



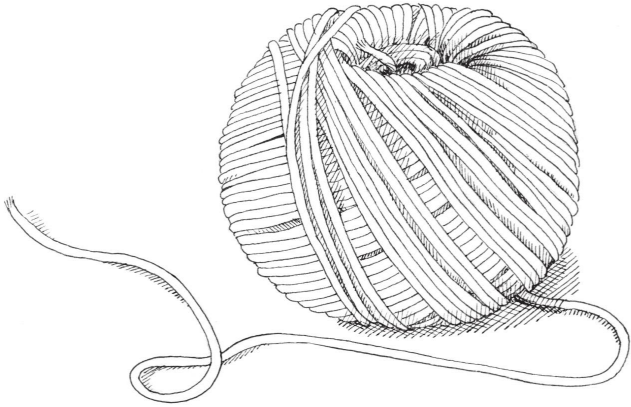
POSITIVE
PARENTING
CARDS

40 CONVERSATION STARTERS

Authors: Lorraine Leitch with
Russell Deal & Karen Bedford
Illustrator and designer: Anna Marrone

**Innovative
Resources**

innovativeresources.org





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Innovative Resources acknowledges the Jaara people of Dja Dja Wurrung country, the traditional custodians of the land upon which our premises are located and where our resources are developed and published. We pay our respects to the elders—past, present and future—for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and other First Nations peoples. We must remember that underneath this earth, upon which we so firmly stand, this is, was and always will be, the traditional land of First Nations peoples.

Foreword :

The Power of Reflective Conversations

In this complex and uncertain world there is nothing more certain than the challenges of parenting. Long has it been remarked that this fundamental role in society is undertaken without the training, supports and qualifications required for much less demanding activities. However, as the centuries have passed, we have been able to adapt and develop our parenting practices, re-think our impacts as parents on our children's wellbeing, and alter our cultural attitudes and behaviours towards our offspring

accordingly. This does not negate the struggles we experience on a daily basis as parents, however. From the time of the birth of our child we are learning to nurture and respond to another human being with a unique combination of needs, temperament, personality, learning style and responses to the world to which they are exposed.

In this twenty-first century, we are continuing to experience rapid change in demographics, in technology and workplace demands, as well as in the pressures to raise our children to be healthy citizens. Shifts in attitudes and laws associated with the discipline of children, changes in the nature of our working lives, and contradictions in values related to childrearing and market forces are only some of the factors that combine to impact



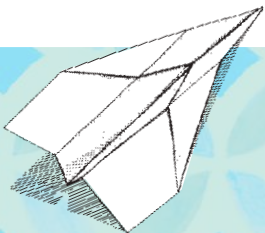
on our sense of what it is to be a good parent to our children. In spite of the range of research on so many facets of family life and child development, we also still have little to guide us on what sort of resources parents need, want, and are able to access at those times when the challenges become tough.

In recent postgraduate research carried out through La Trobe University, Bendigo¹, our analysis of interview data obtained from parents suggests that parents respond to their children based on a complicated array of factors including the modelling by their own parents, observations of family and peers, the influences of marketing, professional opinions and the particular demands that face them at any point in time. Those who have less opportunity

for support, are vulnerable or are disadvantaged, are often left feeling inadequate and even frightened by the expectations of being a good enough parent, while those who come to the notice of welfare authorities often feel debilitated and blamed for failing to provide care that might be beyond their current capacities.

In other studies, attention has been given to children who experience out-of-home care and the trauma associated with these circumstances. A return to their family of origin means additional pressures for those parents who may not have had opportunities to develop expertise to deal with the impacts of trauma and problems of attachment.

Positive parenting, as a concept, has been discussed in education



and welfare circles for many years now, with some notable authors such as Dr Matthew Sanders providing a model for parenting that has been widely promoted². However, parents' motivations to provide beneficial outcomes for their children do not always lead to the purchase and reading of books, nor a commitment to maintaining new patterns of parenting based on specific models. It is in the conversations between parents, between professional staff and parents, and between parents and their children that motivation and change become established. Ideas about parenting, like most ideas, need to be discussed within the context of an engaged relationship—in which trust and openness and sharing can occur.

It is through these conversations that people are able to see more

deeply into their hopes for their children, to locate and overcome barriers to achieving better outcomes for their children, and feel supported in their goals.

Professional staff working with parents need straightforward tools for engaging parents in conversations about their children and the card set *Positive Parenting* provides a medium through which this can occur. The sentence starters are open, allowing parents to contemplate what it is they want, their priorities and to reflect on the influences shaping their parenting and the direction they wish to take. The design of the cards has a gentle, homelike feel with everyday objects used on an uncluttered background. The fabric-like pattern is subdued so that the effect is light in touch, with the



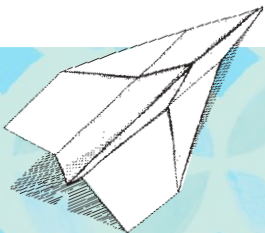
questions themselves constituting the challenge to parents' thinking. The sentence starters are skilfully crafted to explore parents' sense of themselves in their parenting role, the influences of others on their parenting and their hopes for the future. This is one of the consistent strengths of Innovative Resources' approach to tools—the ability to access conversations about hopes and change, without negating the need to talk about fears and concerns. Reading through the questions on the cards resulted in many pauses on my part, as I remembered some of the parenting behaviours that I valued, that I had rejected and that I always wondered about.

There is no perfect way to parent and it is easy to regret decisions with hindsight, but this card set

carries with it the sense that wherever we are on our parenting journey, there is still much to contemplate, to share, to hope for and to smile about as we watch our children mature and make their own way to become caring adults.

Dr Jennifer Lehmann
Senior Lecturer
La Trobe University

1. Rachael S, Lehmann J & Gardner F 2014, 'Parents' Experiences of Early Parenthood – Preliminary Findings', *Children Australia*, 39(3), pp 185-194. doi:10.1017/cha.2014.20
2. Sanders, MR 2004, *Every parent: a positive approach to children's behaviour*, rev edn, Penguin, Melbourne



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Introduction: Strengths, Solutions and Stories



Parenting can be tough. This will not come as news to any parent!

