CHILD DEVELOPMENT & PARENTING › PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Parent Education Programs

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1. Parent Education programs - Attending courses after a child has been given a diagnosis

Hello, my name is Charlene. I'm mother of four neurodiverse children. Kia ora, my name is Jonathan Crosby. I'm employed by the Christ Church Methodist Mission. Currently working for the Mana Ake Service as a Kaidehi team leader. And I've been facilitating tuning into kids for the last five years. Kia ora, my name is Becky. I work for Christ Church Methodist Mission under the Mana Ake contract as well. And I've been facilitating tuning into teens mostly and a bit of tuning into kids for the past three years. Kia ora, I'm Julie Foreman. I work for Presbyterian Support Upper South Island. I'm a counsellor.

I also facilitate tuning into kids, tuning into teens and dads tuning into kids. Been facilitating the programmes for the past eight to ten years. Okay, so after a diagnosis there's always a lot of information to take on board and lots of courses. So am I best to dive into all the courses at once for the best chance of success? Or what would be your recommendation? It's a tricky one, isn't it? Because there is so much isn't there and you just want to, like you say, dive into every single one. And I guess it's how do you know which one is going to be the right one for me is what I'm also hearing.

So I guess I'd probably suggest about trying one, seeing how the interventions or recommendations that are in that course work and then seeing if that's going okay, then stick with that for a bit. If other things crop up, then that might not have been the right course for you. So it might be time to dip your fingers in another one. Yeah, so you're knowing what things work and what things don't. Otherwise, it's just such a muddle and you won't be knowing what's working and what's not. After a diagnosis, why would I attend a course? Somebody would say to me that I need to do a parenting course. I would be sort of like quite taken back.

So why would I attend something? Lots of different reasons. The vast majority of courses nowadays really empower parents that you're not just turning up and watching a presentation and hearing the content. Often they're very much parents are empowered to really tailor the content to their needs as well. So you'll be able to turn up. You'll be able to have a talk with other parents and learn from them and they might be quite far down the journey on what they know and learn from each other during the course. Yeah, I think I'd say as well, I guess after you maybe go to an appointment and get a diagnosis, you know, it can be quite overwhelming or where to next or you might have more questions.

So at parenting programs, it's a nice opportunity to connect with other parents and see if they hold similar questions or if you can delve into something that you're wondering about and just do that journey with other people instead of doing it alone as well. I think that's the biggest thing that we do here is about parents making connections. And not feeling alone in this whole process. And like I said, it does feel a little bit confronting like, perhaps what have I done wrong? Why am I being suggested to go to this parenting course? And that's a really, you know, hard one that we come across.

But I also think lots of courses offer different things and it's how can I fill my toolbox as a parent, you know? And it also takes that, I'd like to think of it as it takes a village to raise a child and this is about being part of a village. Yeah. What I love to think about as well is, yes, you may have just had a diagnosis for your tamariki or you may have just gone through an event as a whānau where you'd like some extra support through one of these courses. But yes, you're starting fresh at this new intersection of your life. But actually you already have a decent amount in your toolkit that you can bring over to the learnings in the course.

I think what I love doing in the first session of a lot of the parenting courses I have is actually you're not coming here in the wrong. You're actually just, you're already doing a lot of great things that you've had skills from your past. So how can we look at what you're doing right and how you can do more of that in your current stage of your life? And just validating that, you already have probably a lot of great skills that you've learned in your life and how can we offy that so that you can be aware that actually there are some things I'm already doing.

2. Parent Education programs - What's the format of these courses, online options and costs

And what can I expect when I come along to a course? Are we all sitting in a circle, or what happens? Yeah, sure. Like I said, I've been facilitating and tuning into kids for the last five years. Even before when parents turn up, I often give them a phone call and just tell them what to expect, the amount of people that will be in the room, what the location will look like. When you turn up to one of the courses I facilitate, there'll be some relaxed music in the background. There's often a bit of kai on the table. We offer parents a chance to go and get some coffee. And then often it's just straight into just some really relaxed getting to know each other games without pushing you out of your comfort zone.

