



# Early Life Foundations

Education Consultancy, Research & Parent Support

## WELCOME

Well it is hard to believe that the winter solstice has "been and gone" and here we are into term3!! As time flies past us at an ever increasing rate it is timely to read the contributions to this newsletter about parenting and "In search for the happy family".

We always encourage the professionals we work with to use reflective practice to grow and develop; and to use the continual cycle of plan; analyze; review and plan. It is quite ironic that many of us spend large portions of our life studying, training and learning about our professions but rarely spend similar time to train, develop and build our skills and knowledge about child development, behavior and parenting. And yet for those of us who are parents – it is likely that we will be parenting for longer than we will be pursuing our career!

One can be a parent without any training, certificate, experience, mentor, financial or extended support.... and yet parenting is one of the most important jobs we can do in a lifetime.

Being an effective parent is not something that is natural or just happens – like any other job it requires understanding, skills, experience and mentoring. We hope this newsletter and the parent outreach service that we offer through the office and website will provide parents with a little bit of this professional-parent development!

**Shona Bass**  
Editor

Chief Executive Officer - Early Life Foundations

*We are delighted to announce that a collaborative partnership has been forged with Outside School Hours Care providers (OSHClub). OSHClub will be sponsoring the production of this newsletter. Early Life Foundations will be working with OSHClub to review quality control of their service, provide parent education and consult on developmentally appropriate practice.*

## COMMENT EFFECTIVE PARENTING

In February this year my new book "Parenting" for parents and educators of preschool and primary aged children was published. Many parents have given me wonderful feedback about the book and in particular the need for us as a community to share, support and reflect upon our parenting.

Comments about the book have included,

*"It has opened my eyes to see that there are so many ways in which I can build my relationship with my young children and help them to respond to the daily tasks and challenges of childhood"*

*"The strategies in the book have really helped my partner and me to reflect more deeply and to have a go at changing some things that just weren't working for us or our children."*

Parenting is a challenging role that often can feel lonely, isolating and frustrating. There are times when no matter what we do there just doesn't seem to be an answer.

Effective parenting is about being able to reflect, respond, reach out, renew, recharge and revisit how we are parenting. It is also about being able to seek support and further strategies to enhance and build upon the strategies that are effective for you and your child.

Effective parenting is not just about the here and now moments of frustrations of when children won't do their homework or get into the bath or eat their meals. Effective parenting is about building a family

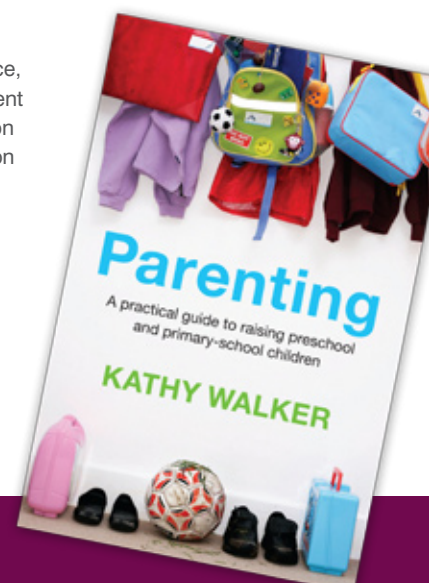
life that promotes openness, honesty, trust and responsible behaviors and interactions that will last well into your children's adolescence years and beyond.

*How we parent in the early years sets patterns and expectations and ways of interacting that children take with them into their later years..... it is the "Early Life Foundations" we give to our children in childhood that set them up for a 'successful' adult life.*

Our focus at Early Life Foundations is to constantly provide support in a variety of ways that helps to support, empower and respond to the varying range of challenges that parents face.

Our free phone consultation service, our face to face sessions, our parent workshop series, our fact sheets on the websites, our parent information presentations on a range of topics are all part of how we reach out to the wider community of parents and educators.

**Kathy Walker**  
Founding Director  
Early Life Foundations



It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself.

