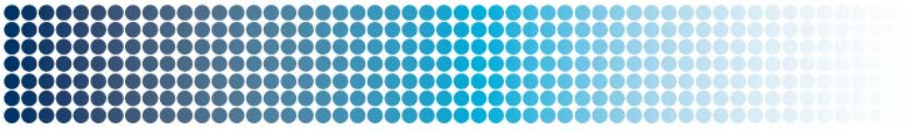**ATTACHMENT** [**SW 1**]
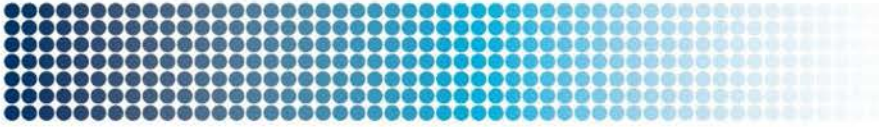
This is the attachment marked "[**SW 1**]" referred to in the witness statement of Susan Annette West and Timothy Gerard Moore dated 11 August 2015.

THE PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE:
Background Information

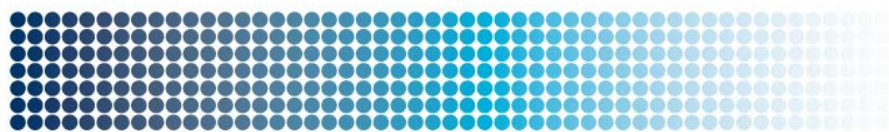### Centre for Community Child Health

January 2015

For further information, contact:

Dr. Tim Moore, Senior Research Fellow

███████████████████

Di Halloran, Senior Project Officer

███████████████████

Centre for Community Child Health
Murdoch Childrens Research Institute
The Royal Children's Hospital
50 Flemington Road, Parkville, Victoria, Australia 3052

www.rch.org.au/ccch

THE PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE

Extract from

Centre for Community Child Health (2013). **The Parent Engagement Resource: A handbook for practitioners.** Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Royal Children's Hospital.

> *NB. This extract provides background information only regarding the Parent Engagement Resource. The material it contains should not be used in direct work with parents without access to the full handbook and training in its use.*

## 1: About the Parent Engagement Resource (PER)

Why has the PER been developed?

The *Parent Engagement Resource* (PER) is designed to support practitioners who work with the families of young children. The resource aims to assist practitioners with early identification of factors that are known to adversely affect a child's wellbeing and development.

Practitioners, policymakers, and parents are becoming increasingly aware that the family, neighbourhood and wider social environment profoundly influence children's development and wellbeing. Many psychosocial issues that are known to compromise child development are common in society, complex in nature, and may be both challenging and costly to change. Many of these psychosocial issues are not being addressed in current practice.

Many children continue to live in difficult circumstances, in environments that may potentially impact negatively on their development. There have been increasing calls from professional bodies, academics and others that identifying and responding to these issues ought to be a fundamental aspect of the work of practitioners who work with children and their families (Hall and Elliman, 2003; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003).

Engaging parents well so that they feel genuinely listened to and an equal partner in the helping relationship remains a challenge for many practitioners. Many practitioners believe they are expected to find solutions to the problems or concerns being presented in the helping process. However, the failure of parents to follow through with referrals may be attributed to the willingness of the practitioner to find the solution without a real understanding of the parents' situation. The solution may not meet the parents' belief or values, or they may not feel able to follow through due to a lack of time, energy and resources. A more active role in the decision-making process may support parents to find their own solutions (McWilliam, 2010).
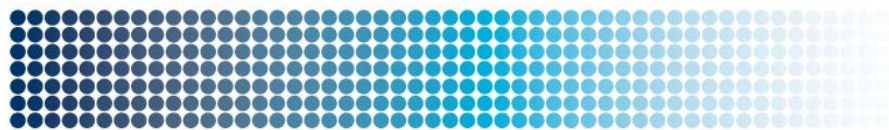
Although there is generally increased knowledge around the factors that influence child development, service providers, practitioners and parents continue to struggle with 'the 'how to' of responding appropriately to challenging issues. At this time, there are few universally applicable tools available to assist practitioners in early identification of psychosocial issues.

