



Parenting TODAY



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand



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PRAYER

Almighty God, from whom we receive the gift of life,
you have blessed us with the joy and care of children.
As we bring them up,
give us calm strength and patient wisdom,
that we may teach them to love you with all their heart
and to love whatever is just and true and good,
following the example of our Saviour Jesus Christ.
By the power of your Holy Spirit,
help us to model the life and freedom which is found in you,
and to grow in faith, hope and love.
These things we ask in the name of the One who gathered children to himself
and declared that to such as these belongs the Kingdom of God.
Amen

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Introduction

Google parenting and 21,800,000 sites pop up. Visit the parenting section in a good bookshop and there are a large number of publications covering what appears to be every aspect of parenting. Scan community newspapers and you will find many advertisements for parenting support programmes run by community groups and churches. Check the brochures at medical centres, WINZ and community centres and yet again parenting is to the fore.

If parenting in NZ today is receiving so much support why create yet another resource? Surely with all the programmes and support materials available, every parent, grandparent and yet-to-be parent should be able to access the help? Sadly, this is not always the case.

While many parents and families are doing well, the concern being expressed throughout our communities is that parents need far more support. Many parents are struggling with the challenges of raising children in a culture that seems to throw up barriers to good parenting. Parents hear repeatedly that the home environment they create is the single most important factor in shaping their children's wellbeing. But circumstances, especially in tough times, can overwhelm the best of intentions. When we factor in that many Christian churches are no longer recognised and respected leaders in our communities' parents lose yet another source of support.

However, it's not all grim news. There are increasingly evident examples of innovative ways of supporting parents and families throughout the country. Concerns for quality parenting have often translated into effective responses by churches, neighbourhoods, schools, early childhood education centres and community groups. Parents themselves are increasingly demonstrating a growing appetite for discussion, information and advice.

This booklet aims to be a catalyst for rethinking what it means to be a "better parent", a "good parent" and a "Christian parent". It asks us to rethink church and how Christians can be effective in our communities in order to bring help, hope and transformation.

PARENTING: A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Graham Redding

A little over 10 years ago, when our oldest child was approaching intermediate school age, my wife and I attended a parenting seminar led by Ian and Mary Grant. The *Hot Tips for Parents* seminar was entertaining and informative, practical and positive, much like Nigel Latta's *Politically Incorrect Parenting Show*, which screened on TV recently.

The fact that these and other parenting programmes are proving so popular is perhaps indicative of the need for parents and caregivers to feel encouraged and to pick up some practical tips. While a certain amount of parenting is intuitive, there is a lot that is learnt, and in the absence of traditional support structures (eg extended families) an increasing number of parents and caregivers are looking to parenting books, magazines and seminars for encouragement and practical advice.

This is important. Equally important though, but seldom talked about, is an understanding of the *purpose* of parenting. What's it all for?

Now you might think this is a no-brainer, that parenting is about raising children to be the best that they can be. You might go on to say that parenting plays an important role in the fulfillment of a cluster of biological, genealogical and sociological purposes to do with the perpetuation of the human species, the extension of the family line and the wellbeing of society.

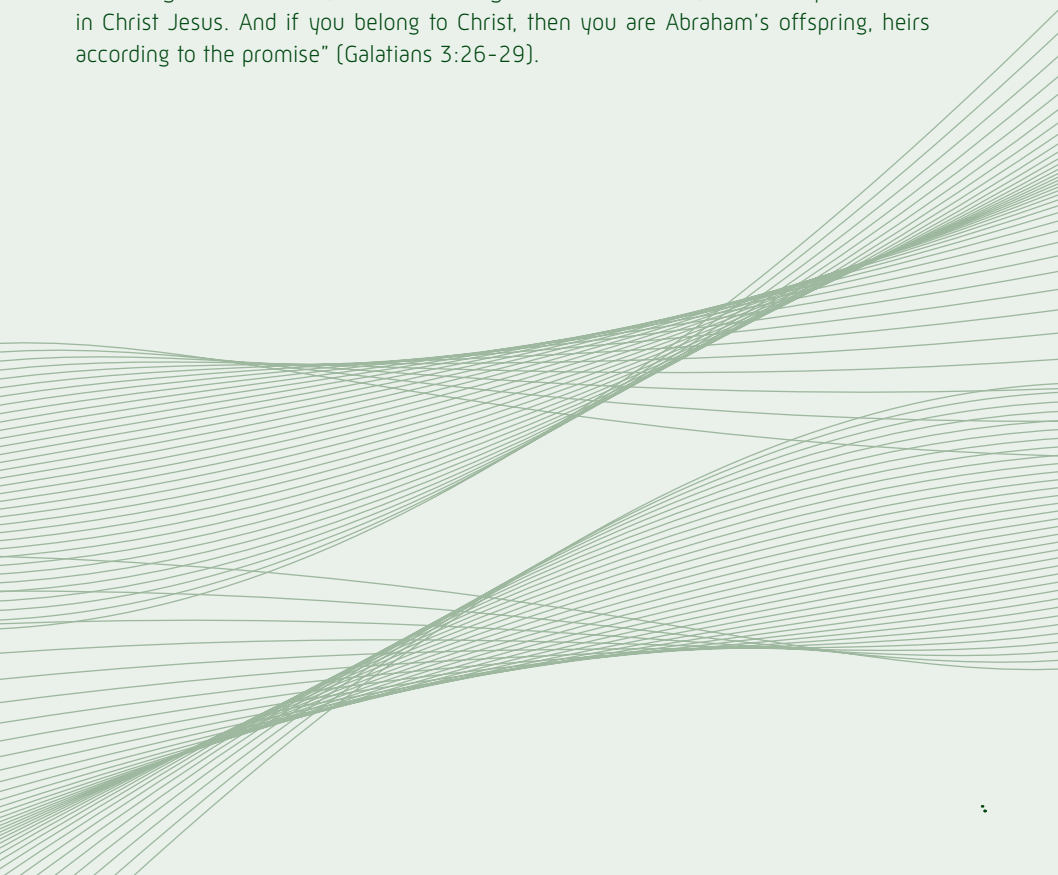
All that is true. But the Bible offers yet another perspective, which is bound up with the intention of the One in whose image we have been made. How does the Westminster Catechism put it? *To glorify God and enjoy God forever!* From a faith perspective, parenting is meant to serve this higher purpose of glorifying and enjoying God.

Such knowledge and enjoyment occurs in the context of a worshipping community that has been called into being for that express purpose, namely the church. It is there that we experience a new set of family relationships. In John 19, Jesus looks down from the cross and sees his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing below. John tells us that Jesus says to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he says to his disciple, "Here is your mother."