**Joyce Maynard**

# MINDFUL PARENTING: IN SEARCH OF THE HAPPY FAMILY

“ When the Navajo child asked her mother for counsel on a particular question, her mother said “Put it in your holy middle and sleep on it.” Charlotte Kasl, “If the Buddha Married” ”

In my Melbourne Psychology practice I have observed with growing concern the distress of parents who are trying to keep pace with the Western idea of having it all and doing it all “NOW”. This idea has been perpetuated by a sophisticated and ever more psychologically aware advertising and marketing world that prey on our emotions to get sales.

If our children are old enough to watch television, they are being continually bombarded by images of their peers with the latest designer gear, technology and attitudes which perpetuate the myth that **Having = Happy**. However, extensive research has shown that true happiness is achieved if we have meaning in our lives and if we feel connected to something larger than ourselves (extended family; community; religion etc). A graphic illustration of this is that research has demonstrated that a 14 year old orphaned prostitute in Mumbai scored higher on the Happiness Scale than an office worker in the USA. This was because the money she earned supported her orphaned siblings in an outlying village and whom she visited twice a year where she was welcomed and her connection with her family and village was celebrated. How many of us yearn for what we don't have and despair of what we do have.

If our children are old enough to be in school, the competition to keep up with their peers increases their desire to be “the same as” their friends and not to feel left out of the crowd. This idea is innate as we are born with a need to be accepted by our group. This is hardwired into our physiology and dates back to cave man days when being rejected and expelled by the group meant certain death. So, psychologically aware marketers play on our emotions and our need to be “the same”.

## COMING UP IN 2010:

- > Brighton parent workshop series starts in August.
- > Parent session on Resilience in Donvale, Victoria. 11th August
- > Bayside parent session: Choosing a school and school preparation. 17th August
- > NSW Conference: Playgroup NSW. 28th August

Check website for further details  
[www.earlylife.com.au](http://www.earlylife.com.au)



In reality, however, owning “stuff” only creates more desire to own more “stuff” as next year or even next week what we have is superseded by other brands, newer technology, more sophisticated ideas (witness the number of garage sales in your suburb).

Busy, often overworked and stressed parents often present in my consulting room complaining of exhaustion and a family who they sometimes see as out of control. Often, after investigation, what it boils down to is a family who feels isolated from their community, without enough inter-generational support and out of touch with what children actually benefit from. Extended family often live on the other side of town as young families, eager to live in their own home, have had to sacrifice family support to buy into an area they can afford. It is only in the last generation that “Parenting Support Groups” have sprung up in Western society to fill in the gaps traditionally filled by tribes, then by extended family and neighbours.

With more and more families relying on Day Care to replace extended family for child minding when both parents are working, families can feel isolated and desperate to provide the best they can for their new families.

For thousands of years, Buddhists have known and understood the “power of now”. Buddhists have practised and taught Mindfulness Meditation and now at last the Western world is beginning to understand its benefits. Mindfulness Meditation allows us to be in the moment, not worrying about what we said yesterday or fearful of something in the future that has not yet happened and probably never will. Mindfulness also allows us to really ‘BE’ with our children, our partners, our friends and most importantly, with ourselves.

Becoming Mindful does not mean that you need to go to a cave in the mountains and practise stillness and non-thinking for hours on end. It can be as simple as when you are driving the car practise Mindfulness, be in the moment and DRIVE THE CAR. Don't think about what's for dinner, when you will have time to call that friend or pay the bills. Get in the car, watch yourself turn on the ignition, do up your seatbelt, check the rear view mirror, release the handbrake, turn on your indicator, turn OFF the music and DRIVE. Watch where you're going, notice the other cars, the feel of your body on the seat, your hands on the wheel, the traffic. “BE” in the car. How often do you get to your destination and think “I don't even remember driving here?” We all do it, because we are doing the opposite of being Mindful, we are being Mind-less.

With our children, if they want us to play with them, sit with them, read with them, how many of us feel exasperated, both because it may be an inconvenient time, but also because we are just plain exhausted from all the “Doing” and not enough of the “Being”.

With your children, 10 minutes at a time of actually really “Being” with them, that is focusing on them, truly listening to what they are saying and engaging with them often has the bonus effect of calming children down and creating a new and positive pattern of inter-relating in the family. Dynamics in a family can be turned around very quickly for the positive if children feel heard and understood. Often in our busyness (to get the house looking right, our chores done and our work finished for the day) childrens’ bedtime can be upon us before we have spent any meaningful time with them at all.

