



... a better place to live

Responsible  
Parenting  
Initiative



# The Responsible Parenting Initiative

*... Building better lives for children*



## Responsible Parenting is ...

- loving **relationships** guiding the way now and for the future
- supporting the **rights** of the child to a safe and healthy life and to have a say in decisions that affect them
- **respecting** individual differences
- establishing **routines** essential for everyday life
- nurturing **rituals** that celebrate family, culture and special times together
- providing **room to grow**, explore and belong

# INTRODUCTION

The *Responsible Parenting Initiative* was introduced in 2004 to address growing community concern about the number of young people—including children under the age of 10—involvement in truancy, anti-social and criminal behaviour.

The *Responsible Parenting Initiative* supports the most important people in children's lives - their parents. While parents, families, communities and government are all responsible for the well-being and protection of children, there is strong evidence to confirm the unique importance of positive parenting. Ultimately the development of young people and their capacity to become responsible members of the community rests with their parents and family networks.

Parenting is an important and rewarding job that can be difficult even at the best of times and most parents manage this responsibility successfully.

Ongoing parenting problems such as poor supervision, harsh or inconsistent discipline, child rejection, abuse and neglect can all contribute to serious behavioural problems in children.

The *Responsible Parenting Initiative* helps parents who are experiencing difficulty parenting and shows them how to manage their children's behaviour and how to provide a safe and encouraging environment.

The initiative is based on extensive research and uses a phased approach to state-wide implementation that takes into account the diverse circumstances of Western Australian children, families and communities.

The initiative is an important part of the *State Community Safety and Crime Prevention Strategy* (2004) and the State Government's *Children First* agenda.



rituals  
Parenting ... supporting rituals that celebrate family,  
culture and special times together

# WHY DO WE NEED A RESPONSIBLE PARENTING INITIATIVE?

Parenting involves nurturing, protecting, teaching and supporting children as they grow and learn how to behave and relate to others in the wider community. There are many factors that influence a child's development and their parents' capacity to parent effectively.

There is now clear evidence to show that poor and inconsistent parenting contributes to the development of child behaviour problems. Ongoing parenting difficulties can have an adverse and long-term impact on children, their families and society.

Some parents, for a variety of reasons, may be unable or unwilling to care for their children - to make sure they go to school, to monitor where they are and who they are with, to ensure they are

safe or to help them manage their behaviour. It can be difficult to decide how, when and where to ask for help – and as a result some parents don't ask for the help they need.

The *Responsible Parenting Initiative* addresses this by introducing a service called *ParentSupport* and a system of Responsible Parenting Agreements and Orders.

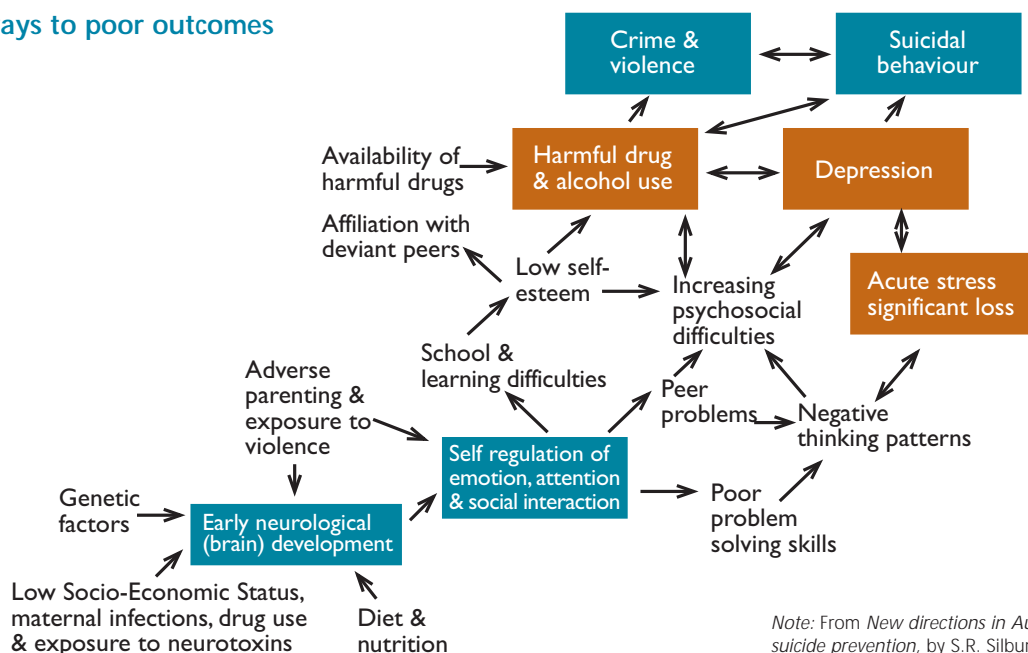
By actively improving parenting and family relationships, the *Responsible Parenting Initiative* aims to ensure children are well cared for, given the best educational opportunities and are kept out of trouble.



