

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION AUSTRALIA (VICTORIAN CHAPTER)
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Concurrent Paper

**Early G.O.A.L.S: A model of support for families of young children at risk of,
or with problem behaviour**

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Existing knowledge about how to effectively support families of children with delays/disabilities who are at risk of, or present problem behaviour has a long research tradition. Studies have generated valid and reliable supports and interventions, especially for families of school-aged children. It is argued that the practice of such knowledge 'early' and in 'natural' situations with families of young children in ways that are preventative and actively promote social and emotional development is yet to be accomplished. Further, the characteristics of children during the early childhood period and those of their family contexts have often been ignored in the development of behavioural supports. In a time when 'evidence-based' practice is the required ruling, there is an imperative for professionals to devise supports and strategies that are specifically usable, accessible and tailored to families of young children. At the same time, these need to have stood rigorous examination in the early childhood intervention field. This is particularly important when recent studies reveal that 7% to 24% of 2-3 year old children have social emotional or behavioural problems (Briggs-Gowan, Carter, Skuban, & Horwitz, 2001). The aim of this paper is threefold: (1) to present a model of support and intervention for families that incorporates existing research in the early childhood field; and (2) to report on the pilot implementation of the model, including the materials used, outcome measures, and preliminary findings; (3) to report on future program development and implementation.

About the Project

- William Buckland Foundation
- Project team
- Support from EPIC ECI and RMIT University

Aims

- (1) to present a model of support and intervention for families of young children with developmental disabilities/delays; and
- (2) to discuss the pilot implementation of the model

What does research tell us?

- Children with developmental delay/disability are at risk of developing problem behaviour;
- Behavioural family interventions and supports: Long research tradition;
- Need to intervene 'early';
- Ecological perspective: family systems and program factors
- Building on child socio-emotional competencies;
- Need to embed strategies in 'natural' family life

What else do we know about interventions?

- *On the positive side:*
 - Families gain emotional supports;
 - Families gain a greater sense of competence;
 - Several factors affect families' participation in programs.
- *On the not so positive side:*
 - Families do not necessarily maintain intervention/support strategies overtime;
 - Behavioural changes are not maintained overtime

Conclusion

Although we know a lot about 'the problem' and about what works, this does not necessarily translate into practice that will meaningfully assist children and their families.

Research project

- Project plan
 - Literature review
 - Identification of child and family outcome measures
 - Design of study
- Survey of families
- Development of program
- Trialing of program with families

Survey: Sample

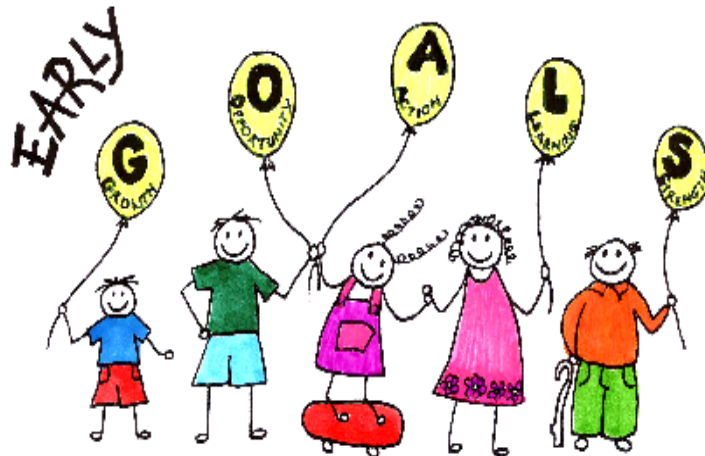
- 21 families
- Children <3: 5
- Children >3: 16

Survey: Findings

- What parents enjoyed most about their family life:
 - seeing their children learn and grow;
 - time with their family;
 - time to themselves and relationship with their partner
- What parents found most difficult in their family life:
 - child behaviour;
 - managing family routines;
 - feeling tired
- What would parents find most useful?
 - dealing with people's reactions;
 - how to teach their child;
 - avoiding problem behaviours in the first place;
 - knowledge of local services