While being a parent can be joyous, fulfilling and delightful, there are inevitably times in every parent's life when the frustrations, challenges and demands of parenting are intensely stressful. Every parent has intimate knowledge of these highs and lows.

At times, the lows can be overwhelming. As parents we can anticipate that we will be pushed to the limits of our resilience. We all have days when we know we are failing our own, and other people's, tests of 'good parenting'. These are the times when we fear the knock on the door lest anyone else see us at our worst.

Sadly, some parents are pushed beyond their limits.

In Australia, as in many countries, child protection notification rates continue to climb. Thousands of children are removed from their parents' care because of significant concerns

We all have days when we know we are failing our own, and other people's, tests of 'good parenting'.

for children's safety and wellbeing. They are placed with other family members, in foster care or in residential units.

Out-of-home placements of children remain the safety net for the most serious examples of parenting stress. But to these numbers one might add the continued epidemic of family violence, parental separation and divorce, youth homelessness and other indicators that point to pressures that have become overwhelming.

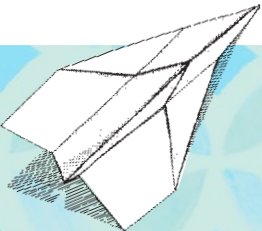
Faced with such evidence of the inordinate demands of parents under siege it is easy to lay the blame at parents' own feet when things go wrong. It is easy to be judgmental and point the finger at the parenting mistakes of others. However, we need to remind ourselves of the times we may have failed 'tests of good parenting' and were it not for friends, family, tolerant partners and resources in our environment, we too could have been the subject of serious questions and concerns about our role as a parent.

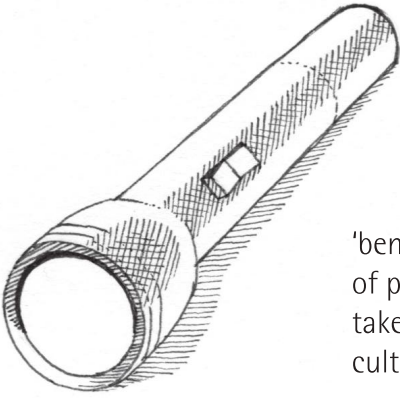


Labels can stick, carrying with them a raft of assumptions and stereotypes.

It is easy to blame the victim and overlook the complexity of social structures, expectations and processes that add to the burdens parents carry. It is also easy to attach labels such as 'abusive', 'neglectful', 'inadequate', 'dysfunctional', 'at risk', and 'vulnerable' to parents and families as if there are clear categories of parents. Yet we know that there are times when any of us could be described by others as fitting these labels. Labels can stick, carrying with them a raft of assumptions and stereotypes. Does a 'dysfunctional' parent intend to hurt their child? Do they deliberately expose their child to danger? Do they dislike being a parent?

Parenting is very much walking a tightrope between labels of neglect and labels of over-protection. Terms like 'bubble-wrapped children', 'helicopter parent' (always hovering) and 'tiger mothers' make it patently clear that parenting in a way that doesn't generate criticism from some quarter is exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible. It has certainly been argued that the





'benign neglect' that characterised parenting of previous eras and arguably produced 'risk-taker's advantage' has been replaced, in some cultures, by risk-adverse parenting.

In applying labels to parents it is easy to take on board any number of deficit-based interpretations of parental behaviour. How do parents get to feel good about themselves as parents when potential criticism reinforced by negative labels may lie around the next corner?

For parents who are overwhelmed by the demands and stresses of their role a key question is: What are going to be the most helpful sources of support and the most useful catalysts for change and growth? We can ask ourselves whether affixing a label, or diagnosing, assessing and describing the problem are the most useful responses human service practitioners can make. Or are there other pathways to sustainable change that are respectful and empowering for those parents who are overwhelmed in their role?

These are some of the questions that led to the publication of the *Positive Parenting Cards* by Innovative Resources, the publishing arm of Anglicare Victoria.

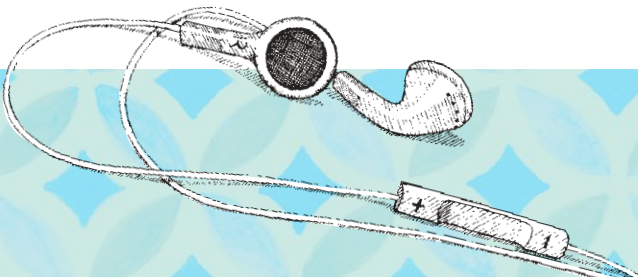
In any given year, human service organisations in Australia work with thousands of stressed and struggling parents across a range of family services programs, using a variety of approaches to practice. For over twenty years Innovative Resources has created resources arising from the principles of solution-focused brief therapy, narrative therapy, intensive family services and most prominently, strengths-based practice.

At its simplest, a strengths approach to practice revolves around the following questions:

Is it more useful to understand problems or seek solutions?

Is hearing parents' best hopes for the future more helpful than looking for causes of the problem?

What are the most efficient ways of generating change and growth?



How can we value and mobilise parents' own expertise?

What happens when we assume parents have good intentions?

The central belief of a strengths approach is that knowing a person's strengths, skills, resources and future hopes is more useful than knowing what someone can't do. This is not merely to add questions about a person's strengths to an assessment, but is a profoundly different way of inviting the person to collaborate in working towards change and growth.

A strengths approach does not ignore the problems and issues a parent might be struggling with, but rather, attempts to employ a person's own qualities and assets to identify solutions that work for them. This often occurs through storytelling.

Sometimes in our counselling and family services roles the only stories we focus on and hear are the stories of mistakes, failure and blame. Such is the seductiveness of 'The Problem'.

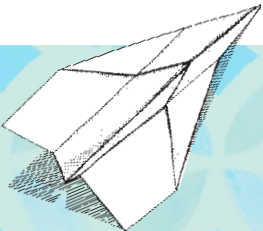


However, solution-focused and strengths-based approaches would argue that solutions are more likely to be discovered in stories about anything *except* the problem. These stories are sometimes called 'problem-free', 'non-problem territory' or 'resource stories'.

