

PARENTING PROGRAMMES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



A SUMMARY GUIDE TO KEY ELEMENTS OF PARENTAL SUPPORT IN ECD

FEBRUARY 2022

A KNOWLEDGE PRODUCT PREPARED BY BRIDGE

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GUIDE TO THIS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCT



SOURCES

Much of the information found here has been drawn from BRIDGE's national and provincial ECD Communities of Practice, and the inputs given by its members. BRIDGE CoPs aim to link policy and practice, and over the past two years we have explored what this means in terms of policies and practices around supporting parents of young children.

WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND BY PARENTING?

We understand parenting as giving support, care and love to children in a way that leads to their total development. It means keeping them safe and healthy, and encouraging their growth in all aspects of life. It means being positively involved in their day to day lives, and helping to lay the foundation for good social and academic skills. While there is diversity in parenting styles, there is a common understanding that it means establishing secure attachments to lead to healthy social, emotional, cognitive and motivational development in children for future success.

WHO ARE 'PARENTS'?

In South Africa, many families are not made up of a typical nuclear family structure. According to the General Household Survey of 2019, 33% of children below the age of 17 live with both parents, 42% live with the mother while 21% do not live with their parents. This means that many children are raised by their grandparents and other relatives, especially in rural areas due to reasons such as labour migration.

In this knowledge product we use the broader definition of a parent as the one who nurtures and raises a child. 'Parents' include teenage parents, siblings, or any other caregivers who have taken on a parental role. The term and concept of 'parent' and 'parental care' covers all primary caregivers of young children (0-6).

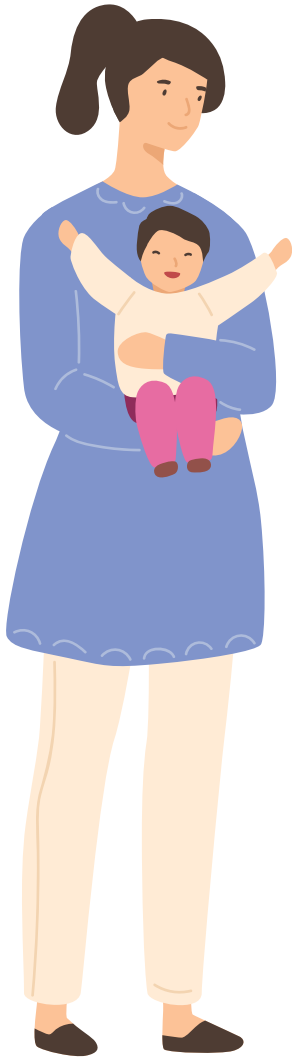
WHO IS THIS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCT FOR?

This product is not aimed at parents, or at organisations with extensive experience in running parenting programmes. It is mainly intended for NGOs that do not specialise in parenting programmes, but have recognised the need to include parents and integrate support for them into their overall work. These are NGOs working for young children through providing ECD programmes, nutrition, health, or social support programmes or services, or offering various forms of training. ECD centre managers and principals might also find useful information here. We are limiting our discussion to parenting programmes for young children (0-6) only.

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR PARENTING PROGRAMMES?

Briefly (and at the risk of over-simplification), discussions held at BRIDGE ECD CoPs suggest two main trends amongst parents. Some parents see their primary roles as clearly separated from dealing with learning or developmental needs, which is seen as the business of ECD practitioners and teachers; these parents typically focus on obligations to do with physical needs, or those linked to cultural or religious contexts. Other parents recognize the need to be involved in all aspects of children's lives, but feel that they don't know how to address activities such as play or early learning support for their children.

The impact of Covid-19, and the closure of ECD programmes during lockdown and beyond, has also had an impact on parenting programmes and extended pressures on parents. While the pandemic has sparked innovations in terms of reaching parents through different media platforms, it has also weakened the sector because of lack of in-person contact. We need to continue to pay attention to the consequences of the pandemic and its implications for supporting parents.



