juggling work, family and childcare
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Introduction

Parenting can be a rewarding and sometimes difficult task. There are many demands on time, added to this can be pressures from work or study. Juggling these demands while staying focused on the needs of our children is something we all aim for but sometimes find hard to maintain.

This resource booklet aims to give parents / caregivers utilizing *child care services some tips, ideas and places to go when they need help or more information. It was written in response to the frequently asked questions we receive about, children’s development, relationships, looking after yourself, Child Care Benefit, special circumstances, family friendly work practices and balancing household management, work and family.

We hope this booklet is a useful starting point and we encourage parents / caregivers to contact any of the services and groups listed, should they need further information or support.

* For more information about choosing quality child care, the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc. has a detailed website www.ncac.gov.au or telephone 1300 136 554 For information about local child care services contact the Child Care Access Hotline on 1800 670 305 or Teletypewriter Service 1800 639 327 (free call except for mobile or pay phones)

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Family friendly workplaces

Balancing a hectic working life with the demands of running a household and taking care of your family is not easy. Family responsibilities can have an impact on employee’s lives and a family friendly workplace is one where employers are prepared to be flexible where possible.

Increasingly many employers are beginning to think more about the needs of their employees and are introducing family friendly work practices. Many work places have found that flexible conditions work well and can add to the well being, happiness and productivity of their staff.

Family Friendly Workplaces

- Consider an employee’s family commitments when planning overtime, travel, relocation etc. and provide a mix of employment options
- Discuss work and family issues in staff meetings
- Develop ‘Keep In Touch’ programs for employees on maternity, parental or any other form of extended leave
- Recognise the importance of families to workers by having open days or social events that involve families

Employment Options can include

- Part time arrangements
- Job Sharing
- Working from home occasionally (especially when the children are sick)
- Flexible start and finish times
- Averaging hours (e.g. total working hours can be condensed or spread out over periods other than a week)
- Flexi-time, time banks or make up days, Compressed hours (working longer hours per day in order to have a day off instead)

What if I need more help?

- (refer to resource page 19)
Looking After Yourself

Today, parents are living very busy lives and it is not always easy to fit everything in, especially for sole parents. Work, housework, family and community commitments, running children to childcare, kindy, school and sporting activities can leave you feeling stressed and just plain exhausted. Too much stress in your life can have serious consequences for your physical health as well as your sanity! It makes sense then that looking after yourself is a major priority!

Parent Survival Tips

▲ Are you taking on too much? It’s easy to feel pressured to take on extra commitments especially when your children are involved. Be your own best friend and prioritise. Learn to say no to the things you don’t really have time for or don’t enjoy. This isn’t always easy, but you will feel more in control if you can. Remember QUALITY time spent with your children is more important than quantity. Taking 5 minutes to really connect with your family - to share a book & cuddle or enjoy a rough & tumble game is OK.

▲ Do you often say I don’t have time? Try planning your day/week and put it on the fridge, try family meetings and share household tasks with children (this helps them feel special). Only do what you can really do, negotiate the rest with your spouse and LEAVE THE REST for another day, it’s not going anywhere.

▲ Are you having fun? Keep a sense of humour, watch a comedy, get together with friends for a chat or a BBQ as laughing and joking helps you see life more positively. Socialising and having fun is as important for you as it is for your children.
• **Is your lifestyle lacking vitality?** Become active, try belly dancing, yoga, sing & dance with the children, kick a ball around. Eat a wide variety of nutritious foods, as a healthy lifestyle will provide you with lots more energy. You are your kid’s main resource – so your wellbeing affects their wellbeing.

• **Are you getting enough sleep?** This is not always easy with little ones, but a good nights sleep can leave you refreshed and the stresses of the next day won’t seem so bad.

• **Are you allowing others to support you?** Admitting that you are not coping is really hard as it’s often easier to give than to accept help from others. Sharing with others can provide valuable peer support and decrease feelings of isolation.

• **Are you comparing yourself to others?** Sometimes we focus on others and think that they seem to have it all together causing us to feel inadequate. All parents struggle at times with family, parenting or personal issues, so you are not alone. REMEMBER you’re doing the best you can with what can often be a REALLY TOUGH JOB!

**what if I need more help?**

• Speak to your GP who can make a referral to a counsellor/social worker

• Contact the Southern Fleurieu Health Service Ph: 8552 0600. You can talk to women’s health and social workers (appt needed).