Storytelling is not merely small talk nor suitable only for 'ice-breaker' activities. Rather, it is the purposeful elicitation of stories that might provide glimpses of strengths, skills, resilience, expertise and future hopes. Solutions to problems can lie hidden in stories about what works, what the person's interests and passions are and what motivates them to keep going.

The *Positive Parenting Cards* provide an invitation to parents to talk about themselves, their children, their joys and rewards, their challenges, the strengths they inherited from their own parents and what they believe and know they do well as a parent.

There are no judgments to be found in the *Positive Parenting Cards* as to what constitutes



Solution-focused and strengths-based approaches would argue that solutions are more likely to be discovered in stories about anything *except* the problem.

good or bad parenting. There are no explicit lessons to be learned from the cards about how to be a better parent. This resource is neither a critique of modern parenting methods nor a manual of successful parenting techniques.

Rather, there is an assumption behind these cards that every parent is motivated to be the best parent they can be, and even if their lives are overtaken by stress and trauma, there are times when they can celebrate their success as a parent. Celebrations of these 'little' successes may be the harbingers of hope, change and growth in building the resilience needed to confront times of despair.

Even parents who feel overwhelmed and devastated by what they are facing may be able to find glimmers of hope in these cards. It could be that their child has been removed and placed in foster care or even permanent care, but maybe in providing the opportunity to remember and discuss their glimpses of better times, discoveries might be made about a more hopeful future.



Each *Positive Parenting card* features a simple sentence starter inviting participants to explore how parenting is for them.

These glimmers of hopefulness are sometimes called 'exceptions' (to the dominance of the problem), 'unique outcomes' or 'sparkling moments'. It is in these glimmers of success that optimism and pictures of best hopes for the future may be found.

Each *Positive Parenting card* features a simple sentence starter inviting participants to explore how parenting is for them. For example:

'The values I would like to pass on to my children are ...'

'We really laugh together when ...'

'What annoys me as a parent is ...'

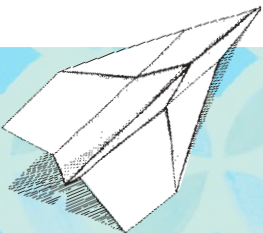
'What gets me through tough times is ...'

'What I have learnt about being a parent is ...'

'What I want more of as a parent is ...'

'I was proud of my children when ...'

Using sentence starters such as the above, parents are given opportunities to speak about



the tough times in their families, as well as the times of good humour, accomplishment, happiness and fulfillment—even if these times are exceptions within a narrative dominated by stories of doom and gloom.

If, as Leonard Cohen's song 'Anthem' says, 'There is a crack in everything, that's how the light to get in' we hope the *Positive Parenting Cards* can play a role in simply noticing and widening the cracks.



Origins of the Cards

The concept for the *Positive Parenting Cards* was the brain-child of Lorraine Leitch, a member of the Family Support team at St Luke's Anglicare in Bendigo, Victoria (now part of Anglicare Victoria).

Lorraine and her colleagues are frequently talking with parents struggling in different ways with the demands and expectations of their parenting role. They work alongside families who have reached the point where they feel unable to parent their child or children adequately. Some have been investigated by child protection because of perceived issues of abuse or neglect. All are struggling to cope with the circumstances in which they find themselves as parents.

Lorraine wondered, 'What kind of tool could be created to invite people to tell their stories of being a parent?' Out of this reflection arose the idea for a set of conversation-starting cards. She wanted the cards to complement (but not replace) the other tools, practices and forms used in family support work.



Commonly, parents accessing family services feel they are in a 'spiralling down' phase. They can feel worn down by the focus on their faults and deficits—an approach that can easily reinforce a sense of helplessness and ignore the moments when the situation is not so bad.

The cards were conceptualised as a tool for 'spiralling up'; a way to encourage parents to share their own experience of being parented and to reflect upon changes they had made, or hoped to make, in the way they parent their own children.

Lorraine said, 'Rather than asking questions, I trialled a series of sentence starters (illustrated with some simple images) aimed at helping parents reflect on what they want their child's experience of family life to be, what they think the influences on their own parenting are, and what they think their strengths as a parent are.'

She continued, 'The reflective conversations prompted by the cards have allowed some parents to put new meaning to their



experiences of the past, and enabled them to re-story their perception of self and their problems, freeing them to create a new view of the future of their family.'

Lorraine approached Innovative Resources with her prototype set of cards. What followed was a series of drafts (and re-drafts) of the sentence starters, and an emerging visual style based on the delightful line illustrations produced by Anna Marrone.

The criteria that guided the development of the cards included that they be perceived as safe, non-threatening, inviting, gender-inclusive and readily-useable in a broad range of family services, counselling and group work settings.



About the Cards

The 40 cards in the *Positive Parenting Cards* set are designed to invite conversations about the joys and challenges of being a parent of a child of any age.

Each card has a phrase that works as a sentence starter, such as:

We really laugh together when ...

As a parent I really enjoy ...

A good thing about my family is ...

I would like our family to be doing more ...

How a sentence is finished is entirely up to the user. There are no right or wrong answers. There are no criteria for judging whether one story is better than another. And while this booklet will offer lots of ideas and suggestions for using the cards, there is no manual giving instructions about how they 'should' be used.

Each sentence starter appears on a card within or alongside a line drawing of a common kitchen or household object. These everyday objects don't directly relate to the words in the



sentence starter. That is, they are not intended to illustrate the phrase, but they may intrigue and gently remind users of an aspect of family life.

Similarly, the design style of the cards incorporates 'retro-style' linoleum, wallpaper or tablecloth designs with no overt or hidden meanings, apart from the desire of the publisher, Innovative Resources, to create safe, non-threatening cards that neither glamorise nor underestimate parenting. Talking about parenting can be challenging, particularly in times of stress, and we hope the design style and illustrations of everyday objects will help create a resource that appeals to many people and is friendly and approachable.