Here are some examples of a number of parenting challenges cited from a community project:

- Absentee fathers and absence of good male role models
- Lack of time to spend playing with and bonding with their children
- Financial pressures and the need to prioritise spending
- Contexts in which children are exposed to crime and violence
- Unemployment leading to depression, which impacts on children
- Intergenerational tensions, such as different views between younger and older generations on issues such as discipline
- Lack of confidence in handling their children's emotional issues
- Concerns around their own literacy and ability to help children with early learning.

Ways of dealing with these challenges are all topics addressed in parenting programmes.

**Drawn from a survey done by BRIDGE - ECD General Report and Recommendations to Dorper Wind Farm project, 2020.*



PARENT AND PRACTITIONER VOICES

"In this consultation with over 90 parents (caregivers) and practitioners, there was consensus on one thing: giving children love is foundational to their development. Love has to be shown through actions, and not just through words."

Thankdeka Rantsi, reporting on consultations held through surveys and interviews with practitioners and caregivers in the Eastern Cape (Dorper Wind Farm programme, 2020 and 2021)

WITH THANKS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COP PARENT WORKING GROUP

In 2021 the BRIDGE CoPs formed a parental support working group to share ideas on how to strengthen support for parents, and to build up networks between different initiatives in this field.

- DG Murray Trust and Ilifa Labantwana: Kayin Scholtz
- Mikhulu Trust: Kaathima Ebrahim
- Do More Foundation: Pam Picken
- DG Murray Trust: Yomelelani Twetwa
- BRIDGE: Thandeka Rantsi and Kathaur Conrad
- Early Learning Resource Unit: Faadiela Ryklief

WITH THANKS TO THE FUNDERS OF THIS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCT



DG MURRAY TRUST

The LEGO Foundation

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FOUR CORE AREAS

These four areas of information categories have been distilled from BRIDGE ECD CoP meeting reports.



PROGRAMMES

- What are some general principles of parenting programmes?
- What range of topics or components do parenting programmes cover?
- What is the range of delivery mechanisms?



RESEARCH AND M&E

- What are some of the research areas in the field?
- What general trends have been identified?
- What is the role of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and what lessons have been learned from data gathered?



STATE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- What government services for parents do programme implementers need to be aware of?



CENTRALISED INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- Some examples of network bodies that provide information on parenting services and resources, along with their website addresses.
- BRIDGE CoP Meeting Highlight links are given as a source of further shared information and discussion.

PROGRAMMES

A QUICK OVERVIEW

These general features often came up in BRIDGE ECD CoP discussions.



NO SINGLE PROGRAMME MODEL

Programmes can address a range of needs, or may be need-specific (e.g. for parents of children with disabilities; for communities suffering trauma [war, natural disasters]).

Parents may have a range of goals they want their children to meet.

Common elements across programmes are packaged in different ways; some programmes are comprehensive, while others focus on selected elements.



FREQUENT PARTNERSHIPS

Programmes are often done in partnership with government (e.g. Department of Social Development [DSD]), NGOs or international development agencies (e.g. UNICEF).

NGOs often act as service providers for design and development components, or for implementation/ delivery components, or for both.

Parenting programmes may often develop in the context of an overall ECD programme or other interventions.



GENERAL UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

Programmes often include a capacity-building element.

Prior parenting skills and knowledge need to be recognized and built on, in the interests of confidence-building.

The target audience needs to be clearly understood in terms of approach and resources (e.g. groups with low literacy rates will require audio and visual resources rather than text-heavy materials).

PROGRAMMES

COMMON PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

The table below consolidates a number of different elements that have been presented in BRIDGE CoPs. Parenting programmes select, deliver and present these elements in varied and innovative ways. Content examples are given under each element.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION
 Correct feeding for babies, including issues regarding breastfeeding and formula; balanced diets for young children; vitamin needs and deficiencies etc.
 Road to Health guidelines: clinic visits, immunization and common childhood illnesses



PARENTAL CONFIDENCE AND SELF-CARE
 Confidence in role as a parent
 Taking care of self in order to be a good caregiver



THE HOME ENVIRONMENT
 Physical: safety issues, hygiene, stimulation
 Emotional: safe, loving, peaceful environment



PRE-SCHOOL & SCHOOL PREPARATION
 Strategies for preparing children for learning and interacting with others
 Motivate for love of learning



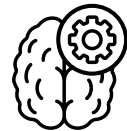
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT/ PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT
 Nurturing, feeling loved, attachment, and managing grief
 Social behaviours such as tolerance, interactions with other children



DISCIPLINE APPROACHES
 Non-violent discipline, boundaries, behavior management, consequences, using praise and rewards, rules etc.



COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT
 Tracking of milestones, language development and referrals if required
 Stimulation of curiosity and learning through play



VALUES
 Ethics, role of cultural and religious values



PLAY, CREATIVITY AND STIMULATION
 Role of play, types of play, strategies for using playful activities in everyday routines, tips on appropriate and inexpensive resources
 'How to' tips to combine play and learning (e.g. through use of LEGO, colouring books etc.)
 Stimulating the desire to learn



CROSS CUTTING ELEMENTS

Identified key benefits for parents: increased knowledge in certain areas of care, and more confidence in their own parenting skills.

Identified key benefits for children: self-esteem and confidence, readiness for learning and improved learning outcomes.



CHILD SAFETY AND PROTECTION
 Child-proofing environment from everyday hazards (electrical, fire, sharp objects etc.)
 Recognition and prevention of negligence or abuse
 Referrals if required



PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
 The bond between the parent and the child
 Dealing with family dynamics, siblings etc.



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT
 Tracking of milestones (sight, hearing, motor skills etc.) and referrals if required
 Play, exercise, activities



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS
 Child rights and legal frameworks for caregivers
 Referrals if required



BUDGETING AND ITEMS NEEDED
 Babies: essentials and their costs in respect of clothes, bedding, nutrition, toys, kitchenware etc.
 Young children: as above, but additionally planning for school fees, stationary etc.



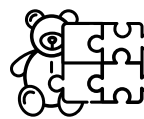
GENDER ROLES
 Modelling equality
 Awareness of gender-based violence
 Referrals if required



PRE-BIRTH SUPPORT
 Some parenting programmes are targeted at expectant mothers. These are often more health-oriented, though they may include attachment strategies.



PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES
 Different approaches include modelling, interactive discussion and resource-based approaches



RESOURCES
 Training materials for facilitators
 Learning materials for parents, such as booklets and guidelines on tips and strategies; could include audio and visual aids, and WhatsApp messaging
 Reference materials such as Road to Health and other DSD support materials
 Some programmes might provide toys or other resources for the children (e.g. LEGO blocks); and books or other learning aids for the children

PROGRAMMES

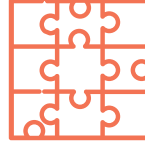
DELIVERY MODELS

Parenting programmes can be delivered using different modalities. Some parenting programmes adopt a few of the elements below and some even use them all.



SUPPORT WORKERS/ FACILITATORS
Facilitators might be paraprofessionals such as community health workers, social auxiliary workers; or NGO based-personnel in a programme; or mothers from the community who are trained as facilitators

Facilitator training in relation to a specific programme is essential.



SOMETIMES EMBEDDED IN OTHER INTERVENTIONS

Municipal programmes (e.g. the Expanded Public Works Programme) could include parenting elements
Skills development programmes
ECD programmes including sessional programmes (toy libraries, mobile bus, home visits etc.)
Immunisation/clinic checkups



STRUCTURED SESSIONS

Generally 8 to 12 sessions
Mostly 2-3 hours
Recognition that not all sessions will be attended



MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY

WhatsApp groups, easily used on mobile phones
Extending access to resources through zero rated websites
Radio and TV programmes developed specifically for parenting on themes such as play, health, and other programme features



PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS / TARGETED GROUPS/ SPECIFIC COHORTS

Often identified through an ECD centre, a school or another intervention



USE OF LOCAL HUBS AS MEETING PLACES

Churches, schools, community centres
Mitigate transport costs



INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS

Some programmes offer one-on-one sessions to parents



USE OF INCENTIVES FOR FUNDED PROGRAMMES

Provision of food
Loyalty cards



HOME VISITS

Home visitors (who may be community workers, programme facilitators or even social workers) visit the home to speak to caregivers and to advise and support

RESEARCH AND M&E

Research on parenting programmes in a South African ECD context is gaining momentum. Here we give a snapshot of a few key themes.



