sections 3.2 & 3.5



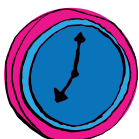
### WHY?

- Helping families identify their strengths and how they rely on each other
- Helping children realise that they have positive people around them who can keep them safe
- Helping children realise that they are not the only support available to their parents/family members and to identify additional supports/resources
- Helping families affirm their relationships and connections in a relaxed and fun way
- Exploring new possible supports



### WHO WITH?

- Families or, if appropriate, other groups of supportive people



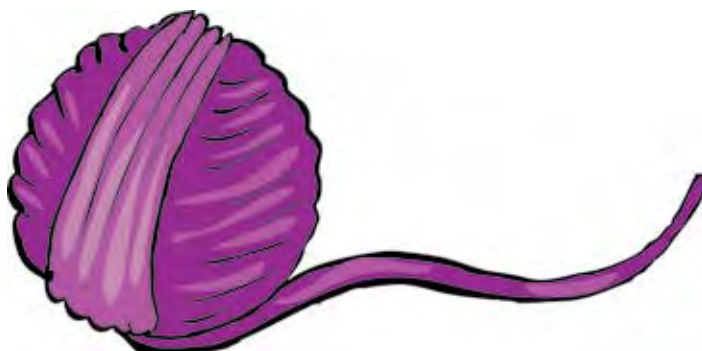
### TIME?

- 10 minutes to ½ hour



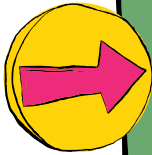
### YOU'LL NEED?

- A long ball of coloured string (or a few balls of different coloured string if you'd like to make it more colourful!)





# My FAMILY is SPECIAL



## WHAT TO DO:

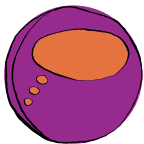
- Have everyone sit in a circle. Explain to them that we are all connected to each other and help each other out in lots of different ways.
- Talk about some of the ways that people support each other (ie by hugging them when they're down, holding their hand when they walk across the street, sticking up for them when they're in a fight).
- Hold the ball of string and share a reason why you need someone else in the circle. While still holding on to the first section of the string roll the ball across to the person identified.
- Continue until everyone is holding at least one part of the string. If you've got time, maybe go again – this time identifying someone else in the family that offers support.
- Discuss the importance of the web: why it's important to support each other and how even during tough times there are people around who can help.



## SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

This activity can actually be completed regardless of whether the family is present or not.

- Option 1. Draw a wheel on a piece of A3 paper and ask the child to either draw or stick down string leading from one person to another by asking them a series of questions: 'who do you think Marcus would go to to get help?'; *Marcus might feel a bit overwhelmed – who do you think could help him?* Have a discussion about the supports that are available and how everyone can help each other out.
- Option 2. Draw a wheel and ask the child to list around the wheel all the people who are special or important to them. Have them draw themselves in the middle of the wheel and ask them to draw lines to those people who support them. You might want to colour code them (for example, draw a blue line to people who you might talk to if you're feeling worried about your Mum; draw a green line to people who you think could tell you what's going on with your Dad if you needed to know).
- Option 3. Draw a wheel and asked the child to list around the wheel all the people who are special or important to them. If they have raised a concern about another family member, get them to draw that person in the middle of the wheel. Go through a similar process as in option 2 but identify people (including but not limited to the child) who might support them. For example, 'It sounds like you're worried about who's going to look after your Mum while you're at school. Is there anyone from the list who could check in? who your Mum might call? who helps her out?' If they are unable to identify people who can support their parent, for example, make some suggestions: 'Caroline from the refuge said that she could drop in sometimes – could that help? Your aunty Margaret seems to call a lot – do you think she could suss out how your Mum is going?'



## TO THINK ABOUT:

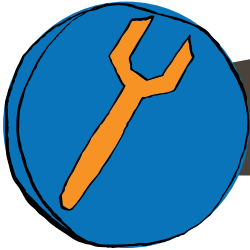
- It is important to set up a dynamic where people feel safe. It may be that a particular individual is not identified as a person who provides support and they may feel excluded. If this is the case, start another ball – get them to begin this time by identifying who is a support for them. This will often lead to them being part of the discussion.



## HAZARD ZONES:

- Families need to be in an OK place to be able to complete this exercise. If you get a sense that there is some discord or that people aren't feeling hopeful enough gently let the activity rest. Families need to be given permission to sit with their feelings.

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3C COMMON GROUND

### LINKED TO:

- Sections 3.2 & 3.3



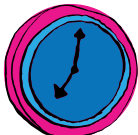
### WHY?

