

Parent Participation Model and Framework

Objective and Purpose

What is it?

The Voice of Parents project has developed a framework for birth parent voices to be heard through:

- A Charter of Parental Participation, applicable across organisations and programs in the child and family services sector,
- A Parent Participation Model,
- A toolkit of practical resources, to support the implementation of the framework.

What is it for?

This work is based on research that shows children with child protection contact whose parents are engaged by child and family services experience improved outcomes. These project outputs should be used to facilitate the meaningful and effective engagement of parents in contact with child protection with child and family services.

Who has been involved in creating it?

This model, framework, and toolkit of resources are co-designed with a Parent Advisory Group; a group of 9 birth parents with lived expertise as service users of the child and family service system, including child protection. The further development of these resources has been supported by evidence-based research, with strategic guidance from a Senior Reference Group of sector leaders in child and family services and government.

Who it has been created for?

These resources target two major audiences:

- Professional resources (i.e. for practitioners, organisations, boards) are for professionals in the Victorian child and family service system who have clients who are, or design and develop services for, birth parents with child protection contact. The resources will support professionals to include parent voices in their work and increase parental participation and engagement.
- Parent resources are for birth parents in contact with the Victorian child protection system and child and family services. The resources provide parents with accessible information about what their engagement with services should look like, what their rights are throughout this process and how they can increase their participation with services.

What will it achieve?

These resources provide a framework for Victorian child and family services to provide a consistent, scalable, system-wide approach to embedding parental participation in the development, design and delivery of child and family services for parents with child protection contact.

How do we define engagement and participation ?

- Engagement refers to the intentional contact and actions taken by professionals to engage parents in a dialogue that:
 - Facilitates parental inclusion and participation in decision-making processes that affect them.
 - Aims to improve public services and public policy programs,
- Participation refers to informal opportunities that are acted upon or initiated by parents, aimed at:
 - Allowing space for parents to be part of an engagement and contributing to decision-making processes that affect them,
 - Promoting the voices of parents,
 - Providing lived experience data for the purpose of a project,
 - Improving public services and public policy programs through listening to parent voices.

How to use this model and framework

The model

This model outlines 6 key areas of engagement that should be considered in all interactions with birth parents in the child and family service sector. These 6 key areas are detailed below and are colour coded across the model and framework. The 6 key themes are:

1. Respect and recognition
2. Advocacy and guidance
3. Building relationships
4. Empowering parents
5. Access to information
6. Connection and identity

The butterfly

The model is represented as a butterfly, with child safety as the body of the butterfly, which must underpin all practice, and the 6 key themes as the wings. The antennae of the butterfly represent 'timely' and 'responsive' practice as additional elements that support parental participation.

A butterfly was chosen as the basis of this model to represent the transformative potential of increased parent participation and inclusion in practice - for children as well as their parents. This draws on the well-known metaphor of a butterfly's transformation from the cocoon; with the right conditions, time, and support, all parents have the potential to emerge, flourishing, from a service engagement, equipped with the knowledge and power to enhance their family and child's wellbeing. The parents we worked with went through a transformative process by having their voices heard in this project, which demonstrates the potential for impact and change on an individual level:

"The project means that there are actually people out there willing to listen to those with life experiences to change the system. I have learned I can speak expressively about what I've been through and I can get some advice. I've learned not to be ashamed of what I've been through, to give others advice. I feel good about sharing my voice, my experience, and I hope some changes are made." - Parent Advisor

The model represented as such also draws on the idea of the "butterfly effect"; in essence, small changes being made can be the steps that lead to larger, more sustainable change. This is the critical aim of supporting children's wellbeing and safety within the context of their families.



Under this model, we ask professionals working with birth parents to be aware of the potential for unconscious bias that can infiltrate the relationship, including:

- The continued overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in our child and family service system, and barriers to inclusion that exist for all families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds,
- The over-reliance of mothers as primary caregivers and contacts for child and family services/child protection,
- Differences in ability that can limit equal access to participation opportunities when services are not designed to accommodate their needs,
- Increased surveillance of some families who are more likely to come into contact with services due to factors outside their control, such as living in poverty,
- Differences in families and parenting paradigms that can be subject to judgement without interrogation.

In this model we also explicitly call out the need for consistency of practice to promote equal opportunities for parents to be included in services that engage with their families.

