



# Using the resource to plan a program or session

Programs or sessions will vary according to the needs of the participants and the context of the session or program.

The following headings are used in each of the main sections of the resource. The headings will be relevant to planning sessions. They are:

- Key issues (relating to that stage, phase or role)
- Myths
- Background notes (general)
- Group exercises
- Homework — for participants to take home and think about.

## Key issues



This refers to the focus and/or the purposes of examining each issue.

It is essential to be clear about the objectives of each session and to communicate these clearly to the participants. Selecting the focus for the key issues to be explored will assist in clarifying the objectives of a session.

The key issues of the specific phases of separating, future directions or repartnering sections may all be appropriate if you are providing an ongoing or comprehensive program. Alternatively, you may select and adapt only those relevant to your program or session and the needs of the participants in your group.

Clarity about the target group and the focus and purpose of your program or session, is essential to ensure you select the relevant concept notes, exercises and tasks.

## Myths

This section outlines myths relating to each section. They are common things people hear, believe or think at each stage of the journey.

They can be used as discussion-starters and have been included so that participants can examine the implied messages and question how true or fair the myths are in reflecting reality.

## Background notes



### Adults, children and extended family

The background notes provide leaders and co-facilitators with an overview of the relevant issues relating to the topic.

These notes identify myths, attitudes and challenges relevant to the key players. This is followed by specific notes on adults, children and extended family to explain what they may be going through.

A bibliography of relevant texts appears at the end of each section.

## Group exercises



Group exercises are designed to be engaging, stimulating and to encourage learning.

They are specifically designed to involve all participants in activities, which will further clarify the issues identified in the background notes.

They have also been designed to motivate participants to be able to take action and, where necessary, to change or modify their behaviours.

A number of group exercises are presented in each section. You can select the exercises you think will be most appropriate, useful or fun for the people participating in your program.

The group exercises outlined in *Back on track* can also act as 'inspiration' for you to develop your own exercises — just make sure you document them so that you can remember how they worked for next time.

The exercises reflect the following key principles of adult learning that is, adults:

- Already know a great deal
- Learn by solving problems
- Are more able and motivated to learn what they need to learn
- Learn by doing
- Have individual learning mode preferences
- Like a variety of learning activities
- Want feedback on their learning performance
- Want to apply what they learn
- Learn best when the content fits their value system.

## Homework – things to think about



Each section lists a number of tasks. These tasks have been planned as 'homework' activities for participants to complete between, or following sessions.

The aim of these tasks is for participants to continue their learning outside the session through practising, observing and experimenting with new ideas or behaviours. It provides another way for

participants to relate the content of the group session/s to their specific situations and learning needs.

## Handouts

Handouts are clearly noted with the symbol of a hand. They are numbered and provided in a separate section of this resource.

The handouts support specific stages and can be adapted to use with the various stages of the resource, as appropriate to the session plan.

The following planning guide can help you to use *Back on track*. Your plan could be for:

- A single community education seminar
- Ongoing sessions in a group education program
- A session in a support group.

The planning template is designed for a session of approximately 90 minutes and is based on an outline commonly used by experienced educators who work with adults.

## 1. Objectives

Objectives define the outcomes you want your participants to achieve as a result of your activity.

It is useful to frame objectives by starting with the phrase 'for participants to...'. Continue the sentence by specifying what you want the participant to achieve during the session.

Well crafted objectives are S.M.A.R.T., that is:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Time-limited.

You can help the learning process by telling participants what they should get out of the session.

Some examples of objectives are:

- For participants to identify a different way of dealing with their ex-partner by the end of the session
- For participants to identify three new activities they can do with their children that do not cost money and will enhance their relationship during access visits
- For participants to understand how and why they have reacted to a particular situation by the end of three sessions
- For participants to find out about three new sources of advice/information/assistance available in their local community by the end of the session.

As a facilitator, always take a few minutes at the beginning of a session to outline the objectives to the group. This should only take about five minutes.

## 2. Warm-up activity

A warm-up activity is one that:

- Settles the group
- Generates a feeling of comfort and fun

- Prepares the group to contribute and learn.

A warm-up activity may not always be necessary, but if included, should only take about five minutes. It may work better for you (and the group) to conduct the warm-up activity after you have presented your 'mini-talk' (see next section). If members of your group are shy or uncomfortable, it is often a better tactic to let people focus on something together.

### 3. Mini-talk

A mini-talk is a brief presentation by the leader/facilitator about what is in the session.

The background notes in this resource provide information for you to 'set the scene' in your opening or introductory mini-talk.

