

# Parents Not Partners: Evaluation Of A Program Of Challenge, Learning And Reflection For Separated Parents

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## Abstract

Parents caught up in acrimonious separations already see the hurt their children are experiencing, but their own hurt and pain often takes control and prevents them from being the parents they can and want to be. When they are mandated to attend a post-separation parenting program, they often feel judged as bad parents in need of re-education. Little wonder that they enter such programs with high levels of resistance and antagonism. The challenge for practitioners is to engage these parents in a way that overcomes their resistance and helps them to embrace new possibilities in their parenting. Parents Not Partners (PNP) is a six-session post-separation parenting program designed to be delivered to parents who are, in the main, entrenched in conflict and mandated by Family or Federal Circuit court orders to attend. PNP is practice-informed, strengths- and evidence-based, and attempts to build parents' capacity to make good decisions, rather than provide prescriptive parenting education.

Even when separated, parents need to be have a functional relationship that allows them to communicate about their children's needs without exacerbating, or further exposing their children to, conflict. PNP is both educative and therapeutic, giving parents the opportunity to reflect on their own experience of the separation journey, challenging them to think and act in new ways, and giving them alternatives to the habitual behaviours that have been undermining their own and their children's lives. Designed from the bottom up by practitioners who work with this client group, the program focuses on self-awareness and choice, and challenges parents to examine and reflect on their behaviour and decide for themselves what and how to change. The program has a built-in evaluation component to assess participant outcomes, and was piloted in late 2015.

The key components and processes of the post-pilot version of the program will be outlined, but the main focus will be on the outcomes for clients and their assessment of the program. Having run the revised program for several months across several service sites, we now have feedback from multiple groups. The presenters will discuss the results of the analysis of participants' progress through this time in their separation journey and explore the views of both parents and facilitators about the program, obtained through participant feedback and practitioner comments and reflections.

To learn more about *Parents Not Partners: Evaluation Of A Program Of Challenge, Learning And Reflection For Separated Parents*, contact Interrelate's Research & Service Development team on [rsd@interrelate.org.au](mailto:rsd@interrelate.org.au).