Often it's sort of passing a ball around and talking about where are your special memories in your life. And then it's straight down to actually what would you like from this course? What do you want from it? And what's going really well for you at the moment? So it's a really soft, relaxed start, but actually a real good start. So I think that's really important. So I think that's really important. So I think that's really important. A real vision on the parents in the program, really moulding what they want from the course around the already content that's there. And is there any chance to do something online if you aren't able to go to something in person?

Yeah. So we found that online was a really nice opportunity to run some courses because a lot of parents work during the day or it's just an easier time to connect together or have partners join, which was cool. So yeah, in the online space, it's very similar. We've got a lot of online classes, but we like to keep it relaxed and make sure that people feel comfortable in that space. You're not going to just rock up and have someone talk at you for two hours. We often play videos. We use some interactive features where you can sort of type in answers and see them pop up on the screen. Yeah, keep it quite dynamic so that you don't lose the elements that you would get if you were to attend in person.

And I think some people worry sometimes that if they attend online, that it won't be as valuable or on the other hand, if they attend online, that they can just sit back and watch the seminar. But yeah, I guess from my experience and the ones that we've run online, it's a really nice place to still connect. And we often use breakout rooms so parents can go into a room with two or three other parents, have a smaller conversation, come back to the main group. So yeah, try to utilise the awesome online world that we've got to make it accessible for people who can attend online. And so what happens if I come to one of your courses on two sessions and I think this just isn't for me, this isn't the road that I was wanting to go down, what happens then?

I think that's something that you can dip in and you can opt out of if you like throughout, because it is about choosing the thing that actually works for you and sits with you and resonates with you. And that's one of the things that we do. I think all of us probably do as we talk at the beginning about it, about how, you know, like you'll be offered a whole range of things and take what you want from the course and leave the rest if you like. And so if it's not working for you, then absolutely we can suggest maybe even other programmes that might be more what you are after. But there's no pressure at all to remain.

And as far as if I was to go to a course and a friend of mine is interested in doing that course also, but hasn't gone through the diagnosis part or anything, is it something that we can access or do I need a referral? You can, most of the parenting courses I know, at least the ones we run, yeah, you can access them without any referral. I often have parents contact me and want to sign up and give them some information. So it's pretty easy to just put yourself forward and attend that programme, regardless of where you've come from. Often places will have an online sign up or a phone number or email that you can contact.

And I've had quite a few friends join together, you know, so they can be a part of that conversation and support each other, which is really nice as well. And is there any cost for these courses or are they all funded? Good question. I think that would depend on where you're going. I know that the ones that we offer are for free. And I think the same for you as well. I know that the ones that we offer are for free. And I think the same for you as well. I know that the ones that we offer are for free. And I think the same for you as well. I know that the ones that we offer are for free. And I think the same for you as well.

I know that the ones that we offer are for free. And I think the same for you. Yes, tuning into Kids is free. I'm aware that for some other courses out there, attached to other services, there is a cost available to them. But from my experience of those specific services I'm talking to, they're very open to actually getting a phone call and just being like, you know, hey, this is my current situation. I'd really benefit from your content. Are there any different ways we could work this out? Or, you know, do you have any particular funding streams or whatnot? And often they're very open to problem-solving.

Oh, gosh. Yeah.

3. Parent Education programs - Putting things in to practice as the course progresses, involving others

There's always a lot of information to take on, and certainly for two hours you don't always take everything in. Is there stuff to take home, or is there any homework that needs to be done? Well, firstly, we keep away from the word homework. Homework and role plays, we keep away from those words. But yes, there are helpful tips and activities to do during the week. In specifically the parenting courses that we facilitate, often those home activities tie in really nicely with your week anyway. So it's when you're having conversations with your tamariki, when you're supporting them through big emotions, just some great things to keep in mind to try out during that week.

It's certainly not a 2,000-word essay. It's great home activities that actually fit into your week and will empower you to have, yeah, just try those during the week. Awesome. Because also, the more that you can sort of utilise some of the things that we're talking about on the programmes, then you're going to be able to see how they're working and become more familiar with them, and it's practising. So instead of just learning and hearing, we're wanting you to really take it away and roll with it and run with it. Sure. And is there any opportunity to speak with tutors or anybody in between sessions?