- To remind families that there are things that each has in common with the others
- To help highlight family strengths that can be built on or used to help families plan
- To gain some insights into family dynamics, relationships and roles



### WHO WITH?

- Groups of 2 to 10
- This can be run with children of any age and a mixed age group. It is also great to use with family groups



### TIME?

- 10 minutes to ½ hour

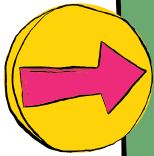


### YOU'LL NEED?

- Paper and pens or crayons
- Prizes (optional)



# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



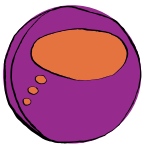
## WHAT TO DO:

- Groups of 2-10 are formed and given paper and pens. If you are doing this with families, each family is a group. First they can make up a team name. Tell teams their challenge is to list everything that they have in common (eg: team members might watch the same TV show, like the same music, or like the same type of chocolate). The only rule is that they can't list similar body parts such as 'we all have 2 arms and 2 legs'. Tell teams they have 3 minutes to create their lists.
- Discuss:
  - How easy was it to find something in common with other team members?
  - How are we alike/different?
  - How can things in common bring us together?



## SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

- Challenge the teams to list things they don't have in common – things that make them unique.



.....

## TO THINK ABOUT:

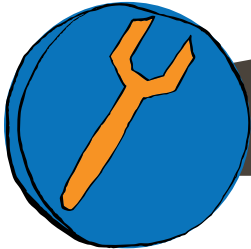
- It is also important, as with all games, to allow children and families the option of not playing the game or of changing it.



## HAZARD ZONES:

- Some families may need a high level of support to do this activity and to include everyone in the family, so be prepared to facilitate their ideas and start off with easy ideas like foods they all like, TV programs, colours, places. Once the 'team' start coming up with ideas, leave them to it if you can.

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3D SENTENCE STEMS

### LINKED TO:

- This tool can be used in all situations where you might engage children directly
- Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4



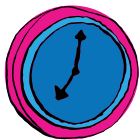
### WHY?

- To assist families with a way of talking about a range of experiences, including difficult ones
- To provide an opportunity for families to listen to each other's perspectives on their needs, problems, strengths and hopes
- Good for:
  - breaking the ice
  - Giving children an opportunity to speak
  - Identifying family strengths and resources



### WHO WITH?

- Groups of children / families



### TIME?

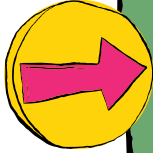
- 20 minutes to 1 hour



### YOU'LL NEED?

- Sentence stems

# My FAMILY is SPECIAL



## WHAT TO DO:

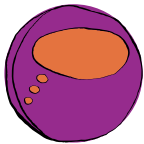
- Place all the sentence stems in a bowl and pass it around the circle
- Have each child/family member take out one stem at a time and read it out, completing the sentence
- Children may choose to open the question up to the whole family at which point everyone gets a turn to answer



## SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

- Throw in some tasks for participants to do to break up the activity: “run around the circle”, “pretend like you’re a monkey”, “hug the person to your left”.

.....



## TO THINK ABOUT:

- Some family members may not be literate so have options ready: facilitators read out the sentences or number the stems from 1-12 and get the participants to roll a dice rather than picking the stems out of the bowl.

# Sentence stems



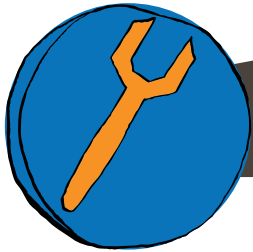
If I could meet someone <b>famous</b> I'd meet...
If I could have three <i>wishes</i> they would be...
The best <i>holiday</i> I ever had was when...
There's nothing I like better after a <i>long day</i> than...
If I was an <i>animal</i> I would be a ... because ...
The food that always makes me wanna <b>puke</b> is...
The thing I like <b>most</b> about my family is...
Me and my family always <b>FIGHT</b> about...
I'd like people to describe me as <i>being</i> ...
I go to ... when I need some <b>HELP</b>
The <b>best</b> thing about my family is...
The <b>first</b> thing I thought about this morning was...
The thing I like to <b>wear</b> the most is...
I would never grow tired of <i>eating</i> ...
If I was in <b>charge</b> of Australia I'd ...
The best way to deal with <b>STRESS</b> is...

The thing I <i>love most</i> about (the person sitting to my right) is...
The <b>best</b> thing that's ever happened to me was...

My favourite place to be is...	There's <b>nothing</b> better than...
If I was <b>75</b> I'd like to...	My <b>HERO</b> is ... because...
I get <b>scared</b> when...	I feel most <i>happy</i> when...
<b>I HATE...</b>	There's nothing <b>cuter</b> than...
I'm <b>scared</b> about...	The <b>tallest</b> person I know is...
Nothing <b>annoys</b> me more than...	I get <i>frustrated</i> when...
When I <b>grow</b> up I'd like to....	When I was <b>little</b> I liked to...
My <i>earliest</i> memory is...	The best <i>smell</i> in the world is...



# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3E: MY FAMILY COLLAGE

### LINKED TO:

- Sections 2.11, 3.2, 3.3 & 3.4



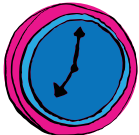
### WHY?

