

BOOK REVIEWS

From strength to strength

A manual for professionals who facilitate diverse parent groups

Pat Jewell and Prue Blackmore

ACER Press, Camberwell, Vic. July 2004 (ISBN 0 86431 5317)

From strength to strength is a manual which is designed as a practical resource to assist in the facilitation and development of parenting groups in the context of social change. The reader is introduced to a broad range of information and theory that builds an overview of key issues in relation to parenting education, group process and specific content material.

Informed by their practice experiences, Jewell and Blackmore are able to identify key issues that may be helpful to include in generalist or mainstream parenting groups. These are child development, behaviour and discipline, communication and emotional well being. The authors suggest targeting parents who are likely to have children of the same age. They also identify the topics which parents most commonly request, including:

- bullying;
- homework;
- loss and grief;
- siblings; and
- transition stages.

The manual provides a resource bibliography after each section. Strategies to facilitate learning in each topic area are identified, with multiple options provided at times. Flexibility exists, however, for users to incorporate their own material at any point or to tailor the material to the group's needs.

In addition to generalist parenting groups, there is a section devoted to the planning and development of parent groups that focus on parents with particular needs. Parenting of grandchildren is one such area. Taking a strengths-based approach, the authors highlight the advantages of this parenting model such as identifying the value of connecting children to their roots. Content suggestions in this case include the opportunity to connect grandparents with other grandparents, increasing knowledge of developmental needs associated with developmental stages, identifying pressures and issues for children in current times, an introduction to strengths-based parenting, and how to have fun.

Further topics are highlighted as possible content for grandparent groups. These are consistent with issues arising from the experience of Oz Child's Kith and Kin program, eg, 'Grieving for the "child-free" lifestyle you were hoping for at this time in your life' and 'Communicating with your child about his or her child'.

From Strength to Strength appears to be a valuable resource for newcomers to parenting group facilitation given its overview of key issues and program structuring information. It is easy to read and provides users with flexible, practical tools for planning and implementation. It draws from the extensive experience of the authors, providing users with many insights that should work to enhance positive outcomes for parents/carers.

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Protecting children from abuse and neglect in primary care

Michael J. Bannon & Yvonne H. Carter (eds)

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003 (ISBN 0 19 263276 0)

The confusion experienced by professionals when faced with a child who has been, or is at risk of being, abused and/or neglected, is no secret. In fact, it is the subject of many studies performed in Emergency Departments

worldwide (for example, Jenny, Hymel, Ritzen, Reinert & Hay, 1999; Taitz, Moran & O'Meara, 2004). Recently, this issue has been the subject of a report released by Monash University and the Australian Childhood Foundation

(Goddard, Saunders, Stanley & Tucci, 2002). Two of the most alarming findings of this report were that 42% of professionals participating in the study would not report to the Department of Human Services (DHS) when they considered a child to be at *considerable* risk, and 12% of professionals would not report to DHS if they considered a child at *extreme* risk.

Protecting children from abuse and neglect in primary care goes a considerable way towards providing some practical guidance through this contentious problem. The book consists of twenty chapters, written by a number of authors from various backgrounds, explaining the various facets of child maltreatment. The style of writing varies from theoretical to more general and practical approaches. Information is provided on the clinical presentation of more specific forms of abuse such as physical abuse (Hobbs), emotional abuse (Hall), child neglect (Jones and Gupta) and child sexual abuse (Mott). Davidson and Lynch tackle the difficult topic of domestic violence and child protection. They document the effect of domestic violence upon children, describing them as 'children in need' and 'children with child protection issues'. The chapter covers a number of the difficulties and conflicts experienced by General Practitioners (GPs) in responding to situations of domestic violence, such as treating the violent offender and confidentiality issues.

Although the book is aimed at Primary Health Care Teams, it focuses almost exclusively upon GPs in their role as the primary health care provider. The GP is uniquely positioned in a number of stages of the child protection process. The book is largely ecologically driven: considering risk and protective factors within an ecological context as crucial to assessments of children at risk of child abuse and/or neglect. This is particularly evident in the chapter by Jones and Gupta who make a strong link between poverty, deprivation and child neglect.

There are a number of useful key messages in the book. Examples of these include 'the paramount importance of the child's welfare' and 'doing nothing is not an option when child abuse is suspected' (p.29). These are listed in a number of guiding principles suggested by Carter and Bannon – arguably one of the central aspects of the book. However, a potential weakness of the book lies in the relative lack of focus placed on these principles.

Although some of the information described is exclusive to Europe (in particular, the UK), DeBelle looks at child abuse in a multicultural society – which is both relevant and useful to GPs in Australia. In addition, Bannon and Carter describe problems not uniquely experienced by GPs in Europe, such as their very high workloads and potential conflicts. Slowther outlines other commonly experienced problems such as doctors acting in the patient's best interests, respecting autonomy (such as consent and confidentiality of adults and

children) and moral decision-making. Within the context of GP training and child protection, Bannon, Carter, Jackson and Blair comment on the limited amount of child protection training for GPs. This is reflected in their reluctance to recognise and report child abuse, and effectively provides the rationale for the book's existence.

Only a brief reference to violence against staff was included (pages 134-135). It could have been further expanded upon at the expense of other, possibly, more theoretical parts of the book. The effect of violence against child protection workers is often minimised and overlooked, resulting in some child protection failures (Stanley & Goddard, 2002).

Some errors and inaccuracies were noted through the book, which could have benefited from more rigorous editing.

One of the most attractive aspects of the book is the simple and useful case studies that illustrate what should be done and why. This information is urgently needed: it links well with issues of mandatory reporting and, most importantly, it provides the reader with guidelines on how to deal with cases of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. Overall, provided specific Australian information is not sought, the book represents a more than adequate reference for GPs (or possibly other primary care workers) who find themselves in situations of knowing a child is in need of assistance and/or potential danger.

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