The Parent Engagement Resource aims to:

- support practitioners to develop effective partnerships with parents
- identify early the wide-ranging and complex psychosocial issues that impact on children
- sensitively and safely raise and discuss these issues, and
- help promote effective responses to any concerns raised.

Principles and practices underpinning the PER

The issues covered in this resource are complex and potentially very sensitive. The PER approach is based on extensive research and and experiential knowledge of best practice. This approach endeavours to promote effective parent-practitioner relationships in order to promote positive child outcomes.

A fundamental aspect of the PER is acknowledging that families are diverse in nature, different in size and composition, marital status, ethnic and cultural background, sexual orientation of parents, biological relationship to the child, religion, and socioeconomic and employment status. Importantly, the PER considers that what matters is the *nature* of the family relationships, and the way in which a family is able to support child wellbeing and development, rather than the *type* of family (Lamb, 2012).

Additionally, the nature of the parent-practitioner relationship is important. To effectively support families, practitioners need to build supportive, positive, and non-judgemental relationships based on trust and respect, irrespective of family dynamics. Communication with families needs to focus on promoting trust, respect and a sense of equality—the quality and content of the communicative exchanges between families and practitioners 'what is said, what is not said and how and when the messages are exchanged' will form the basis of an effective parent-practitioner relationship (McWilliam, 2010). Practitioners also need to have an understanding of the hardship that many families face.

The following principles and practices underpin the *Parent Engagement Resource*:
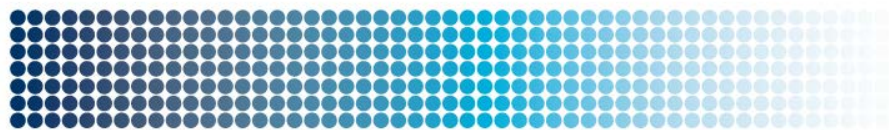
- Do no harm

  – Practitioners treat families and family members with dignity and respect and use a non-judgemental approach.

  – Services strive to make an appropriate and acceptable response available for all issues raised and consider the safety of all people involved (children, family members, and practitioners) to be paramount.

- Parents know their children and family best, and want to do the best for them.

  – Practitioners acknowledge and respect the family's expert knowledge of the child and the family circumstances as complementing their own professional expertise.

  – Practitioners seek to build partnerships with parents as a means to improving outcomes for children and families.

- All families have strengths and competencies.

  – Practitioners adopt a strengths-based perspective, acknowledging and building on existing family strengths.

- All families are different and come from diverse ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

  – Practitioners are sensitive and responsive to each family's ethnic and socioeconomic diversity and consider the issues of equity and inclusion.

- Child development is influenced by the dynamic relationship between the child, family and the wider community and environment.

  – Practitioners use an ecological model to understand and promote childhood development.

- Children and their families are entitled to effective, accessible and well-coordinated services.

  – Services form strong links with other generic and specialist child and family services to ensure that the needs of all families in the community are addressed in a well-coordinated fashion.

  – Services place a greater emphasis on prevention, promotion and early intervention and on reducing inequalities.

  – Service delivery continually improves as new information and new ways of working are identified.
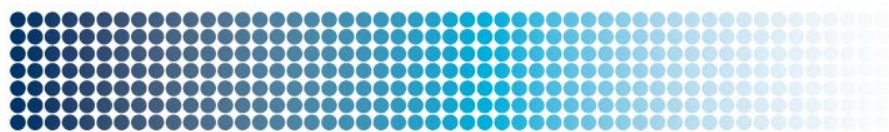
Taking a different approach

Many screening tools—such as Parents Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS), Brigance, and the Ages Stages Questionnaire—are designed to identify children's developmental and behavioural problems/concerns at an earlier stage. The *Parent Engagement Resource* allows practitioners to focus attention towards underlying psychosocial issues that may lead to adverse child developmental outcomes.

Research on PEDS has confirmed the utility of and validity of a parent-based method to elicit parent concerns about child development (Glascoe, 2000). Together with the benefits of simplicity and brevity, eliciting parent concerns is empowering to parents and is a collaborative and family-centred approach to identifying developmental problems. Establishing a genuine partnership between parents and practitioners is also more likely to result in conditions that support long-term beneficial changes and action.

