



Northern
Territory
Government

Tune in to Little Ones

A cartoon illustration of a family of three. A woman with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a red dress, is holding a baby. A man with light skin and short hair, wearing a green shirt, is standing next to her. The baby is wearing a yellow shirt. They are all smiling. The illustration is enclosed in a red circle.

Worker Resource Manual

Information and ideas to help workers to:

- © understand the needs of little ones under two years old
- © know how to best support little ones and their families

About the Tune in to Little Ones kit

The **Tune in to Little Ones** kit has been developed by the Department of Children and Families as part of an initiative to focus on vulnerable infants. **Tune in to Little Ones** has five key elements (see back page) that aim to strengthen service responses for those who work with vulnerable infants under 2 years old and their families. It has been produced in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

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Welcome

The **Tune in to Little Ones** resource kit aims to support and strengthen the way workers respond to vulnerable infants less than 2 years old (little ones) and their families.

Little ones grow, learn and develop faster in the first two years than at any other time. This means that abuse or neglect during these years can have significant and life-long effects on their physical, social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. What happens now (both good and bad) sets little ones up for life.

National child protection statistics show that infants under 2 years have the highest rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect, with the Northern Territory rate far greater than that of the rest of Australia.

If we want to reduce this rate and achieve the best possible outcomes for little ones and their families, we need to intervene EARLY to support families and PREVENT child abuse and neglect.

The best ways to do this are to:

- ① understand the needs of little ones; and
- ① know how to best support them and their families.

Tune in to Little Ones is designed to help workers to achieve this aim.

For more research and information on the issues covered in this kit, please visit the Department of Children and Families
www.childrenandfamilies.nt.gov.au



'Little ones' in this kit are children under 2 years old. They can also be referred to as infants, babies, bubs, babbies, tots, littlies or toddlers.

Tune in to Little Ones is for workers

Do you work in an area such as family support, family violence, child protection, mental health, child and family health, early childhood, alcohol and other drugs, community health or Out of Home Care?
and

Do you work with families who have little ones under 2 years old, or who are expecting the birth of a baby?

If so, then **Tune in to Little Ones** is for you.

Tune in to Little Ones is not designed for you to use directly with families. Instead, it has ideas and information that can help you to support them.

Here are some examples of workers in remote, urban and regional areas who might find this kit useful:

Community Child Safety and Wellbeing Team Practitioner
Community Health Nurse
Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Worker
Aboriginal Health Worker
Residential Care Worker
Family Support Worker
Women's Safe House Worker
Aboriginal Community Worker
Aboriginal Mental Health Worker
Child Protection Worker

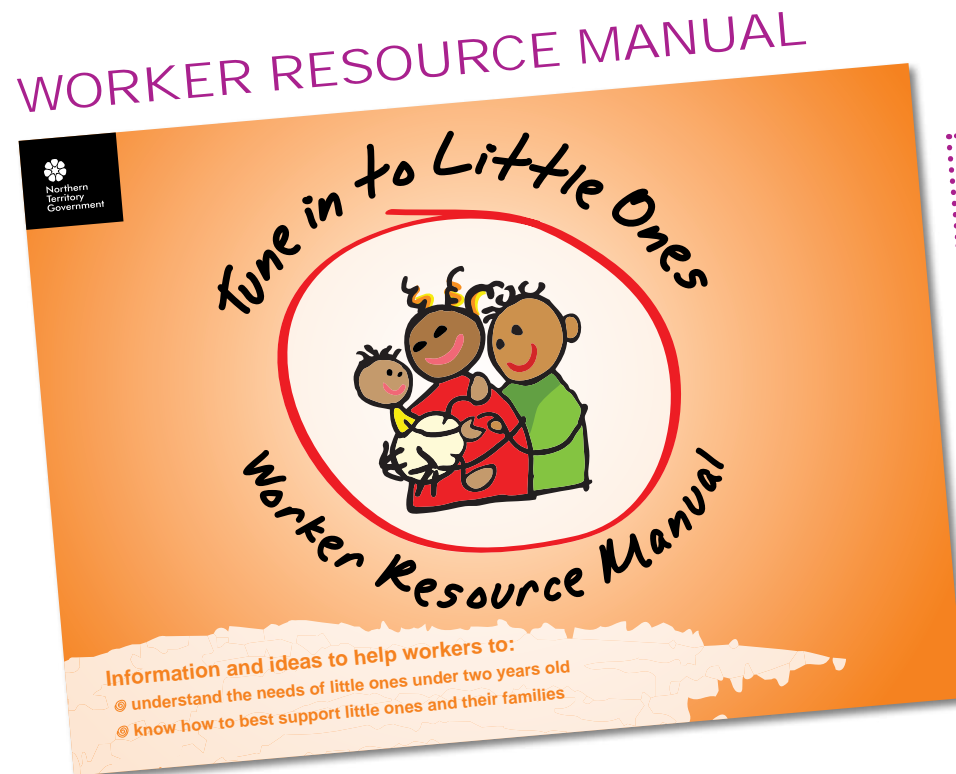
If you believe that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer abuse or neglect, contact the 24 hour free call number to make a child protection report 1800 700 250.