Parenting ... establishing routines essential for everyday life

# routines

## Pathways to poor outcomes



Note: From *New directions in Australian suicide prevention*, by S.R. Silburn, 2003

# HOW WAS THE RESPONSIBLE PARENTING INITIATIVE DEVELOPED?

The Western Australian Government is serious about preventing the causes of crime and is committed to making a difference for children and families at-risk.

In January 2004, in response to evidence about the importance of responsible parenting and concern for children at risk, the State Government released a discussion paper on the possible introduction of a system of parenting contracts and orders based on the successful United Kingdom statutory program.

## Success Elsewhere

In light of the sensitivity of the issue, the State Government undertook extensive community consultation before it would commit to drafting legislation. Submissions were received from a range of Government and non-government agencies, community groups, professional associations and individuals. The feedback confirmed the need for a greater focus on responsible parenting and provided important information about safeguards and issues that needed to be addressed.

The UK experience showed a 27.5 per cent reduction in the offending rates among the children of the parents involved in the programs, and a 50 per cent drop in the number of recorded offences committed by each young person. (It should be noted that the young people themselves also received support which helped them to change their behaviour.)

Evaluation of the UK Parenting Programs found that more than 4,000 parents and carers had been referred to a parenting program. Only 16 per cent were referred through a formal order of the Court; the rest attended voluntarily. Nine out of ten participating parents on formal orders said they would recommend the parenting program to others, and reported an improved relationship with their children.

Lessons learned from the UK highlighted the need to design policy and practices around local needs and individual circumstances.

