

Our Men, Our Shields

Messages of belonging and hope

First 1000 Days Australia focuses on the period of time from preconception to a child's second birthday

We recognise the transformative moments that occur with becoming a first-time parent, and all the responsibility that entails.

Our work supports and celebrates the roles of mothers, fathers and extended family in ensuring the health and wellbeing of children in their first 1000 days.

However, a focus on mothers and babies, to the exclusion of men, undermines and undervalues the important contribution that men make to their families during those first 1000 days.

When men's roles and responsibilities are either not acknowledged or denied, the very foundations of our societies are disrupted and our cultural ways of rearing children in nurturing homes are denied.

The birth of our children heralds the arrival of a future Elder. We honour our collective duty to use these 1000 days to build a lifetime of support so that our children grow up strong in their identity and into these roles over time.

This duty embodies the promise of self-determination and demonstrates the seven generations principle in action. More than ever, we need parents, families and communities to be at the forefront of supporting our children to grow, thrive and flourish.

Valuing the powerful capability of both men and women to support our infants is in keeping with our vision for a free, just and equitable society in which our cultures are valued and our parents are supported to ensure all children are set up for a good future.



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There is a consensus among many First 1000 Days Australia Short Course participants that, for far too long, men and their roles in families and communities as fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, sons, partners, friends and leaders have been underrepresented in discussions about the early years.

This underrepresentation is recognised as having taken a toll on our relationships, our cultural ways, and our societies and negatively affected our future wellbeing.

As a response to this, in November 2017 Townsville Short Course participants wrote messages of hope and belonging to men about the importance of their position in both the family and the community.

They wanted to acknowledge the crucial role that men play in ensuring that the goals and aspirations of families and infants are met during the first 1000 days of life.

Messages of belonging and hope

The following messages reiterate our belief that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child can rightfully expect to receive love and care from the men in their family.

Men who:

- 1 Have their role and identity as key contributors to the health, wealth and wellbeing of our households acknowledged, supported, celebrated and sought after, particularly in the facilitation of positive generational change for our families and children.
- 2 Live without unfair and unjust scrutiny, suspicion and judgment based on the wrongdoings of others.
- 3 Are free of systemic and racial oppression and not subjected to media or other campaigns that portray all our men as inherently violent, absent and abusive towards women and children.
- 4 Stand up and call out other men on violent behaviour, and actively work together with men and women to encourage one another to live to a higher standard of relationship with our families and communities.
- 5 Are supported to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities to be present and active in the lives of children appropriate to their age, status and opportunity.
- 6 Can be vulnerable and express emotion without challenge to their manhood.
- 7 Know what it is to experience the joy, excitement and wonder of holding a newborn baby or child, and becoming a powerful and tender protector and nurturer of their family.
- 8 Mentor, and can be mentored into what it is to be a respectful man and father by their fathers or other significant male role models in their families and community.

In all our Short Courses we now write messages of hope and belonging to men. These messages are then shared with men's groups around the country, and are powerful reminders for those who receive them that they are valued and worthy of love.

The role of our men in early family formation

All men have cultural responsibilities to attend to in the first 1000 days of their child's life. This role includes being

a teacher, protector and nurturer, an involved and compassionate carer, a knowledge holder, an ancestor for future generations and an everyday provider.

Critical to fulfilling these responsibilities is for our men to choose to become fathers at a time when they are resourced and supported to give our future Elders the best start in life.

9 Are free from discrimination based upon their sexual identity or orientation and are acknowledged for their contribution to our families and communities.

10 Feel the power of forgiveness, know how forgiveness can turn anger into healing and peace, can forgive themselves and seek forgiveness when they have caused offence, and can offer forgiveness when an offence has been committed against them.

11 Address social and emotional wellbeing issues that have been unresolved or unmet.

12 Practise and teach culture, language and ceremony or reconnect with these if they have been disconnected.

13 Are capable of self-love and self-reflection, who can show their love and affection with ease, and who know how and when to take care of themselves so they are fully equipped to share themselves with others.

14 Are supported to be their child's first teacher, hero and role model and understand the gravity and importance of these roles in the lives of their children, family and communities.

We want to acknowledge the women who write messages of hope to our men through our Short Courses. We also acknowledge the lads who received these messages. We want to thank you all for responding to these messages in powerful ways; we are deeply appreciative of your journey of healing.

First principles for engaging and acknowledging our men

First 1000 Days Australia has adopted the following principles to encourage initiatives generated from within our communities that:

- + Let our men know they are loved, they are worthy, they are valued, and they are supported to have the highest standard of relationship with themselves and each other, and with their families and communities.
- + Use strengths-based language in policy documents, programs and entrepreneurial activities that describes, acknowledges and empowers men's contribution to our households.
- + Facilitate and support men to become aware of how their behaviours impact on their families through the first 1000 days, and encourage sustained behaviour change that affirms their contribution to providing loving, safe homes.
- + Provide space for men to support each other in healing, ceremony and developing a capacity to care.
- + Facilitate men's leadership in connecting children to their Country, their kin, and their totems, songlines, dance and language.
- + Prepare men for their journey into fatherhood, recognising their skills, capabilities and the cultural obligations needed for active participation in the first 1000 days of their child's life.
- + Pay critical attention to and are inclusive of Indigenous masculinities in Australia; especially those that have been defined through our own knowledge systems and by our own academics.
- + Engage men in relationships that equip them for a life filled with love, companionship, connection, meaning, purpose, stability, prosperity, celebration and joy.
- + Facilitate gender equity approaches to raising children, supporting single fathers and debunking the colonial mission that set out to erase and disregard our men's contribution to our families.
- + Ensure their child is carried in a pristine pregnancy and can spend their early years in supportive environments.
- + Resource men to provide good quality nutrition and early life supports for their women and growing children.
- + Celebrate and acknowledge our men's contribution to the health and wellbeing of our families through their nurturance, protection and stewardship of resources that support their families to thrive and flourish.

This Position Statement on Including Men in the Work of First 1000 Days Australia was written by Matthew Starr (The University of Melbourne), Jack Bulman (Mibbinbah Spirit Healing) and Kerry Arabena (Executive Director, First 1000 Days Australia). The Statement was ratified by the First 1000 Days Australia Council on 26 April 2018.