When you are using the background notes, think carefully about the needs of your group and select the information accordingly.

Your role at this point is to give people a chance to get to know you, to get an idea of what ground will be covered and what they can get out of the session.

Your mini-talk should take about 10 minutes and it should be fairly informal.

In a large group or a community education session, this segment could go for up to 30 minutes.

### 4. Activity

Group exercises are included in *Back on track*. You can use them as they are, adapt them, design your own or select activities from other resources. You probably have a few tried and tested activities for groups and you should build on your own experience.

The important thing is that the activity is related to the focus and aims, and engages participants in learning.

Activities promote:

- Further understanding of issues
- Exploration of issues in new or different ways
- Learning from other people's experiences or ideas
- A chance to practise new skills.

Activities need to be varied during a program or series of sessions:

- Brainstorming
- Working in pairs or small groups
- Working in the whole group
- Individual work.

It is important that the facilitator gives clear directions prior to the activity and assists the group to process and summarise the learning at the conclusion.

You should also take note of which styles of activity work best with your groups and be prepared to be flexible. For example, some groups work very well together and get a lot out of working in smaller groups or pairs. Other groups with a different dynamic may work better on brainstorming activities where everyone is involved.

So you can plan effectively each of the exercises described in *Back on track* should take about 20 minutes unless otherwise indicated.

## 5. Brief summary

The facilitator indicates that the session is moving towards closure by summarising what has been achieved in relation to the session objectives and the content of the mini-talk. This should take about five minutes.

## 6. Pressing issues/growing edges

At the end of the session, invite participants to raise issues related to the content of the session.

Make sure that no one person hogs this time, or uses it as an opportunity to hijack the discussion and steer it off on a tangent that is not relevant to the rest of the group.

The aim is to use this part of a session to problem-solve in relation to an issue raised during the session. This activity should take about 10 minutes.

## 7. Tasks

Each section of *Back on track* lists a number of 'homework' tasks. You could photocopy the tasks for participants so they remember to refer to them.

Tasks are suggestions for participants to work on between sessions. They will need to be adapted to the needs of the group. In ongoing group sessions, remember to ask participants how they went with the tasks.

Participants also need to be encouraged to identify personal challenges and behaviours that they need to change/or practice between sessions. These are also important homework tasks.

## 8. Evaluation

Evaluating each session and considering participant feedback before planning the next session will help you make sure your sessions are relevant and will provide the most useful information possible to participants.

Sample evaluation forms are included for you to use or adapt. See pages 217-222 for details and samples of forms.

## 9. The 'Suggestion circle' and the 'Fish bowl'

These are referred to in various exercises. They are listed here in more detail because they are exercises which will always be useful to you as a professional and can be adapted in many ways.

### (a) The 'suggestion circle'

This is a technique for collecting a variety of ideas. It is used to activate clear thinking and to tap into the experience and knowledge of the group.

#### Method:

- 1 Ask participants if anyone has a current problem that they would like to share.
- 2 Tell the person who has the problem to be a listener and to accept each suggestion with no comment other than 'thank you'.
- 3 Ask that person to state one problem in a clear concise way.
- 4 Ask the participants to request any necessary clarification of the problem.
- 5 Ask the participants in the suggestion circle to pause and think carefully for a moment about the possible solutions to the problem. Invite each person to give one high-quality (one-or-two sentence 'you could...' or 'I would...') suggestion.
- 6 Ask someone else to write the suggestions down so the listener can give their full attention to listening.
- 7 Give the listener the written list of suggestions to take home.

### (b) The 'Fish bowl'

The fish bowl provides a forum where each person is able to 'hear' in a non-threatening way. For example, participants might hear about the issues for their partner in their role as a non-biological parent.

#### Method:

1. Rearrange half the chairs to form a small inner circle. The other half are formed into a larger circle surrounding the inner circle.
2. Divide participants into two equal groups based on their parental status as:
  - a) non-biological parents
  - b) biological parents.
3. Explain that the couple must separate into different groups. Where an individual is both a biological and a non-biological parent the couple choose the most appropriate group for each of them to join.

### First fishbowl (non-biological parent)

Ask the non-biological parents to sit in the inner circle and the biological parents to sit in the outer circle.

Before the discussion begins, state the rules for this exercise as follows:

Participants sitting on the outer circle are to make no comments at all. They are asked to listen to the discussion and to write down their partner's views on:

- a) challenges in their role
- b) opportunities in their role.

Questions are then asked to stimulate discussion. The questions will depend on the current topic. Ensure that you have a clear time-limit for group discussion.