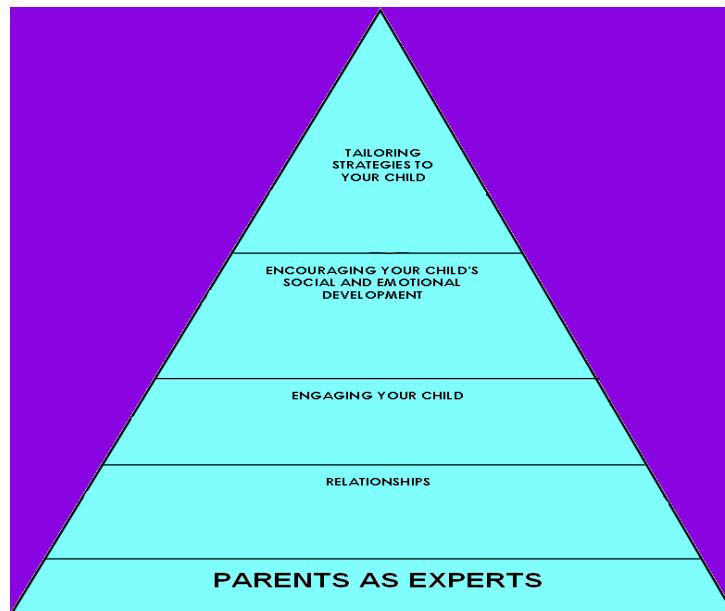
Outcomes  Full child and family participation in natural settings

- **G**rowth
- **O**ppportunity
- **A**ction
- **L**earning
- **S**trength



A conceptual model: Principles

- Acknowledgement of the uniqueness of the early years;
- Working in partnership with families
- Building positive relationships and working on strengths;
- Strategies for child engagement;
- Learning strategies to promote social/ emotional development;
- Interventions on the basis of individual goals.



A practical model: Characteristics

- Scope: Birth to 5 years of age;
- A whole of service approach: Coordination among team members (families, universal and specialised services);
- Goal oriented: Starting where families are at;
- Flexible: Wide range of behavioural concerns, with a wide range of family resources;
- Same language/strategies by team members;
- Immersion in natural environments
 - Addressing situations/behaviours that will make the greatest difference in family life
 - Addressing factors that act as barriers to managing situations/behaviours in routines
 - Embedding strategies in routines

A program, a model of practice, or both?

- Structure
- Mode of delivery
- Strategies

The program: Structure

- Modules
- Facilitator's manual
- Home visits
- Phone contact

The program: Mode of delivery

- Group
- Individual
- Flexible

The Program: Strategies

- Discussion
- Rehearsal/practice
- Activities
- Homework
- Monitoring of individual family/parent goals

Modules: Characteristics

- Written
- Discrete/self-contained
- Individualised

Modules

1. Why do I need this program?
2. All about relationships
3. Why does my child do that?
4. Staying on course
5. Smooth sailing
6. Be cool! DIY Guide to managing stress
7. Who's on your team?

Child and family outcome measures

- Demographics
- Parenting Sense of Competence
- Parenting Hassles
- Family Time and Routines
- Family Quality of Life
- Child Adaptive Behaviour
- Family Satisfaction with program

Pilot of program

- 10 families
- 8 group sessions
- 2 home visits
- Tip sheets for key workers
- Child care available

Findings so far

- Families found most useful
 - to learn and understand why their child (and other people) do what they do;
 - to work strategies in routines;
 - to have strategies matched to their own goals;
 - to have the support from other parents;
- Families stated preference for:
 - More home visits;
 - Partner involvement;
 - Doing the program when they first became involved in ECI;

Program modifications

- Initial one-to-one goal setting;
- Booster (Reunion) session;
- Introduction of extra home visits;
- 12 sessions;
- More information/training sessions for the service system (key workers and others);

Challenges in program implementation

- Variability in child behaviour and development;
- Variability in family functioning;
- Worker competencies: Clinical, relationship- building and resource-building

Next Phase

- Further funding
- Refinement of measures
- Refinement of materials
- Training of ECIS providers

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