I think... I've made a difficult situation that I've got some advice on, and I haven't quite nailed the technique or taken on what you've said. Can I contact anybody in between? Yeah, we have, you know, all the whānau that attend the course I'm running at the moment, I have their contact details, they have mine. So if there's things that crop up during the week, then absolutely, there's been times where we've just, you know, might be a bit of advice over text or, oh, can I have a call, and as long as that can be arranged and fit in, then, yeah, it's a really nice opportunity to get that extra help.

But if it is turning into something that, oh, you know, it sounds like you'd really benefit from this service or, you know, navigating onto things that would be helpful to make sure you're getting what you need, but, yeah. I think that we're all out there to help support parents because we know, you know, it can be a tough job as well. And we want parents to get the most out of the programmes, so to be able to support them is really important to us. Yeah. Do you have many parents, or is it available to do, like, a refresher course if we've done it already? Oh, look, even speaking from my personal experience, I've been facilitating, tuning in to kids for five years now, and every time I do that, I learn something else to add to my parenting journey, and not just from the content, but actually mainly from the great conversations that the parents have while we're talking.

So I'd very much recommend looking into further courses in the future, even doing the course again, because sometimes you might do it with a different facilitator and get a different idea of things. Yeah. And we know how the world is changing with technology, and I think continually looking at how can you upskill yourself to add some more tools to your journey by redoing a course or seeing what else is out there moving forward. It's a great idea. Yeah. Absolutely, yeah. Cool. And do any of the children actually come along to the course, or is it just for the parents? Just for the parents. Yeah.

So we can't bring the kids, but can we bring grandparents or aunties or uncles? Yeah, absolutely. It's really important that they do, because they're able to support the children, and that's what we're after, really. And it is, the programs that we run are a communication

style. I think it's about getting away from parenting, of course, and it's how do we communicate, and that's the biggest thing that we're wanting. How do we communicate with each other? And so that's what we're... Looking at to support our tamariki. Thank you.

4. Parent Education programs - How do I know which course to attend_

So many courses out there. How do I know which one to go with? Is there a list somewhere? Like what's available? Yep, like there are different courses and we facilitate the Tuning Into series really. And I guess it's that there are different things for different, there are different programs for different things. So this is about how do we support emotional regulation and how do we help to children with these big emotions. And that's what this particular course is. So it's not a behavioral style. It's not so, but there are other programs that do do that. So I guess it's about finding out which of the courses that we want to, that you want to attend and what is it that you're coming for. So there's quite a range that you could choose from. And those all have specific, they're specifically designed for specific things. On the website, on the Listening to Families website, there'll be some links through to some various organizations and various places that have those courses running.

5. Parent Education programs - Talking to the children about my participation in a course

OK, when I'm going on these courses, I'm saying, see you later to the kids. I'm off to do a course on how to parent you better. What's a good way of talking to the children about where I'm going and what is going to be expected when I come home? I say, right, these are the new rules. So how can I tell my kid about what I'm doing? It's a really tricky business. Because one of the things that we do talk about is that, you know, maybe your kids are going to say, who are you? What are you doing differently? This is not my parent. Because the way in which we communicate in the Tuning Into series is a different approach and a different style.

So it is important to be able to be honest with our kids. You know, we're going to learn some things. I don't know quite what I'm going to learn yet. You know, but we'll see how it goes. I think I've had some of the best conversations and comments from parents. When they come back and they've been trying out some of the new skills and their kid's like, oh, have you been learning this in your parenting program? Or they start noticing like, oh, mum, I think you're feeling angry. So it's a great opportunity to make sure your kids, yeah, know what you're learning and that we're all in this together.

And, yeah, really be part of that journey. And it's, yeah, the gems that come out of their mouths when they know that you're learning something too. It sort of brings them down. To just that level of being human, that we're all learning and growing. And, you know, for parents, it's the first time that you're parenting a five-year-old or a 10-year-old or a 12-year-old. So the fact that you can have those open conversations, I think, is really key to having success in the program. Yeah, sounds really good. I also think parents know their children the best, actually. And we've had parents that have kept, their attendance on the down low and have practiced the skills at the supermarket or at the dairy or with friends before slowly adding them into their normal life with their tamariki.