### Second fishbowl (biological parents)

Ask the biological parents to sit in the inner circle and the non-biological parents to sit in the outer circle.

The outer group are reminded of the rules and each person is asked to listen and write down their partner's point-of-view as before.

Ask participants to move the chairs out and join the large circle.

Ask participants to identify what they learned during the exercise.

Ask them to discuss this with their partner:

'What I heard you say in relation to your challenges and opportunities was...'

Then ask the participants to compare what was said with how they were understood.

Running a group or presenting information sessions requires particular facilitation skills.

A summary of the things you need to pay attention to when developing your skills in this area include:

- Relationships and interaction between group members
- Different needs and learning styles of individual members
- Theories of adult learning
- Impact of the leader on the group
- Impact of the co-facilitator on the group
- Importance of careful planning and debriefing.

## Effective group facilitation

To be an effective group facilitator, you should develop your ability to:

- Identify relevant learning issues
- Involve participants in discussion
- Support participants' learning
- Establish group rules so that there are guidelines about how the group will operate
- Enforce these rules firmly and appropriately, when necessary, in the group process
- Engage both men and women
- Listen and communicate effectively
- Convey acceptance, respect and understanding
- Plan relevant and varied processes and activities
- Acknowledge differences in learning styles
- Problem solve with the group
- Convey optimism and hope when relevant
- Be well-informed on the topic at hand

- Be resourceful
- Be comfortable about not knowing everything
- Follow-up with information when this is required or promised
- Deal appropriately with difficult and unexpected situations that are likely to occur.

## Gender differences

Men and women will engage, participate and learn in different ways.

Traditionally, it has been more difficult to attract men to counselling or group sessions dealing with personal and relationship issues. This needs to be acknowledged and taken into account when planning programs.

To ignore gender differences and failing to plan accordingly, will result in men not attending or being alienated during sessions. It must be remembered that men are an important target group for this resource.

A section on engaging men in programs can be found on page 232.

## Cultural diversity

In every group there will be a diverse range of people who may be linked or separated because of their:

- socio-economic background
- religious affiliation
- sexual orientation
- age
- ethnic background.

It is the responsibility of the leader to be sensitive to any needs that arise out of this diversity.

## Evaluation

Evaluation of each session and the entire program is essential in order to inform future planning and allocation of resources. Four evaluation forms are featured on the following pages.

- 1 **Participant's evaluation (single session)** should be filled in by participants at the end of a one-off session.
- 2 **Evaluation of *Back on track* (multiple sessions)** should be used where participants attend a program made up of more than one session.
- 3 **Group leader reflection sheet** is designed to help you reflect on your planning and group facilitation skills and process.
- 4 **CSA evaluation** to assist the resource sponsor evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of this resource to facilitators.

# 1. Participant's evaluation

The aims of this session were: *(Facilitator to complete)*

---



---



---



---



---



---

1 From your point of view, were the above aims of this session achieved?

Yes       No       In part

2 This session was *(Mark on the line)*

1	2	3	4	5
Not useful				Most useful

3 The most useful part of this session was

---



---



---



---

4) The least useful part of this session was

---



---



---



---

5 Would you recommend this session to others?

Yes       No       Perhaps

*Thank you!*

## 2. Evaluation of *Back on track*

This questionnaire gives you the opportunity to express your views of the program anonymously.  
We are interested in your opinions, whether they are positive or negative.  
Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

1. Your Sex:  Male  Female
2. Your Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years      3. Country of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Relationship Status:
- Separated, no new relationship       Remarried
- Separated, with a new partner       Never married

Here are some statements about your program experience. For each statement tick the box which best represents your immediate reaction to that statement.

	Strongly disagree	Partly disagree	Not sure	Partly agree	Strongly agree
The program was clearly relevant to my concerns and problems.					
The group leader was well-prepared and communicated information effectively.					
The program's material and activities have aided my learning.					
The program increased my understanding of my financial and legal responsibilities.					
The program was less interesting and useful than I had anticipated when enrolling.					
I feel the program experience will lead to changes in my personal relationships.					
The program has helped me to deal more effectively with parenting issues.					
The program failed to address my feelings and emotions about personal difficulties.					
The program offered practical and realistic ideas for handling future problems.					
I learned a great deal about communication and conflict management.					
I felt that the group leader was rather insensitive to my feelings and difficulties.					
The program was too confusing and lacked focus.					
I would return to similar programs if I have problems in the future.					
I felt that the program discussions wasted time by not addressing important issues.					