- To help families create a positive picture of their family
- To help families see what they have in common, their strengths and needs
- To help families define (without having to use words) what they value, what is important to them and how they want to be as a family



### WHO WITH?

- Individuals, groups of children and family groups
- Preschoolers to grandparents



### TIME?

- 20 to 45 minutes plus time to take photos and print them out before this activity

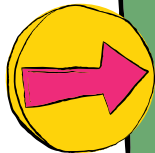


### YOU'LL NEED?

- Materials for your collage
- Cardboard/posterboard
- Scissors
- Glue



# MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL



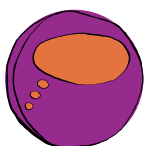
## WHAT TO DO:

- Before the session, get a photo taken of the family as a whole and then give the children a camera and ask them to take photos of their family – either at a joint activity, spending time together or just hanging out
- Help children collect lots of bits and pieces that tell a story about themselves and their families – words or pictures from magazines, artwork that family members have completed (check that they're OK for them to be included!)
- Arrange all the items that you have collected on a mount board. Move them around until they are happy with the way that they look



## SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

- 3D pictures: To make a picture stand out from the cardboard:
  - glue the picture on to a lightweight piece of cardboard. Cut out around the picture
  - fold another strip of cardboard in half, then in half again. Open it up a little, so it looks like a chair with the bottom folded in
  - glue the flat part to the top of the mount board
  - glue the picture to the raised part that sticks out from the board.
- Try to get photos of families for children to use. However, if it's not possible to take a family photo, children can draw pictures of their family instead.



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## TO THINK ABOUT:

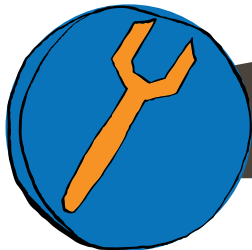
- This is a great tool for including whole families. However, some parents or children may not want to participate. That's OK – they can watch or help their children to find the bits and pieces they need.



## HAZARD ZONES:

- You may need to model open ended non-judgemental questions about their collages (eg 'I notice this shape/picture/colour here – can you tell me about it? I wonder what that is about?') for families who haven't spent much time working together.

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3F FAMILY PORTRAITS

### LINKED TO:

- Sections 3.2, 3.3, & 3.4



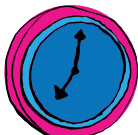
### WHY?

- To start discussions about family and family strengths
- To learn more about children's support networks
- Good for
  - Highlighting family strengths
  - Giving kids the opportunity to talk about family separation in a safe and comfortable way
  - Getting families talking



### WHO WITH?

- Individuals, groups of children and whole families
- Children from 5 years of age



### TIME?

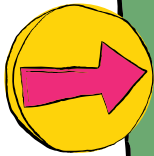
- You'll need enough time to set up the activity, to paint or draw and then to pack up - try not to rush. Remember - you can always paint or draw first and then come back and talk later



### YOU'LL NEED?

- A3 sheets of paper (photocopy the template if you'd like)
- Paint, paint brushes and paint pots,
- painting shirts, plastic sheets (and water!)
- OR pencils, textas and crayons

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



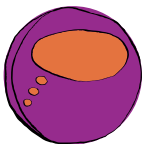
## WHAT TO DO:?

- Have children draw / paint a picture of their family members in the template provided.
- As they begin, prompt them by asking questions like “do you have any pets? are they part of your family?”, “are there other family members that you don’t live with or see often?”
- when complete, laminate the pictures or put them in a photo frame so that the child is able to hang it in their room or in another place where everyone can see



## SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

- for children who prefer to build / sculpt things, try using craft clay to create models of each family members. Clay will often harden in the sun or can be baked and then painted