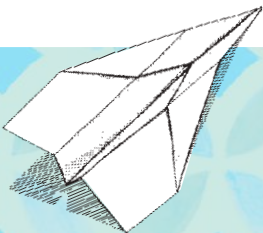
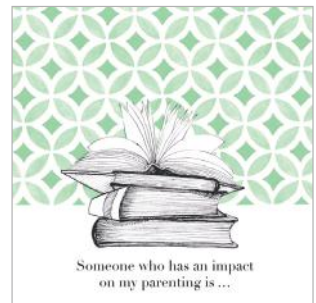
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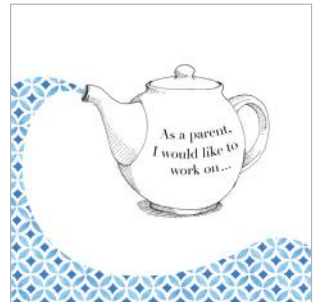
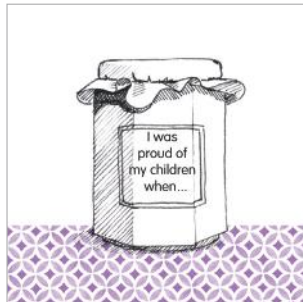
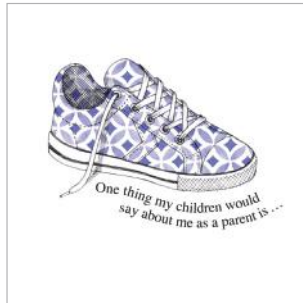
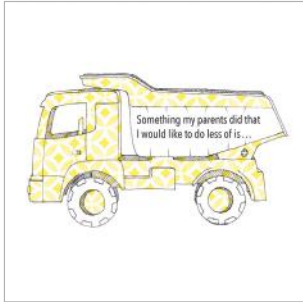
It was important to the creators of this resource to produce cards that make few assumptions about anyone's experience as either a child or a parent. We hope the cards can be used in a wide variety of situations by many different people, including:

- parents of all genders
- parents who may have had their child removed through child protection services
- play groups
- parents going through separation and divorce
- foster carers for placement assessment
- teenage parents
- counselling perpetrators and victims of domestic violence
- parents with mental health issues
- grandparents
- parents with an intellectual or a learning disability
- prospective parents who are thinking about the kind of parents they want to be.



The Array of Cards





One thing I hope my children remember me for is ...



As a parent, I wonder ...



Something I never seem to get around to as a parent is ...

One thing I would like to change about my parenting is ...



The values my parents passed on to me are ...

I'd really like to know ...



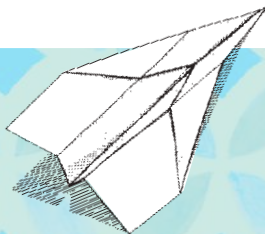
As a parent, I was really surprised when ...

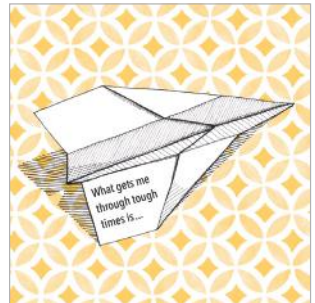
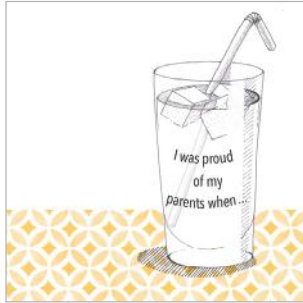


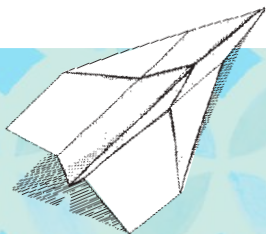
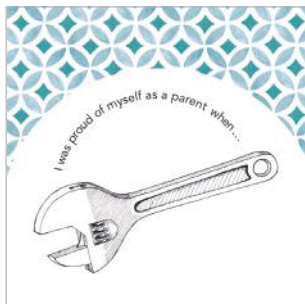
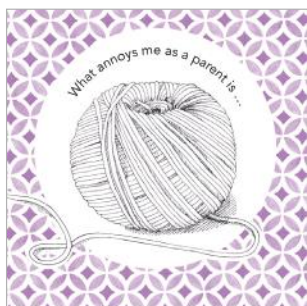
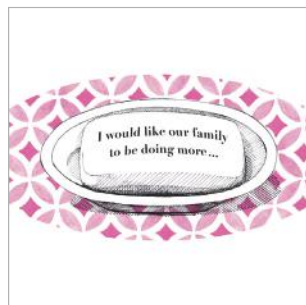
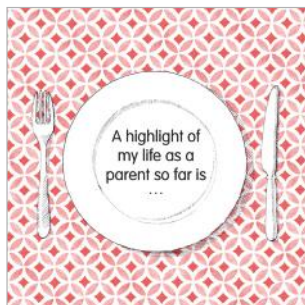
We really laugh together when ...



A good thing about my family is ...







Taking Care

The intent behind the *Positive Parenting Cards* is to provide an invitation to parents to tell stories of their strengths and achievements as parents. We hope the cards will provide rich invitations for parents to describe what they think they (and others) do well as parents. We also hope that the cards can be used to open up a safe and respectful space to talk about the challenges they may experience as parents from time to time.

The sentence starters combined with simple illustrations from everyday life will hopefully help create a warm invitation for this storytelling to flow naturally. However, it always must be recognised that any metaphor or artifact can have significant and unexpected emotional impact.

A parent who is beset with anxiety, stress or guilt may have a strong reaction to one or more cards, especially if the image or the sentence starter triggers past memories, fears and traumas. What appears to be gentle and innocuous to one person, may unleash a flood



Have I done all I can to create a 'safe space'?

of emotions for another. This, of course, may not be in any way negative or inappropriate but it does require any facilitator who introduces the cards to be mindful of the possibility that the conversation may take some unexpected twists and turns.

Some questions for any facilitator:

Do I know the cards well enough to believe they are appropriate?

Do I know the people I am using the cards with sufficiently to be comfortable taking the risk of introducing the cards?

Is the timing right?

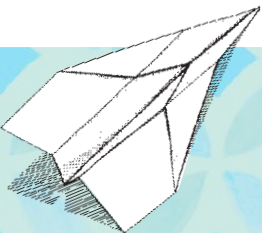
Have I done all I can to create a 'safe space'?

Have I allocated enough time to adequately deal with whatever arises?

Am I personally prepared to deal with the expression of strong emotions?