• The Women’s Information Service, has information on a wide range of topics. Ph: 1800 188 158

• Women’s Health Statewide, provides counselling for rural women Ph: 1800 182 098

• Men’s Health Line – Ph: 1300 789 978

• Your local library is a wonderful resource – check out the latest publications.
Being a Dad is one of the most important and rewarding jobs you will ever have. As dads are often (though not always) the full time worker, fitting in work commitments, family demands and spending time with your children can be difficult, but the benefits are well worth it. Here are some suggestions for finding a balance.

**Working Smarter**

- Put a limit on how many extra activities you take on at work. Being on too many optional committees can eat into the time you spend with your family, so think about the benefits you will get from those activities and weigh them up against time you could be spending with your children.
- At times it is not possible to avoid working late or long hours. You can do simple things like taking the time to phone and say good night to your children.
- Avoid having to take work home by taking shorter lunch breaks or improving your time management.
- If you do need to work at home, spend a little time with your children and try to work after they have gone to bed.
- Work is important to you too and your family can feel a part of that. Let your children visit your work place so they can see where you spend your time.

**Things All Dads Can Do With Their Children**

- Enjoy your children’s company – get involved, read, play, have fun, do things together
- Talk about your feelings so that your children learn that it is OK for men to talk about feelings.
- Comfort your children. Children, even tiny babies, often get a special feeling of security from being comforted by their Dads, especially when they are frightened or upset
- Share your own interests by involving them in what you do
- Share your child’s life. Go to the Childcare Centre, meet the staff who will care for your child, get involved in parent nights and Centre activities.
- Play with your children. Dad’s often enjoy active and tumble play. Children can learn a lot from this sort of play with their Dad’s, they learn that you can be strong and have fun as well as being gentle.

**what if I need more help?**

- Phone Relationships Australia 1300 364 277 or visit their website [www.relationships.com.au](http://www.relationships.com.au) (refer to resource page 19)
Relationships

(based on information from Relationships Australia)

For many of us there are often big decisions to make about relationships, work & children. Conflict occurs at some time in every one of the relationships that are important to us and it is important to find ways to balance the needs of our partners, families, friends and jobs with our own individual needs.

What are the Ingredients of a Good Relationship

- Good communication
- Love
- Respect
- Commitment
- Emotional Support
- Balance and shared decision making
- Empathy

What Can I Do for a Healthy Relationship

- Be open and honest
- Do fun things together
- Spend time alone together, as well as time as a family
- Really listen and understand what your partner is saying
- Tell your partner when you are unhappy about something
- Try to find solutions that are OK for both of you
- Show appreciation when your partner does something for you

Look After Yourself

- Share the load – agree on who will do what
- Allow yourself time to relax
- Make time especially for you – soak in a bath, read, listen to music, work in the shed, visit your mates, excercise

What if I Need More Help?

- Phone Relationships Australia 1300 364 277
  or visit their website www.relationships.com.au
  (refer to resource page 19)
Keeping Up With Your Child’s Milestones

When children are born, parents become aware of the relevant “milestones” their children will be reaching and when they should be expected to do this. For example, they should be smiling by 6 weeks, crawling by 8-10 months, walking by 10-15 months, and speaking at least 100 words by the age of 2.

Parents often pick this information up from other parents and child health professionals when their children are quite young. After returning to work/study it can be difficult to maintain these supportive networks and gain knowledge about child development. If this is your experience the following information may help.

What if I have concerns about my child’s development?

The first thing to do is “stay calm!” Each child will develop in their own time, and it is important to remember that the general information we receive is a guide only. There are going to be children who fall either side of these guidelines.

- If you are concerned about your child’s development, speak with your GP, your Child and Youth Health Nurse, your child care / preschool provider or community health service. They will be able to point you in the right direction. If there is a clear developmental delay, you might be referred to an early intervention team. This is a service offered to children generally 0-8 years old and their families, that may offer speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and social work services.

- You don’t have to try and rush your child developmentally. These milestones come about through a step by step process, and your child will need to experience each step in their own time so that they learn what has to be learned before moving on to the next stage.

- Children develop through play and experiencing the world around them. Participating in everyday activities is part of this process. You can nurture your child’s development at home by involving them in the activities you normally do (eg housework, shopping, social events).
Time To Talk: Encouraging Communication Development

Communication allows us to share information, desires and ideas with those around us. Communication involves pre-language skills (listening, attending, turn-taking, eye contact), understanding what is said (instructions, questions), expressive language (using words and sentences, grammar), articulation (producing speech sounds), voice and fluency.

