

Improved Outcomes For Children: Helping Conflictual Parents See With New Eyes

Presented at Family & Relationship Services Australia National Conference, 2015

Abstract

“You are a bad parent in need of education so that you do not do further damage to your children.” That is the message given to parents who are mandated to attend ‘parenting after separation’ programs. It may not be the stated or desired intention, but it is the very real felt experience of this client group. How then should we engage with the increasing number of court-ordered parents who often enter our programs with high levels of resistance and antagonism? This workshop outlines a program that is both therapeutic and educative, designed to lead parents through a process of reflection and learning that builds on their capacity to make better decisions about how they manage themselves through the separation.

Parents caught up in acrimonious separations already see the hurt their children are experiencing. Often, though, their own hurt and pain takes control and prevents them from being the parents they want to be. As one mum said when speaking of an argument with her daughter’s father: “I knew my daughter was standing there, I knew that she was upset, but I just couldn’t stop myself.” This is an all too common scenario that in itself produces a lot of guilt and shame for parents. The last thing these parents need is a program that increases this guilt and shame.

Interrelate’s Parents Not Partners (PNP) program presents a fresh evidence-based and practice-informed look at this perennial struggle. Designed from the bottom up by those who work with this client group, the program focuses on self-awareness and choice to allow parents the agency to examine their behaviour and decide for themselves what and how to change. It is strengths-based and incorporates our new understanding of neuroscience and the power of mindfulness. In addition, it incorporates these newer understandings in a package with existing strategies designed to increase emotional intelligence and functioning, and a built-in evaluation framework allowing measurement of client outcomes.

Participants in this workshop will hear how the program was developed. They will see some of the program content via PowerPoint and experience firsthand the dynamics of the group experience created by participation in some of the exercises. Feedback from the pilot implementation will be reported. This workshop follows on from our paper on Service Practice Groups. Participants will see how working with a parent’s passion for their children will easily engage them and overcome their resistance and antagonism.

To learn more about *Improved Outcomes For Children: Helping Conflictual Parents See With New Eyes*, contact Interrelate’s Research & Service Development team on rsd@interrelate.org.au.