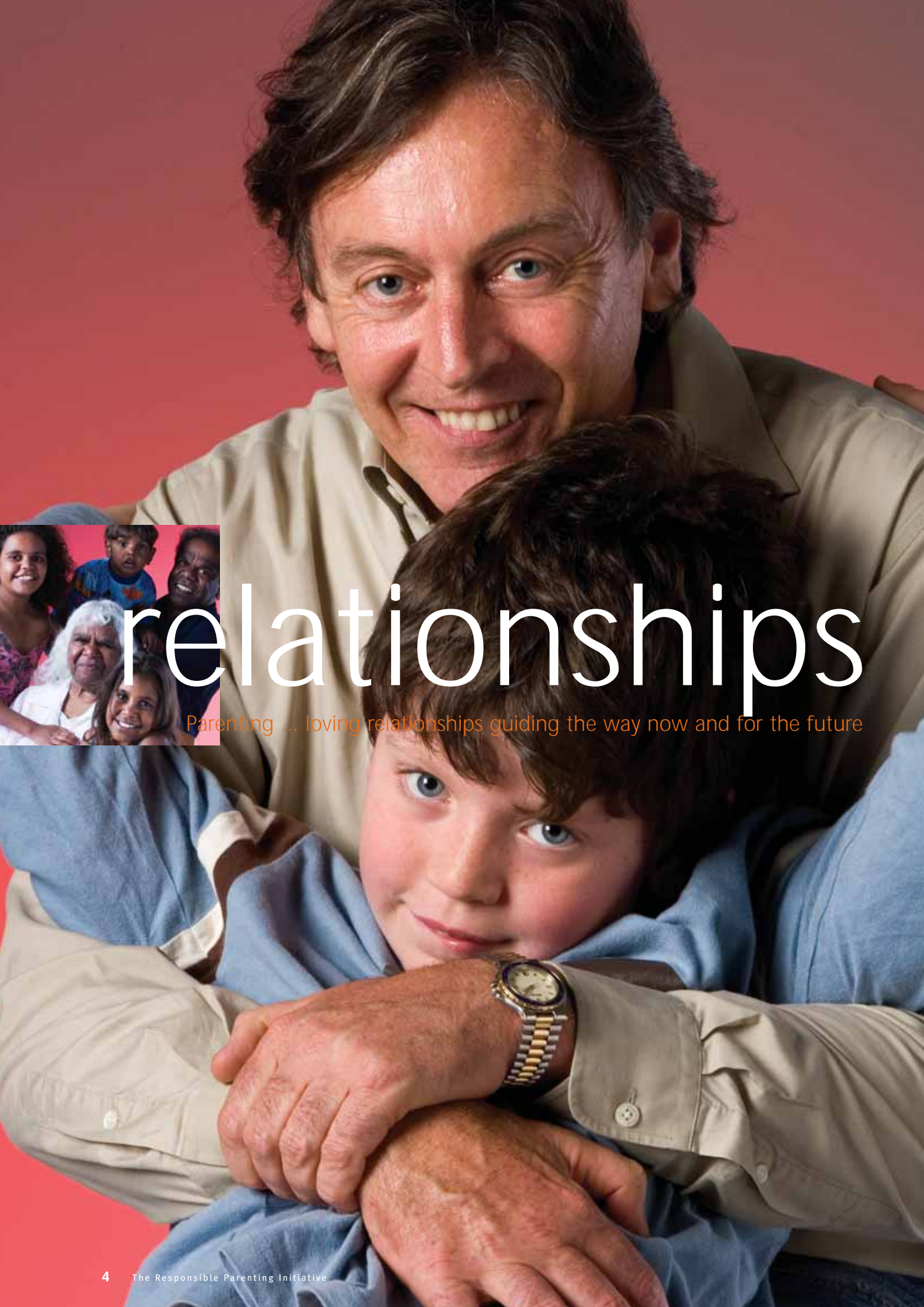
## Western Australia's Initiative

Western Australia's \$2.9 million *Responsible Parenting Initiative* responds to the recommendations raised in the consultation process and has been designed to encourage parents to access the intensive support they require as soon as possible.

### Key Community Recommendations:

- Securing voluntary involvement is more likely to lead to success and Parenting Orders should only be used as a last resort.
- Establishing appropriate local services, particularly for Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Providing inclusive educational programs for children excluded from school or failing to engage with the mainstream education system.
- Ensuring that Responsible Parenting Agreements and Responsible Parenting Orders don't have any unintended consequences or impact unfairly on Aboriginal families, particularly young Aboriginal women.
- Ensuring a comprehensive assessment of each family and child before determining whether a Responsible Parenting Order would be appropriate and in the child's best interest.
- Managing concerns about the use of fines as a compliance measure and expressing a preference for Community Based Orders.
- Maintaining Government agency responsibility and improving inter-agency cooperation.
- Ensuring that there are appropriate services available to refer parents to or require them to attend.

Following the consultation process and careful examination of the evidence, Government determined that a comprehensive approach was required and agreed to establish a specialised parenting support service and to introduce new legislation as essential elements of the *Responsible Parenting Initiative*.



# relationships

Parenting ... loving relationships guiding the way now and for the future

# WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S FOCUS ON RESPONSIBLE PARENTING

The *Responsible Parenting Initiative* is a comprehensive strategy that works in partnership with a range of local community services, State Government and non-government agencies.

It assists parents who are experiencing difficulties parenting and shows them how to manage their own and their children's behaviour.

The **purpose** of the *Responsible Parenting Initiative* is to promote the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children do not engage in antisocial, truanting or offending behaviour. It provides appropriate assistance and support so that parents can meet this responsibility.

The **goal** of the *Responsible Parenting Initiative* is to provide high quality support to help parents re-establish their parental authority, improve family relationships and nurture the development of their children.

The **objectives** of the *Responsible Parenting Initiative* are to:

- increase capacity to parent
- improve the socialisation of children
- improve school attendance
- reduce anti social behaviour
- reduce juvenile crime

## Delivering Services and

**Key elements** of the *Responsible Parenting Initiative* include:

1. Interagency collaboration and coordination
2. Provision of targeted parenting services  
– *ParentSupport*
3. Legislation to enable:
  - Information sharing
  - Responsible Parenting Agreements
  - Responsible Parenting Orders

## Support

The *Responsible Parenting Initiative* operates locally through authorised agencies including the Departments of Education and Training, Community Development and Juvenile Justice in Corrective Services.

Government agencies who normally work with at-risk children and families are able to refer parents to the *ParentSupport* service. A referral is made when normal avenues are not working, parental responsibilities are consistently being ignored or when significant family intervention is required.

A **Responsible Parenting Agreement** is an agreement between a parent/s and the Departments for Community Development and Education and Juvenile Justice in Corrective Services. The agreement clearly sets out roles, relationships and actions to be taken by the parent/s and the referring agency.

A **Responsible Parenting Order** can be sought by authorised departments. This requires an application to the Children's Court for an order directing parents to take up the support offered. A Responsible Parenting Order is a last resort that is used only after all other avenues and efforts to engage parents have been explored.