The framework

The model (represented below in both professional and plain English/accessible language) is followed by its supporting framework. Again, this is colour coded to align with the 6 key themes represented in the model. Each theme is explored on its own, using the following structure:

1. What is it? (e.g., 4-5 key practice elements within the theme)
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it look like?

This framework gives professionals a clear and practical overview of respectful practice with birth parents that can help to increase parental participation and engagement. Where a resource is available to support the practice, a number is listed next to the relevant element. These numbers correspond to the resources listed in the toolkit, below.



Toolkit of resources

To support the implementation of the model and framework, a toolkit of practical resources has been developed. Ideas for these resources were developed through our co-design work with birth parents, and through the analysis of our workshop findings and identified gaps. These resources are written to support increased parental participation, and are variously available for parents, friends and family of parents, practitioners, organisations and boards. The resource topic and intended audience are listed below.

Toolkit resource table

Reference no.	Resource	Audience
1	Ten tips for parents engaging with services	Parents
2	What does it mean? Child protection, child and family services, and Courts	Parents
3	How to make the most of your meetings	Parents
4	Ten tips for supporting birth parents	Friends and family of parents
5	Ten tips for working with birth parents	Practitioners
6	How parents want to tell their story	Practitioners
7	Supporting parent participation from the first point of contact	Practitioners
8	Supporting parent participation in a child protection investigation	Practitioners
9	Supporting parent participation when their child is in out-of-home-care	Practitioners
10	Supporting parent participation in Court	Practitioners and legal professionals
11	How to plan engagement with birth parents to support service delivery	Organisations
12	Embedding parent voice in the design of services	Organisations
13	Planning engagement with birth parents to support service delivery	Organisations
14	How to seek parent feedback	Organisations
15	Listening to lived experience voices, including birth parents	Organisations (boards)

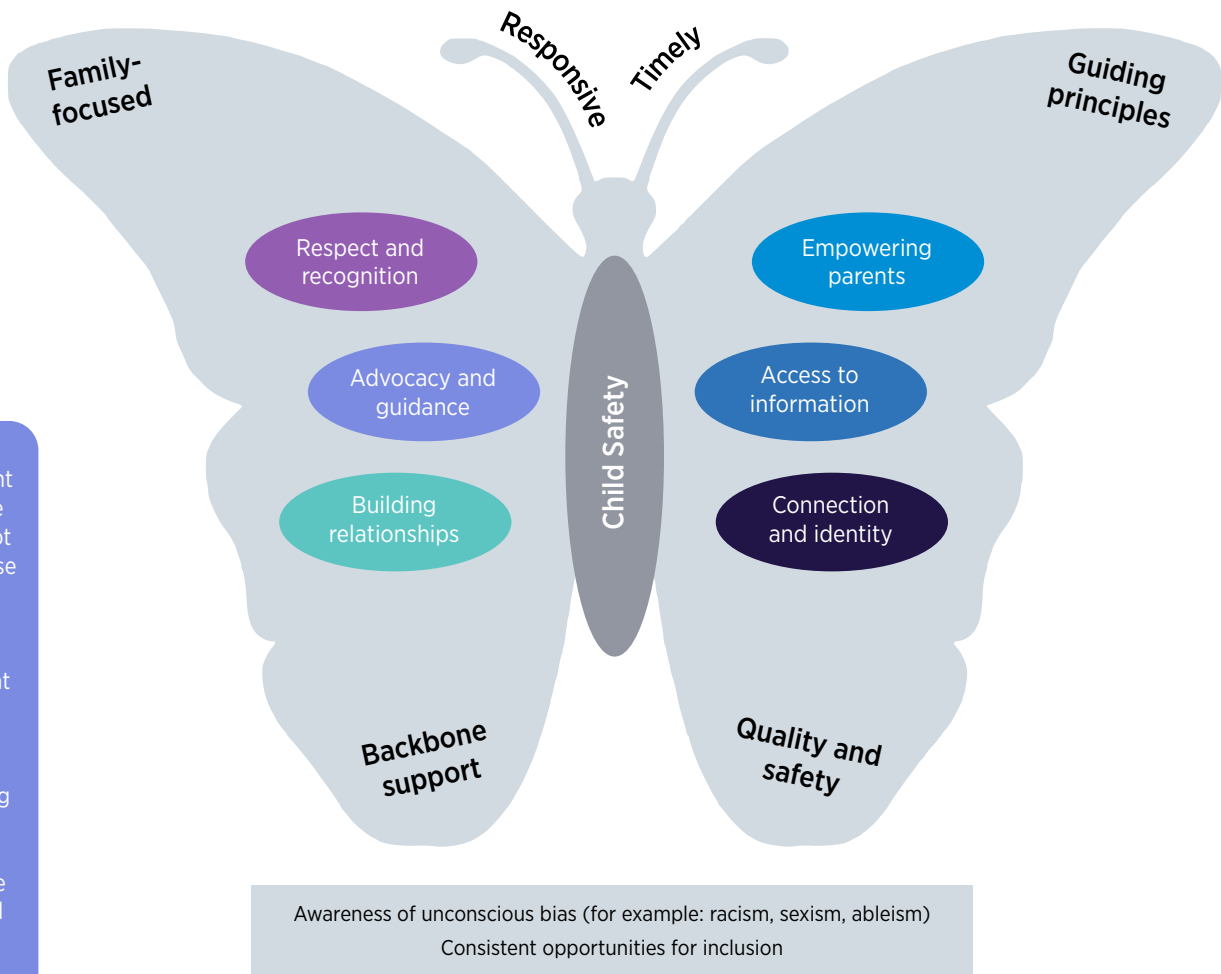
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Parents deserve to be respected and to have their experiences recognised. Interactions that are embedded in respect and recognition will help to strengthen the relationships between services and parents. It will also help develop an environment where parents feel safe, comfortable, and seen. This is essential for parents to be able to engage with services in a meaningful way.