Are the cards appropriate to the literacy levels of the participants using them?

Are the cards culturally appropriate?



Will I use all the cards or make a selection?

How will I give participants the right to 'pass' or opt not to use the cards?

If I am using the cards in a group, how will I ensure people's privacy is respected after the group?

How will I make sure that everyone gets equal time to share their stories or responses to the cards?

How will I ensure people don't interrupt or talk over each other?

If it is decided that the cards are not appropriate what is my 'Plan B'?

How will I know when to wind up the activity?

How will I evaluate the success of the activity?

Will I follow up with participants after I have used of the cards, and if so, how?

Will I use the cards only once with a particular person, or will I create a series of conversations?



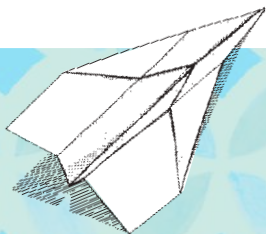
Getting the Cards into Participants' Hands

While there are endless creative activities for using the cards, in general, they all fall into two broad methods.

Spread, Scan and Select

Firstly, there is the method known as 'Spread, Scan and Select'. Using this method, all or some of the cards are spread out, face up on a surface—often a table or desk—and participants are invited to scan the cards and make a deliberate selection based on a particular question or prompt. The prompt can be as simple as, 'Pick a card that catches your attention for some reason.' Of course, you can invite participants to pick more than one card—or even a series of cards. (Later in this booklet, you will find lots of suggestions for prompts you can use or adapt.)

Spreading the cards out on the floor can create a different dynamic from spreading them out on a table where everyone is seated. Participants get a bird's eye view of the cards, and they can be invited to walk around the





cards or follow a line (or meandering path) of cards. Getting participants to move around the cards can also be achieved by placing the cards around the walls of a room, or on one or more tables that people then walk around while scanning the cards and making their selection.

Brain studies indicate that the human brain functions differently when our bodies are in motion compared to when our bodies are at rest. Therefore, activities that involve significant movement can open up different pathways to learning and reflecting. Notions of 'multiple intelligence' contained in the work of such education pioneers as Howard Gardner, also indicate that for those who may have a kinesthetic learning style, movement is a critical factor in being able to concentrate or absorb information. It is useful to keep in mind that in any group of people there will most likely be kinesthetic learners who don't seem to learn as well when stationary. Plus, most people find it refreshing and fun to get up out of their seats, if possible—especially if they have been sitting

for some time. For these reasons, facilitators are often looking to include activities that get participants moving, as well as those that create stillness and quiet.

Whether the cards are spread out on a table, wall or floor, the amount of time needed for scanning the cards can vary enormously depending on several factors. Generally, the larger the number of cards, or the more complex the cards, or the more complex the activity—the more time is needed for scanning the cards and making a selection. As always, it is preferable to move at a pace that suits most of the users. As in any therapeutic conversation, managing the available time well is an important skill, and many facilitators find that more time is needed for an activity and conversations to unfold than they anticipated.



Sometimes interesting learning occurs when a touch of random choice is introduced into a conversation using cards or other prompts.

Random Choice

The second broad method for using the *Positive Parenting Cards* is 'Random Choice'. Sometimes interesting learning occurs when a touch of random choice is introduced into a conversation using cards or other prompts. This method includes such activities as shuffling and dealing the cards, placing the cards face down on a surface, fanning the cards and having participants randomly select a card, playing a range of games that involve hiding and finding cards, lucky dips, random cards on chairs, selecting a card with eyes closed, and so on.

It is amazing how fruitful and meaningful random selections can be for people. Time and again they see connections between randomly selected cards, and they find useful and significant next steps and prompts in cards that come to them through a random method of selection. Often an element of whimsy and serendipity enters the conversation, and is welcomed and appreciated by participants.



Questions built around 'the fourth S' can include:

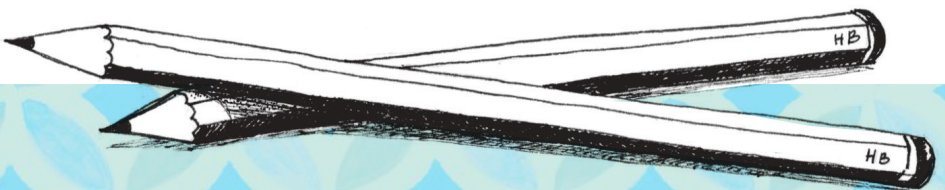
Even though the cards you now have in your hand were not deliberately selected, do they have any particular meaning for you?

Can you think of times when one or more of the cards in your hand have been particularly relevant in your life as a parent?

Do these cards have any significance or special relevance for your parenting at the moment?

Would you have deliberately chosen these cards in relation to your experience of being a parent?

Looking at all the cards you have in your hand, do you think they relate to each other? Are they complementary in any way?



Creative Ways of Using the Cards

As mentioned earlier, there are no prescribed ways of introducing or using the cards. The manner in which people are invited to use the cards will depend upon the creativity of the facilitator, the number of people present and the time available. However, in this section of the booklet, we offer some ideas for using the cards in particular settings. We hope these ideas will spark your imagination and that you will feel free to adapt them in any way you think is appropriate, respectful and helpful.

Parent Support Groups

The cards can be arrayed face up and participants invited to choose a card that has a sentence starter they feel comfortable completing.

The group can be varied in numerous ways. You may wish to:

- give each participant a time allocation (for example, one or two full minutes each) to finish the sentence, and then talk about why they chose that card and completed the sentence in that manner



invite other participants to say how they would complete the same sentence
continue to go around the group until all the cards have been chosen and discussed
invite participants to complete their sentence in writing and then discuss
use random choice card selection
ask participants to complete the sentence as their own parent/s might have
invite participants to choose a card by any method and finish the sentence by imagining the different stages their parenting role may have gone through. How would they have completed the sentence:

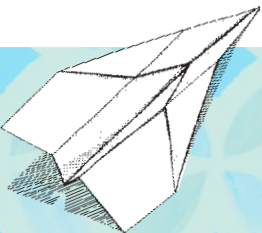
during pregnancy?

as the parent of a baby or toddler?

as the parent of a young child?

as the parent of an adolescent?

as the parent of an adult?