THE IMPORTANCE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The aim of monitoring and evaluating (M&E) is to collect data in order to:

- Understand parent needs in order to develop appropriate programmes.
- Test the efficacy and impact of parenting interventions.
- Use the data collected to inform improvements and to scale up these programmes.
- Assess which kinds of delivery models are most effective for different target groups.
- Evaluate longer term impacts such as whether any changed behaviours are sustained.

RESEARCH AND M&E

SOME CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Running parenting programmes can be both rewarding and challenging, and M&E unearths key lessons and solutions that have been devised to counter these challenges. Below is a selection of insights into some of these as discussed at BRIDGE CoPs.

RECRUITMENT



- It is important to understand who the parent is and who makes the decisions regarding the child in the home.
- Those who attend programmes may experience stigmatization. They are afraid of being seen as not good enough by others.
- Parenting programmes often target mothers but recent studies have shown that in sub-Saharan Africa, about 20% of caregivers engaging in high stimulation of children are actually other caregivers - grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles. Mothers seldom had the time.
- Involving previous beneficiaries in advocacy and in the programme helps build trust and increase uptake. Previous participants who have completed the programme will often share their experiences and reflections of the programmes freely.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING



- Poor messaging often leads to poor uptake. Cultural sensitivity and careful messaging about the programme increases programme uptake.
- Programme messages can be misaligned with parents' aspirations for their children's development.
- Disempowering messages should be avoided.

ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION



- High attrition, and irregular attendance is a common problem.
- Barriers to attendance and participation include:
 - socio-economic barriers
 - substance dependency and addiction challenges
 - logistical issues such as clinic appointments and working times
 - competing priorities
- Shortening the duration of the programmes contributes to the retention of participants. Regular attendance is critical when gathering data and evidence from participants and implementers.
- Providing meals for participants can serve as an incentive.
- Support and knowledge sharing in the families, home visits and regular communication with families improves retention.

PARTICIPATION IN THE HOME



- The home environment is one of the strongest predictors of children's long term academic success.
- Local studies show that degree of access to learning materials of different kinds (e.g. books and play materials) will predict outcomes in terms of cognitive functioning and fine motor skills.
- Recent studies show that parents in poor communities have relatively little time to spend on stimulation with their children.
- As it can be difficult for parents to implement new practices at home, they should be given an opportunity to apply new skills during the programme.

RESEARCH AND M&E

THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION

The ECD sector is by nature cross-cutting, in that it intersects with professions in the fields of health, psychology, education and social work. One view gaining traction in our context is the need to deliver and implement programmes in partnership with other relevant interventions. Here are some points to consider from research presented at BRIDGE CoPs.

PARENTING PROGRAMMES COMBINED WITH EARLY LEARNING INTERVENTIONS

FINDINGS



School readiness is significantly improved by a combination of the ECD centre's efforts and parenting interventions.



A number of local parent-based programmes evaluated have framed themselves as alternatives to centre-based programmes.



It is beneficial to equip both the educators/practitioners and the parent with the requisite skills as the children divide most of their time between them.



Some research shows that group learning works well, though there are still challenges in getting enrolment.

IMPLICATION



The sector needs to think about how to integrate parenting interventions with early learning programmes, and to do so early (targeting children aged 0-3 years old).



Parent-focused interventions should be thought about as part of a larger suite of things that children need, and should measure important components of wellbeing, positive parenting, parent engagement.



The benefits of joint training include increased understanding by parents about the challenges practitioners might face, and vice versa. This can result in better communication and sharing of issues between practitioners and parents, which can only benefit the children involved. At the same time, training should at times be separated as both parties need their own space to ventilate issues, share and learn. Even separating the training of principals from that of educators should be considered.