*Your children need your presence more than your presents.*

~Jesse Jackson

Dr Daniel Siegel in his book “The Mindful Brain” states that brain science studies have shown that daily mindfulness practices include a number of profound ways in which we can become healthier and happier:

- > **Ability to regulate the body**
- > **Ability to regulate moods**
- > **Fear extinction**
- > **Attuned Communication**
- > **Ability to be flexible**
- > **Ability to be empathic**
- > **Capacity for insight**
- > **Morality**
- > **Intuition and the ability to use intuition to inform reason**

Mindfulness practises are really about “being” instead of “doing”.

We all have to do things to get through our daily lives, our work, our obligations. When was the last time you took time out for yourself to read a book, have a bath or pick a flower for yourself? Our children learn from watching what we do, not from what we say. When we can truly give ourselves the time to be in the moment, we are giving our children the greatest gift of all.

#### SOME IDEAS FOR CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS FOR YOUR FAMILY:

- > Take time to practise Mindfulness around your children to help them grow up feeling noticed, heard and understood
- > Look deeply to learn who your children are rather than projecting your hopes, fears and expectations on to them
- > Use Mindfulness to discover what you can learn from each new situation and with your children – are you making unrealistic demands on life and your family or can you accept the inevitable imperfections of life?
- > Listen to your children without judging – allow them to talk things through; let them feel understood; concentrate on feelings and allow them to solve their own problems
- > Whenever you find the time, even if it is one or two minutes, breathe – watch your breath
- > Remember, no matter how intense your current emotional state is - it will pass. Find opportunities to share this with your children
- > Strive to accept imperfection in yourself and your others (including your children)
- > The way we speak fuels the atmosphere of the home
- > Remember your children are learning from watching your relationship
- > Pause before you speak

Adapted from “Buddhism for Mothers” Sarah Naphtali

#### A SIMPLE MINDFULNESS PRACTISE FOR YOU!

- > **When it feels too hard to take**
  - > **Stop**
  - > **Take some gentle, deep breaths and ask**
  - > **“What do I need to do to take care of myself right now?”**
  - > **If you can’t engage in the activity of self care**
  - > **Take some more gentle, deep breaths and plan your self care**
  - > **REMEMBER**
  - > **Stay close to those who love you and respect you**
  - > **Be kind to yourself; Remember this too will pass**
- (Sandie Harrison, Family Therapist, Melbourne 2008)

Lyn Benson - Psychologist and Family Therapist, Melbourne

## FURTHER READING

### “IF THE BUDDHA MARRIED”

Charlotte Kasl, Penguin Books 2001

### “BUDDHISM FOR MOTHERS”

Sarah Naphtali, Allen & Unwin, 2003

### “THE MINDFUL BRAIN”

Daniel J. Siegel, W.W. Norton & Company, 2007

### “THE HURRIED CHILD”

David Elkind, 3rd Ed 2008

### “WHATS THE HURRY”

Kathy Walker, ASG 2005

Recent reports, frameworks and peer reviewed articles can be accessed from the “library” on the Walker Learning website





the  
**Walker Learning  
Approach**

AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPMENTAL CURRICULUM

## IT ALL STARTED WITH AN INVESTIGATION!

It all started with an investigation!!!! Early Years teachers at Anula School (NT) applied for an AGQTP grant in 2008 to explore alternative Early Years teaching pedagogy. The project was initiated and led by the early year's team with the support of the leadership team; it seeded the growth of "grass roots" change.

Reading widely, seeking beyond our comfortable context and looking at national and international trends in early childhood education led the Anula Early Years Team to Kathy Walker and the Walker Learning Approach (Australian Developmental Curriculum).

It resulted in our kids asking us why they couldn't sleep at school and why the school didn't open on the weekend. Student attendance in the early years has consistently remained in the low to mid 90's since the Walker Learning Approach was introduced. Parents report "disagreements" with their children when they need to remain at home because they are ill. Our children do not yearn for the school day to end or for holidays to arrive. School is the place to be; where learning is focused and FUN!!!

