Parent–child play: A mental health promotion strategy for all children

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CFCA Emerging Minds Webinar 4 December 2019

This webinar is coproduced with Emerging Minds. They are working together as part of the National Workforce Centre for child Mental Health, which is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the National Support for Child and Youth mental health program.

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Emerging Minds.
National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health
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We acknowledge the importance of connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community for the wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.
Webinar series

2019/20 Emerging Minds series: *Focus on infant and child mental health*.

Future webinars:

- Child-focused supervision. What does this mean and how does it work?
- Working with Aboriginal children and families in mainstream services
- Cultural considerations when working with children and families
Housekeeping

- Send through your questions via the chat box at any time during the webinar.
- Let us know if you **don’t** want your question published on the online forum following the presentation.
- All our webinars are recorded.
- The slides are available in the handout section of Gotowebinar.
- The audio and transcript will be posted on our website and YouTube channel in the coming week.
Presenters

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'Children who have a consistently responsive and nurturing relationship with their Parent*, typically experience better mental health and are more resilient.'

(Legge, 2018)
Strengthening the relationship

Child – led play
+
Responsive Parent
=
strengthened relationship
Your role in this universal mental health promotion strategy?
This webinar will focus on:

- Defining child-led play & its benefits
- How parents can participate in child-led play
- Exploring behaviour change theory
- Providing practical ways to support parents
Practice resources:
Evidence Based Practice Lens

Best Research Evidence
Clinical Expertise
Patient Values

University of South Australia Library, 2019
What is child-led play?

Free, child directed play, where the child is the decision maker, moving at their own pace, discovering their own areas of interest, and ultimately engaging fully in the passions they wish to pursue.

(Ginsburg, 2007)
What is child-led play:

• The child explores their environment freely without restriction.

• They make the rules & decisions without direction or intervention.

• The child chooses what to play with & who to play with.

• The play will look different depending on the child’s individual differences.
What are the benefits for the child?

Children’s freedom to express themselves through play is fundamental to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional wellbeing (Ginsburg, 2007).

Children whose parents regularly engage in play with them are less likely to develop mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, aggression, and sleep problems (Goldstein, 2012).

An effective way for children to negotiate their own interests and place in their broader environment, increasing confidence and resilience (Brussoni et al., 2015; Fearn & Howard, 2011).
The role of the parent:

• The parent aims to see the world through their child’s eyes.

• The parent conveys their love and delight in their child.

• The parent ensures that the environment is safe for the child’s free exploration.

• Key things for the parent to avoid during this play include:
  – Using play as a reward
  – Interruptions
  – Multi-tasking
  – Teaching and correction.
What are the benefits for the parent?

- Parents report getting to know their child as their own person, with their own interests and values.
- This deeper level of understanding of the child supports attunement to their needs (Ginsburg, 2007).
- Provides parents with a focus for supporting their child’s social and emotional wellbeing.
- Parent anchoring thoughts and experiences ‘in the moment’ opposed to focusing on current stressors.
Key learning:

- The child explores their environment freely without restriction
- Play is fundamental to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional wellbeing
- The parent is fully present, sharing love and delight in the child's experiences
- Parental perspective shifts to the strengths and interest of the child
Part 2: Translating knowledge into practice

Exploring behaviour change theory as a tool to support families to act

Providing practical ways to support parents in child-led play
Who might this approach suit?

- Parents and children who will benefit from strengthening their relationship
- Parents who need support to see their child’s perspective & strengths
- Parents who due to their own adversities find it hard to prioritise their child’s needs
- Children and families living through stressful times
- All families
Take a moment to reflect on a family where child-led play might be useful.
The Health Iceberg:

Case example

Above the surface:
• Child referred to the service with a developmental delay.
• Parent had been reported to have difficulty connecting with child.

Below the surface:
• The home environment had limited physical resources, routines and social supports for family.
• Domestic violence, maternal mental health, unstable housing and financial concerns.


(Talbot and Verrinder, 2014, p.16)
THE STAGES OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE

MAINTENANCE
works to sustain the behavior change

ACTION
practices the desired behavior

PREPARATION
intends to take action

CONTEMPLATION
aware of the problem and of the desired behavior change

PRE-CONTEMPLATION
unaware of the problem

(Prochaska, 2008)
Key learning:

- This approach is beneficial for all families.
- Important to understand the factors that can impact behaviour change.
- Important to understand the stage of readiness for change.
- Opportunity to take this learning and reflect on your own client.
Introducing Child-led play to families

- Connect with family
- Strengthen capacity
- Making a plan
- Action & Reflection
Connecting with family:

- Connect so the parent feels safe and supported.
- Involves listening, remaining curious and working collaboratively.
- In order to work with a family we need to truly understand them.
- Supports understanding of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the parent and family.
Strengthen capacity for child-led play: Knowledge

- Build knowledge and education around child-led play
- Knowledge of previous play experiences
- Knowledge to support an informed decision
Strengthen capacity for child-led play: Knowledge

- What support does the parent require from us?
- The focus is on building on the strengths of the parent.
- How can we model skills for the parent?
THE STAGES OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE

PRE-CONTEMPLATION
unaware of the problem

CONTEMPLATION
aware of the problem and of the desired behavior

PREPARATION
intends to take action

ACTION
practices the desired behavior

MAINTENANCE
works to sustain the behavior change

(Prochaska, 2008)
Planning for success (preparation phase)

Making a plan that feels realistic for the family.

Setting a specific goal: when, where, how long?

Finding time and space.
Goal examples:

This week I will play with Joe on 2 days after school for 15 minutes each time.

3 times a week, when Isaac plays outside, I will ask if he would like me to play with him. I will follow his lead if he wants me to join him and play for at least 15 minutes.

When I put Emily on the floor, I will provide her with a range of toys and sit with her for 5 minutes. In this time I will focus on which toys she seeks out and what she seems to enjoy and try describing some of her actions to her.
Making a plan:

What might get in the way?

What supports are available?
Guide for practitioners:

What might get in the way of our playtime?
To overcome this, I could:

To help keep me motivated towards achieving this shared playtime I can focus on:

To help me remember to have our playtime I will:

The things/people that can help make this plan possible are:
Action & Reflection:

- Role of the Practitioner
- Providing Support Through Accountability and Interest / Care
- Facilitating Reflection and Action Cycle
Key messages:

- Child-led play is an important health promotion strategy for all.
- Behaviour change theory can be helpful in enabling families to act.
- Practitioners need to tailor their support to the family’s context.
- Strengthens the parent–child relationship.
Practice resources:
Questions
'When you asked me what I did in school today and I say, "I just played." Please don’t misunderstand me. For you see, I am learning as I play. I am learning to enjoy and be successful in my work. Today I am a child and my work is play.'
Anita Wadley, 1974.
References:

Continue the conversation

Do you have any further questions?

Please submit questions or comments on the online forum following today’s webinar:

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