All parents need networks of advocacy and guidance, and this will look different for each family. Some roles may include providing guidance to parents, while not necessarily advocating for them. In these cases, helping parents to access advocacy via services or informal networks can have a positive influence on their engagement or participation. This might come from broader family, friends and peers, or from professional assistance such as counselling, mental health or alcohol and other drug support, housing support, financial support and more. Advocacy and guidance that is long-term, accessible and inclusive should be explored. Parents' self-advocacy should also be encouraged, recognising that they are best placed to understand the unique support needs of their family.

Building relationships is a critical element of improved parent participation. Interactions that work to build trust, increase feelings of safety, and reduce power imbalances between parents and professionals help to strengthen the relationship. Active steps to include parents that are time-sensitive and responsive can contribute to a sense of partnership and improve parent engagement with services.



Empowering parents (and their children) to have a voice in the processes that affect their family is essential practice. Parents may need support to see themselves as experts of their own lived experience, and as experts in their child's life. Create space for them to contribute their expertise in planning and decision-making, and help to address the practical barriers that can limit participation and achievement of goals.

All parents have the right to transparent, timely and accessible information about processes involving their family, and about their own rights in decisions being made. Information needs to be shared regularly and in a form that is accessible to parents, followed by a confirmation of understanding. Space should also be made receive information from parents (and children), including their preferred method for sharing their story.

Parents continue to be parents, even if services are involved or their child is not with them. A child's connection to their family and culture remains important throughout the lifespan, and this should be strengthened at every opportunity (unless this compromises the child's safety). Supporting parents to stay connected to their child can be critical for child development and wellbeing, and their own emerging identities. It can also support the support the healing of parents.



Parent Participation Model and Framework

1. Respect and recognition

What is it?

Respect

Recognise parent/s as an individual

Recognise parent/s as a member of their family and system

Recognise lived expertise (of self and child)

Acknowledge parent's experience of the situation

What does it mean?

Respect means that the feelings, wishes and rights of birth parents are listened to and understood. Respect is an important part of building trust and connection. It is about ensuring that a parent's basic humanity and dignity are upheld.

Parents are their own individual people. They each have their own histories, experiences, perceptions, needs, cultural backgrounds and ideas about family. Recognising parents as individuals allows professionals to understand them holistically and provides important insight into the child/ren as well as the broader family unit. It also helps the professional to attend to the needs of the individual parent.

Children exist as part of a complex system of relationships and the surrounding environment, ranging from their immediate settings of family and school to broader cultural values, laws, and customs. A child's birth parents are part of that complex system, and this system may look different for every family. Considering this complex system informs a holistic assessment of the child's environment and influences. Professionals should help parents to identify and build on the strengths in this system, and address any concerns.