A new family has been borne at the foot of the Cross. Parenting has been put on a new foundation. In and through the waters of baptism we are born into this family. There we learn the habits of faith and are disciplined into the ways of the Kingdom. Part of this

involves acknowledging the limitations of our biological families, addressing the reality of sin and learning to forgive. Indeed, a key part of parenting is learning to forgive and to be forgiven.

Finally it is in the context of this faith-family that we learn the truth of Paul's words: "In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).

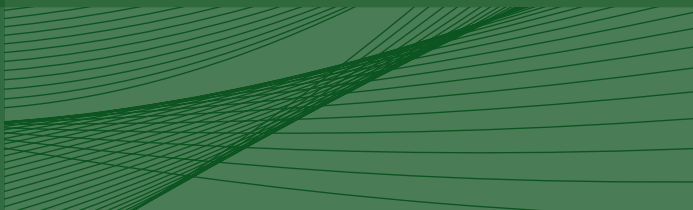




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STUDY ONE: What's happening?



Study One

Parenting; What's happening?

It has been said that parenting is the greatest single preserve of the amateur, and this is probably true. There's no manual, website or know-how programme to equip parents for the challenges and complexities of parenting in New Zealand today.

Parenting remains the most challenging, important, frustrating and fulfilling responsibility you can take on. It's a tough role and much more than a job - you can't check in and out, the holidays are few and far between, the demands are 24/7 and you can't resign!

So why do people become parents? On one hand, there are couples who are desperate to have children, going to great lengths including the assistance of medical interventions to achieve their dreams of a family. On the other, an increasing number of people are choosing to remain childless for a range of reasons including being satisfied with their life without children, career choices, and fear that the world is becoming a polluted and bad environment for raising children in. Thus the reasons that people do or do not choose to have children are complex.

Sadly there are those who do not seem to give much thought to why they should or should not have a child, but instead do so without considering the huge responsibility entailed. Or they may have a child for the 'wrong' reasons, perhaps born out of a need to be loved.

A concerning trend in New Zealand is the numbers of teenagers who become parents. New Zealand has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the developed world, with about 50 teenage girls in every 1,000 becoming pregnant each year. While many people have theories as to why our teenage pregnancy rate is so high, there is no one reason. Young parents may aspire to create a better life for their child, but low socio-economic backgrounds, limited education and other challenges mean there are often not good outcomes. Societal prejudice is also a barrier to both teen mothers and fathers. Most teen parent partnerships break up within a short time of the birth, it is known that outcomes for children of teen parents are often poor, and children born to teenage parents are more likely to become teenage parents themselves¹

Is there a parenting crisis?

Some say there is a parenting crisis in New Zealand; we are not alone as this concern has been expressed around the Western World. The media reminds us daily of the mostly negative issues impacting upon parents. A recent international report² states that outcomes for New Zealand's children are weak in several key areas: youth suicide;

high rates of relationship breakdown; child mortality rates; recession; unemployment; and underage drinking. The report has been aptly described as a wake up call not just for parents, but all sectors of our society. In light of such depressing findings it would be understandable if less people were to contemplate parenthood, but surprisingly New Zealand is currently experiencing an unforeseen 'baby blip' with increasing numbers of babies being born. The reasons are unclear but it would seem that the desire to raise a family is as strong as ever.

For Christian parents, raising children to become mature adults who love God and bring Christian values to their communities is a daunting but highly important goal.

What's changing?

Today families look far different than they did in the 1970s when the nuclear family of mum, dad and two or three children was the norm. The last 25 years have seen the percentage of two-parent families decrease by almost one-third, from 62 percent of all families in 1976 to 42 percent in 2001. There has been a corresponding rise in couples without children from 29 percent of all families to 40 percent over the same period. Couples without children are expected to increase faster in the future.

There has also been a significant rise in 'solo parents'; one-parent families have more than doubled from 1976. As the number of sole parents continues to rise, the number of couples choosing to marry has fallen with more choosing de facto relationships.^{3,4,5}

Separations, divorce, re-partnerships and remarriage are no longer uncommon. Between 2003 and 2004, one in ten family members changed their family type. One in three couples separate after 3 years of marriage. One third of women enter new partnerships within 2 years of separation from marriage and one-in-three marriages is a remarriage for one or both partners.⁶

- » 50 percent of children were either born into or entered a single parent family by age 16
- » 71 percent of these re-entered a two parent family within 5 years
- » 53 percent of remarriage/re-partnerships dissolved within 5 years
- » 70 percent of reconciled families dissolved within 5 years
- » 27 percent of children in the study had experienced two family situations by age 9
- » 18 percent of the children had experienced three family situations by age 97

Women are having fewer children and at older ages. Parents of all ages are finding that their children remain dependent on them for longer and many baby boomers

(born post WWII) are also the 'sandwich generation', juggling both care of parents and dependent children. When parents are unable to continue raising their children increasingly grandparents are taking on the role of parenting their grandchildren and feeling financially and emotionally unsupported.⁸

Family violence and alcohol abuse are taking a huge toll on families and communities. While we are seeing more collaborative approaches to tackling these problems it is widely acknowledged that change for the better takes a 'whole-of-society' approach. Today even young children are accessing alcohol and drugs, and developing damaging habits such as binge drinking and addictions. A youth culture has been created where young people increasingly spend less time with their parents, this is due mostly to both parents being in paid work, sole parents raising children alone and having less time to shape their development, and teens spending large amounts of time online accessing social networking sites and gaming.

Urbanisation of Maori has for some weakened connectedness to whānau and marae. Some young people have few or no positive role models, especially males, in their lives. An extreme result is that young people are becoming involved in gangs because they offer a sense of family.

Youth today are very much divided into the haves and have nots. Money is far more available to youth than preceding generations; they express feelings of entitlement to being provided with the latest technology, and parents who are absent because they work longer hours say they buy their children things because they cannot give them time. Advertisers aggressively market to youth and we have seen a dumbing-down of what's acceptable in terms of sexuality and violence in entertainment mediums. It is thought that this has influenced the fundamental shift in attitudes towards premarital sex. Young people from disadvantaged households are doubly burdened as an increasing number are affected by mental health issues.

What can churches do? Many 'mainstream' churches are no longer mainstream in their ability to influence societal attitudes and Christian values. In the 2006 Census, 55.6 percent of the population said they were affiliated with a Christian religion, a drop from the 1991 census 71 percent. In the past 60 years Christian church attendance has plummeted and an increasingly large proportion of our population has no idea about Christianity. For many the Church has no relevance to their lives. This does not mean they are unspiritual or lack faith, but that they are more likely to be looking for ways to explore the spiritual questions of life and have an eclectic belief, with little understanding of what the Bible teaches.^{9, 10}

What does this mean for parenting?