## TO THINK ABOUT:

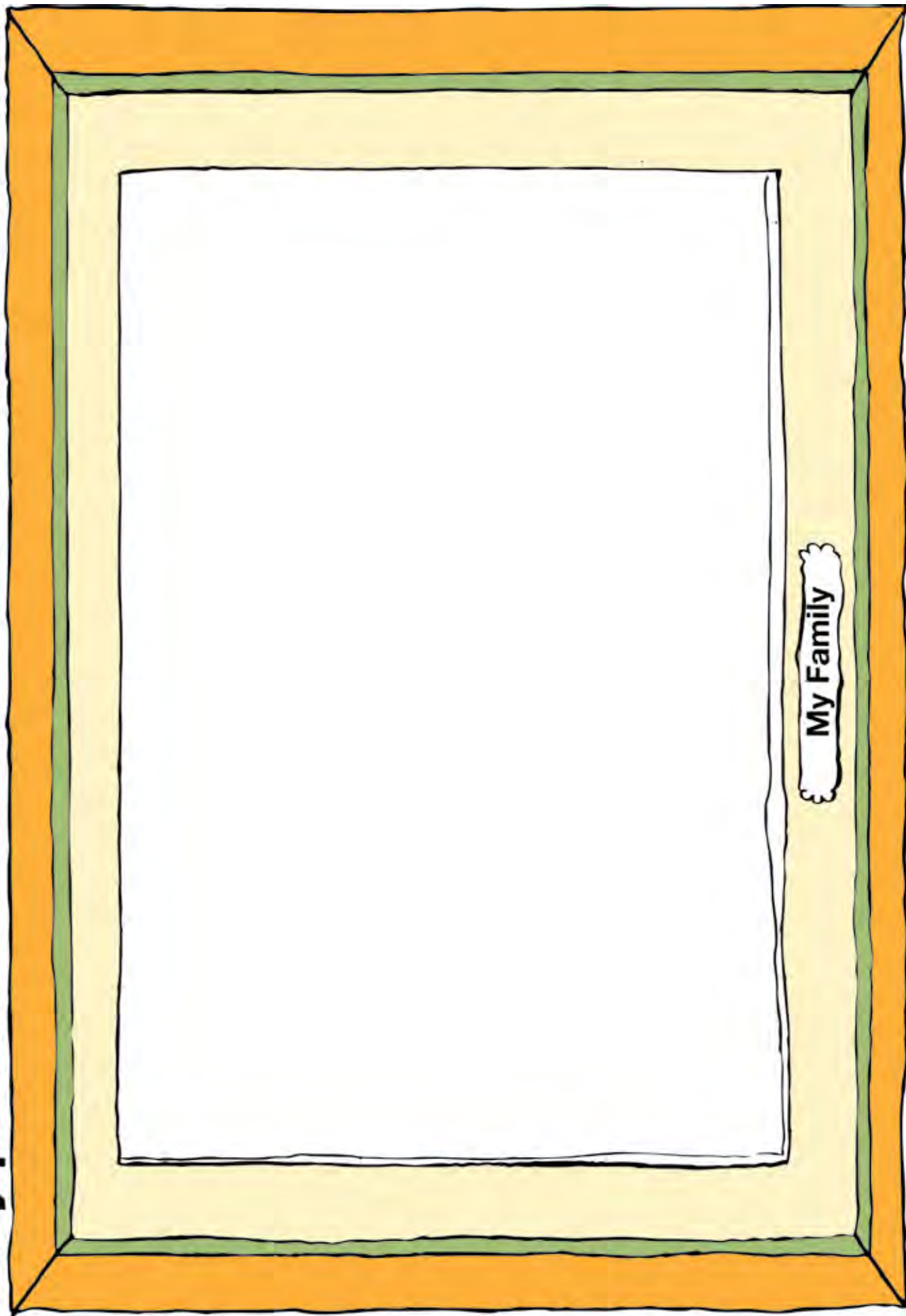
- older children might like to incorporate symbols into their portraits: ask them to include images that represent the things that they most respect / admire in their family members (a smile for a good sense of humour, a musical note for their ability to play, a hand for the support they provide)



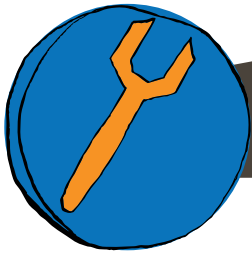
## HAZARD ZONES:

- Children often feel strongly about their families so an activity like this can bring up strong feelings like loss and grief if they no longer live with a family member or no longer have contact with them. Be ready for this - get them to write their sibling a letter, develop a treasure box in which they can keep things that remind them of their parent, talk about the good things that they shared.
- Conversely, some children may feel upset when talking about estranged family members where there has been family conflict or breakdown. Allowing children to vent their feelings is important - find them someone to talk to about their ongoing feelings where possible.

# Family portraits



# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3G FAMILY COAT OF ARMS

### LINKED TO:

- Sections 3.2, 3.4 & 3.4



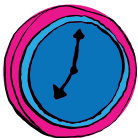
### WHY?

- To help families understand each other's needs and experience of being in their family
- To help families think through how to meet the needs of different family members, particularly children
- To draw out common positive experiences and identify simple things that can be done to enhance everyone's happiness and wellbeing



### WHO WITH?

- Individuals, family groups
- All ages (under 5's won't be able to complete this activity, but parents can still help them participate and answer some of the questions)



### TIME?

- 30-45 minutes

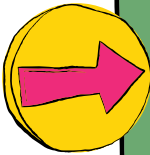


### YOU'LL NEED?

- Enough copies of the questions for each person, pens and paper
- Cardboard, textas, crayons, copies of the crest symbol for everyone



# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



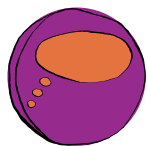
## WHAT TO DO:

- Explain that we are going to look at six questions that will help each family member figure out what is important to them in their family and what they need in their family. Ask if they would prefer to each have a piece of paper and spend a few minutes writing down their answers or if they prefer to have a couple of minutes to think about each question, discuss it together and then move on to the next question.
- Fill in the parts of the coat of arms answering the proposed questions. Use the template attached or draw your own crest on paper or cardboard. *'In times of knights, kings and princesses, people created special signs called family crests to represent their families and what they stood for. In each square of the family crest provided draw a symbol of something representing your family. Examples might be a football if your family loves sport, food if your family likes cooking, a favourite animal you all love or a favourite place.'*
- Finish by coming up with a family motto that sums up the family's strengths.



## SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

- This can be done separately (at different times), then bring everyone together to share their answers.
- To turn this into a fun game, cut up each person's answers, put them in a box and mix them around. Just like a lucky dip, each person could pull another family member's answer out and read it aloud. Everyone has to guess whose answer it is.
- Allow families to choose whether they just talk about their answers, or write them down. Perhaps one person in the family wants to be the scribe, or perhaps they nominate the worker to record their answers.



## TO THINK ABOUT:

- The coat of arms can be as serious or fun as families want to make it. Anything that gets people talking about what they have in common and what they enjoy about their family is a good thing!



## HAZARD ZONES:

- This activity could be too hard for young children to do on their own, so help them to participate by using pictures, cards or stickers. Reword the questions to make them easier for young children to understand, eg 'what is the best thing your family has ever done?', 'what are the things you like doing the most with your family?'
- If some family members are feeling unsafe or don't have their basic needs met they will not be able to focus on this activity. Address those needs first, then come back to the activity.

# Family coat of arms

What three words could be a family motto that we could all believe in?

What one thing could other family members do to make you happy?

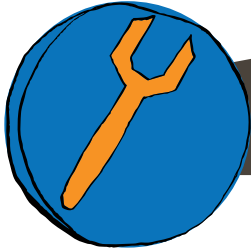
What is something that our family improved over the past year?

What do you consider to be your families greatest achievement?

What three family rituals mean a lot to you?

What three family activities do you enjoy doing?

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3H GIANT PUZZLE

### LINKED TO:

- Sections 3.2 & 3.3



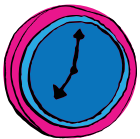
### WHY?

- Helping families identify the needs of each individual
- Helping families affirm their relationships and connections in a relaxed and fun way



### WHO WITH?

- Works best with 3 to 6 family members or a small group of children



### TIME?

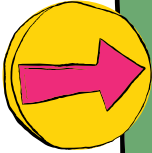
- 15 - 45mins



### YOU'LL NEED?

- Large piece of cardboard divided into puzzle pieces and almost cut completely out. Mark the back of each piece so that participants all make their collages on the correct side.
- Provide fabric pieces, magazines, crayons, glue, coloured paper, shapes, stickers, scissors

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL



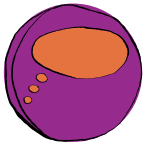
## WHAT TO DO:

- Each person chooses a large blank puzzle piece (made from cardboard).
- Provide pens, crayons, glue, fabrics, coloured and textured paper, magazines to cut up (both female and male themes). Each person creates a puzzle piece about themselves, things that are important to them, their needs and wants. Or you could use this to focus on a specific area or specific question.
- When everyone is finished, the facilitator supports participants to share a little about their puzzle piece and what it tells about them. After everyone has shared, ask if anyone noticed any similarities between puzzle pieces, any differences, any themes, any things they can all work on together, ways to support each other to reach their goals etc.
- Then participants put the puzzle pieces together to make the whole puzzle and, if they choose to, stick/glue these onto a big piece of cardboard and write individual names on each piece.



## SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

- If children want to be more involved in the activity get them to paint or draw pictures on the opposite side of the cardboard before beginning the activity.