And that's worked for them. And on the other side, I've had a number of families that have actually sat down at the dinner table and talked really openly with their children and just said, hey, look, we'd love to, we're going to do a course, we're going to do some work on ourselves and think about how we can build our relationship, as a family, and how we can support you as well. And we'd love if you could join us for that journey. And that has worked for those families really well. So I think the answer to that is it sort of comes down to the parents knowing their children the best and how they might approach that with their children.

6. Parent Education programs - Personal experience from attending courses – real benefits

What courses have you, well I'm just gauging sort of. I've done many over the course of 17, 18 years. The last one is always going to be the, I did a sensory one recently which was the most life changing for us at home. Oh yeah? Yeah, because we've got my two youngest, 4 and 10. And Xander is a guy where his cup is never full. And so he needs lots of bright colours, lots of noise, throwing him around before bedtime. You know, everything opposite of what you would expect to do with a child before bed. Those sorts of things. And then Raven, who's 10, her cup's always just overflowing a little bit, so everything's a little bit too large.

You know, it's too bright, it's too, so yeah, we created, so with Xander's bedroom for us, we painted every wall a different bright colour. Oh cool. And we got him a red and blue light for in his room. And Raven got, she's, you know, organised and she used to have everything. So we've just made it, you know, yeah, lots of little things like that. Just looking at things. Yeah, I think that's what each child needs sensory-wise, because the two older ones, 17 and 19, they are, have got other sensory needs again, but they sort of know, you know, we know a wee bit more about them. They're sort of, I don't know, it's so many balls in the air, it's, you know.

But yeah, that was a really life-changing one for us, because bedtime is always so difficult, with the young one trying to, you know, come on, sit down, be quiet, and these ones jump around. So now we're like, right, let's get on the trampoline, you know, chase him to

bed, throwing him on the bed, and he's out like a lion, you know. So just different, different things. Nuts. Yeah, and I would never have thought to do that. And just learning about the other, all the different senses, you know, inter-intersection, and everything was just, I just was just like, it was like this light bulb moment for me.

Yeah, that I could create this, yeah, great environment for all of the kids, just with the likes of, yeah, using all these senses. Yeah, so that was really, it was a really good one.

7. Parent Education programs - Feedback from parents that have attended courses

So what type of feedback have you had from parents during the courses? Things aren't always perfect and there's never any magic wand and some nights just don't go to plan for some parents but the feedback that I've got from parents is that children are a lot more open with them and that even if their children have made some bad choices they seem to be more likely to come to the parent and say hey dad look I've just messed up and they know that the parent will just connect with them before any correction as well so just that increase in relationship with the child notice it being a real theme throughout. Yeah I agree with you Jonathan it's about the biggest feedback is that they've got a greater connection with their children that their households are calmer as well so there's not as much conflict because their children are being listened to and being heard and not having to escalate the behaviour so they the calmness the connection is the biggest they're communicating like you say the children are coming to them.

8. Parent Education programs - Learnings from attendance

So, Charlene, you know, you've been to a few courses now, huh? I'm just wondering what your experience of these courses is like. I think they're really beneficial. Overall, learning to communicate better with my children and remembering to be calm is really important and has worked really well throughout, but also to have fun. One of the courses, the sensory course, was probably the most beneficial, a real lightbulb moment for me, and just learning that, you know, things don't have to be a certain way for every child. Some kids need to be squeezed and thrown in the air and some need lots of noise, some need lots of quiet, so I learnt a lot from that particular course.

And I imagine that that... But also, when you're talking about one might need calm, one might need quiet, they can all be needs within one family, is what I'm also hearing. It's also really important to learn about what stage each child's development is at, like what sort of, you know, because we talk to them, you know, they're little humans, but sometimes we, you know, talk to them in such a way that, you know, they don't always understand what we're asking of them. I've learnt to be more, thinking a bit more about what is going on for them and how I can relate to them so that they can understand what I'm wanting and I can understand what they want.