In 2009 the Anula Primary School Early Years Team won the **NT Teaching Team of the Year Award** for the implementation of the Walker Learning Approach across the Early Years in the mainstream and Intensive English School.

Learning with Kathy Walker, running team and individual teacher focus sessions at Anula School almost every term over the past two years has been both challenging and inspiring. Watching our Early Years Team engage in their learning journey as they identify the key areas of their teaching they need to focus on (tuning in), devising teaching approaches and strategies to define and refine their intentional teaching (investigation) and considering what went well, what needs to be changed and where to from here (reflection) has been almost a parallel to observing our children's engagement with and enthusiasm for negotiating and shaping their learning.

## COMING UP IN 2010:

Look out for Kathy, Shona and Associates:

- > Northern Territory: 4-8th August
- > Sydney: 16 August
- > Adelaide: 6th September
- > Tasmania: 22nd – 23rd  
October & 5th-6th November
- > Country Victoria

Check website for further details  
[www.walkerlearning.com.au](http://www.walkerlearning.com.au)

Not only have our Anula teachers taken control of what they are doing, they are strongly engaged in contributing to the knowledge bank of how to best implement the Walker Learning Approach in the NT context; with indigenous children from remote communities, with migrants and refugees and children from suburban backgrounds.

In 2010 Anula Primary School has become an **NT Early Years Learning Framework Hub**, recognized for its approach to early years professional learning and its commitment to supporting teachers in other schools to implement "next practice" in their early year's classrooms.

**Teachers from around Darwin and across the Top End have visited Anula to observe the Walker Learning Approach in action across the eleven early year's classrooms, including the pre-school.**

Early in term 3 we look forward to the beginning of our teacher accreditation in the Walker Learning Approach and our investigation into the possible extension of the approach into the primary years. Equally, I look forward to beginning post graduate research supported by the Menzies School of Health and Charles Darwin University to investigate the unique conditions of learning that the Walker Learning Approach establishes the longitudinal impact on student learning outcomes in remote and urban schools and teacher engagement in professional learning and retention to NT DET.

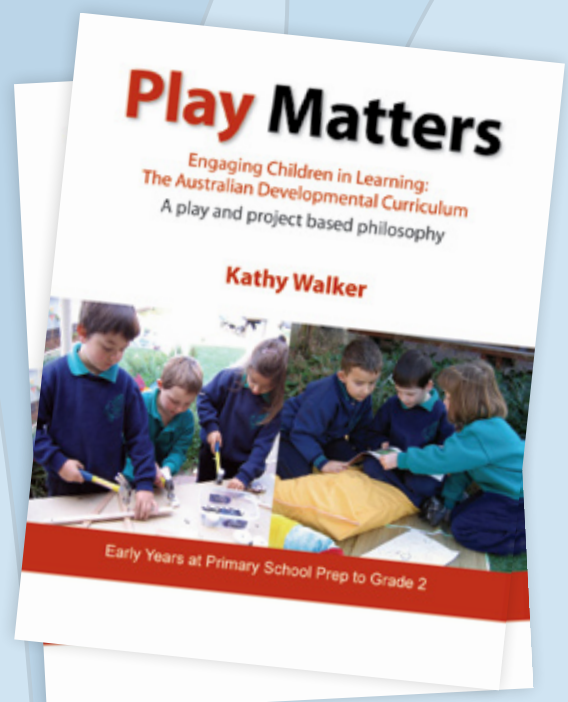
Just like the kids we look forward to what we can learn and create on our individual and collective learning journey with the next classroom, the school in the next suburb or in the remote community a plane flight away. With Walker Learning Approach there is never a dull moment; adventure is guaranteed!!!

**Karen Modoo**

*Principal, Anula Primary School*

Anula PS will be hosting Kathy Walker and Shona Bass to conduct a symposium "Effective Teaching and Learning in the Early Years" on Saturday August 7th 2010 from 9.00- 1.30am; it is open to all interested educators. Contact Jaimi-Leigh at Anula ph (08) 8927 9477

Teachers, leadership teams or education advisors interested in visiting Anula are invited to contact Karen Modoo at: [karen.modoo@ntschoools.net](mailto:karen.modoo@ntschoools.net)



Visit: [www.walkerlearning.com.au](http://www.walkerlearning.com.au)