We hope these ideas will spark your imagination and that you will feel free to adapt them in any way you think is appropriate, respectful and helpful.

invite participants to imagine how they might complete the sentence at some time in the future.

Working with Couples

When working with couples any of the above formats could be employed, or you may like to try some of the following ideas:

Each person in the relationship could be asked to choose the cards they would be most comfortable discussing. What is it about those sentence starters that appeal so much? Are the different choices significant?

Both partners can be invited to finish the same sentence starters. What might the different answers reveal?

Both partners can complete the sentence, verbally or in writing, as they imagine their partner might.

Both partners can be invited to complete the sentence as they imagine their own parents may have?



In counselling situations, the cards may provide a different way for a parent to tell their story—a way that doesn't focus exclusively on 'the problem'.

Both partners can be invited to complete the sentences in a way that captures their best hopes for the future.

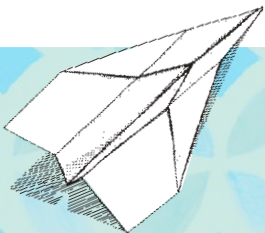
Working with Individual Parents

Any of the above activities can be incorporated into one-on-one conversations with a parent. In counselling situations, the cards may provide a different way for a parent to tell their story—a way that doesn't focus exclusively on 'the problem' but provides a reframe of the problem's dominance.

A counselling conversation might centre on a single card in a session that the parent identifies as the most useful one for them. Alternatively, the cards might be placed face down and the parent invited to turn each card over in sequence finishing the sentence starter before moving on to the next card.

The counsellor or therapist might then ask:

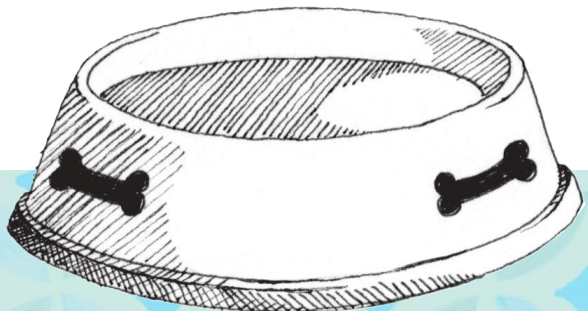
Which of the sentence starters did you most enjoy discussing?



Which ones reminded you of your strengths and hopes as a parent?

Did any of the sentence starters make you feel uncomfortable? Can you say why?

Putting all your sentences and stories together, what do you know that you do well as a parent?



Between Sessions

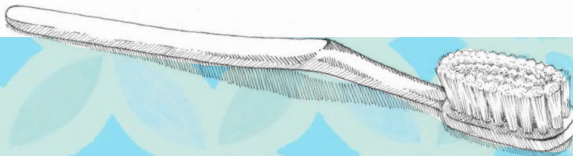
Individual parents or people from a group can each be invited to take one or more cards away with them and bring their completed sentence(s) with them to the next session. Focussing on just one card (for example, 'I was proud of my children when ...'), groups or individuals can be invited to complete a sentence in a different way each day for a week/two weeks.

How did the way you completed the same sentence differ each day/week?

What qualities/achievements/strengths/actions did you find to be proud of in your children or in yourself as a parent?

Were any of these surprising or new?

Was it harder to notice something you are proud of in your children or yourself on one day than on another? Why do you think that is?



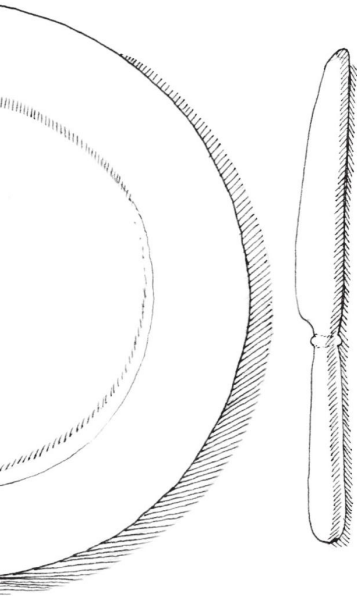
If all the members of a group have taken the same sentence starter to complete each day, this can be an interesting starting point for the next group session. How do their sentences differ? How are they similar? What can they learn from each other about noticing strengths and achievements?

Stretch Listing

Nearly everyone uses lists. It is perhaps the easiest and most commonplace way in which we write—and it requires only the most basic of literacy skills. Some lists require no literacy skills at all since a list can be spoken rather than written, or it can be a series of drawings, pictures, marks or objects of any kind.

Chris Iveson from BRIEF in London (www.brief.org.uk) speaks of lists as an elegantly-simple, solution-focused way of 'interrogating brilliance' rather than assessing deficits or problems. Chris and his colleagues at BRIEF have turned the very familiar skill of listing into a powerful





therapeutic tool by 'stretching' or 'pushing' a list comprised of strengths, skills or resources.

Firstly, the focus is put on the positive—something that is done well, accomplishments rather than mistakes, and aspirations rather than prisons of the past. Then, once the theme is established, the desired list will be extensive. Depending on the time available the list of strengths and positives that is sought often exceeds 35 items.

In the case of a parent the 'interviewer' might ask for a list of '35 things you do well as a parent'. Initially, such a long list can seem daunting and forced, particularly if the parent presents with lack of confidence, relationship issues with their children or in response to intervention by child protection agencies. But persevering with the construction of such a list is achievable even in situations that seem quite dire. One very useful tool the interviewer can use to stretch the list is the great solution-focused question, 'What else?'

An extensive list of a parent's strengths can provide some balance for those parents who may be facing continued criticism of their 'failings'.

To achieve an outcome of, say, 35 or more stated strengths can be immensely therapeutic in itself. Irrespective of what is on the list, recognising that it is possible to write an extensive list of a parent's strengths can provide some balance for those parents who may be facing continued criticism of their 'failings'. Stretching or pushing the list out in this manner helps ensure that the parent actually answers the question thoroughly and is heard by the interviewer. Writing down the strengths and then reading the list back to the parent can be very supportive and affirming.