Psychosocial concerns may be particularly sensitive to address, and as such can be challenging for practitioners to raise in the therapeutic conversation. Most practitioners approach the discussion of these issues in an unstructured manner, often in the course of a routine contact. In some instances a more formal screening tool targeting a particular issue is used, e.g. the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), where there is concern around a mother developing perinatal depression.

The *Parent Engagement Resource* has been designed to support a family centred approach to parent concerns, as modelled in the Parents Evaluation of Developmental Status tool. The *Parent Engagement Resource* addresses 12 psychosocial issues that are known to negatively impact the health, development and wellbeing of children. Through focusing on the child, parents are encouraged to feel more able to discuss these potentially personal and sensitive issues. The resource aims to provide practitioners with a constructive and practical response to the psychosocial issues that divert a parent's energy and attention away from the task of parenting. This approach does not take a judgmental approach or apportion blame.

2: Key features of the PER

The PER domains

The *Parent Engagement Resource* aims to support practitioners to better respond to the complex needs of families in domains such as parent health and wellbeing, parenting capacity, family functioning and family circumstances. Potentially, there are many issues that impact on children that could be included in this resource.

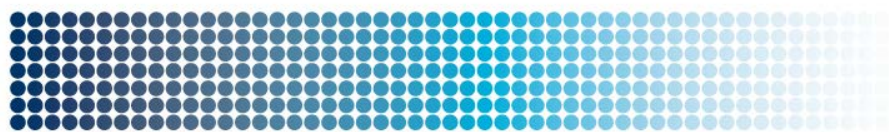The 12 psychosocial issues considered in this resource are: social support; finances; housing; employment; family physical health; parent mental health; parenting; child neglect; alcohol and substance abuse; family relationships; family violence; child abuse.

The criteria used in selecting the psychosocial issues to address were:

- importance of the issues—relatively common and there is evidence of a strong and consistent link with poor outcomes in child or family functioning

- under identification of the issue—currently not being well detected or addressed

- modifiable nature of the issue—the issue has a direct effect on the child and family, it is not merely an indicator of future risk, and an effective and acceptable service response is available.

Any issues that exist within a family are best viewed within that family's context and history. Many of these issues arise due to the interaction of individual, family, community or societal influences. These issues may also coexist in families. Their detrimental effects on children are cumulative. For practitioners, this means that many families with children—particularly vulnerable, disadvantaged families—will be facing the substantial challenge of having to address multiple, co-existing issues.

The origins of many of the 12 issues considered in the PER are external to the family. Their occurrence is related to wider socioeconomic, political and/or environmental factors. Presented with such complex situations, practitioners may sometimes feel a sense of helplessness about being able to effectively intervene at a family level. The solutions do not lie solely in the hands of individual practitioners; action is necessary at other levels. However, there are multiple ways in which practitioners can provide families with meaningful assistance; assistance that can benefit children and families now. By aiming to assist families in the here and now, in a positive and supportive manner, the parent-practitioner relationship may also strengthen, leading to improved outcomes in all areas in which the practitioner is working with the family. Furthermore, implementing this approach across a service network may potentially provide information on the extent of the issue in the community, raise awareness and prompt advocacy initiatives.
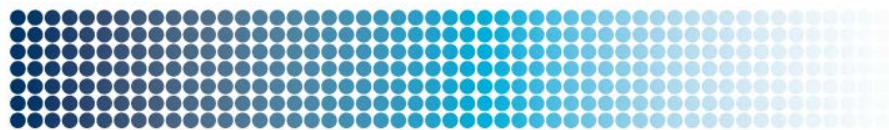
The PER approach

The Parent Engagement Resource is:

- practical — assists practitioners to engage in a conversation with parents about the psychosocial issues that influence child development

- universal — a comprehensive tool designed for practitioners to use with all families

- collaborative — involves practitioners working in partnership with parents.