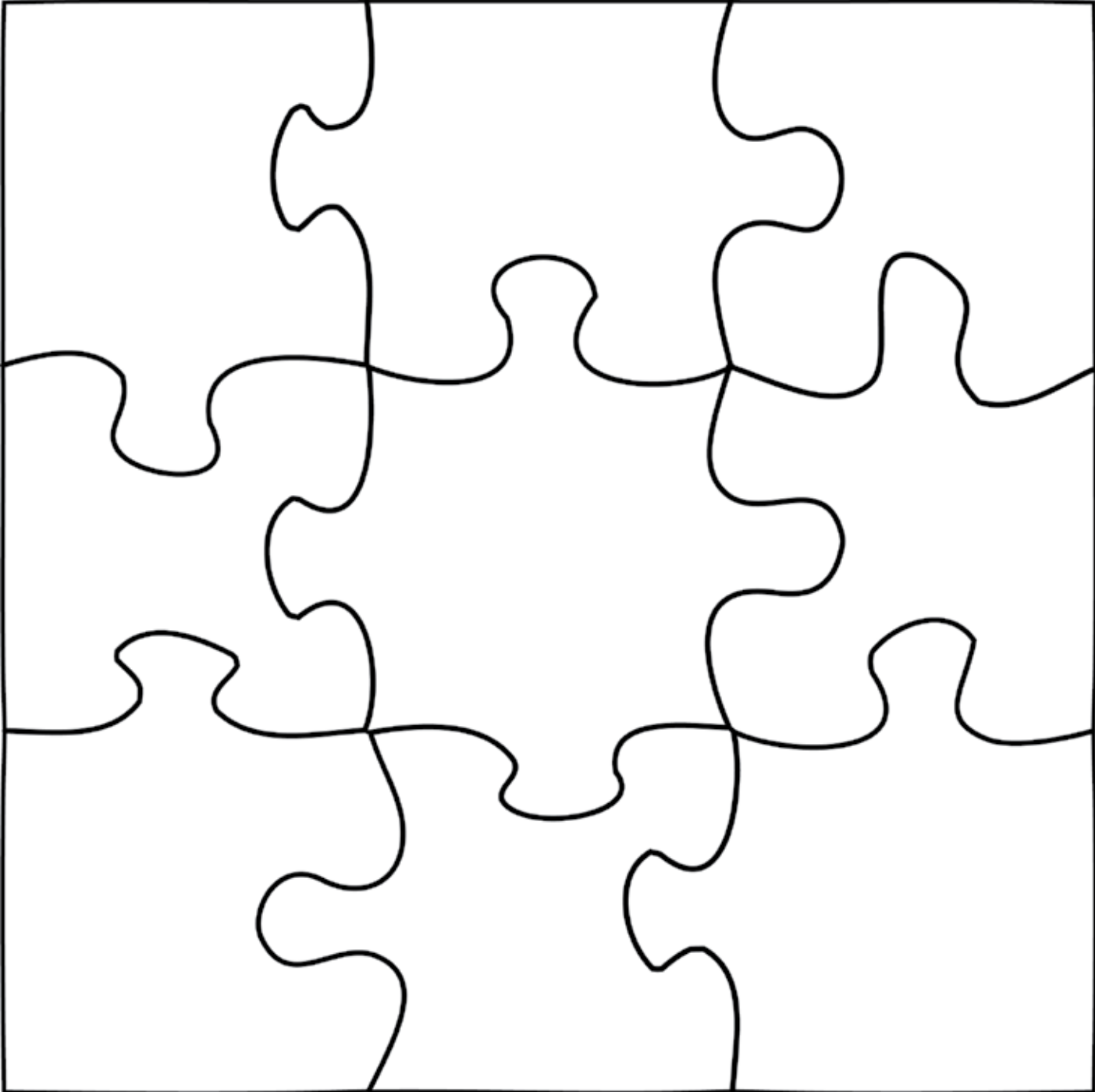


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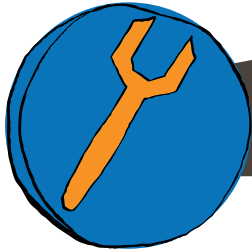
## TO THINK ABOUT:

- Try to stay back and observe how families organise themselves. Who helps who, who takes the lead with putting the puzzle together, are everyone's ideas listened to or just the oldest or loudest family members? This, as well as the content of the puzzle pieces, gives you some additional clues about family dynamics, roles, responsibilities and needs.

# Giant puzzle



# MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL



## TOOL 3I HOW ARE WE GOING?

This activity is based on a tool by Andrew Turnell from Signs of Safety. More information about his work is available at [www.signsofsafety.net](http://www.signsofsafety.net)

### LINKED TO:

- Sections 1.6, 1.7, 3.3, 3.4 & 3.5



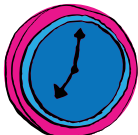
### WHY?

- This tool is designed to be used with families in an open way so that they have an understanding of your concerns and you understand theirs. Even when there are serious concerns and a notification has to be made to Child Protection authorities, for example, this tool can be a valuable way of helping families contribute to child safety and play an important part in solving the problems.



### WHO WITH?

- Families (including children 8+ and younger where appropriate)



### TIME?

- 15 mins+



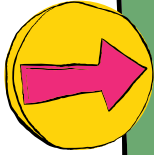
### YOU'LL NEED?

- A copy of the template and markers



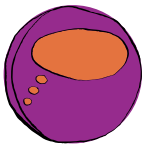
# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL

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## WHAT TO DO:

- Ask families to brainstorm what things are working well in their family – you can do this as a free-for-all brainstorm, or take turns to say one thing, or use stickers, pictures or cards (like St Luke's strength cards) to help people identify what they think is working well. List those things in the middle column.
- Do the same process with 'what are we worried about'?
- Ask people to rate safety on a scale of 0 – 10 where 0 means the family can no longer care for the children and 10 means that everything that needs to happen for the children to be safe is happening.
- Finally brainstorm what needs to happen to address those things people are worried about. What safety score would they like to give themselves in a month's time? What needs to happen to get that score?



