



BREAKING THE CYCLE OF TRAUMA
KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US



Healing Foundation

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF TRAUMA KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US INTRODUCTION

→ WHY KOORI PARENTING?

The counselling team at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) recognises that many Aboriginal parents have experienced trauma in their lives, including both childhood trauma and historical trauma and loss resulting from colonisation. Many parents believe that trauma is passed down the generations, and that this 'intergenerational trauma' can have a big impact on children and parents' wellbeing and make healthy parenting hard. The good news is that many parents have been able to break the cycle of trauma. Yet, information to help parents break the cycle of trauma is scarce.

→ BACKGROUND

Koori parenting: What works for us is part of a 12 month trauma education project, funded by The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation in 2013. Staff from VAHS and other Koori agencies helped manage the project, which also included staff training and education.

→ WHO SAYS WHAT WORKS?

Koori parents who have experienced healing and are breaking the cycle of trauma with their own families were invited to yarn about parenting and what strategies work for them. **Koori parenting: What works for us** are the findings from yarning circles with seven Koori parents.

→ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VAHS would like to acknowledge the Koori parents who participated in the yarning circles and the project reference group, including representatives from VAHS, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

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Based on findings from the Trauma Education Project Parenting Yarning Circles

For more information, or to request postcards containing further parenting strategies identified by Koori parents during the yarning circles, please call the VAHS Family Counselling Service on (03) 9403 3300



KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US SAFETY



→ SAFE PEOPLE AND PLACES

- Creating a safe-haven at home to allow our kids to be kids.
- Shielding our kids from intense negative emotions and conflict.
- Refraining from physically punishing our kids.
- Being willing to leave abusive relationships.
- Making sure our kids have always got plenty to eat.
- Not exposing our kids to alcohol or drugs
- Taking our kids to safe, drug and alcohol free community events.
- Not leaving our kids alone with adults we don't know or trust.
- Respecting our kids' choice if they don't want to kiss or cuddle people.

→ SAFE CONVERSATIONS

- Encouraging our kids to tell us their concerns, and acting on these.
- Talking to our kids about unsafe situations, touching and secrets.
- Teaching our kids to leave unsafe situations and tell someone they trust.
- Talking to our kids about peer pressure, the impact of substance abuse, and why we try to protect them.
- Sharing information about unsafe people with family members.
- Only talking to our kids about 'hard truths' when they are ready.
- Telling our partners if they are being too harsh on our kids.

KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US HEALTHY MIND



→ SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND REFLECTION

- Understanding and healing our own trauma for our children's sake.
- Being aware of how our own trauma can impact on our parenting.
- Recognising that stress and pressure is a part of parenting.
- Checking in with ourselves, and asking 'Is this the kind of life I want to give to my children?' 'Am I heading the right way?'.
- Accepting our selves and our self worth.
- Trusting our instincts and staying true to who we are.
- Observing and learning from our own and others' experiences.

→ DEVELOPING A STRONG MIND

- Practicing self-discipline and self-control.
- Rehearsing things in our mind before acting.

- Using positive self-talk and reminders - e.g., 'I'm doing the best I can'.
- Countering the badness in the world by recognising the goodness and innocence in our children.

→ MANAGING TRAUMA RESPONSES

- Understanding what situations trigger our trauma responses.
- Learning to respond, not to react
- Working out what situations trigger things like flashbacks and rehearsing in our mind what we will do when it happens again.
- Trying to observe flashbacks from a distance and not react.
- Using counselling to help make sense of things.
- If we feel overwhelmed and zone out at times, we acknowledge it when it happens and then gently bring ourselves back.

KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US HEALTHY EMOTIONS



→ POSITIVE EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Making sure we take time out if we are upset, and then 'getting back out there'.
- Remembering those we have lost, without forgetting those here.
- Seeing goodness in ourselves and others and trying to understand and forgive.
- Being open and caring with family, and accepting love and support.
- Giving ourselves permission to heal.
- Learning to trust life.

→ MANAGING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

- Remembering bad things can happen to good people and not blaming ourselves for our past trauma.
- Talking about instead of acting out anger with our kids.
- Letting our anger out safely through exercise, or other means.
- Taking time out to calm down.
- Being able to feel our grief and loss without being destructive.

KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US HEALTHY PARENTING

→ LOVE, RESPECT AND BOUNDARIES

- Working at loving and accepting our kids, for who they are.
- Balancing affection with firm but fair discipline.
- Showing our kids how to feel difficult emotions without reacting.
- Giving our kids routine and structure.
- Sticking to our guns about what's right and wrong.
- Being able to say no to our kids and follow through.
- Being flexible and remembering things change.
- Being prepared to take the good with the bad with our partner.
- Having confidence in our abilities, and demonstrating our strengths, to our kids.