The resource is not:

- a scientifically validated screening instrument

- an instrument requiring complex, specialist administration

- a tool requiring the practitioner to be proficient at treating or managing concerns/problems themselves or in isolation

- a tool for the purpose of identifying the presence of risk factors or determining which children are "at risk".

3: Using the PER—general guidelines

The *Parent Engagement Resource* has been developed so that it is simple and brief to use. However, the complex and sensitive nature of the issues require service networks and practitioners to prepare prior to implementing the resource.

Service fundamentals to support the PER in practice

Service providers are required to meet a number of requirements before the *Parent Engagement Resource* can be implemented. This section summarises these key requirements.

To successfully implement the *Parent Engagement Resource*, practitioners need to view the importance of engaging parents as a fundamental component of their work, and services need to take steps to support their practitioners to administer the resource as effectively as possible.

This will require service providers to:

- Engage with the local community and increase knowledge of the characteristics and needs of the local community. This may involve engaging a range of parents in small groups or individually to discuss local issues and concerns.

- Establish referral options and referral pathways according to the local context and the locally available services and resources. In order for the resource to assist practitioners effectively and to respond

Centre for Community Child Health
The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne
50 Flemington Road Parkville Victoria 3052 Australia
TELEPHONE +61 9345 6150
EMAIL enquiries.ccch@rch.org.au
www.rch.org.au/ccch
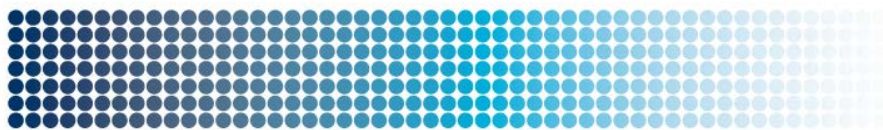
appropriately to family needs, it is crucial that referral pathways are well established and well coordinated. This requires knowledge about local resources, services and facilities (Government, non-government and private sector) and to establish collaborative, effective working relationships and referral pathways with other local service providers. Ideally, gaps in current service provision should be identified and addressed.

- Work to establish a professional support model, which may be a combination of reflective practice sessions, peer group review, or formal supervision for all practitioners applying the PER. Issues may arise during conversations with parents. However, the resource does not intend for practitioners to manage these issues in isolation, but to encourage practitioners to feel confident to refer a parent to a suitable service when necessary. However, there may be instances where a practitioner is unsure of how to proceed. A system of formal backup for practitioners must be in place prior to commencing the administration of the resource. This includes ensuring sufficient time and an appropriate space for practitioners to implement the key questions. In light of their roles and responsibilities, administrative and auxiliary staff may benefit from an introduction to the resource and associated referral processes. Administrative and auxiliary staff may also have a role in supporting practitioners to respond to potentially high-risk situations that may occur in some cases if there are serious safety concerns and an urgent referral is needed.

- Inform families of the service's commitment to timely and appropriate support. Services may need to introduce innovative methods of getting their service message across to the community.

- Work towards being more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

- Work towards being more responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families.

- Work towards being more able to address the needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged or socially isolated groups.

- Have in place a service-wide action plan to manage high-risk situations. For example, management of abusive clients.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Legislation: Each state in Australia has legislation mandating certain professionals to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to Child Protection Services. Each service is required to ensure that practitioners comply with this important legislation.
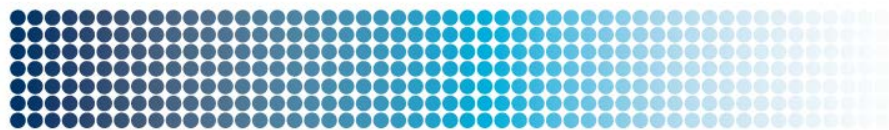
PER training and education framework

Prior to administering the resource, practitioners need to complete the following components of the *Parent Engagement Resource* training.

Component 1—compulsory pre-reading

Component 2—workshop

Practitioners are required to have well developed knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- the wider determinants of child development

- the factors that impact on children and families

- family-centred practice and how to establish a "partnership" with parents

- working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

This knowledge and understanding needs to be underpinned by well-developed communication and inter-personal skills.

4: Parent engagement questions

Overview

There have been 16 questions developed to address a range of psychosocial issues.