Recognising expertise means explicitly acknowledging a parent's role as an expert their child's life. Their experience as that child's parent is a rich source of understanding of both the child and the systems surrounding them, and this recognition supports both the parent's engagement as well as the ability to respond to concerns in tailored, effective manner.

Acknowledging a parent's experience means understanding and acknowledging that a service intervention like child protection contact can result in a deep sense of shame, and leave parents open to stigma and judgement. This can prevent parents from sharing information, seeking help, and engaging with services.

What does it look like?

- Practice deep listening
- Acknowledge parent's point of view and experience
- Speak to parents in a way that is polite, accessible to them, and culturally appropriate

- Be curious about both parents
- Create an environment where parents feel comfortable and want to share information about themselves
- Consider small ways you can minimise power hierarchies and build a partnership
- Acknowledge that parents are the experts of their own lives and their child, and that it is important that you hear what they have to say

- Help parents to identify and build on the strengths in this system, and address any concerns
- Upskill in principles of family systems theory/ecological systems theory, recognising that the child within the context of their family

- Treat parents as having expertise in their own lives and seek their input
- Understand and respect the parents' narrative and choice
- Recognise parents' expertise in their own child, and how they can facilitate the child's voice being heard in the engagement as well

- Encourage parents to share their feelings
- Acknowledge, validate and normalise parent emotions to reduce feelings of stigma and alienation
- Acknowledge the impact of the intervention, and revisit this discussion throughout the engagement
- Maintain a non-judgemental approach to interactions
- Let parents know that they are worthy of support
- Provide clear pathways for support where required



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2. Advocacy and guidance

What is it?

Understand what is required

Address what is missing

Identify, include and build support networks

Support parents to strengthen their advocacy (self or third-party)

What does it mean?

Parents are best placed to understand the unique needs of their family, including their child/ren and themselves. Understanding these unique needs is something that should be led by the parent, in partnership with the professional. The professional's role is to help parents understand what is available to them, and how this might be able to benefit their child/family.

Help parents to understand that there is support available if they feel they are struggling with something. This could be something the parent is struggling with personally, it could relate to the child/ren's wellbeing and development, or it could be parenting-related. It's important that professionals are sensitive to the stresses family's face in their lives when exploring any gaps and goals.

Parents may feel overwhelmed and vulnerable during this process with reduced capacity for connecting with supports. They likely do not know what kinds of supports are available to them, and how to access them. This could include support for things that they may not realise can help, for example, with grief and loss if they have experienced the removal of a child.

Many parents feel more confident and comfortable in engaging with services when they have the support of a third party. This person can play a role as a family's advocate, ensuring parents understand what is happening, and they can also support the parent to ensure their voice is heard throughout the process. This could be a professional from another service, a dedicated peer advocate, or a trusted friend or family member.

What does it look like?

- Ask parents directly about what they think is working well and what isn't
- In partnership with parents, explore their assessment of the situation, and validate their experience
- Encourage exploration of various domains in the parent's life: child's wellbeing, parenting, interparental relationship, family safety, practical needs and other domains identified by the parent. Provide additional professional insight as a final element of this discussion

- Identify the strengths of the family and the parent/s
- Ask parents if there are any areas they've identified that they could use support in
- Explore support options available to them and empower them to engage with these networks. Encourage parents to reach out for support and reassure them that there is no shame in doing so. Reiterate that this is likely in the best interest of the child
- Explore and help to plan for practical barriers to accessing services

- Talk to parents about what kind of support is available to them
- Provide options for making warm referrals or introductions for parents accessing services
- Help mothers to see themselves as part of a network of people that can support them in the parenting role
- Where possible, strengthen informal networks of support, for example, supporting dads to take on more of the parenting role
- Work with parents to identify support networks and self-care strategies

- Advise parents of the option of having a support person with them through critical meetings or discussion
- Invite parents to bring this person with them, making them feel welcome
- Allow space for parents to self-advocate and for the advocate to support the voice of the parent
- Consider linking the parents in with professional advocates if it is something the parent wants (e.g., through Independent Family Advocacy and Support, Family Inclusion Network)



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3. Building relationships

What is it?

Acknowledge the trauma and impact of system involvement (chronic and acute)

Develop a partnership with attention to power imbalances

Collaborate through active involvement of parents in planning and decision-making processes

Provide responsive action that is timely and robust

What does it mean?