The advantage of setting up programmes for group learning is that these parents will tend to be a specific cohort linked to an ECD centre or specific community. They may have shared challenges and be able to share local solutions.



HINTS FROM EVALUATIONS

STARTING A PROGRAMME

The earlier in a child's life a parenting intervention takes place, the better. But it is not too late if a child does not receive support in the first 1000 days; later interventions can still have impact.

THE NEED FOR FOLLOW UP

What makes parenting programmes work is knowing when to follow up. We need to understand which families need a little intervention, which need a bit more and which need a whole lot more.

STATE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Government has the responsibility to achieve policy objectives related to the well-being of children, and by extension their caregivers, as set out in key legislation such as the National Integrated ECD Policy (NIECDP) of 2015, the National Health Act No. 61 of 2003, the Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the Municipal Systems Act No. 32 of 2000.

Most parenting programmes will include information on which government services are available to parents (e.g. referral to specialised health services, legal assistance, or to financial aid or grants), and how to access these support systems.

The following is a brief overview of the government information ports and support services that are relevant to organisations that run parenting programmes.

ACTOR	RESPONSIBILITY	KEY FOCUS
<p>Department of Basic Education (DBE)</p>	<p>With the implementation of the Function Shift from DSD to DBE in 2022, the DBE will be responsible for ensuring the universal availability and adequate quality of, and equitable access to, inclusive learning opportunities for children from birth up until the year before they enter formal school. The DBE will do this through the development, delivery, regulation, registration, quality monitoring, improvement and evaluation of early childhood development programmes.</p> <p>The DBE is responsible for development of the early learning curriculum (birth to four years), and continuity and synergy between the early learning and Grade R curricula; for budgeting and procurement of training for early childhood development practitioners; and for integration of key communication linked with the department’s responsibilities regarding healthy pregnancy and parenting into the school curriculum.</p>	<p>Early learning provision and curricula</p>
<p>Department of Social Development (DSD)</p>	<p>DSD works through various agencies in the area of child welfare and protection.</p> <p>Partial care facilities as defined in the Act remain with DSD. Partial care refers to after-school, private hostel and temporary respite care services, including foster care. For partial care, DSD carries out the same functions as those given above for DBE, including registration, compliance, monitoring and evaluation, and partial funding at provincial level.</p> <p>Child protection is a key mandate, covering 0-18 years. Through the National Child Protection Register, DSD (i) monitors the well-being of children who have been abused or neglected; and (ii) keeps records on those who have been found unsuitable to work with children to prevent further abuse.</p> <p>DSD is responsible for the duties carried out by social workers.</p> <p>DSD delivers parenting programmes.</p>	<p>Social welfare and child protection</p>
<p>South African Social Security Agency (SASSA)</p>	<p>SASSA is responsible for the provision of social assistance (grants) to all eligible children and their caregivers. Examples include the Child Support Grant, Care Dependency Grant and the Foster Child Grant.</p>	<p>Financial support</p>

STATE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

ACTOR	RESPONSIBILITY	KEY FOCUS
Department of Health (DoH)	DoH is responsible for the provision of the health and nutrition programmes for pregnant women, infants and children; for parenting support programmes; and for opportunities for learning and play for children from birth to 2 years, through health facilities and home visits by community health workers for children at risk of poor development outcomes.	1st 1000 days and health and nutrition
Department of Home Affairs (DHA)	DHA is responsible for birth registration, provision of identity documents and registrations of deaths.	Legal requirements for children
Department of Labour (DoL)	DoL is responsible for incentivised support for business practices accommodating breastfeeding and extended paid maternity leave. Furthermore, the Department of Labour will develop, in collaboration with the National Inter-Departmental Committee on Early Childhood Development and other key stakeholders, the necessary laws, regulations and guidelines in respect of employer-employee relations for the early childhood development workforce, in line with the provisions of Basic Condition of Employment Act and the NIECDP.	Parental rights in terms of maternity and paternity leave
South African Police Service (SAPS)	SAPS is responsible for protecting young children against crime, and for investigating and supporting the prosecution of abuse, neglect and violence against children in terms of the governing protective legal framework.	Information on how to report abuse

CENTRALISED INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Civil society networks and organisations play a critical role where there are gaps in terms of information and support, and in trying to understand what effective and systemic support for parents looks like. A major challenge picked up through the CoPs is that there is a need to centralise information about all these types of support so that this information is readily available to entities working with parents, and to parents themselves.