## TO THINK ABOUT:

- You can use some of the other tools to inform this one. For example, Sentence Stems, All tied up and Family Strengths (Tools 3.1, 3.2, 3.4) will give families heaps of information to use in this planning tool. You can use this as an assessment and a planning tool.



## HAZARD ZONES:

- Families should feel safe in completing this exercise as should the workers facilitating the discussion. Time and energy should be spent before the exercise considering how the family is faring and some discussion about how to manage if family's find the conversation difficult to unproductive.

# How are we going?



What is working well?



What are we worried about?



## Safety Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Can no longer care for children

Everything to keep the child safe is happening

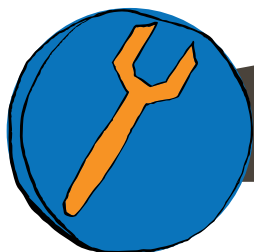


What safety score would you like in a month?

What needs to happen to get that score?



# My FAMILY is SPECIAL



## OTHER TOOLS RELATED TO PRINCIPLE 3

LINKED TO:

Tool:	Relates to sections
2D	3.5
2E	3.5

# MY FAMILY IS SPECIAL

## RESOURCES

### BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

#### ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE

Go to: [www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/bibs/kearney2/kearney2.html](http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/bibs/kearney2/kearney2.html) for the four books listed below, and others.

1. Diane Davis, **Something is wrong at my house: A book for children about parents fighting**, Seattle, Washington, Parenting Press
2. Maxine Trottier, **A Safe Place** *A mother escapes to a domestic violence shelter with her young daughter, where she builds up her strength and gains the courage to begin a new life. As they leave, the little girl gives hope to a frightened boy just entering the shelter (ages 5 to 9 years).*
3. Candy Dawson Boyd & Floyd Cooper **Daddy, Daddy, Be There**, New York City, Philomel Books Division of Putnam & Grosset *Children's moving pleas for a father's love and support. This easy-to-read story touches on all that children want from their father - emotionally - as they go through their life span together. This book only touches on domestic violence, but its use as a tool for assessment & for exploration of wish-fulfillment cannot be denied. Picture book with multicultural illustrations (ages 3 to 10 years).*
4. Steven Timm **The Dragon & the Mouse** Available exclusively from: Touchstone Enterprise 2108 South University Drive Fargo, ND 58103, (701) 237-4742 *A mouse lives with a dragon who abuses him emotionally, physically, mentally and socially. In the end, the mouse leaves the living arrangement, but continues to be friends with the dragon (ages 4 to 11 years).*

#### ABOUT PARENTS SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

- Boegehold, Betty **Daddy doesn't live here anymore**
- Berry About divorce: **Good answers to tough questions** (suitable for older children)

#### ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND PROTECTION AND SAFETY

- Johnsen **The trouble with secrets** (discussion of different types of secrets, surprises, breaking someone's possession, medical examinations and unsafe touches)
- Otto, Maryleah **Tom doesn't visit us anymore**

#### ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

- Paola Mason **Helpful Harry: A story for children who have a parent with a mental illness** (comic) [www.howstat.com/comic/](http://www.howstat.com/comic/)
- Some of the resources from the Children Of Parents With a Mental Illness (COPMI) website ([www.copmi.net.au/](http://www.copmi.net.au/)) are listed below. There are heaps more on the website.
- Margaret M. Holmes, **A Terrible Thing Happened**, Magination Press, 2000 *A picture book for 4 to 8 year old children who have witnessed any kind of violent or traumatic episode. It uses friendly animal characters to tell the story, which centres around Sherman, who has had something terrible happen to him. The story explores the ways this made him feel and what helped him to feel better.* Availability: [www.maginationpress.com](http://www.maginationpress.com)
- David Miller, **Big and Me**, 2008 *Big and Small are machines that work together as a team. But some days Big goes a bit wobbly, and Small gets worried. Big malfunctions in a variety of ways and Small tries to help, with the assistance of The Boss and Mechanic. The story is a metaphor for a child living with an adult who suffers from mental illness. Big and Me is dramatically illustrated with paper sculpture* Availability: Ford St Publishing [www.fordstreetpublishing.com/](http://www.fordstreetpublishing.com/)  
Review available from: [www.copmi.net.au/common/book\\_reviews.html#Bigandme](http://www.copmi.net.au/common/book_reviews.html#Bigandme)