Service involvement has the potential to be disruptive and even intimidating for both parents and their children. It is normal for parents to experience complex emotions, especially if they fear their child may be removed. A parent's identity can also be threatened through this kind of service engagement, and attention to preserving this may be required (for the child's sake, particularly). Service involvement has increased potential to be traumatising if a family is continuously having to re-engage and re-tell their story, for example if there is a high turnover of case workers involved or if they have a history of service involvement.

The power imbalance between workers and parents is a significant barrier to engagement and participation. Taking care to build relationships is an important part of overcoming this, being responsive to the subtle and overt ways power imbalances can be manifest. This includes being able to have a non-punitive exchange of information, for example, if parents need to provide genuine feedback to services that is negative.

Parents may need explicit and even repeated attempts to be actively involved in planning and decision-making processes. Establishing trust is important. Parents may need to feel that they can trust you and that they will genuinely be included in these processes before they are confident that they will be listened to.

Parents can have positive experiences with services when they understand what is required and how to navigate the system in a timely fashion. Processes that are slow, unresponsive or subject to ongoing changes, impact parent morale and hope for positive progress. It can make it difficult for parents to comprehensively achieve case plan goals and can be a factor in parental disengagement. When delays in processes relate to court or when a child is in out-of-home care, it can severely impact the critical parent-child bond and risk influencing reunification goals.

What does it look like?

- Show parents you understand that your presence in their life can have a major impact
- Understand parent emotions that can be part of an initial interaction where child removal is feared. Upskill where possible in identifying how this can manifest and how to attend to these emotions/behaviours
- Help parents to understand that they are not bad people if they are struggling with parenting duties or home life, focusing on how this might have an impact on their child
- Consider involving parents in a handover when a new worker is allocated to the family

- Start from a place of curiosity and empathy, understanding that you need access to their expertise of lived experience
- Consider options for reducing your identity as the 'professional/expert' (e.g., dress, avoiding role titles, relinquishing decision-making power, using plain language)
- Use language that demonstrates the goal of a parenthood and sharing the role of decision-making
- Provide clear and accessible information, and be accountable and transparent to help reduce the power imbalance
- Spend time coming to a shared understanding of what is happen in a child/family's life
- Keep returning to your service's legal obligations and/or guiding principles regarding parental involvement and family-focused practice

- Make proactive efforts to include parents (mum, dad, and/or any critical people in the child's life), and help them to feel welcomed into the process
- Establish trust and reassure parents that they will be genuinely listened to
- Talk with parents about how their views will be received and if there is any chance it will risk their case
- Involve parents in planning meetings and co-developing an agenda to facilitate participation

- Be accessible to parents to provide information and clarification
- Recognise the importance of accessible information in strengthening parent understanding and participation
- Clarify expectations of when and how parents can contact you, and where they can go for further information or questions
- Support parents through processes that are slow or delayed, and be transparent about changes to timelines
- Show understanding and empathy of processes that can feel frustrating and slow for parents who are under scrutiny



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4. Empowering parents

What is it?

Share and invite information

Use strengths-based approaches

Motivate parents to make positive changes

Support parents to participate in decision-making processes

Address practical barriers

What does it mean?

Information sharing that is clear, ongoing and bidirectional is a critical element of engagement and participation. Information needs to be accessible to parents, and culturally appropriate. The provision of important information should be paced to ensure it has been taken in, followed by regular checking for understanding.

A strengths-based approach focuses on parents' strengths, as individuals, parents and their community networks. Many professionals are likely to use this approach already in their practice. This can be a critical way to strengthen parents' belief in themselves and can contribute to the relationship building process.

Some parents might need support to make positive changes, especially if their family has multiple and complex needs. Motivating parents to make positive changes may help them from turning to potentially more familiar habits that are self-sabotaging at times of stress (for example, during a child protection intervention).

Parents need to feel included and welcomed to participate in decision-making processes. They won't necessarily feel confident or comfortable to make this happen on their own, even if they know they are entitled to participate. Parents can have positive service experiences when they feel respected as an important member of these processes, and when they understand what is required.

Practical barriers can have a significant impact on engagement and participation. Parents may need support to overcome these barriers, and some will not feel comfortable speaking up about this need. Practical barriers can include limited access to transportation, over-scheduling of meetings, limited support for child care to attend meetings, poor digital access or literacy, and more.

What does it look like?