A list of 35 or more suggestions for 'What you have done well as a parent' is likely to contain many glimpses into the parent's strengths. Naming the strengths seems to increase the likelihood that they can be employed more consistently or comprehensively in the future.

It may also be the case that the most useful reflections are the last items on the list. Perhaps it is those strengths nominated towards the



end of the list that contain the most significant insights into the parent's identity?

Finally, completing such a list can work in a similar way to providing a trampoline to a high jumper. It means that one can often scale greater heights and create aspirations that go beyond the hopes that one otherwise might have started with. The challenges can look less extreme and the capacities for change and growth more enhanced.

Compiling such a list prior to using the *Positive Parenting Cards* may inspire reflections that are less likely to be dominated by problems.

Interviewing One's Best Friend

Another of Chris Iveson's solution-focused brief therapy technologies is to interview the client's 'best friend' ... as the client imagines their best friend would answer.



The conversation might begin in a way such as the following:

Facilitator: Sue, I'm wondering if it might be useful if I was able to get another impression of who you are and what your strengths are? Would that be alright?

Client: Yes. OK.

Facilitator: I'm assuming you have a best friend—would you please tell me their name?

Client: My best friend's name is Wendy.

Facilitator: Given that Wendy isn't here right now and it would take a bit of organising to have her join us in the future, I'm wondering if it would be OK if I interviewed her through you?

Client: OK

Facilitator: So Sue, do you think you could pretend to be Wendy and imagine what she would say about you when I talk to her?



The interviewer then proceeds not to interview Sue, the client, but best friend Wendy with Sue playing the role of Wendy. Some questions for the best friend might include:

Wendy, what would you say that Sue does really well as a parent?

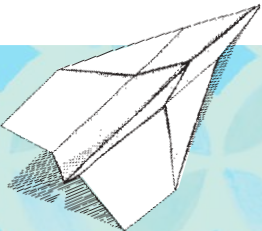
As a close friend, what strengths in Sue do you observe and value that other people might not notice?

Wendy, do you see strengths in Sue that she might not know she has or might be self-conscious about revealing?

Wendy, what have you learned about parenting from Sue?

Interviewing an external person through the eyes of the client creates 'audience'.

Interviewing an external person through the eyes of the client creates 'audience', that is, someone else's perspective, albeit an imaginary one. Like stretch listing, interviewing one's 'best friend' changes perspectives. Having to imagine how another person sees you, particularly someone with whom you have a positive relationship, adds richness and texture



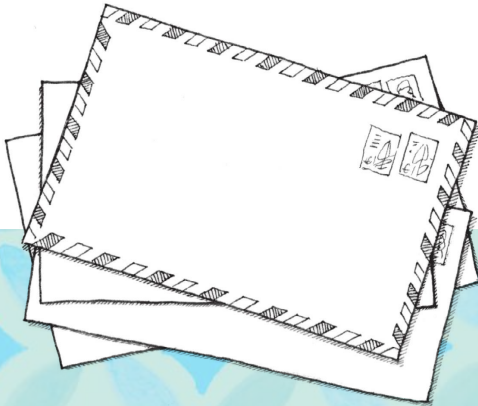
to whatever insights you may already have about yourself. Chances are the best friend's observations will provide some further clues about strengths, skills and resources that the interviewer can use to glean fresh insights into what is working well in the client's life.

The 'best friend interview' is often concluded by reading the friend's observation back to the client and checking whether the client agrees with their best friend's assessment. For example:

So Sue, I have just been talking to your best friend, Wendy, about what she considers to be your strengths as a parent. Her list of the things she thinks you do well consists of ...

Do you think Wendy got it right about you?

Conducting such an audience interview prior to using the *Positive Parenting Cards* may evoke more nuanced and considered responses to the sentence starters.



Best Hopes

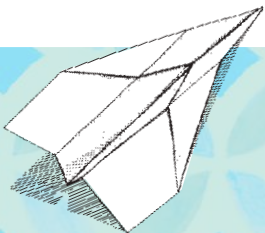
Central to solution-focused and strength-based approaches is identifying where we want to get to in our lives. Chris Iveson from BRIEF uses the metaphor of a taxi. He says that when you get into a taxi it doesn't make sense to tell the driver where you have come from. The only really useful topic of conversation is where you want to get to, that is, your destination.

The claim is that in counselling this is also the most vital question. It is the destination or the 'preferred future' that gives the counselling purpose. There are a number of different ways of inviting people to share their pictures of the future, but asking about their 'best hopes' is arguably the simplest, the most direct and the most applicable across a wide variety of situations.

What are your best hopes for this session?

What are your best hopes for yourself, your family, your children?

What are your best hopes for when the problem is no longer present?



Central to solution-focused and strength-based approaches is identifying where we want to get to in our lives.

The *Positive Parenting Cards* have a focus that spreads from the past ('I was proud of my children when ...'), to the present ('What I have learned about being a parent is ...') to the future ('My hopes for my children are ...').

Sentence starters that are clearly future-focused are readily able to be used to build pictures of the future because they are embedded with 'best hopes'. However, even those cards that focus on the past or present can be re-jigged to be forward looking with a 'best hopes' reframe. For example:

'What gets me through tough times is ...'
can be extended to 'What I hope will get me through tough times ahead is ...'

'As a parent I really enjoy...'
can be shifted to 'As a parent what I most look forward to enjoying is ...'

'I was proud of myself as a parent when...'
can become 'I most hope to be proud of myself as a parent when...'



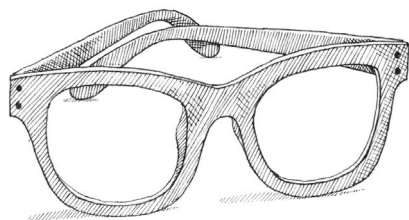
The Creators

Lorraine Leitch

Lorraine is married with two children. She says that her eldest child, her daughter, posed a number of challenges to her as a parent and consequently moved out of the family home earlier than Lorraine would have wanted. Lorraine subsequently completed a social work degree working initially with the Salvation Army in a family support role before joining the Family Support team at St Luke's Anglicare (now part of Anglicare Victoria). The concept for the *Positive Parenting Cards* was a product of her own experience as a parent as well as her professional roles. From these experiences Lorraine believes the cards will find a place in the tool-kits of a wide range of human service practitioners working with parents, children, young people and families.