## 2. Evaluation of *Back on track*

Thinking about the program as a whole:

1 What did you feel was the most helpful and engaging?

---

---

---

---

---

2 What seemed like a waste of time or confusing?

---

---

---

---

---

3 What would have more closely addressed your concerns?

---

---

---

---

---

4 What other changes to the program would you suggest?

---

---

---

---

---

### 3. Group leader reflection sheet

As a group leader, consider the following questions.

1 How appropriate was the physical setting?

---

---

2 Were your session aims appropriate?

---

---

3 Were the aims of the session achieved?

(a) by all participants

(b) by some participants?

---

---

4 What did you think was the most helpful and engaging segment of the session for participants?

---

5 What did you think was the least helpful or engaging segment?

---

6 How adequate was your planning and allocation of time?

---

7 Were you satisfied with your facilitation of the group?

---

8 Is there something you would do differently next time? What?

---

---

9 Did you effectively engage male and female participants?

---

10 Were there any barriers in engaging participants? For example, language, cultural differences or psychological?

---

11 Do you need to take any follow-up action before the next session? What?

---

---

# CSA evaluation



CSA has sponsored the development of this resource and we invite your feedback. Please assist us by filling in and returning this detachable Reply Paid evaluation form.

## Since receiving this resource:

Number of sessions conducted: \_\_\_\_\_ Total number of participants \_\_\_\_\_

Your state/territory \_\_\_\_\_ Male/female participant ratio: \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural/linguistic diversity of participants: \_\_\_\_\_

## How did you use the resource:

To create a new program       Supplement existing program

As professional information only

## Format Used:

Education session       Information session       Counselling

Extended program (how many weeks: \_\_\_\_\_)       One-off session

Family therapy       Workshop

## Resource Components Used:

All

Separating     Future Directions     Repartnering     And Then!     User's Guide

## Ratings:

Rate how this resource has supported your requirements in providing a service to separated/repartnered parents and their children:

Poor       Below Average       Average       Good       Excellent

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Rate the overall usefulness of the resource:

Poor       Below Average       Average       Good       Excellent

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Rate the overall ease of application and organisation of the resource's contents:

Poor       Below Average       Average       Good       Excellent

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Rate the overall fit between the resource and the needs of participants:

Poor       Below Average       Average       Good       Excellent

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any additional comments/feedback about this resource?

Fold here



**Delivery Address:**  
GPO Box 9815  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

No stamp required  
if posted in Australia



Back on Track  
National Products & Services Unit  
Reply Paid 9815  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Fold here

## Introduction

This section is to help you promote and develop your program in your local area and to your client base. A range of tools has been included to help you with this process.

The following suggestions are just that — suggestions. Clearly, some of the suggestions are more easily accommodated than others.

The developers of this resource have made a conscious effort to provide suggestions that do not require much work with budgets, and that are relatively quick to complete. The budget section is to provide you with a checklist of items you may need to consider.

## How to get a group happening in your area

If you are trying to assemble a group of participants for a session, or series of sessions, a promotional rule is that you should try to ensure that people in your community are exposed to information about your activity from as many sources as possible.

Repetition of information is one of the keys to successful promotion. It is equally important to ensure that your information is in places where the people you want to inform can access it. These things may sound straightforward, but it's surprising how many people overlook them. For example, think about activities or events (they don't have to be work-related) that you have found out about recently. How did you find out about them? In how many places did you find information?

The main tools for promoting your activity are provided in this section. You can photocopy them and insert the relevant

details and then distribute them in your community.

## Flier/poster

A black and white A4 size flier is included on the following pages. The information on it is generic and it is designed to be visually appealing and easy to photocopy. You can write in the appropriate details about the time, place and specific topics to be covered in your session/s.

You can:

- Copy the flier to A3 size
- Pin it up on community noticeboards
- Ask the local library to display it
- See if the local supermarket can post it on their doors
- Think about other community locations that attract people and whether there is a noticeboard facility available. For example: childcare centres, kindergartens, schools, community health services, doctors clinics and sporting clubs
- Ask local retailers if they can display the poster in their shop window
- Identify local workplaces or employers willing to put the poster in their tearooms.

Be prepared to take the poster to the location yourself — everyone likes a personal touch and a thank you!

## Brochure

You can use the poster/flier in the same way you would use a brochure.

The value of brochures is that people who might be uncomfortable about reading information in public (especially if they are sensitive about repartnering or are currently experiencing difficult times) can take the brochure away and read it in private.

However, the brochure distribution should be more targeted than a poster/flier might be, partly to minimise the quantity of brochures you need to copy and partly because a wide distribution will be a waste of time and resources.