Children learn to communicate through listening, talking, playing, music and books. To encourage your child’s communication development:

- Talk about what you and your child are doing
- Talk about what comes next
- Use simple words and sentences
- Expand on what your child is saying
- Use a range of words eg naming (ball, cup, car) action (sleep, eat) and describing words (big/little, wet/dry)

Everyday activities provide the best experience for language development. For example, when you’re shopping you can talk about:

- Food (naming, size, colour, picture object matching)
- People (boys/girls, what they are doing, where they are)
- Objects you need (basket for carrying food, money for buying things)

At bath time you can talk about:

- Body parts
- Water (hot/cold)
- Objects you need (towels for drying/soap for washing)
Communication difficulties

Speech Pathologists help children with communication and/or feeding difficulties in a variety of settings. They may work with children individually or in small groups.

If your child needs to see a Speech pathologist you may be given specific activities to work on at home or at the child care centre or kindergarten your child attends. Talk with your speech pathologist about ways of incorporating activities into your family’s schedule. Regular practice for short periods of time is the most effective way to help your child develop communication skills.

What if my child attends a child care service?

Parents may become concerned when their children are in child care that the attention and time may not be put into assisting their children to meet these milestones. What is important to note here is:

In a quality child care setting, the focus will be on the development of your child in all aspects (e.g. physically, socially, emotionally). The centre’s curriculum will be based on the very best care for your child. When child care staff believe that there may be a problem emerging, they will talk to you and perhaps suggest a referral.

What if I need more help?

▶ (refer to resource page 19)
Helping Your Family ENJOY Healthy Eating

One of the things busy parents can find difficult is managing shopping and meal times. There can be a great temptation, when time is limited, to buy take away foods and eat highly processed prepackaged meals. A healthy diet for you and your family is important as it allows you to manage life’s ups and downs and maintain a healthy vitality. Here are some thoughts about how you and your family can ENJOY food.

E ating a nutritious Breakfast provides a fresh “fuel” supply at the beginning of the day. Children & adults who skip breakfast are more likely to become irritable and tired, and show less concentration for learning and tasks. For breakfast on the run, try a milk drink or fruit smoothie, fruit yoghurt or cheese sandwich. You might like to speak with your child care service about providing breakfast or allowing your child to eat their breakfast when they arrive.

N  utritious foods should be eaten everyday, to provide the essential vitamins and minerals required for growth and development. Healthy snacks are especially important for kids, as they may provide between 1/4 and 1/2 of their daily food intake. Convenient, healthy, tasty snacks include crackers with peanut butter, raisin toast, plain yeast bun and a “rainbow” of diced fruit. Quality child care services have great ideas on what to put in kids lunch boxes or they provide quality meals and snacks.

J ust as important is a healthy attitude to food. With so much advertising and sometimes peer pressure for less healthy foods, a balanced approach is vital. It is not a case of “forbidding” less healthy choices, but the healthy options should be the everyday choices, leaving high fat, high added sugar, high salt foods as sometimes foods (save these for the occasional treat at home!)

O btaining a variety of vegetables can be a difficult task as most children refuse to eat vegetables at some stage. It may help to try raw vegetables (grate hard vegies/fruit like carrot and apple to prevent choking) try grating or dicing vegetables into hamburger patties or bolognese sauce. Preparing and sharing a meal together is a good way to spend time as a family, try including your children in age appropriate tasks.

Y our family may find that healthy eating at dinner may be a challenge. Not only is time and effort required in meal preparation, keeping the whole family happy can be difficult sometimes too! Top time savers include using frozen vegetables to save preparation time, and one pot meals such as stews or casseroles to save mess and washing up. A “make your own” approach is usually popular – try burritos and chicken wraps filled with salad, and homemade mini pizzas on English muffins, with chopped vegetables and cheese.

What if I need more help?
- Dietician Southern Fleurieu Health Service 8552 0600
- Dietician Adelaide Hills Community Health Service 8393 1833
Many parents returning to work feel a sense of guilt about leaving their child in care. Some are concerned about what impact this may have on their child’s behaviour or self-esteem. As a working parent it is important to maintain good communication with your child’s care providers, so that you are working together in your child’s best interests. The following information can be used as a guide and some excellent resources are available.