If you work with adults in an area such as mental health or alcohol and other drugs, remember to think about their roles and needs as parents, and how they can best meet the needs of their children.

Parts of the kit

The ***Tune in to Little Ones*** kit has a number of parts. Some of these have useful information that can inform and support your work; while other parts you can use directly with families.

The *Worker Resource Manual*, the *Extra Concerns and How to Help* booklet and the *Healthy Development* booklet all have information based on research that can help you to understand the needs of little ones and to work out how you can best support them and their families. They are not for direct use with families.



The first half of this manual has background information on the needs of vulnerable infants and families and how to work with them.

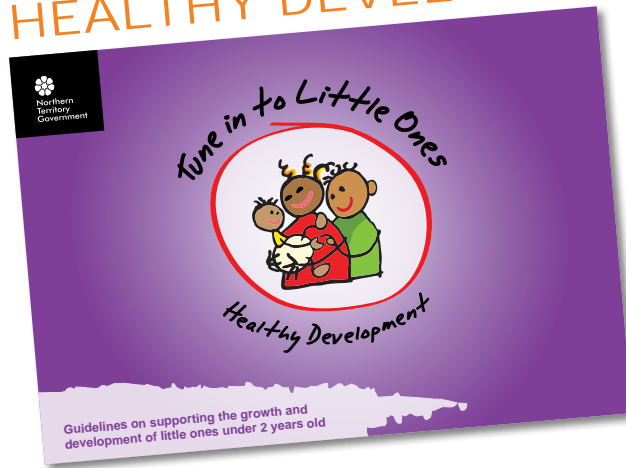
The second part can help you 'tune in' to the specific needs of the families and infants you are working with. It also has strategies and ideas to help you support them.

This 'Worker Resource Manual' and the 'Extra Concerns and How to Help' booklet are for you to refer to as a worker. They are NOT for direct use with families.

Booklets

These booklets include ideas on how you can help parents and caregivers have close relationships with their little ones and promote their learning and development.

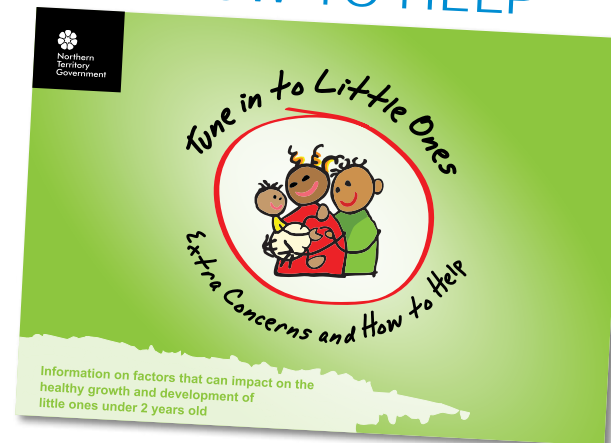
HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT



This booklet outlines what you can expect children under 2 years old to be doing as they grow and learn. It includes ways parents and caregivers can support and encourage their little one.

This booklet briefly describes a range of issues that can affect a child's healthy growth and development (e.g. Failure to Thrive, Toxic Stress, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder and Family Violence).