- » More parents are increasingly saying they need support. They suffer from ongoing tiredness from juggling family and work; financial stresses and coping with high expectations.
- » The 2009 recession exacerbated concerns about unemployment, redundancies, high costs of housing and food, and created greater uncertainties about the future.
- » Parents of teens are saying they want help in transitioning their children through to early adulthood. They often struggle with managing the fine balance between fostering independence and self discipline.
- » Increasing ethnic diversity in our multicultural society is reflected in differing patterns of parenting. For many migrant and refugee parents there are particular challenges in raising children in a culture so different from that of their countries of origin.
- » Isolation and lack of connectedness can be an issue for both migrant and Kiwi-born parents. Families spread around the world, changing family groups caused by separation, divorce, re-marriage and re-partnering, blended and step-families can result in changed relationships and disconnection. Grandparents can lose touch, children suffer from multiple transitions and fathers can disengage. Traditional family supports cease to operate.
- » Correspondingly, neighbourhoods and communities change as people move more often in response to changes of family and work. Whereas once almost every family in a street or neighbourhood knew and looked out for its children and gave friendship and support to parents, this is unfortunately seldom the case today.
- » Changes in technology have revolutionised communication and relationships, bringing both positive and negative impacts. Parents need to be extra vigilant as it is increasingly easy for all ages to access age-restricted music, TV, DVDs, Xbox and Playstation games.
- » Many parents want their children to live by a value system that is good for them and their community. Because of the disconnect between some churches and their communities many parents do not know what their local church can offer.

In the face of all these serious challenges, most parents do a good job, most want to do better and all want their children to succeed in life.

Case study: Autagavaia Fa'afetai and Pele Tui, Pacific Islanders' Presbyterian Church (PIPC) Newtown, Wellington.

Mr Autagavaia Fa'afetai Tui and Mrs Pele Tui have been members of PIPC Newtown, Wellington, since childhood and they continue to worship there with their four adult children. Pele is the Principal of Strathmore Community School in Wellington, and Autagavaia is studying at Victoria University of Wellington. They both agree that their perspective on parenthood is strongly influenced by their Samoan traditions and culture.



Mrs Tui

Image: Strathmore Community School.

Our parenting style is different from our parents, Autagavaia and Pele Tui say, because times have changed. "We try to keep the same values but we use different strategies to achieve the same results, we instill respect, confidence, and humility through a more modern approach." The key to the modern way for the Tuis is open communication.

The couple is fortunate to share the same approach to parenting and the same ideals, Pele says. "We recognise we have different roles, it's important that my husband is dad to our boys and that my relationship is different as mum".

When the Tui's were expecting their children they prepared by reading books on parenting and child development. "We bounce parenting ideas off each other and try different things to see what works. Early on we decided that the children would grow up with TV restrictions, the computer would be in the lounge where we can monitor it and there would be no Playstation. The children caught on fast that there wasn't much point in them saying, 'but our friends are allowed to do this and that'", Pele says.

Another decision made when the children were young was that they would put them into day care, "it was costly but we could afford to do it." Pele says. "Extended family was important in my upbringing because my parents were often working and commuting so we would go to our grandparents where the older children would care for the younger ones. Today extended families aren't as large, there aren't as many cousins and more members of extended families work full time".

"In my day I was not encouraged to leave home and go flatting; I stayed home out of respect for my parents until I got married and even then both our parents wanted us to live with them and we did for a little while. We encourage our

children to study, travel and see the world, save for home ownership and stay close to God. When I lived at home and was working I gave all my pay to my parents and they gave me enough to buy the little things. We were not given pocket money in our early years so we didn't get to learn how to handle money. In contrast, we allow our children to keep most of their earnings because we have gone through a budget with them and discuss short and long term financial goals."

Pele says she and Autagavaia have raised their children to be responsible in their relationships. "When I was a young woman if you brought a boy to your home it meant you were going to marry him. Girls were not expected to ever have more than one boyfriend. Our children are now young adults and we don't want them to feel pressured, we tell them to take things slowly. We have taught them good life skills, and we continue to do so and now we are seeing the good results. We praise God for our own parents, for what they instilled in us".

What does the Bible say about parenting?

It would be so good if the Bible explicitly gave parents all the answers to raising children. While there are scriptures pertaining to parenting, the Bible's inestimable value is that it is unlike any of the thousands of parenting books that have been written. That does not mean that everything the Bible says on parenting is good; Biblical writings contain a wide range of parenting examples, including the good (those reflecting the teachings of Jesus) and the bad (those that do not).

The bottom line is that when parents choose to understand and apply the teachings of Jesus, lives are changed – hearts and hopes can be transformed and love can be brought into the most testing parenting situations.

Christian parents face a challenging task in passing on what it means to follow Jesus' teachings in Kiwi culture. Being a Christian parent means to know that your children are a gift; that you have been entrusted with the privilege of stewardship of a life, and that you have a responsibility to be intentional about teaching and shaping this young life. Christian parents need to be conscious of how they live their lives because children learn best by observing – truth and faith need to be a part of a parent's day-to-day lifestyle. In Deuteronomy 6:1-2 and 6:6-9 God gives instruction, through Moses, as to how his chosen people were to live in a foreign and often hostile culture. Throughout the Bible the scriptures reveal God's heart for families, children and parents as part of God's redemptive plans for transforming individuals, and communities to operate by principles of the Kingdom of God – seeking justice, caring for the poor, serving others, doing good, nurturing children, forgiving, imparting grace, being kind and generous and loving one's

neighbour as oneself and loving God wholeheartedly. These same principles apply to Christian parents today; we are called to live within a bigger divine plan.

What shapes us in our parenting role?

No one comes to the present with a blank slate. We bring attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour carried over from our early years – those things we learnt when we didn't know we were learning. While cultural contexts can have a strong influence, the primary shaping of our values and beliefs takes place within the families we grow up in. A stern parent who withheld affection and praise; a household devoid of warmth and love; a punitive environment where punishment for disobedience was the norm; constant criticism from a mother or father, a parent who provided no boundaries – all can have strongly negative impacts in childhood and later in adulthood, and affect how an adult parents their own child. Conversely, a loving, affirming parental relationship, and an environment in which a child is valued and given affection are highly positive influences.

The patterns, values and attitudes we learn in childhood are not set in concrete. If we have not had the good fortune to have been raised well, we can consciously choose to make changes for the better. The more we understand what has shaped us in our early years, the more likely we will be able to change.