You can consider the following suggestions for distributing the brochure:

- At other seminars run by your organisation
- Ask local service clubs if you can give them some copies for a meeting. They can ask members to pass the brochure on if they don't need it themselves
- Give the local library a few copies if they have a community brochure display — 10 copies will be sufficient
- Give some of the brochures to a local neighborhood house, community centre, community health centre or youth club
- Provide some copies of the brochure (along with the poster) to a few local sporting venues — like the local football club
- Offer to provide copies to relationship counsellors or GPs in your area.

## Pro forma media release (s)

Two pro forma media releases have been supplied for your use. All you need to do is photocopy them onto your organisation's letterhead and fill in the blanks.

Feel free to adjust the content or have the release retyped if you have time and prefer to make alterations. Then:

- Make sure the date is on the media release (the date of the time the media release is issued as well as the date of your activity)
- Identify your local media outlets and phone a journalist; have a discussion to let them know that you would like them to help inform the community about some activities/sessions you are organising. Tell them you will fax the information in writing
- Be appreciative of any assistance they can provide; they may not print the whole media release, but they might be able to fit it into a 'community calendar' or 'events' section of the newspaper
- Make sure you contact them at least one week before you need your release to be published, so you fit into the publication deadlines
- Contact your local community radio station (if you have one) and ask for similar assistance — offer yourself as an interviewee on the subject of repartnering and what your activities aim to do for those that attend
- Make sure your contact details are clear on all the media releases.

# Budget – what to include

When you are planning your activity or sessions, it's important to think about any budget implications that this might have for you or your organisation. You should also read the section on charging fees for a program you run in your community. The suggested fees may help recover the costs.

Budget items you might need to consider:

- Paper for the brochures/posters
- Copying costs for any handouts you will provide
- Refreshments for participants — will tea/coffee/biscuits be provided?
- Venue hire
- Hire or acquisition of presentation items such as whiteboards or display boards or AV items
- Hire or provision of chairs and tables
- Purchase of pens/paper or any other stationery you want to use in the group.

## Charging fees

Whether you charge participants for attending sessions will depend on:

- Funding available to the program
- Costs of the program
- Participants' ability to pay.

Many community organisations need to charge nominal fees for the groups they offer. Some do so to offset the costs involved, others believe participants value programs more if a charge is involved.

The following costs are a guide, and each organisation should nominate appropriate charges (if any) that are in keeping with other fees charged to the clients.

The intention of charging clients a fee is to assist organisations to recover some of the cost of presenting the program. For example, the fees may cover the costs of providing refreshments, venue hire, photocopying sections of the resource and staff time in completing promotional activities of facilitating the program.

Fees charged are normally retained by the service provider for the above reasons and not for profit.

It should be remembered that this resource has been developed in the hope that it will be implemented in communities to allow the broadest possible access by people who are separated and/or repartnering, and who have children.

The sponsors of this resource acknowledge that sometimes even the most nominal cost can be prohibitive for some families. For this reason, it is hoped that all service providers will allow charges to be waived for clients who are unable to pay.

## Schedule of suggested fees and charges:

Activity	Duration	Fee
One-off community information session	1-2 hours	No charge (or option to make small, anonymous donation to organisation).
Group sessions (any number). Cost includes handouts and materials.	2 hours per session	Approx. \$5 per person, per session.
More intensive group sessions (any number). Cost includes handouts and materials.	3-4 hours per session	Approx. \$10 per person, per session.

# Separated? New relationship? Kids?

## **Get *Back on track*, and find your way through separation and repartnering.**

If you've got kids and have recently separated, or formed a new relationship, you're probably dealing with a lot of things right now.

First there's the emotional side — dealing with the break-up of a family. The how and why. The arguments, the anger and the pain involved. Forming a new family brings a whole range of challenges.

Nearly everyone who has ever been in a family breakdown will tell you the worst part relates to the kids. What to tell them, how to tell them. Who gets them? Where they will live, who they can see? How to tell them about new relationships.

And if you're the new partner of someone who's been through this, then you know what a roller-coaster it can be and how hard it can be to hang on. Dealing with the ex, dealing with the kids.

And then there's the money and the courts and CSA.

It's not easy when children are involved — but it is even more important to sort things out and get on with life.



## ***Back on track*: finding a way through separation and repartnering**

A special session(s) focusing on: \_\_\_\_\_

Who's it for? \_\_\_\_\_

What can you get out of it? \_\_\_\_\_

Where is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Why come along? \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Cost: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information phone \_\_\_\_\_ and ask for \_\_\_\_\_.