- Be explicit about inviting parent input and welcoming their insights
- Try to include both parents, or critical people in the child's life, in the exchange of information about their wellbeing and care
- Genuinely listen to parent voices and be transparent about how this will be included in decisions
- Include parents in an ongoing conversation about their goals and progress
- Be open to receiving information and feedback
- All information should be made available to parents in a way that is accessible, and culturally appropriate

- Communication with parents should be warm, curious and compassionate where possible
- Be attentive to the fact that parents may already have a negative view of themselves
- Work with parents to identify strengths and continue to highlight these
- Avoid overly deficit-focused language as much as possible
- Acknowledge that some engagements (for example, with child protection), can be very deficit-focused. This can feel disempowering and intimidating, and does not necessarily represent the full picture

- Meet parents where they are. For example, if they are feeling hopeless about the engagement, work with them to regain hope that change can happen
- Set realistic goals and reinforce positive behaviour and progress
- Ensure parents are aware of what is expected of them and what support they can expect from their services
- Support parents to attend access visits and accommodate preferences where possible
- Keep parents informed about their child while not in their care (unless it is unsafe to do so)
- Consider peer support that may be available for parents to get guidance on navigating this process

- Be flexible in accommodating parent preference, for example scheduling meetings for a time/place that is suitable for parents to participate
- Co-create meeting agendas that are shared ahead of time, and establish a clear goal for meetings
- Confirm who will be taking notes in meetings and when they will be made available to parents
- Invite parents to bring a support person with them
- Try to include both parents in meetings about the wellbeing and care of a child or about the family
- Understand that these processes can be difficult, and parents may need time to prepare and engage
- Consider (with the parent) whether counselling support for grief and loss may be beneficial

- Talk explicitly with parents about what barriers to engagement they might be facing, and be ready to provide solutions such as money for public transport
- Ensure that help-seeking behaviour is met with positive regard and options
- Don't wait for parents to bring up practical difficulties, as these can be shrouded in shame and stigma



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5. Access to information

What is it?

What does it mean?

What does it look like?

Provide accessible and regular assistance in system navigation

It can be difficult to know how to navigate the system even if you are not a parent with vulnerabilities and stress. Some parents will not be in touch with their own needs, and many will feel uncomfortable reaching out for support. In addition to this, parents may fear child removal if they engage with a service in a time of need (e.g., a drug and alcohol service for adults, which may lead to a child protection report).

- Provide parents with accessible information about services that may support their family
- Facilitate a connection with services where possible and wanted
- Help parents to access to legal support as soon as possible when engaged with child protection
- Regularly check in about a parent/family's needs with system navigation, as it is subject to change
- Be available for support in accessing services, such as helping to apply for the NDIS, or completing complicated Centrelink paperwork. If this isn't part of your role, connect parents with someone who can help

Share relevant case information in a timely, accessible manner

Parents have a right to information about their engagement with services, to know what is happening, and what to expect. This information also needs to be time-sensitive and accessible to best support the inclusion of parents in decision-making processes.

- Provide information that is relevant to their case as soon as possible
- Be available for clarification and feedback from parents
- Be transparent about processes that are delayed or inaccessible and support parents with alternative options

Receive and provide information through parent's preferred mode

Parents need access to up-to-date, plain language information about the processes they're engaged with. Information that is full of jargon or professional language excludes parents from participating and reinforces power hierarchies, which can leave parents feeling powerless. Parents are diverse and will have different needs of accessibility, including the need for information in other languages and information that is not in written form.

- Consider providing parents with a targeted information pack at initial engagement
- Explore parents' preferences and provide options for preferred ways of being contacted
- Information should be provided in the parent's preferred mode of receiving information, and ideally this is duplicated in written form (e.g., for record keeping purposes)
- Give clear guidance on where parents can go for further information they may need to know, for example about child protection or court processes
- Advocate for centralised information that can be made available to parents about engagement (currently, this is not available to parents in Victoria)

Confirm understanding

The provision of information during a service engagement can be vast and is often in inaccessible forms. Parents are entitled to know what is happening in a service engagement, and to understand the concerns and the expectations. Information can be inaccessible due various reasons, for example, jargon and technical wording, parent literacy levels, developmental delays, English as a second language, trauma-based reduction in capacity, or no existing accessible information. Confirming understanding is a critical element of facilitating parent participation in processes that affect them.