Talking point:

- » Share some examples of how you have parented as a Christian parent.
- » Discuss the changes in New Zealand culture you have seen since you became a parent. Have they made it easier or harder for you to parent effectively?
- » Deuteronomy 6 and Romans 12 talk about integrating God's Word into our lives and modeling a lifestyle often quite different to the one promoted in our culture. Do you think that Christian parents have an easier time raising their children, why or why not?

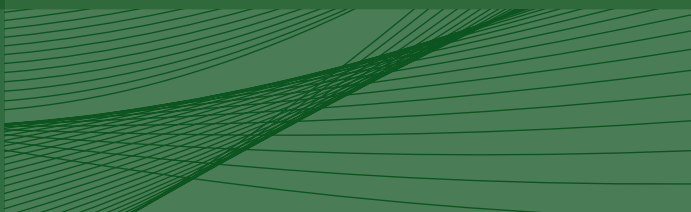
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2

STUDY TWO: What's works?



Study Two

What Works: Navigating the rough seas of child raising

Effective organisations evaluate and measure their progress. Isn't it surprising then that while we often put time, energy and resources into developing vision and mission in our workplaces, community and churches, very few parents apply the same thinking to their family life? We agree that parenting is the most challenging, and important responsibility but seldom do parents intentionally plan for a return on that investment.

Without a clear understanding of who we are and where we are going we can drift aimlessly instead of arriving at our intended destination.

Raising children requires parents to constantly make choices in the light of the type of the adults (and eventually, most hope, parents) we want our children to become. Therefore we need to figure out what type of family we want to be, where we want to go and how we plan to get there.

What influences how we parent?

Values

These guide the decisions we make and the actions we take. Even if we never take time to identify and articulate our core values and beliefs, it is wise to discover what motivates us as parents. How can parents find their core beliefs? Try these questions:

- » What do we want to achieve as parents, as a family?
- » What do we hope our children will be like in their 20s?
- » What values and beliefs do we hope they will live by?

Culture

Each family has unique qualities and ways of doing things reflecting shared values. Ideally behaviours, traditions, customs and standards are consistent with shared values. If not, it is difficult to build the family relationships that parents most want. How can you find out about your family culture? Try these questions:

- » How do we behave towards one another?
- » Where are we successful in how we treat one another?
- » Do we need to make changes in how we interact?

Parenting styles

Each family has its own parenting style, a family may be:

Disengaged – individuals think first and foremost about themselves, the 'I' mentality; they do their own thing and seldom eat or spend time together.

Enmeshed – family members think 'we' for almost everything. They seldom have separate opinions or interests.

Balanced – family members balance 'I' and 'we', they eat together regularly, may holiday together at times, have family nights and also follow individual interests.

In addition every family has degrees of flexibility – to change, adapt, provide structure and adjust relationships when circumstances change. This flexibility may vary between rigid and chaotic. If rigid, the clock rules and there is a very controlled environment, 'this is what happens', 'this is the way we do things'. If 'chaotic' it's an environment where no one knows the rules, if there are any. The family may move frequently; members of the household may come and go; there are no consistent routines or set responsibilities.

The combination of these styles may be healthy or unhealthy. At times parents may switch between styles.

For example:

Parenting by default

Takes lines of least resistance; may be haphazard, uninvolved and even neglectful. Could be permissive and low in affection and warmth. Adopts a 'hands-off' approach.

Helicopter parent or OAP (over anxious parent)

Micromanages the child; may be overprotective and controlling; sets rigid boundaries; has high expectations; authoritarian.

Indulgent

Often warm and accepting, 'I just want them to be happy'; seldom sets boundaries; seldom sees faults in their child's behaviour; inconsistent; tries to 'buy' love.

Authoritative

Effective and practical on-purpose; makes parenting a life priority; takes stewardship of child's development; knows what they are aiming for; models values and beliefs.

Ideal elements of Christian parenting

- » Knowledge and understanding of child development and expected behaviours
- » Cultivates connectedness, respect, play, fun, affirmation, generosity and self discipline

- » Willingly seeks support, assistance, accountability and information
- » Integrates faith into day-to-day living and nurtures spiritual awareness
- » Provides hands-on protection, care, nurture and love
- » Sets reasonable boundaries, has consistency
- » Seldom punishes yet disciplines often
- » Articulates encouragement, support, wisdom and love
- » Is proactive in addressing own behaviour, parents 'get their act together'
- » Active participation in faith community, with a clear sense of call
- » Understands Christians are called to outreach to their community and integrates this into family life

Churches and Parents: partners in children's spiritual nurture

Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly coach

When I migrated to New Zealand (with my husband and our 6 month old, Jessica) I stopped going to church, despite having attended consistently up until motherhood. When I was in hospital, after giving birth to my second daughter Pip, the chaplain visited me and noted that I had indicated I was a Christian on my admittance form. When she asked if I attended a church I replied no because I didn't think churches "did" young children and I had two babies. She regrettably agreed that many churches "don't do young children" and suggested she find me one that did. The next day I was visited by the local minister who invited me to come to church as soon as possible. He suggested that the sooner my children came to church the sooner they would believe they belonged to the worshipping family. And he assured me that if my children got restless or upset there were plenty of grandparents in his church to love them. This was wonderful advice and something I encourage our churches to heed.

People are often lost from churches during times of transition, yet this is a time when the support of a loving and faithful community is most needed.

Kids Friendly churches are encouraged to partner with parents and support them in their important role of spiritual nurturer. We must recognise that parents are the prime faith teachers for their children with the church reinforcing the parents' efforts. This makes sense practically and theologically. Churches are lucky if they have 20 hours with a child in a given year, whilst parents have over 3000 hours

to share their faith. God clearly commands us to talk about our faith with our children at every opportunity (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Partnering requires us, the Church, to equip, resource, educate and encourage parents in this important task, and also to provide a community of faith that truly values children and allows them to belong as full contributing members.

Research undertaken by doctorate student the Rev Nikki Watkin, with parents and leaders in Presbyterian churches, found that many churches still believe that spiritual nurture of children is best done by the church through age appropriate programmes, and that whilst many parents want help in nurturing their children's faith none had received training or resources from their local church.

For too long churches have communicated to parents that they are the experts on teaching children faith, 'drop them off on Sunday and we'll take it from there'. We must change that message if we are to significantly impact children's faith. Parents are meant to have the primary role in teaching and disciplining their children and our job as Church is to support parents. It is only if parents refuse this opportunity that the Church should, by default, take this primary role.