**Pro forma media release (A)**

Note: All you need to localise this release is call your local council and find out the latest population data. If you can, find out the number of households or families in the municipality — it'll make the calculation easier. To work out the data, calculate the number of households that equal 20% of the total number.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## MEDIA RELEASE

### In-laws, outlaws and the whole damn lot

About one in five Australian families are 'repartnered' or 'step' families. Based on the latest population figures for this area, this translates into about \_\_\_\_\_ (insert number) \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of town, suburb or district) families.

In 1997, the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that in repartnered households where there are children, it's likely that they're living with their mother while their father pays child support (this is for seven out of eight children).

The period following separation, and the decision to repartner and form a new family, brings with it enormous challenges and decisions.

'There are issues to do with access to the kids and payment of child support, and dealing with Centrelink and the Child Support Agency,' explained \_\_\_\_\_ (insert your name) from \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of your organisation).

'Then, when a new relationship is formed, there are a whole different set of issues. It's not easy to develop a new relationship when you've got an ex and kids — or when your new boyfriend or girlfriend has them. It can have an enormous emotional and financial impact,' said \_\_\_\_\_ (insert your name).

The following program will be offered to explore the issues to help men and women with children who are separated and/or repartnered to get back on track.

A special session(s) focusing on: \_\_\_\_\_

Who's it for? \_\_\_\_\_

What can you get out of it? \_\_\_\_\_

Where is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Why come along? \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Cost: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information phone \_\_\_\_\_ and ask for \_\_\_\_\_.

**Media inquiries:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organisation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pro forma media release (B)**

Note: This release involves the 'testimonial' of a person who is recently separated or repartnered. You will need to get their permission to use their experience and their comments and give them the option of remaining anonymous. If they choose to remain anonymous, you should refer to them in the release as '[name of municipality] resident, mother/father of X children'. You can either handwrite the answers to the questions in the spaces provided, or retype the release and delete the questions from the final document. Make sure your subject sees, and approves the release before you issue it — and that you accommodate any changes they want to make.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Separating and repartnering  
– local speaks out and help is at hand**

Statistics show that after separation, men are more likely to repartner within four to six years. (74% of men repartner in that time compared to 54% of women).\*

Nearly one million Australian children have a parent who does not live in the same house as they do.

The reality is that after a family breakdown, it is usually the father who lives elsewhere, and sees the child fortnightly while mothers have the responsibility of the daily care and discipline of the children.

How long ago did your family break up, and what is your relationship with your children like?

‘ \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_,’ said \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name or municipality resident), mother/father of (insert number of) children.

If you have formed a new relationship, what are the best things about it at the moment? What hopes do you have for it in the future?

‘ \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_,’ he/she said.

How have you organised arrangements (contact and child support) for the children with your ex-partner? How do you feel about those arrangements?

‘ \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_’, he/she said.

The following program will be offered to explore the issues to help men and women who are separated and/or repartnered to get back on track.

A special session(s) focusing on: \_\_\_\_\_

Who's it for? \_\_\_\_\_

What can you get out of it? \_\_\_\_\_

Where is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Why come along? \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Cost: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information phone \_\_\_\_\_ and ask for \_\_\_\_\_.

**Media inquiries:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organisation:** \_\_\_\_\_

\* Mc Donald, P., *Family Trends and Structures in Australia*, AIFS, Melbourne, 1993.

# Engaging men in groups

It is well known that men are less likely than women to seek professional advice on personal issues, use relationship education or counselling services.

Men are also generally:

- less likely than women to initiate separation and divorce
- more likely to be adversely affected after separation, and for longer
- more likely to become disengaged from their children after separation
- less likely to be granted residency with their children
- as committed as women to developing and maintaining strong relationships with their children
- need assistance in developing parenting skills (especially following separation and divorce) so that they can make contact visits meaningful.

For these reasons it is important to develop effective ways of engaging men in this program.

They are an important target group, and research indicates that fathers make important contributions to their children's well-being and development.

While some men are able to express emotions, and to be actively involved in their children's lives, others need considerable support and encouragement if they are to do so.

The challenge for service providers is to attract, engage and retain men so that they are provided with the information and support to enable them to make any necessary changes in their family relationships. Engaging men in these programs may provide the support needed

to ensure that they maintain meaningful contact with their children.