- Routinely and explicitly confirm understanding with parents, especially after sharing written information or having critical conversations
- Consider checking in with parents after meetings to ensure they understand, and to receive feedback on improving communication in the future
- Understand how trauma and stress can impact the brain, and be sensitive to how this may affect the retention of information
- Provide alternative plain language explanations for information that is not accessible
- Advocate for the development of more plain language resources in your service

Explore and identify mechanisms for sharing parent stories that reduce repetition

Parents can suffer due to the need to re-tell traumatic aspects of their stories with services. This can happen due to a history of service engagement, or it can be due to multiple changing workers throughout and engagement. Some parents can be re-traumatised by this process, through specific recollections as well as the presence of attitudes or expressions that can replicate dynamics from the original trauma.

- Ensure there is adequate time to listen to a parent's story in a way that is non-judgemental
- Explore parent preferences for sharing their stories with services (e.g., through written or recorded mediums)
- Ask for the parent's consent to share their story with services on their behalf
- Be conscious of how staff turnover impacts parents' need to have their story understood, and the risks of having to retell their story



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6. Connection and identity

What is it?

Identify, agree and reinforce the common goal of what is best for the child

Acknowledge that what is best for that child includes seeing their family respected, engaged and supported

Support and strengthen child-parent connection at every opportunity, even if the child is not in the parent's care*

Maintain, rebuild and reconnect parents to their sense of identity

Maintain, rebuild and reconnect the child with their sense of familial and cultural identity

What does it mean?

Showing parents that you have a common goal of supporting the needs of the child may help to align you with families engaging with services. If parents feel threatened by a service interaction, they may not realise you share this common goal. Returning to this shared goal can be a useful point of conversation with families and can be a chance for parents to contribute to the conversation.

Some service interactions put parents at risk of being overtly judged or undermined in front of their child. This can create difficulties for the child, who may be distressed to witness their parent not being respected or included in their home. It could also cause conflict between the parent and child if the parent's authority and position as the adult in the home is undermined.

Parents need support to remain connected to their child after a separation. There are many barriers that can make it difficult, such as grief and loss, unresolved feelings about the intervention, difficulty interacting with the child's carer, not being sure what they are allowed to do or say, or mixed messages from their child. Supporting a healthy, positive bond between the parent and child is a critical element of child wellbeing and identity development. Even when families are apart, efforts should be made to keep this connection alive and healthy (unless it is not safe for the child to do so). This is particularly important if a child is ultimately to be reunified with their family of origin.

Having a service intervention, particularly from child protection, can threaten a parent's identity as a 'good person' and as a 'good' parent. Help them to think about your concerns in a way that is not black-and-white; they can still be a good person even if they need some support. This may help to contribute to relationship building and to motivate parents to make positive change. Parenting identity can be particularly damaged through the removal of a child, and this needs attending to in a system that aims for reunification.

A child's separation from their family can be traumatic, even if their home environment was not safe. Children largely want to remain in contact with their parents, and may feel sensitive to any perceived rejection from their parents (e.g., if the parent is distressed, struggling with grief). Children need age-appropriate support to process their feelings and to understand what is happening is not their fault. Unless it is unsafe to do so, it is also important for children to remain connected to their sense of familial identity.

What does it look like?

- Be explicit that you have their child's best interests at the fore of your work
- Show parents you understand that they want what's best for their child, and that you share this goal
- Invite parents into the conversation about what they think is best for their child
- Explain how you can support the family to achieve these goals

- Where safe, try not to interact with parents in a way that undermines their parenting role in front of their child
- In conjunction with this, encourage positive parenting behaviours and provide psychoeducation to parents. This may need to happen away from the child
- Role model warm, strengths-based communication and encouragement of help-seeking behaviour in families
- Let parents know that you understand it is important that their child sees them treated with respect and being supported. Welcome feedback on ways you can do this

- Talk to parents about the importance of this connection for their child's wellbeing
- Explore any barriers to staying connected (e.g., distrust with carer, need for counselling)
- Let parents know what their rights and options are for staying connected
- Support parents to attend access visits and accommodate preferences where possible
- Keep parents informed about their child while not in their care (unless it is unsafe to do so)
- Consider peer support that may be available for parents to get guidance on navigating this process