Kids Friendly is an initiative of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa that recognises the vital contribution children and families make to healthy congregations and aims to equip churches to intentionally minister to children and families. See back page for contact details.

Different forms of parenting in NZ

How are family structures changing? In 2006, 21 percent of households with dependent children were single-parent households. Most single parent families are headed by women, only one-in-eight children in a single-parent family lives with their father. There were 9,700 divorces in 2008, affecting 7,600 children.¹

What are some of the implications?

For many children growing up in New Zealand the outlook is potentially bleak. While many sole parents parent very successfully and their children do well, the risks of children in sole-parent households doing poorly are high, particularly where a parent is on the Domestic Purposes Benefit. Statistics show that these children tend to have lower living standards, often in rented accommodation, and more negative outcomes in health, education and welfare.¹

The Bible frequently urges us to care for the 'fatherless' and by implication the 'motherless'. We are asked to 'seek justice and encourage the oppressed' (Isaiah 1:17).

How, as Christians, can we embrace children whose parenting is not meeting their needs; what programmes and other supports can we provide? It's a big ask but if we do not reach out into our communities, who will?

How sole parenting is made more difficult*

University of Auckland researcher Christine Todd has studied the way sole mothers on the DPB handle negative representations of themselves. Christine's research was based on interviews with women who were considered typical single mothers on the DPB.

The perception of sole parents as being teenage Māori is inaccurate, Christine says as statistically only three percent of all sole mothers are under 20 and almost 60 percent are Pākehā.

Christine says that single mothers play important roles in raising healthy, balanced children in an increasingly fractured society and that it is not helpful for them to be identified as an economic and social "problem" because these stereotypes affect social attitudes and undermine the health and well-being of the parents and their children.

Almost half the women in Christine's studies reported suffering symptoms of poor mental and physical health as a consequence of stress relating to single mothering on the DPB. The DPB provides a below subsistence level income; the child poverty rate in New Zealand is 16.3 percent, for children in single parent households it is 47 percent.

However, Christine says that the single mothers also resisted negative representations, arguing that mothering is the most important job in the world and that their children were better adjusted and equipped because of their conscientious and devoted parenting. They also argued that receiving the DPB was the only reasonable way of balancing a single parent's increased workload with personal well-being.

* Social stigma makes parenting alone that much harder. New Zealand Herald, 14 August, 2008.

Discipline: What works best?

Discipline is primarily about living a self-disciplined life, developing the self control to live within boundaries (see Proverbs 3:11-12 and Ephesians 6:4). The discipline choices we make affect the quality of our daily lives and later the lives of our adult children. The culture we grow in our families are a result of how we choose to discipline. When parents think long term about the positive qualities and the character

they wish to develop in their children, the style of discipline is proactive and responsive, and the parent uses a bare minimum of punishment, if any, and instead uses lots of physical redirection in the early years. This style of discipline teaches a child that words mean business; it involves consistency, intentional parental involvement and patience. Children learn that when parents say something, they mean it. In younger children it means telling the child, followed by a parental action, such as taking the child by the hand and leading them. In older children the telling may be followed by parental action such as turning off the TV and handing them a tea towel.

Children do respond over time to active, engaged and consistent discipline aimed at long term self-control and self discipline. Parents, keep it up! It is a long process and it requires plenty of effort, especially in the early years.

Section 59 and the referendum:

Section 59 was a legal defence for adults prosecuted for assaulting a child, if the force used was for the purpose of correction. This led to varying, conflicting interpretations in the courts of what constituted 'reasonable force'.

In 2007, 113 of 121 MP's voted to repeal the old Section 59 defence.

In 2009 a non-binding referendum asked the question, "Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in NZ?" Voter turnout totalled 56.9% of enrolled voters, of these 87.4% voted 'No' and 11.98% voted 'Yes'.⁵ Prime Minister John Key said that he would take note of the result but would not change a law "that is working".

Police review how the law is working every six months; they report that the law is working and the number of complaints about smacking is small.

Some positives have come out of the ongoing 'smacking debate': awareness is increasing about appropriate forms of child discipline, the prevalence of family violence, and child abuse and the need for public education and parenting support. Government, churches, non- government organisations and community groups have initiated programmes, publications and projects aimed at addressing education about, and support for, parenting.

Setting a good example

There is immeasurable value in parents setting a good example in their relationship with one another. We only have a short time to shape our children's worldview and they learn more by seeing what parents do than by what parents say, so it is important that couples treat each other with respect.

Ian and Mary Grant

In 1993 parenting experts Ian and Mary Grants set up Parents Inc to provide support to parents through resources and courses.

Married for over 40 years, Ian and Mary have three children and nine grandchildren. Together they run seminars nationwide. Now 70 years old, Ian says he and Mary want to share their experience and tips for maintaining a good long term relationship because "marriage is hard work and couples need to make a commitment to invest in it"

Ian and Mary's top tips for a tip-top marriage:

- » Know you're committed no matter what. In the hard times you really grow.
- » You always believe in your partner no matter what and help them develop.
- » Listen to each other.
- » Have dreams and plans for the future. Build a life together.
- » Treat each other well and be satisfied investing in what you have.
- » Fancying each other is a good reason to get married. People who are sexually in love are kinder to each other.
- » Never use sex as a bargaining chip.
- » Show acts of love rather than just talking about it. There are blue and pink jobs in the house. When he does a pink job, it's an act of love.
- » It's not how you love it's how you fight. Conflict is like a cancer.
- » One of the biggest issues is stress. Look at how you can reduce it.

Ian and Mary Grant have written many books on parenting and relationships including, *Growing Great Marriages*. See back pages for Parents Inc contact details.

Honouring our father and mother

God wants us to honour and care for our own parents, especially when they are old (Ephesians 6: 1-3 and Deuteronomy 5:16). In NZ society there are rising levels of concern about how we care for our ageing population because often they are isolated, undervalued and lonely. Even amongst Maori, Pacific and Asian peoples there is evidence of changing attitudes towards care of the elderly.

In the media we increasingly read that abuse in family units may be on the rise because NZ has a rapidly rising aged population who will have an increasing proportion of disabling conditions.³ Contributing factors to elder abuse are overburdened families that lack time and money, and stress caused by also caring for young children. These factors combined with lack of care giving skills or access to support make for situations in which abuses can occur.⁴ Families in which the parents are able to gladly embrace, and even when possible care for, ageing parents serve their own children well by providing an example of love, care and honour.

Talking point

How can Christian parents teach Christian values to their children and young people who are growing up in a secular society? What things have you found work for you and your family?

Reflection

Read Hebrews 12:1-13.