## Suggestions for attracting men to groups

- Adapt ideas from the marketing section
- Use single-night session format, with a range of options for other ongoing self-contained sessions
- Use a single-gender focus (some men feel more comfortable talking about their feelings with other men)
- Offer sessions to include both genders and have sub-group discussions in single-gender groups
- Note that venue and times need to be taken into account when planning for men
- Look for a community venue likely to make men feel comfortable, for example, sporting venues, clubs (not venues where women are seen as gatekeepers)
- Network with other local organisations that are already working with men and offer courses on their premises
- Collaborate with these organisations to develop joint programs (for example, offer to provide a session or two on relevant topics to another organiser's existing program).

## Strategies for engaging men in groups

(Many of these also apply to women)

- Have a male facilitator or co-facilitator (male and female leaders can model positive ways of working together)
- Use task-focused, problem-solving activities
- Focus on men's strengths in working

- within task-focused and problem-solving approaches
- Build on these strengths through specific tasks, focusing on the present
  - Acknowledge gender difference in learning styles
  - Acknowledge that prevalent social messages encourage men to take on fairly traditional, stereotypical male roles and behaviors
  - Encourage fathers who are seeking more contact with their children to do so
  - Articulate the importance of fathers being involved with their children
  - Acknowledge that feeling daunted and discouraged from time-to-time, is understandable and normal
  - Offer hope and encouragement
  - Acknowledge the social constraints that have limited many men in developing skills to respond to their own and other's emotions
  - Developing a safe group environment which gives men permission to challenge dominant ways of being male
  - Encourage men to discover their own ways to be a man, a dad, a partner
  - Offer opportunities to develop fathering skills
  - Take a non-judgmental approach to both men and women, in terms of acknowledging legal and social realities
  - Affirm fathers who are assuming their parenting responsibilities
  - Offer concrete strategies for dealing with 'unfinished business', (for example, suggest that the parenting relationship between ex-partners is a business partnership, in the best interests of the children)
  - Acknowledge the strengths of traditional roles for men and women as 'tool kits' from which to draw flexibly, as men and women now take on aspects of both roles
  - Encourage movement from an ownership model of parenting children, towards responsible parenting, which focuses on caring for children
  - Accept expressions of powerlessness and anger as valid feelings
  - Focus on parenting situations where fathers have some control, for example, when their children are with them
  - Try to use metaphors which men will identify with. These may reflect men's language, culture, sport or work. For example, taking responsibility for one's own emotions could be 'not dropping the ball', taking time out when angry, rather than reacting aggressively or abusively, could be described as 'letting it go through to the keeper'.
  - The 'company merger' has parallels with repartnering. Questions like: Who will be in charge? What will my position be? will the culture change? Will it be a takeover? Will it work? Note: this metaphor needs to be used sensitively so it does not reinforce patriarchal attitudes and behaviors
  - Acknowledge that some men may have had little experience in group work, and may not be comfortable in discussing their issues outside of their family
  - Acknowledge men's courage in being prepared to discuss issues
  - Ask men what exercises they are comfortable with (for example, role playing, discussion)
  - Give men choices in activities

- Be conscious and careful of program content and structure, to take account of the fact that men tend to be oral/visual learners and may get less from written materials
- Do not assume good literacy skills in all groups
- Combine discussion with active use of visual resources
- Use task-focused, problem-solving activities (brainstorming, suggestion circle) rather than open-ended discussion of feelings. Use the group to help you provide practical ideas and skills.
- Value the role of the parent who has ongoing responsibility for child support and emphasise the importance of financial and emotional support to the person in this role
- Acknowledge that parenting at a distance carries with it feelings of loss
- Note Amato's (1998) concept of 'healthy authoritative parenting' which combines a high level of parental support to children (warmth, responsiveness, everyday assistance) combined with non-coercive, rule-setting and appropriate discipline
- Teach and model respectful negotiating and conflict resolution skills
- Refer fathers to skill-building and advocacy programs which support these approaches (for example, men's support groups, play groups for fathers and their children, counselling and support programs that demystify Family Court procedures around contact, residency and parenting orders, and men's anger management programs)
- Ensure confidentiality and safety.

In summary, in working with men it is important to:

- Expect them to be motivated and committed to positive outcomes
- Convey that sometimes there are no short cuts or easy solutions
- Value men's experience and build on their strengths.