That's helpful to know because we do cover developmental, you know, what's happening for your child at that particular stage, don't it? So to hear that back is really great feedback. Yeah, well, good. Yeah, also, I guess the... A really important part is making that connection with other parents. It can be quite lonely when you're, you know, just in this journey on your own, especially if it's, you know, you're a bit isolated and not being able to let go of that and things like that. So meeting other parents that are in the same boat and you can sort of talk about things that have worked for you and not worked for you and getting ideas and just having that relationship with somebody who knows, yeah, what's happening.

So that's really beneficial with the courses.

9. Parent Education programs - Advice for those thinking about attending a parenting program

What would you tell someone else who has never attended a parenting course and is sort of looking at attending, what advice would you give them? I would say to go to every one you can. Not all of them are going to fit, but you do find some that fit so well that you just really walk away feeling like, you know, I can do this. So finding the right fit itself is important. Yeah, definitely. And like I said before, you know, the age-appropriate courses are important too. You know, parenting a four-year-old and parenting a 17-year-old are quite different. Boys, girls, yeah, very different. So I'm really lucky to have different courses available for those different needs. I'm just wondering what you would sort of say to somebody who is thinking about going and is unsure, where should I go, shouldn't I go? What would you say to them? I would say find out some more information. Like you've said, we can, you know, you give a call the night before or if you're unsure if that's going to be suitable, seek out some more information, contact the person running it, ask questions. Yeah, definitely. I often email like, this is going to be, this is my situation. This is going to be beneficial to me. Because there's so many out there that are tailored to different needs.

10. Parent Education programs - Support for parents who are struggling

So these courses that we go to, you talked about supporting parents through this journey. Something that I've found that has really leapt in any of the courses that I've done, I guess, is the support for the parent as in how do we do, you know, like the emotional toil, you know, all of that sort of things. There seems to be a lot of information on how to, you know, put across or communicate with your children and stuff, where I've personally found the journey itself quite difficult and not able to have anywhere to go to just talk about the fact that this is really, really hard. Yeah, that's it.

I don't know if that's really... I'm just curious as to, as you were saying about parent support, is there somewhere that you can, if you see a parent struggling in your groups, you have places where you can, what would you recommend? That's a really good question because it does bring up, being on these courses also does bring up a lot of stuff for us as parents and whether it's speaking to the facilitator afterwards and then us finding... Having some supports or even just being able to help you in that moment. We're certainly there to do that. The other thing is that we do talk in the group in these particular programs about what's coming up for us as parents and why they come up.

So we're looking at what's going on internally as well as externally and how do we support and you through that as well. So that's something that we're really mindful of. We want to be walking the talk. Yeah.

11. Parent Education programs - Key messages

The key message I'm taking away from today is there's a lot of courses available for all different types of situations, and the facilitators are available to talk to beforehand, which is really helpful, and I look forward to maybe attending one of your courses. The key message for me is just that saying, you only know what you know, and that's what I really bring into these courses as a facilitator. It's not parenting by Jonathan, we're purely the portals for the course content, and I just love knowing that parents know that they have a voice, they have a say, their story matters in actually hearing from them, and so I'm always open to feedback and what could be improved, and listening to where they want the course to go as well.

So as a facilitator, I only know what I know, and I'm really here to serve the parents that attend the course. I think my key message would be the idea of sort of shifting away from this being a parenting program and teaching you how to parent, but actually upskilling around communication, which I think is what you were talking about, that a lot of the content from these courses you can use in your friendships and your other relationships and not being scared that I don't know how to parent, so I need to go to this course, that actually I just love to nurture the communication in my household and help that environment be a place for me to be.

Yeah. A place of calm and of friendship and of fun and of safety and boundaries. I think that's kind of the foundation of what we cover is, yeah, creating a nice home environment and communication is key in that. Yeah, I agree. It is a communication style. How do we communicate? How do we communicate when we've got big feelings and all of those happening is so important in our lives today. So I think those would be the key messages. How do we do that? How do we support as well? How do we support our tamariki? How do we support each other as parents as well? I think it's really important. And as facilitators, it's how, you know, we're here to help support you as parents, because it's not an easy job.

You know, there's lots of pressures that are out there today on parents and on tamariki as well. So how can we support everybody coming together? Greater connections. It's the connection building that's so important, no matter what age and stage.