How can parents best equip children and teens so that they learn to live disciplined lives?

What did a disciplined life mean to you as a teenager? What does it mean to teenagers you know?

Notes:

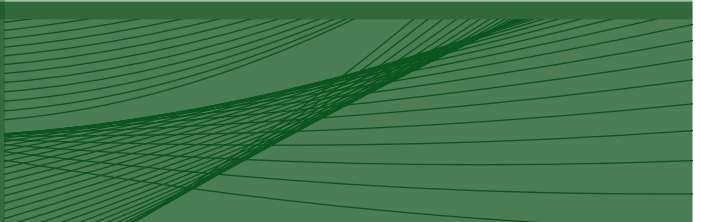
1. Statistics NZ, 2007.
2. Professor David Fergusson, Mr John Horwood, Associate Professor Annette Beautrais, Associate Professor Elizabeth Wells, Associate Professor Lianne Woodward; Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Longitudinal Studies of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.
3. Age Concern NZ report, 2005.
4. 'Elder Abuse and Neglect – exploration of risk and protective factors'. Research Report No 10/08, Families Commission, Jan 2008.
5. www.elections.org.nz/voting/2009-referendum/the-result.



3

STUDY THREE:

What action can we take?



Study Three

What action can we take to be the best parents we can be?

What do we know about supporting parents?

We know that most parents are vulnerable at some point in their lives so we need to ask the parents in our families, our congregations and our communities, “what support do you need”? Remember that support involves a giver and a receiver – parents’ views on what they need may differ from your own. Parenting support means providing a range of options when they are most needed.

We also know that parents are in the greatest need of support when they first become parents; and that parenting programmes are best delivered early and that seeing results from these programmes can take a long time.

It’s not easy to identify ‘the best’ form of parenting support to offer because needs differ. For example, parenting support for vulnerable families will need to address a range of issues, including health, housing, violence and abuse.

What support do parents say they need?

- >> Information on child development and how to manage behaviour - “What’s normal?”
- >> Encouragement, affirmation and valuing of their roles.
- >> Good quality Early Childhood Education and Out of School Care and Recreation (OSCAR).
- >> Information on drugs and alcohol; setting boundaries; how to teach children and teens about making wise choices in relationships.
- >> Effective tools for effective discipline.
- >> Finding balance: family/faith/ work/fun/community/volunteering
- >> Coping with financial pressures.
- >> Supportive social and spiritual networks.

When do parents want support?

Ideally parents would like support to always be available! If this isn’t possible, and few parents are so fortunate, support is most needed in times of family transition:

- >> When there are changes in family circumstance such as a new baby; separation and divorce, illness, death, re-marriage, blended and step-families.

- » When struggling to cope with work and money issues; redundancy; unemployment; juggling shift work and several jobs.
- » When facing health challenges, mental and physical.
- » In times of social and cultural isolation and disconnectedness.
- » When coping with disabilities, the child and/or parent.
- » When parenting adolescents and teens are transitioning into early adulthood.

What do we know about vulnerable parents?

While all parents experience times of vulnerability, some experience high risk factors that reduce their capacity to parent effectively. This may place their children (and themselves) at risk of ill health, stress, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and poverty. Influencing factors can include mental illness, death, family breakdown, children's behaviours, lack of education, low emotional intelligence, low resiliency and isolation.

Vulnerable families can often be hard to reach, isolated from positive examples of parenting and other helpful influences. They may shun support agencies, including churches, through distrust, fear and lack of knowledge of free support available. This failure to seek support does not mean that these parents do not love their children; they may choose to try to solve their problems by themselves through fear of being seen as failures. The ultimate aim of giving support to vulnerable parents is to journey with them so they can confidently raise their children in a healthy way. Those offering support in such difficult circumstances must be in it for the long haul, and understand that they are 'doing with' and not 'doing to'.

Some churches are choosing to fulfil Matthew 10: 5-8 by partnering with community groups to assist vulnerable and needy families in urban areas, building bridges into their faith communities. For example, Prison Fellowship NZ is working with churches that have chosen to support not just prisoners but the families of prisoners.

Grandparents and seniors – an untapped resource?

Grandparents are important supports for parents and their children. Grandparents bring life experience, love, intergenerational links, traditions, security and protection. Many grandparents today are 'time-poor' as they are still in paid work; or they may be 'long distance' grandparents living far away. The Families Commission reports that grandparents are increasingly raising their grandchildren. Some say the cost is high and that they feel isolated, stressed, financially burdened, and unsupported by Government agencies, family and by their churches.

Separation and step-grand parenting present both challenge and opportunity. While any breakdown in family is sad, grandparents can be a constant in children's lives, bringing a stable relationship into the turmoil they may be experiencing.

For many seniors whose families live at a distance there is little contact with the young; they may be a potential support for parents, young people and children both within the church and the wider community.

Statistics indicate that those aged over 65 will outnumber those under 15 by 2020; a quarter of the population will be over 65 by 2040.¹ While some see this as an ageing problem, it potentially brings a great opportunity for churches to tap into a valuable resource - people who are willing to mentor and support young families.

Can your church build intergenerational partnership to assist parents and children?

Parenting programmes

Parenting programmes are based on the premise that caring, consistent, and positive parenting is central to creating safe, supportive environments in which to raise children. These courses are designed to increase knowledge of child development, assist parents to increase confidence, and reduce stress by training parents in behavioural management techniques and personal coping skills.

In a 2006 Families Commission Couch poll, approximately 1000 respondents shared where they seek advice on parenting. Their primary sources of support were: family and friends, whānau, the internet, written publications and parenting programmes. The most commonly named programmes included those run by Barnados, Plunket, Playcentre, Parents Centres, Parents Inc, and to a lesser extent churches, community groups and early childhood centres.

Most respondents said that having better access to parenting classes, information, resources and networks would be helpful. Others said there was a need for unbiased and non-judgemental information and advice, and that they had concerns about availability of programmes, costs, relevance, timing, lack of advertising and access to childcare while parents attended classes.

Case study: Parenting Programme, Presbyterian Support Southland

Six years ago social worker Pam Smith began Presbyterian Support Southland's very successful Parenting Programme.

The programme is available to all Southland parents and is run in 10 week blocks throughout the year. Approximately 15 parents attend each course and around 300 Southland families have now participated.

Pam says that the parenting course focuses on understanding a child's needs at various ages and stages of development "and on understanding our parenting styles. We look at appropriate play and we talk about how parenting is a job so parents need to give themselves a pat on the back because they work hard as care giver, manager and teacher".