**Self Esteem**

- Self-esteem is about liking yourself, and believing in yourself and what you do;
- Self-esteem is also about feeling that you belong in your world;
- We start to develop self-esteem as babies by being loved, cared for and smiled at;
- As children grow older, through their increasing independence they learn what they like/dislike, can & can’t do;
- Toddlers still get most of their messages through their parents, and will take on board your reactions, words and behaviours.

**Some ideas for building a positive self image**

- Show your child that you love them by listening, paying attention to what they have to say or to show you e.g. a painting done at child care.
- Share their interests and joys – find out what they like doing at childcare.
- Recognize your child’s achievements. Encourage them to recognize how they feel about what they’ve done. Get them to praise themselves as well as receiving positive comments and affection from you;
- Let your child make mistakes and try things new to them. Try not to jump in and help or finish things off unless your child asks for your help (or unless it’s harmful!);
- Focus on the child in their own right without comparison to siblings or other children;
- Get your child involved in home activities – allow them to feel that it belongs to them too;
- Maintain wider relationships with family and friends;
- Make sure you as a parent, also follow the above points to maintain your confidence and self-esteem. Remember that your child is seeing the world primarily through you, and will model and learn from what they see and hear.
Managing children’s behaviour

There are a number of different strategies, depending on the age and personality of the child. Be prepared to observe your child’s behaviour and needs and identify triggers if possible, e.g. leave the shopping for a time when your child is less tired, hungry etc..

Accept that “difficult” behaviour is common in early childhood and provides a way for your child to communicate their needs and feelings.

Some thoughts

- Creating a child friendly environment can help alleviate some of the problems. If possible designate a “messy” room, where things don’t have to be packed up each day.

- Keep a realistic view of how much your family can achieve e.g. you may need to lower your house keeping standards for a while, share the load more or employ a cleaner.

- Children need lots of attention, especially if life is stressful.

- Giving attention for positive behaviour (that is the behaviour you want to see) reduces the need for negative attention e.g. yelling and smacking.

- There are many good reasons not to smack, most of all it has only short term benefits and may actually have a negative effect.

- Divert or distract your child’s attention or ignore what inappropriate behaviour you can (the child needs to be safe). If a behaviour is ignored by the adult it is less likely to be repeated by the child.

What if I need more help?

- Quality child care services have well developed behavior management strategies and reference books etc. for patents to borrow. (refer to resource page 19)
Separation at childcare:
Finding a Way to Say Goodbye

Working parents are often on the run and a good understanding about how your child’s carer will support the family member at this often painful time is important;

- Discuss with the carers a clear strategy around how you will say goodbye
- Be consistent with the approach to separation, so that the child will feel empowered in the process by knowing what is going on.
- Don’t feel you need to stay until your child is happy as this may inadvertently send a message to your child that to be upset will result in you staying.
- Appear confident about what is happening as a child looks to a parent’s response for assurance.
- Even though it’s hard, always say goodbye to your child and resist slipping away while they are being distracted. It can increase their anxiety if a child feels that you may disappear without warning.
- Remember there are many reasons why a child may exhibit separation anxiety even after being in a centre for many months. This may include the changing development of the child, giving him or her different understandings and perceptions about what is going on in their world.
- If you managed to be brave enough to leave your child while he or she is upset, ring the centre to talk to your child’s carer for your own reassurance. Remember you are doing the best to help your child build coping strategies that will help them in many areas of life.

A note on separation strategies:

Strategies can be as varied as children and their families. Success depends on a consistent approach that is agreed upon by both the family and the carers involved. It is important to respect and acknowledge a child’s feelings while appearing calm. Some steps may include the ritual of putting the child’s belongings in a safe place, greeting a primary caregiver and reading an agreed amount of books before a kiss and a hug goodbye. Remember it will take time and will vary from child to child.
What if my child is sick?,
a note from childcare staff

For working parents, particularly sole parents, having a sick child is difficult and there are no easy answers.

Plan ahead for such times by:

- Discussing possible leave arrangements with your employer.
- Sharing the load with your partner if you have one (you may want to discuss this when arranging access or custody issues)
- Ensuring you have at least one trusted emergency back up person to care for your child
- Talking to other working parents about these difficult times, you may be able to help each other. Some childcare centres provide regular opportunities for parents to meet and get to know each other.
- Communicating with the child care service staff to ensure they are kept in the picture about your child’s health so you can work in partnership towards the best outcomes for your family.