While it is beyond the scope of this knowledge product to provide an accurate list of all sources of information on programmes, resources and providers, this section offers (i) three examples of network information sources; and (ii) links to BRIDGE CoP reports at which presentations on programmes and interventions have been made.

NETWORK INFORMATION SOURCES

DO MORE FOUNDATION (DMF) PARENTING RESOURCE HUB

The DMF's initiatives focus on young children at a national level, specifically around nutrition, early learning and parenting support. In the early stages of the pandemic, DMF developed a 'hub' that houses numerous parenting resources from different sources and organisations. Click here to learn more about the DMF's parenting resource hub: <https://domore.org.za/parenting-resources/>.

SOUTH AFRICAN PARENT PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTERS NETWORK (SAPPIN)- PARENTHOOD SA:

SAPPIN is a network of parenting organisations that works to strengthen the voice of civil society working with families through collaboration and shared learning. SAPPIN is currently piloting Parenthood SA, an online platform that seeks to centralise supportive resources and information for parents in one place. To find out more about SAPPIN, go to: <https://sappin.org.za/>

PARENTING FOR LIFELONG HEALTH INITIATIVE

The Parenting for Lifelong Health Initiative (PLHI) is a suite of non-commercial parenting programmes developed and tested through a collaboration: UNICEF, WHO, the Universities of Oxford, Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Bangor, in partnership with Clowns Without Borders SA (CWBSA) and similar organisations. The PLH Initiative was adapted to suit middle- and low-income countries, and was developed and tested in South Africa. Find out more at <https://cwbsa.org/parenting-for-lifelong-health/>.

The Lego Foundation offers an accessible repository for parenting organisations and caregivers. Built on decades of play research, www.LearningThroughPlay.com explores the important role of play and playful learning in children's development. The platform offers evidence and knowledge, practical guides and stories from around the world, and a growing library of activities for parents and caregivers to playfully learn with their little ones.

CENTRALISED INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

You can access recent BRIDGE ECD CoP Meeting Highlights which have focused on parental support, as listed below.

ORGANISATIONS SHOWCASED	DATE OF CoP MEETING	LINK TO REPORT
Cotlands	16 May 2019	https://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Mpumalanga-ECD-CoP-Meeting-Highlights-2019-05-16.pdf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ilifa Labantwana • Project Literacy 	11 June 2019	https://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ECD-CoP-Meeting-Highlights-2019-06-11-1.pdf
Penreach	20 August 2019	https://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Mpumalanga-ECD-CoP-Meeting-Highlights-2019-08-20-.pdf
Ntataise	28 May 2020	https://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Joint-ECD-EGR-CoP-virtual-meeting-28-May-2020-.pdf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace Discipline • Ububele 	29 April 2021	https://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/WC-ECD-CoP-Meeting-Highlights-2021-04-29.pdf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clowns Without Borders South Africa • The Parent Centre 	3 June 2021	https://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Meeting-Highlights-Exec-Summary-and-Meeting-Highlights.pdf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAPPIN, Mikhulu Trust • Do More Foundation 	22 July 2021	https://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/WC-ECD-CoP-Meeting-Highlights-2021-07-22-_Final-1.pdf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF/ DSD National Parenting Programme • Panel Discussion: Linda Biesteker Dr Hlengiwe Sacolo Professor Mark Tomlinson • SAPPIN • Care-giver Learning Through Play • Do More Foundation • Mikhulu Trust 	7 September 2021	https://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Parenting-Young-Children-0-5-MH_-20210907-Final.pdf



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