# AN OVERVIEW OF

## 1. WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE — INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION.

Raising happy, healthy children is a shared responsibility that extends across home, school and community settings. Agencies and community groups have different opportunities to support parents and carers with a range of coordinated and culturally relevant parenting support.

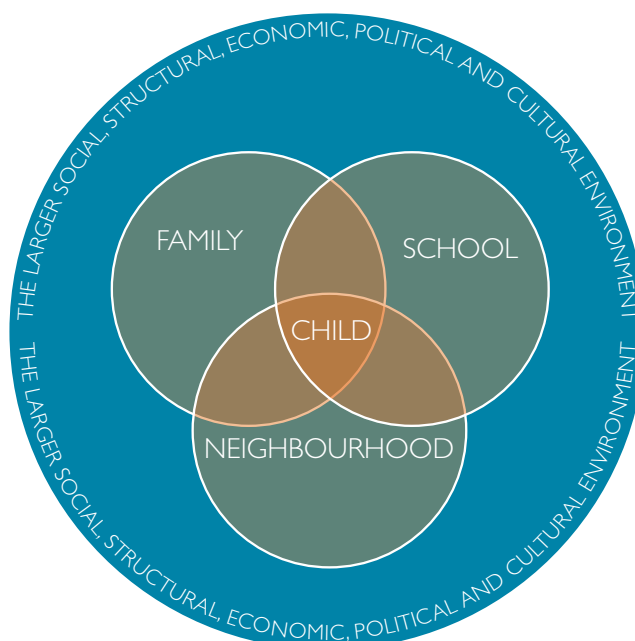
The *Responsible Parenting Initiative* focuses on interagency coordination and collaboration because:

- every child and parent is different
- parenting difficulties often come with other complex family issues that require a combined response
- some parents may be reluctant or unable to get the help they need
- some parents require ongoing assistance and others will require support at different times

Legislation to support the initiative will break new ground for interagency collaboration by opening the way for agencies to share information. This means that parents who lack skills or have trouble accepting responsibility for their child's behaviour will get the support they need.

This collaborative human service approach is a key factor to success. Regional managers forums will guide the best ways to deliver services.

### The Environment of Childhood



*Note: Zubrick, SR, Williams, AA and Silburn, SR. (2000)*

# THE RESPONSIBLE PARENT

## ...Building

## 2. PROVIDING INTENSIVE ParentSupport — TARGETED SERVICE

The *Responsible Parenting Initiative* works collaboratively with local agencies to determine how *ParentSupport* can be used to complement existing support.

On referral from authorised agencies *ParentSupport* provides a specialist service for parents to help increase their parenting skills and confidence so they can exercise greater parental responsibility for preventing their child's problem behaviour.

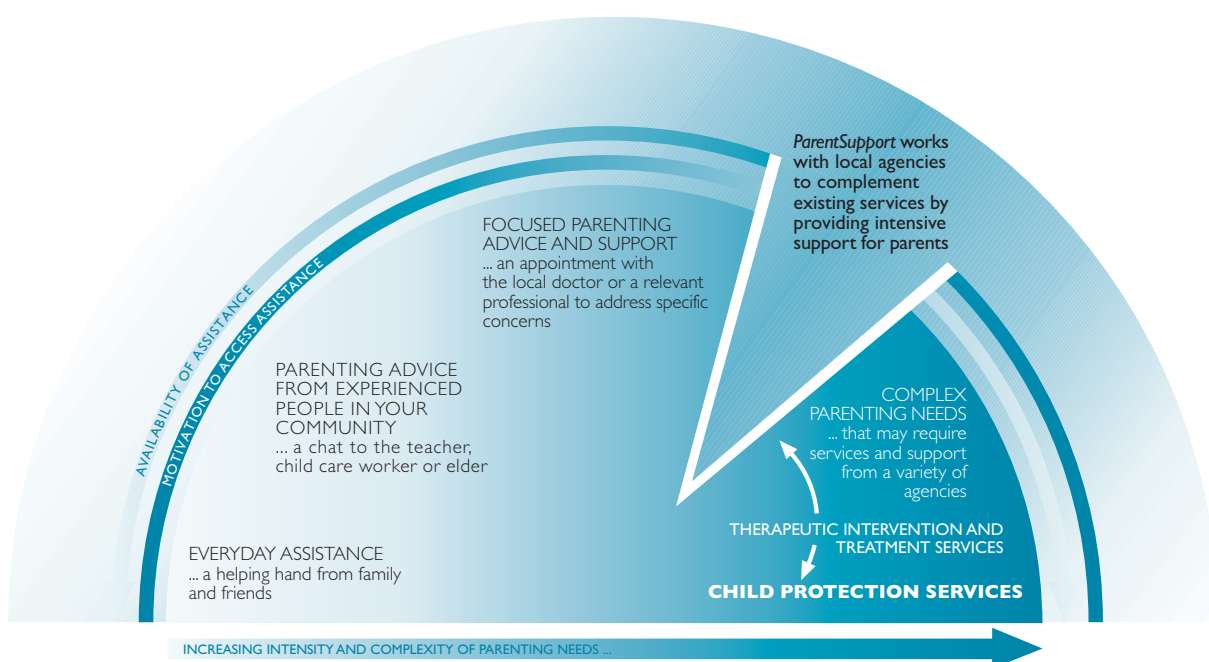
This service offers a range of interventions and support including:

- intensive home based visiting to provide a hands-on approach to creating stability and routine
- one-on-one work with parents to improve parenting skills and confidence, and parent / child relationships

- help to link parents to community support and networks
- liaison with State Government agencies to ensure a coordinated approach to meeting the families needs in a holistic way
- referral to not-for-profit agencies where parents require issues-based counselling
- group based parenting education and skills training

New legislation will require reluctant parents to undertake certain actions in respect to their child's behaviour and to take-up support services such as those provided by the *ParentSupport* service.

### Range of parent support services



# RESPONSIBLE PARENTING INITIATIVE

## *Building better lives for children*

### 3. PROVIDING AUTHORITY FOR AGENCIES TO ACT — LEGISLATION

New legislation introduced under the *Responsible Parenting Initiative* will require reluctant parents to undertake certain actions with respect to their child's behaviour and to take-up support services. The *Parental Support and Responsibility Bill (2005)* upholds responsible, capable and positive parenting as fundamental to helping children achieve their full potential.

This is reinforced by the objects of the legislation:

- a) to acknowledge and support the primary role of parents in safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children; and
- b) to reinforce and support the role and responsibility of parents to exercise appropriate control over the behaviour of their children.

As some parents are unwilling to access appropriate assistance this legislation will address such reluctance by introducing a statute for Responsible Parenting Agreements and Orders, supported by legislative sanctions if they fail to comply. Extensive information sharing provisions provided within the legislation will assist 'information sharing agencies' to work more collaboratively to help parents.

This legislation will enable authorised agencies (the Departments for Community Development, Education and Training and Corrective Services) - to make Responsible Parenting Agreements with parents and allows them to make application to the Children's Court for a Responsible Parenting Order. This legislation will be used by each of the three authorised agencies in concert with their respective legislative and policy frameworks relating to children and young people.

Orders will only be used as a last resort and only after substantial efforts to engage with the family on a voluntary basis have not succeeded.

Under a Responsible Parenting Agreement or a Responsible Parenting Order a parent may be required to attend a parenting course, counselling or access in-home support. They may also be required to take steps to ensure that their child attends school, avoids contact with a particular person or avoids specific places.

The legislation will make extensive provisions for the assistance of parents and the protection of children through specific statutory safeguards. Should a parent fail to comply with a Responsible Parenting Order, provision is made for a maximum penalty of a \$2000 fine. Sentencing dispositions available to the Court will include: Conditional Release Orders and Community Based Orders.

It is not intended that default on payment of a fine for the breach of a Responsible Parenting Order should lead to the suspension of a motor driver's license or imprisonment. Rather, provision is made in this legislation that default on payment of a fine may result in the seizure of non-essential household goods or a Work and Development Order.



respect

Parenting ... respecting individual differences and showing the way



# room to grow

Parenting ... providing room to grow, explore and to belong

# HOW WILL WE KNOW THAT THE INITIATIVE IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

To determine if the *Responsible Parenting Initiative*, including the *ParentSupport* service, is really making a difference, the Australian Institute of Criminology has been engaged to evaluate:

- the impact and effectiveness of Responsible Parenting Agreements and Responsible Parenting Orders in achieving stated objectives
- the effectiveness of the parenting service, *ParentSupport*, in supporting and skilling parents
- the extent of interagency cooperation and coordination in implementation of the *Responsible Parenting Initiative*

The evaluation will take place in distinct stages over a three year period commencing in 2005 as a developmental stage to provide feedback to refine the operational aspects of the *Responsible Parenting Initiative*. The second stage of the evaluation will be completed in 2007.



# rights

Parenting ... promoting the rights of the child to a safe and healthy life and to have a say in decisions that affect them