Learning what is age appropriate can be a harder for younger parents Pam says. "We find that many of the young parents in our courses want their young child to be and to act grown up. We tell them to let the child be a child. A two-year-old shouldn't be put into a position where they are made to tell a parent what to do; children should not be put into situations where they are making decisions beyond their years. We encourage parents to be the parent, to be in charge, that does not mean being abusive but learning to be in charge in a caring, coaching way".

Participants are often looking for better ways to manage their child Pam says, "they want to know how to deal with anger. We talk about choices and consequences and if these do not work we find other strategies they can try that might. The course is a package, we give them lots of things to try and see if they are right for them".

What do successful parenting support programmes look like?

- » They have strengths-based approach.
- » Are family-centred.
- » Culturally appropriate.
- » Start early in a child's life or early in the life of a problem.
- » Include home visiting and inclusion of the wider family.
- » Have a comprehensive range of options to meet a variety of needs – for fathers, grandparents, sole parents, parents in prison and partners of prisoners, migrants and refugees, teen mothers and fathers.
- » Respect the diversity of family structures.
- » Target those families with the greatest needs but avoid stigmatising.
- » Have a strong theoretical approach.
- » Measurable clear objectives.
- » Offer long-term support.

-
- » Engage parents and families in the design, content and evaluation of the programme.
 - » Aim to engage with parents at times, venues and environments that are comfortable and welcoming.
 - » Have well trained and skilled staff, backed up by good management and support.

Cultural context

Māori are less likely to attend formal parenting courses and prefer to get support within a whānau and community context. In courses a focus on whānau rather than individual parents is preferable and training is best in the hands of a culturally sensitive teacher. If planning a parenting course for Māori it is advisable to seek advice from Māori as to how it can be more effective and culturally relevant.

Pacific people often identify their church and cultural community as the best environment and context for parenting support. If accessing parenting courses outside their community there can be language barriers, limited availability of transport and childcare services. Pacific people often access parenting support and advice from within the family; family obligation is strong and parenting practices have strong links with their country of origin. Extended family may be involved in child rearing, intergenerational living arrangements may be common and childcare responsibilities may be undertaken by older cousins and siblings. Community driven initiatives based upon community solutions are important for Pacific families.

Churches taking action

Many churches have developed highly successful forms of parenting and community support. Common success factors include:

- » Identification of what parents both within the church and in the wider community need in terms of support (using surveys, focus groups etc).
- » Using readily available and existing up-to-date data and research from such sources as local councils, Plunket, WINZ and parenting organisations to ensure that churches are accurately assessing what the issues are for families in their area.
- » Recognising that all Christians are called to serve their community and finding ways to serve parents.
- » A shared vision and understanding of the church's missional priorities in their constituency.
- » Finding an outward focus – so it's not just about offering Sunday services.
- » Recognition that programmes are not the answer; relationship building is the key to engaging with families.

- » Size isn't everything. Small congregations can be very effective in reaching parents in their community.
- » Family-centred approaches that develop the church as a family and community centred hub.
- » Providing a welcoming, culturally appropriate environment.
- » Building effective partnerships with suitable organisations such as local schools and early childhood education centres.
- » Adopting an intergenerational approach to being the church in the community.
- » Training mentors to support parents.
- » Recognising that senior members of congregations have a lifetime of experience and skills young parents would be eager to learn from.

Case Study: Toolbox parenting courses run by parishioners from Island Bay Presbyterian Church, Wellington

In 2001 the Rev Judith Bedford, then minister at Island Bay Presbyterian, showed great foresight by inviting some of her parishioners to attend a Toolbox parenting training course run by Parents Inc (then known as Parenting with Confidence) at Knox Presbyterian Church in Lower Hutt.

Parishioner Liz Bruce says that Judith encouraged "a number of us to attend with the hope that once trained we would run our own Toolbox courses within Island Bay".

Liz jumped at the opportunity to train as a course facilitator as several years prior both she and husband Jim had completed a USA parenting course called "Parenting by Grace". They are passionate about wanting to help young parents "do their best".

The Island Bay parishioners ran their first Toolbox courses out of a participant's house. Later they moved the parenting courses to the Island Bay Presbyterian Church hall "but as some members of the community were not comfortable coming into a church we moved the courses to the Island Bay Community Centre where they are still run today" Liz says.

Initially four parishioners completed the Toolbox facilitator training, three more have since trained, and one is currently part-way through the process. Liz says

that “those interested in becoming a facilitator are encouraged to first complete the Toolbox course as a participant and then attend the Toolbox sessions for would-be facilitators.”

Liz says that the courses are run over six weeks, in two hour sessions, and the cost to participants is \$67.50 per person or \$90 for two. The church has a fund to assist those who cannot afford the full cost.

The courses have proved to be popular in the Island Bay community because “they are designed for parents of all ages, over the past six years around 290 parents have attended, everyone from grandparents raising their grandchildren getting a ‘refresher’ to teenage parents feeling a bit out of their depth raising their toddler,” Liz says.

Three different Toolbox courses are offered at Island Bay – parents with children aged 0 – 6 years, 6 –12 years and teens 12+. There are no more than 13 participants per course.

Liz is happy to share Island Bay’s many years of experience running parenting courses, phone 04 383 5114 or email Liz and Jim at jebrucefamily@clear.net.nz

Talking points

What kind of parenting support can meet the needs of parents and families in your community?

How can you reach children in your community? How can they help you to build a bridge to parents?

Reflection

Read Romans 12: 1-2 and Matthew 5:13 – 16.

Christian author Philip Yancy has written about what the church is to be:

“A community of people, thirsty for grace, sharing a mutually acknowledged weakness – looking at our world through grace-tinted glasses; God’s grace, the glue that’s for a broken world.”

If parents both within your church and outside are to be the best that God has called them to be, what needs to change within the life of your church?

NOTES

1 Statistics NZ. National Population Estimates: December 2009 quarter.

A Theology of Parenting

Families, parents and children are central to God's plans

We are created as unique individuals in God's image to live in relationship, interdependence and community with one another and with God. The Trinity, God in three people, is a powerful analogy for parents and their children. Just as Father, Son and Spirit are unified in love yet distinct, similarly parents and children are to live in loving union, yet unique as individuals.

Marriage forms a part of God's plans for procreation and raising children. Refer Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2: 21-24; Genesis 4: 1-2.

Children are gifts from God

Psalms 127:3-5 describes children as God's 'best gifts' and a blessing to parents. God places high value upon children and parents as stewards of these gifts. We are to hold our children with an open hand in recognition of the trust invested in us by God. Children are God's workmanship.