## Issues to consider to avoid trips

In planning groups and programs it is important to consider:

- The safety of group facilitators and group members
- Accessibility of the program geographically, economically and culturally
- The need for administrative support to handle telephone inquiries, undertake follow-up, registration, prepare handouts, reminder letters, name tags, course materials
- The value of networking with relevant community organisations in planning and promoting the program
- Ways of contacting organisations which may be able to refer participants to your program
- Choosing a time that maximises attendance of the target group
- Session and program length. Families have many demands made on their time. Choose between one-off sessions or a series of four sessions. A session of one and a half hours duration seems to work well.
- Choice of venue and how convenient, acceptable and comfortable it will be for the target group
- Whether or not to provide child care
- The size of the group (fewer than five may be too small, more than 20 is probably too large for one facilitator)
- The cost of the program for participants
- The gender of participants
- The mix of people in the group (if participants find others in the group who

are dealing with similar issues, they are more likely to feel positive)

- Implementing intake process to ensure a more homogenous mix in the program
- The language used in the promotional material (it needs to be inclusive and appropriate to different socio-economic and culturally diverse groups)
- Attitude barriers to enrolment and continued attendance.

It is helpful if marketing messages address issues that participants might feel anxious about, such as:

- How much will I have to contribute?
- Will I be made to look stupid?
- Will somebody be telling me how to run my life?
- Who will lead the program?
- What will they be like?
  - their gender?
  - their manner, style and value systems?
  - their life experiences?
  - their group facilitation skills?
  - their knowledge and expertise in the content of this program?
  - their capacity to respect and adhere to the principles of confidentiality?

## Tips for facilitating effective groups

It's important that facilitators:

- Clearly identify the objectives of the group
- Ask the group for help to set group rules
- Adhere to the session times
- Have a variety of activities to suit different learning styles of individuals
- Choose the content to advance the objectives
- Think carefully about the order of sessions (build trust before tackling the more difficult issues)
- Have some fun or relaxation activities, through warm-ups and energising tasks which also advance the content
- Provide coffee or supper at a convenient break or at the end of the session, when one-on-one discussion can be achieved if required
- Provide certificates to acknowledge involvement, contribution or participation
- Address pressing issues early
- Provide a resource kit for participants including booklists
- Allow scope for individuals to move at their own pace
- Allow couples time to connect and reflect about the issues raised.  
Repartnering groups are groups of couples not groups of individuals
- Provide a variety of individual, couple, small group, gender group and whole group opportunities.

It is important that facilitators:

- Raise consciousness and extend participant's understanding while not imposing their views on the group
- Respect participants' thoughts, abilities and strategies
- Are aware of their own personal boundaries (for example, they are acting as facilitators not counsellors)
- Equip participants so that they can undertake work outside the group
- Are aware of the group's boundaries
- Allow each group member to have their own experience, yet draw out the similarities and differences in participants' experiences
- Use the language of participants where possible and appropriate
- Do not use jargon, abbreviations or language which is not inclusive
- Monitor the progress of the group
- Have access to appropriate professional support
- Are knowledgeable about referral options should participants need or request referral to other organisations for specific services.

Families need to know how to access a range of resources, for example, information, support, education and counselling. Resources vary across states and regions. Some are general services, and others are specific, such as women's and men's phone lines, groups for single mothers and single fathers, and groups for stepfamilies.

The existence of a service is no guarantee of its quality, expertise, value base and assumptions, and it is recommended that individuals make their own assessments and develop their own lists of resources. Local networks will be useful sources of up-to-date information.

The following list of services is by no means exhaustive but may be useful.

## Centrelink

Phone: 13 6150

Website: <http://www.centrelink.gov.au>

## Kids Help Line

A national telephone counselling service for children and adolescents.

Phone: 1800 55 1800 for counselling or to access their national database of service providers.

Website: <http://www.kidshelp.com.au>

## Lifeline Australia National Resource Database

A national database listing family resource organisations in each state.

Phone: 13 1114, and your call will automatically be directed to the nearest Lifeline centre, where a crisis counsellor will respond to your referral request.

## Department of Family and Community Services

Website: <http://www.facs.gov.au>

## Family Court of Australia

Website: <http://www.familycourt.gov.au>

## Family Relationship Services

A national website of the Family Relationship Services Program, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra. It lists community-based programs funded by the Department in each state. For example, marriage and relationship counselling and education, family skills training, adolescent mediation and family therapy, family and child mediation, contact services, men in family relationships' services the family violence research and intervention project, and the community development officer project.

Website: <http://law.gov.au/FRB/directory.html>

## RELATE course database

A guide to Commonwealth funded marriage and relationship education courses, available Australia wide.

Website: <http://www.relate.gov.au>

Parent line: 132 289

## Child Support Agency

CSA's role is to help separated parents meet their child support responsibilities. Its service ranges from providing information to help parents manage their child support responsibilities through to working out, registering and collecting child support payments.

Phone: 131 272

Website: <http://www.csa.gov.au>