# My FAMILY is SPECIAL

## RESOURCES

### BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

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- Gretchen Kelbaugh, **Can I Catch It Like A Cold?** *A story to help children understand a parent's depression. Aimed at children in the 5 to 9 year age range.*  
Availability: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 33 Russell Street Toronto, ON, Canada, M5S 2S1  
Email: [marketing@camh.net](mailto:marketing@camh.net)  
Web: [www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net)
- **It's About You Too! A guide for children who have a parent with a mental illness**, National Schizophrenia Fellowship (Scotland), 2004 *A publication for children (especially those aged between 8-10) who have a parent with a mental illness.*  
Availability: National Schizophrenia Fellowship (Scotland), Claremont House, 130 East Claremont Street, Edinburgh, EH7 4LB  
Phone: 0131 557 8969  
Email: [info@nsfscot.org.uk](mailto:info@nsfscot.org.uk)  
Web: [www.nsfscot.org.uk](http://www.nsfscot.org.uk)
- Ann Sved-Williams, **Jake's Dinosaur**, 1996 *A picture book for 3 to 6 year olds.*  
Availability: Helen Mayo House, Glenside Hospital, PO Box 17, Eastwood, SA, 5063  
Phone: (08) 8303 1451  
Email: [svedwill@hcn.net.au](mailto:svedwill@hcn.net.au)  
Web: [www.wch.sa.gov.au/hmh](http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/hmh)
- Denise Scott, **Making Mummy Better**, Spectrum Publications, 2001. *A picture book about Sally, who's mum has had a new baby and is now suffering from post-natal depression. This book gives comfort and reassurance to 3 to 9 year olds in the same situation – that it is possible for their mums to get better with help, support and time.*  
Availability: Spectrum Publications  
Email: [spectpub@ozemail.com.au](mailto:spectpub@ozemail.com.au)
- Andrea Louis, **Robby Rose and Monkey**, 1995. *A Picture book for children aged 3 to 6 years.* Availability: Helen Mayo House, Glenside Hospital, PO Box17, Eastwood, SA, 5063  
Phone: (08) 83031451
- Tricia Irving, **Something Has Happened: An activity book for young people**, 2000  
*An activity book for young children (aged 3 to 6 years old) who are facing difficult times. It is designed to be personalised by each child. There are guidelines on every page for a parent or carer as they help a child with the book.*  
Availability: Skylight, PO Box 7309, Wellington South, New Zealand  
Phone: 0800 299 100  
Email: [support@skylight-trust.org.nz](mailto:support@skylight-trust.org.nz)  
Web: [www.skylight.org.nz](http://www.skylight.org.nz)
- Campbell, Bebe Moore, **Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry**, 2003  
*A little girl copes with her mother's mental illness, with the help of her grandmother and friends.*  
Available: [www.penguin.com/young\\_readers](http://www.penguin.com/young_readers)
- Samantha Tidy and Ian Forss, **The Blue Polar Bear**, 2005  
*Developed as part of the Dual Diagnosis Support Kit produced by the NSW Department of Community Services, this book for children 5 to 7 years old aims to assist workers, carers and parents to introduce the issues of parental dual diagnosis (mental illness and substance misuse), explore concerns and encourage positive coping and help-seeking behaviours.*  
Available: [www.nscchealth.nsw.gov.au/carersupport/fami/ddkit/default.shtml](http://www.nscchealth.nsw.gov.au/carersupport/fami/ddkit/default.shtml)

# My FAMILY IS SPECIAL

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## RESOURCES

### BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

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#### WEBSITE/ONLINE

- **VicCHAMPS [www.easternhealth.org.au/champs/](http://www.easternhealth.org.au/champs/)**  
*The CHAMPS project in Victoria, Australia, has developed this website for children in the 5 to 12 years age group who have an adult family member with mental illness.*
- 

#### PACKAGE/KITS

- **Dual Diagnosis Support Kit 2006**  
*The Dual Diagnosis Support Kit includes information for workers, foster carers, and parents with dual diagnosis - as well as two storybooks for children aged 5 to 7 years and 8 to 12 years, plus a wallet-sized information card for adolescents.*  
The kit is downloadable from the DoCS website and available through the website free of charge.  
Phone: (02) 9716 2356  
Web: [www.nscchealth.nsw.gov.au/carersupport/fami/ddkit/default.shtml](http://www.nscchealth.nsw.gov.au/carersupport/fami/ddkit/default.shtml)



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Flinders Institute for Housing, Urban and Regional Research (2008) *Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness: A Synthesis Report*, accessed from [www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/synthesis\\_report08/Pages/dom\\_fam\\_violrel\\_homeless.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/synthesis_report08/Pages/dom_fam_violrel_homeless.aspx)

Anson, M J and Lynch, E W *Early Intervention*, Pro-Ed., Austin, Texas, 1995.

T. Hodder, M. Teesson, and N. Buhrich, *Down and Out in Sydney: Prevalence of Mental Disorders, Disability and Health Service Use among Homeless People in Inner Sydney*, Sydney City Mission, Sydney, 1998

Moore T & Larkin *More Than My Child's Disability: A Comprehensive Review of Family-Centred Practice and Family Experiences of Early Childhood Intervention Services* cope (Vic) Inc., Melbourne, Victoria, 2006

Stephenson & Hume (2001) *Family Homelessness Discussion Paper*, SA Dept of Human Services: Research, Analysis and Information Team Service Development Branch, Adelaide

Winkworth, G and McArthur, M *A framework for screening assessment and referrals in Family Relationship Centres*, Attorney-General's Department, 2008