Christian parents are to raise their children to know, love, trust and honour God

As parents, we cannot impart truth without learning, living and modeling God's word. Our top priority is to personally know, love, trust and honour God in our day-to-day living, modeling the standards and life principles which Jesus taught through his life on earth. As parents commit themselves to be disciples, they become the primary teachers of their children. The Church is to support them in this highly important role. Refer to Deuteronomy 6:4-9; John 15: 9-17; Romans 12:1-2; Romans 14:17-18.

Parents are to be intentional in training and nurturing their children in God's ways and in understanding the Good News of the Gospel Proverbs 22:6; Proverbs 4:3-9.

It is essential to provide children with a consistent, rational, Biblical framework for understanding the world God has made and their place in it. Integral to parents' training is loving their children unconditionally, just as God loves us, as God's children. John 3:16; 1 John 1:9; 1 Corinthians 13.

When children struggle with sin and self control, parents are to come alongside to lovingly guide, forgive, correct and discipline. Hebrews 12:1-11.

Parents are to be fair and just and to show respect to their children. Ephesians 6:4.

They are to be authoritative without being authoritarian. Parents themselves are also on a journey of lifelong learning, which will involve being subject to God's discipline. Proverbs 3:1-12.

As parents serve others, so their children learn to serve others. Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Timothy 4:11-16.

Parents represent Christ. Philippians 2:14-16.

Notes

Kids Friendly

Kids Friendly is an initiative of the Presbyterian Church to equip churches to intentionally minister to children and families. Contact Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly coach, phone 09 5850959 / 027 2103784 or email jill@sthelierschurch.org.nz or see www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/kids-friendly/ for Kids Friendly resources and workshops including Partnering with Parents and Faith@Home workshops.



Parents Inc. parenting courses

Ian and Mary Grant equip and encourage parents with more than 40 courses www.theparentingplace.com and www.parentsinc.org.nz

Presbyterian Support parenting courses

www.familyworks.org.nz/Site/Default.aspx

Family Works Southland parenting courses

www.southland.familyworks.org.nz

Plunket

www.plunket.org.nz/

Birthright support for single parents

www.birthright.org.nz/

Parenting through separation programme

www.justice.govt.nz/courts/family-court/courts/family-court/what-family-court-does/parenting

Barnardos parenting courses

www.barnardos.org.nz/SupportServices/ParentEducation.asp

Parentline

Free nationwide telephone help line

Freephone 0800 4727368, Auckland callers 09 6250562 www.parentline.org.nz

Parenting through Separation course

Free programme for parents going through separation www.barnardos.org.nz/SupportServices/Parentingthroughseparation.asp

Parents Centres NZ Inc

Support for parents and their children aged 0-6 www.parentscentre.org.nz/

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Parenting second time around www.raisinggrandchildren.org.nz

Kiwi Families

Practical parenting advice for parents www.kiwifamilies.co.nz/index.html

Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) programme

Parent education programme www.familyservices.govt.nz/our-work/strong-families/paft/index.html

Lavender Parents. Social Policy Journal of NZ: Issue 26, Nov 2005. www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/

Teenage Parent Service Co-ordinators

Support for teenage parents www.familyservices.govt.nz/our-work/strong-families/teenage-parent-service-co-ordinators.html

SKIP (Strategies with Kids: Information for Parents) Resources

A positive parenting programme www.familyservices.govt.nz/info-for-families/familyweb/raising-children/managing-behaviour.html

Ministry of Education resources for parents

Free to download at www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents.aspx

Office of the Children's Commissioner resources for parents

Free to download at www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports_documents

Parenting resources (Families Commission)

Free to download at www.families.org.nz/parenting

Supporting Your Marriage or Relationship resources

Free to download at www.familyservices.govt.nz/info-for-families/familyweb/relationships.html

Whānau Toko I Te Ora (WTITO)

Māori Women's Welfare League parenting programme for Māori whānau email mwwl@mwwl.org.nz

Get off your butt parenting <http://go4bparenting.com>

Parents Partner

Parent seminars, counselling and resources www.parentspartner.com

Young Parent resources

www.awc.org.nz/13/index.php?mid=13 and www.youngparent.org.nz.

Bounty

Information for expectant and new parents. www.bounty.co.nz

Parenting Enhancement Programme

For parents with 0 - 3 year olds www.parent-help.co.nz

ParentCare

Support for parents of sick and premature babies www.parentcare.org.nz

Parent to Parent

Support network for parents of children with special needs www.parent2parent.co.nz

New Zealand Single Parents

Parenting website by and for single parents <http://hippydad.co.nz/singleparents/about>

Father and Child Trust

Dads supporting New Zealand fathers <http://fatherandchild.org.nz/>

DIYFather

Parenting from a male perspective www.diyfather.com/

A Fistful Of Tears by Sue Quinn explores youth anger and is published by Presbyterian Support, download a copy at www.ps.org.nz/Site/Upper_South_Island/News/Fist_full_of_tears.aspx

Presbyterian Support SAGES Programme offers older people as volunteers/mentors for positive parenting practice. Phone 03 313 8588

Parents Inc Toolbox parenting course training contacts by region

Northland	Debbie Short	09 433 5040	NorthlandTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
North Shore Auckland	Jenny Jackson	09 479 7442	AkldNorthTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Central Auckland	Joy Sluifers	09 817 8115	AkldCentralTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
West Auckland	Griff Richards	09 818 0204	AkldWestTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
East Auckland	Joy Sluifers	09 817 8115	AkldEastTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
South Auckland	Joy Sluifers	09 817 8115	AkldSouthTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Waikato	Fiona Pook	07 855 1241	HamiltonTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Tauranga	Jackie Paine	07 576 1169	TaurangaTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Rotorua	Paula Taitoko	07 348 8009	RotoruaTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Gisborne	Sharron Stevenson	06 867 5595	GisborneTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
New Plymouth	Fiona Warring	06 755 2374	NewPlymouthTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Hawkes Bay	Joelle Pretorius	06 878 6842	HawkesBayTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Palmerston North	Rachel Bowen	06 358 9862	PalmerstonNthTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Wellington City	Lesley Lambie	04 234 7136	WellingtonTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Hutt Valley	Natalie Alabaster	04 934 8483	HuttTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Wellington North	Alison Hobcraft	04 905 1071	WellingtonNthTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Nelson	Joan Sears	03 548 4760	NelsonTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Christchurch	Kirsten Wyllie	03 355 2680	ChristchurchTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Dunedin	Sue Whyte	03 477 3403	DunedinTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz
Southland	Suzanne Knowler	03 216 6007	SouthlandTBX@ParentsInc.org.nz



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