Introductory Cluster

1. "*What are some of the things that you and your child/baby enjoy together?*"

2. "*What do you think you're good at, or do well as a family/parent?*"

Social Support Cluster

3. Every parent needs someone to talk to, to do things with, or to help out or to look after their child.
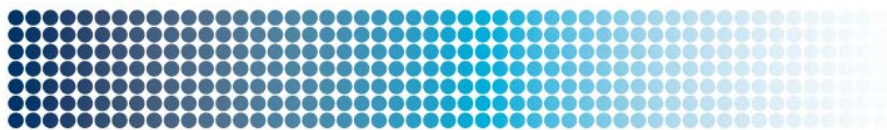
   "*Do you have any concerns that your child is being affected because you don't have enough contact with or support from others?*"

4. We know that parenting is more difficult if you don't have enough money for everyday things such as food, clothing or bills.
*Other financial needs you may find more relevant to list: heating, transport, health care, school and leisure activities, bills or debt repayment.

"Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected because there is not enough money such things?"

5. Raising a family can be difficult when you have problems with homelessness or housing. You might be worried about keeping your home or having to share your home, or having a house that's too crowded, or in need of repair.

"Do you have any concerns that your child or family is being affected because of such problems with housing?"

6. It's always worrying when someone in the family has problems finding or keeping a job, having insecure employment or a job that is not family-friendly.

"Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected by such difficulties?"

Parenting Cluster

7. Parenting can be more difficult if parents have any serious physical health issues or disabilities, such as chronic disease, child birth related issues, physical disability or caring for another person.

"Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected by your own physical health or disability or that of another family member?

8. It's not unusual for parents to feel emotional, depressed, angry, anxious, exhausted or even have strange thoughts such as harming yourself or others.
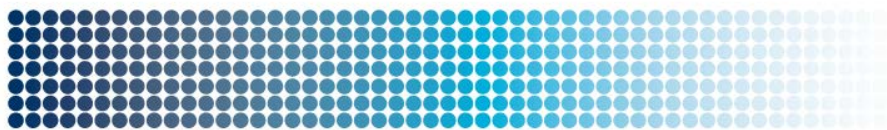
"Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected by you having any of these feelings?

9. Being a parent involves loving and caring for your child, managing daily routines, meeting your child's physical and emotional needs, and managing your child's behaviour.

 "Do you have any concerns that your child is being affected by the way you and your partner manage these things?"

10. We know that children's development can be disrupted or impaired by being neglected. This includes being left to look after themselves too much, not having their needs met, or being given too much responsibility for their age.

 "Do you ever have concerns that your child is being affected by any of these things?"

Relationships Cluster

11. We have learnt that using drugs and alcohol can affect how well parents care for their children.

 "Do you have any concerns that your child is being affected because someone in your family is drinking alcohol or using drugs?"

12. We have learnt that children's development can be affected or harmed by repeated disagreements or conflict between family and loved ones, which may be left unresolved.

 "Do you have any concerns that your child is being affected by conflict or tension between any members of the family?"

13. We have learnt that children's development can be affected or harmed by repeated exposure to frightening behaviour. This might be threats, bullying, yelling, screaming, putting people down, hitting, slapping, kicking, or punching.

 "Do you have any concerns that your child might be seeing or hearing behaviour that frightens them?"

14. We have learnt that children's development can be badly affected by direct physical, emotional and sexual harm.
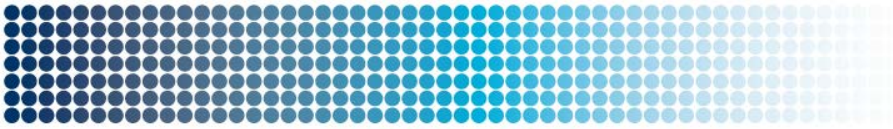
"Do you ever have concerns that your child is being harmed or hurt by anyone?"

Centre for Community Child Health
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Closing Questions Cluster

15. *"Do you have any other concerns about your child's or family's wellbeing?"*

16. *"Thinking about what would most make a difference to your child, if you could change one thing in your life or in your family, what would it be?"*