Quality child care services have policies and procedures relating to sick children. Make sure you have a copy of this information. Generally if your child exhibits any of the following symptoms you will be contacted to take them home; vomiting, diarrhea, temperature above normal, lethargy, head lice, eye discharge or skin rashes. The “staying Healthy in Childcare” guidelines recommend these procedures so that your child is given the best care possible when they are unwell, but also so that infectious diseases are not spread to other children and staff.
Child Care Benefit and Approved Absences
Your childcare centre can also provide information for when your child may need to have days away from childcare and how this may affect your Child Care Benefit. Centrelink has a range of publications regarding Child Care Benefit, such as the “Are you a Parent or Guardian” booklet which is available at Centrelink and Family Assistance Offices.

What if I need more help?
For more information, visit your local Centrelink or Family Assistance Office, phone the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150 (open from 8am - 8pm) or visit www.familyassist.gov.au.

Your local Centrelink offices are:

Victor Harbor
90 Victoria Street,
Victor Harbor

Noarlunga
Commonwealth House,
Ramsay Walk, Noarlunga Centre

Mount Barker
30 Stephen Street
Mount Barker
When Children have Additional Or Special Needs

Parenting, working/studying and caring for a child with an additional or special need can be extremely challenging and the level of family and or community support received can influence how easy or hard this becomes.

Additional or special needs include, physical and intellectual disability, developmental delay, behavior issues, chronic health problems, language or cultural barriers and giftedness. There are schemes and services in place which may be able to provide assistance and depending on your child’s circumstances, child care services many be able to access these so that they can provide quality care. It is important to plan well ahead if possible as setting up special supports can take time.

What if I need more help?

- **Supplementary services program (SUPS) Special needs subsidy scheme (SNSS)** Australian Government Department of Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs www.facs.gov.au
  
  If you would like more information about these schemes Telephone **8400 2151** and ask for the SUPS or SNSS Contact Officer

- **Inclusive Directions** .....................................................www.divdir.asn.au **8358 2299**

- **ELF Team** (Southern Fleurieu Health Service) ..............................................**8552 0600**

- **KIDS Team** (Adelaide Hills Community Health) .................................................**8393 1895**

- **IDSC** (Southern Fleurieu Health Service) ..........................................................**8552 0600**

- **IDSC** (Mount Barker Office) ............................................................................**8391 3022**

- **DIRC** (Disability Information Resource Centre)............. www.dircsa.org.au **1300 305 558**
  
  Information directory .......................................................................................... www.enable.net.au

- **Australian Association For Families of Children**
  
  With Disability (free membership for families) ......................................................**1800 222 660**

- **Autism Association of SA Inc.**............................................................................**8379 6976**

- **Novita Children’s Services** (was Crippled Children’s) ...........................................**8243 8243**
  
  (refer to resource page 19)
Resources

Child Care
National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc .................................................. 1300 136 554 or www.ncac.gov.au
Childcare Access Hotline .................................................................................. 1800 670 305
(TTY) .................................................................................................................. 1800 639 327
Family Assistance Office .................................................................................. 13 6150 or www.familyassist.gov.au

Child Development
ELF Team (Early Learning for Families) ............................................................... 8552 0600
Southern Fleurieu Health Service .......................................................................
KIDS Team ...........................................................................................................
Adelaide Hills Community Health Service .........................................................
Child and Youth Health ..................................................................................... 1300 733 606
Early Learning Program ..................................................................................... 8552 4160

Department of Education and Children’s Services

Parenting Support and Information
Fleurieu Families – Parenting Connections .......................................................... 8551 0542
Fleurieu Families – Volunteer Home Visiting ....................................................... 8551 0543
“Know Where to Go” kits are available at 11 sites across the Southern and Eastern Fleurieu.
The kits provide information on a range of topics relating to child development and parenting, contact 8551 0542 for more information.

Child and Youth Health – Parent Help Line ....................................................... 1300 364 100
Parenting SA – Parent Easy Guides ................................................................ www.parentingsa.gov.au
(also available from most children’s services)

Counselling and Information Services
Social Work and Women’s Health Services ....................................................... 8552 0600
Southern Fleurieu Health Service
Relationships Australia ....................................................................................... 8377 5400
Men’s Health Line ............................................................................................. 1300 789 978
Women’s Information Service .......................................................................... 1800 188 158

Workplace Issues
Australian Government Department of Employment
and Workplace relations – Workplace Information ............................................. www.workplace.gov.au
Working Women’s Centre .................................................................................. Tel: 1800 652 697 or www.wwc.org.au
Safe Work SA (South Australian Government) .................................................. www.eric.sa.gov.au
2000 can be downloaded from this site.