- Help parents to understand that your concerns are nuanced and not a black-and-white judgement of their character
- Talk to parents about how they feel as a result of the intervention and explore ideas of identity and reassurance
- Remind parents that they are still parents, and that they are important people in their child's life
- Acknowledge the importance of the parent-child connection as critical for the child's wellbeing and sense of identity
- Consider (with the parent) whether counselling support for grief and loss may be beneficial

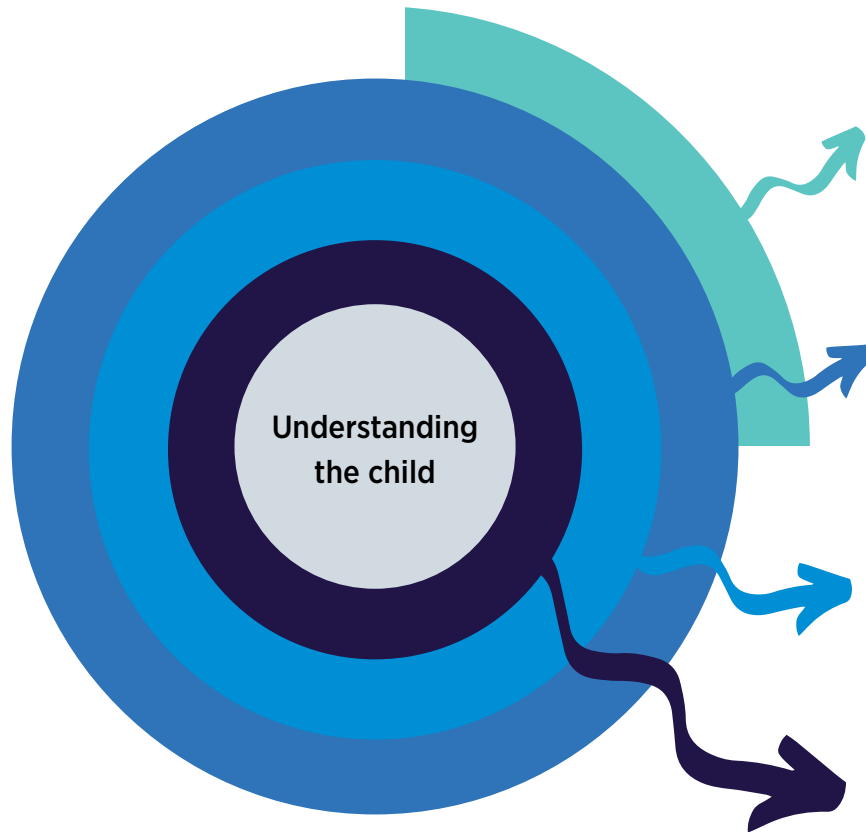
- Talk to children about their preferences for contact with their parents
- Include carers in conversations about the importance of the parent-child connection, as their support can be critical
- Explore options for keeping children connected with parents and other critical people in their lives, even if it is not face-to-face (e.g., through letters, videos)
- Explore options for keeping the child connected to their culture
- Consider (with the child) whether counselling support for grief and loss may be beneficial
- Help parents to know their options for staying connected and encourage high quality contact (where it is safe to do so)

*Unless this compromises the child's safety



Parent Participation Model and Framework

Understanding the child: Using the expertise of professionals, parents, and children



Practitioner's professional expertise in a family's life

This is highly specialised and critical to an intervention that supports child wellbeing and safety. Professional expertise is part of the equation, but it is not the whole picture. Practitioners need the lived expertise of parents as well as the child, so they can best understand the risks and protective factors that may be present.

Parent's expertise in their own life and their family

Parents are the greatest protective factor available to their child. Even when there are concerns about risk, parents still have the expertise in their own lives and their family that is necessary to inform the practitioner's professional assessment.

Parent's expertise in their child's life*

Parents have expertise in their child's life that can help to contribute to the full picture. They can also be an advocate and facilitator for their child's voice to be heard.

* Especially in the child's first 1000 days

Child's expertise in their own life

The child is the expert in their own life. The safe inclusion of their voice and sharing of their experience is an important part of this process.

This graphic shows how we recommend understanding the “weight” of expertise in a professional engagement with families. The inclusion of this combined expertise has the greatest potential for influence and value. The expertise of each person within this system should be included in the partnership between families and professionals, and this can be facilitated by an ongoing and open exchange of information and deep listening. This approach also offers a more holistic assessment of families which requires more than the traditionally risk-averse lens used by practitioners.