→ RESPONSIBLE, NOT PERFECT

- Aiming for responsible, but not perfect parenting.
- Acknowledging our efforts and achievements.
- Letting our kids see we are human and make mistakes.
- Being able to own our mistakes and say sorry to our kids
- Talking about our regrets with our kids as they get older.
- Acting in ways that make us feel proud.



➔ ALLOWING AND TEACHING INDEPENDENCE

- Adapting our parenting as our kids grow up.
- Trusting our kids to be independent, but keeping an eye on them.
- Distracting ourselves from worrying about our kids too much.
- Allowing our kids to make their own decisions and mistakes.
- Giving our kids more responsibility.
- Teaching our kids how to deal with conflict.

➔ GUIDING WITHOUT CONTROLLING

- Trying not to over parent and overcompensate.
- Remembering we can't always control our kids' lives.
- Being able to stand back and sometimes hold our tongue.
- Letting our kids stand on their own two feet.
- Encouraging our kids to question their own choices.
- Allowing our kids to express their emotions in a safe way.
- Allowing our kids to form their own views and relationship with ex-partners, instead of running ex-partners down.

KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US HEALTHY ACTIONS



→ SELF-CARE

- Taking time out alone - having a rest, taking a walk, or a day off.
- Leaving work at work, to allow more headspace for home.
- Writing things down to help plan, and focus on one thing at a time.
- Managing financial stress by prioritising important expenses, and being willing to say no or compromise on kids demands.
- Maintaining and reaching out to at least one close friend or connection, instead of cutting off.
- Avoiding reading and hearing about too much violence and trauma.
- Not taking on other people's issues.

→ COMMUNICATION

- Being open and honest, even about topics we are afraid to raise.
- Communicating how we feel to our kids.
- Sharing our problems with close family or someone we trust.
- Being careful about how much of our own trauma we share with our children, or people we don't know well.

KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US HISTORY AND EDUCATION



→ BREAKING THE CYCLE OF TRAUMA

→ JOINING THE DOTS

- Trying to understand our parent's trauma and cycles of trauma.
- Understanding that our parents might be better grandparents than they were parents because they've healed in later life.
- Trying to accept and enjoy our parents healing rather than get angry or resentful.
- Allowing for differences in parenting across generations.
- Learning and teaching our history to our kids.

- Grieving, and if possible accepting the loss of what we might have missed out on as a child.
- Learning from other parents in situations we are unsure about.
- Acknowledging even small breaks in the trauma cycle.
- Not making promises to our kids that we can't keep.
- Not protecting abusive partners/parents.
- Not modelling our parent's negative behaviour. Learning from their mistakes and choosing a different path for our kids.

KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US HEALTHY CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

→ MAINTAINING AND RENEWING CULTURE

- Being able to identify our cultural values.
- Understanding our cultural responsibilities, obligations and roles.
- Encouraging schooling and education.
- Educating our kids about cultural loss without damaging them.
- Encouraging cultural healing, not bitterness and anger.
- Being cultural teachers of the way of life for our children.
- Learning how to renew cultural knowledge, practices and values.
- Encouraging our kids to have cultural experiences that we missed out on.
- Providing our kids with opportunities to feel pride and learn about Aboriginal culture
- Pushing for learning about Aboriginal culture in schools.
- Using Koori organisations to help kids find out who their mob are.
- Taking kids home to country, connecting them to country.
- Connecting kids with Elders and the community to overcome cultural losses.
- Helping our kids to define their own cultural identity and allowing them to embody the best of all of their cultural heritages.
- Being a role model in the community.



→ DEALING WITH COMMUNITY VIOLENCE (LATERAL VIOLENCE)

- Understanding that lateral violence exists within our own mob and community, and that we can be our own worst enemy.
- Brushing negative comments off.
- Affirming our own truths and views about our culture.
- Remembering that others are entitled to their own opinions and perceptions, even if we don't agree.
- Not tolerating inappropriate community behaviour, especially where our kids' safety is concerned.
- Protecting ourselves by taking a step back from a situation when needed, and not reacting.
- Practicing being calm.
- Recognising both the strengths and dysfunction within community.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF TRAUMA

KEY THEMES FROM THE TRAUMA EDUCATION PROJECT PARENTING YARNING CIRCLES

SAFETY

- Safe people & places
- Safe conversations

HISTORY AND EDUCATION

- Joining the dots
- Breaking the cycle of trauma

HEALTHY MIND

- Self-acceptance & reflection
- Developing a strong mind
- Managing trauma responses

KOORI PARENTING: WHAT WORKS FOR US

HEALTHY CULTURE & COMMUNITY

- Maintaining & renewing culture
- Dealing with community violence (lateral violence)

HEALTHY EMOTIONS

- Positive emotional skills
- Managing negative emotions

HEALTHY PARENTING

- Love & respect
- Responsible, not perfect
- Guiding & letting go

HEALTHY ACTIONS

- Self-care
- Communication



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