Anna Marrone

Anna is a graphic designer and illustrator who's aesthetic is perfectly suited to the accessible nature of the *Positive Parenting Cards*. This project has been an extremely fulfilling one for Anna, combining her love for simple line work with the thought-provoking and worthwhile concept behind the cards.



Russell Deal

Russell is the founder of Innovative Resources and was the creative director at the time of first publication of these cards. Russell established Innovative Resources in the early 1990s with St Luke's initial card set, *Strength Cards*. He has seen Innovative Resources grow into becoming Australia's foremost publisher of conversation-building materials. All of Innovative Resources' 'seriously optimistic' materials have been influenced and shaped by a commitment to the strengths-based philosophy Russell believes is central to the core of his profession, social work.

Karen Bedford

Karen has a Master's Degree in linguistics and literature, a Diploma of Teaching and a Diploma of Counselling Psychology. Karen has taught editing and writing at tertiary level, and she has worked for Innovative Resources for over 15 years, primarily as the managing editor. Karen facilitates workshops based on her book, *The Uses of Sadness* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2009) and on the use of strengths-based tools. She has also facilitated therapeutic creative writing programs that resulted in the publication of a book of participants' writing called *The Treasure Trove* (Open Place, Melbourne, 2013).

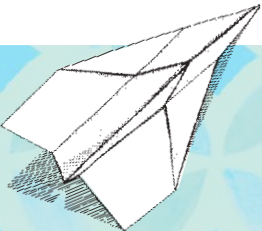


About the Publisher

Innovative Resources is the publishing arm of Anglicare Victoria, one of Australia's leading community service organisations. Anglicare Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation providing a range of child, youth, family and community services throughout Victoria and New South Wales.

Our publishing

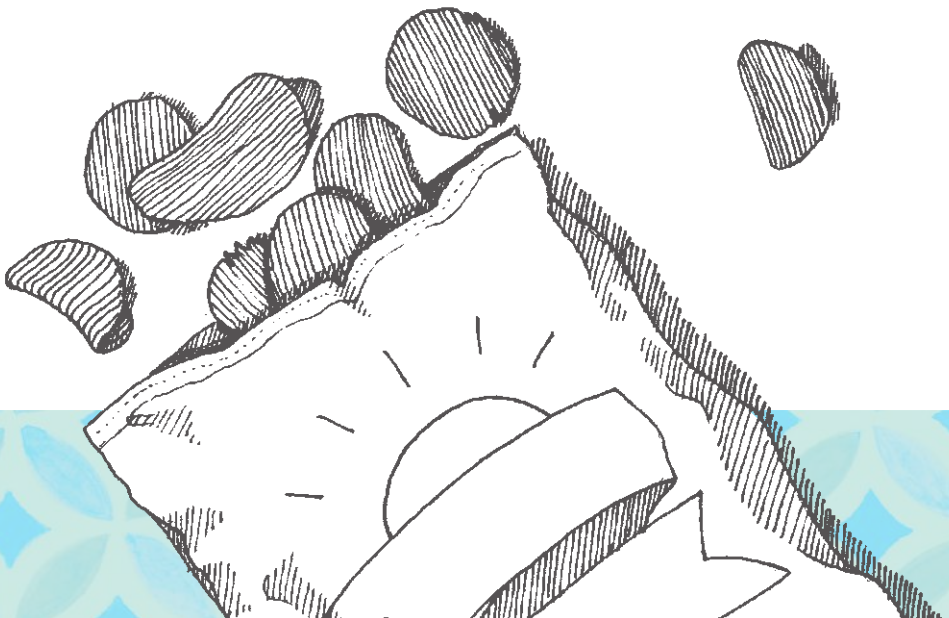
Innovative Resources publishes card sets, stickers, books, picture books, digital and tactile materials to enrich conversations about feelings, strengths, relationships, stories and goals. Our resources bring colour and creativity to therapeutic and educational settings all over the world. They are used by counsellors, teachers, trainers, social workers, managers, mentors, parents, teams, supervisors ... and anyone who works with people to create positive change.



Our training

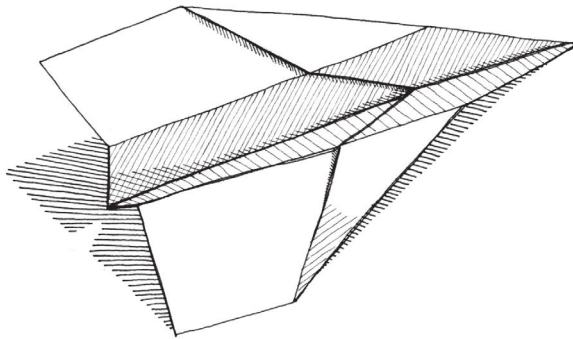
Innovative Resources also offers highly-engaging training in 'strengths-based' approaches to working with people where change arises out of a focus on strengths, respect and hopeful possibilities. We also offer 'tools' workshops on ways of using our resources to invigorate human service work. Our workshops honour different learning styles and the power of visual images to open up storytelling and other ways to truly connect with children and adults alike.

www.innovativeresources.org



Ideas about parenting, like most ideas, need to be discussed within the context of an engaged relationship in which trust and openness and sharing can occur. It is through these conversations that people are able to see more deeply into their hopes for their children, to locate and overcome barriers to achieving better outcomes for their children, and feel supported in their goals.

(From the foreword by Dr Jennifer Lehmann)





POSITIVE PARENTING CARDS

These delightful, approachable cards give parents, grandparents, foster parents and guardians an opportunity to explore the joys, sorrows, challenges and gifts of parenting. These 40 cards are built on the assumption that everyone is motivated to be the best parent they can be. Even if families are sometimes overtaken by difficulty, there are times when every parent can celebrate their successes, and those of their children. Noticing and telling the stories of these successes is pivotal in building hope, resilience and the skills needed to parent well.

Each of the cards features a simple sentence starter like:

I was proud of my children when ...

A good thing about my family is ...

As a parent I was really surprised when ...

Positive Parenting Cards invite all parents to explore their beliefs, values, hopes and dreams for their children.



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