EXTRA CONCERNS AND HOW TO HELP

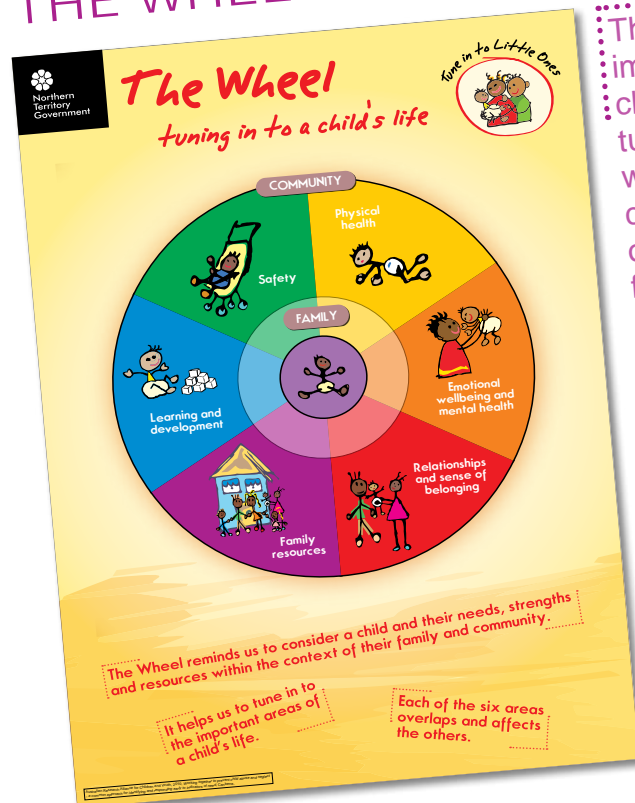


Parts of the kit

Posters

You can display these posters in your office or waiting room or make copies to give to families.

THE WHEEL



The Wheel poster looks at important areas in a young child's life that we need to tune in to. You can use it with families and others who care for or work with little ones to help you talk about a family's needs, strengths and resources.

The Worker Resource Manual goes into more detail about The Wheel from page 32.

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT CHILDREN



These messages help families and community know what's important to help children grow and learn. You can use the poster to talk with families about the importance of early childhood and brain development.

The Worker Resource Manual goes into more detail about the Key Messages about Children on page 18.

Brochures and flyers

You can share the following resources with families to support them in caring for their little one.

7 STEPS TO SAFETY



The 7 Steps to Safety kit has information and activities for families to work out ways to help children be and feel safe at home. You can download copies of each step from the NT Families Website. Steps 1 and 7 are particularly relevant for families with children under 2 years old.

Step 1: Make your place safe can help families work out ways to make their home physically safe for their little one.

Step 7: Make a care plan can help families think about what they want to happen if suddenly they can't care for their little one.

Download copies of 7 Steps to Safety from www.families.nt.gov.au.

NT FAMILIES WEBSITE



The NT Families Website (www.families.nt.gov.au) has about 80 Parent tip sheets that cover areas such as being a parent, toileting, discipline and child development from birth to teenage years. You can refer to them yourself, or print out relevant tip sheets for families and look through them together if required. For wallet cards promoting the website, call 1800 005 485.

PARENTLINE



Parentline (1300 30 1300) is a confidential parenting support, referral and advice telephone helpline that operates 8am–10pm seven days a week for the cost of a local call (mobile phone charges apply).

As a worker, you can call Parentline for advice on how you can support families with their parenting. You can also support caregivers by calling Parentline together, or give parents and caregivers information about Parentline. For brochures, magnets and wallet cards promoting Parentline contact 1800 005 485.

Working collaboratively



The ***Tune in to Little Ones*** kit encourages you to think about infants under 2 years old in the broader context of their family and community. This includes considering other services that may already be supporting the family, or that you can use to help you in your work. It is important that you identify ways you can work collaboratively with these services to ensure you work in the best possible way to support families.

Some examples are:

- 🌀 getting advice from an Aboriginal Mental Health Worker
- 🌀 working with a refugee centre to help a family connect with other families from their country of origin
- 🌀 doing a home visit with a Community Health Nurse
- 🌀 working with a playgroup coordinator to support a family to go to playgroup.

Information sharing

The *Care and Protection of Children Act* assists people in certain organisations to work collaboratively by allowing them to request and receive information from others to help a child and their family. People such as child care workers, safe house workers, registered foster carers and nurses can share information that relates to the safety and wellbeing of a child. Information should be shared sensitively and carefully and must remain confidential.

To find out more about who is able to share information and in what circumstances, go to www.informationsharing.nt.gov.au

Keeping children safe and well
is everybody's responsibility.
Information Sharing legislation
makes it clear how people
and organisations can share
information for child safety
and wellbeing.


Consent

It is good practice to seek and gain consent from a child or their family before discussing information about them with others, provided this does not place the child or another person at risk.

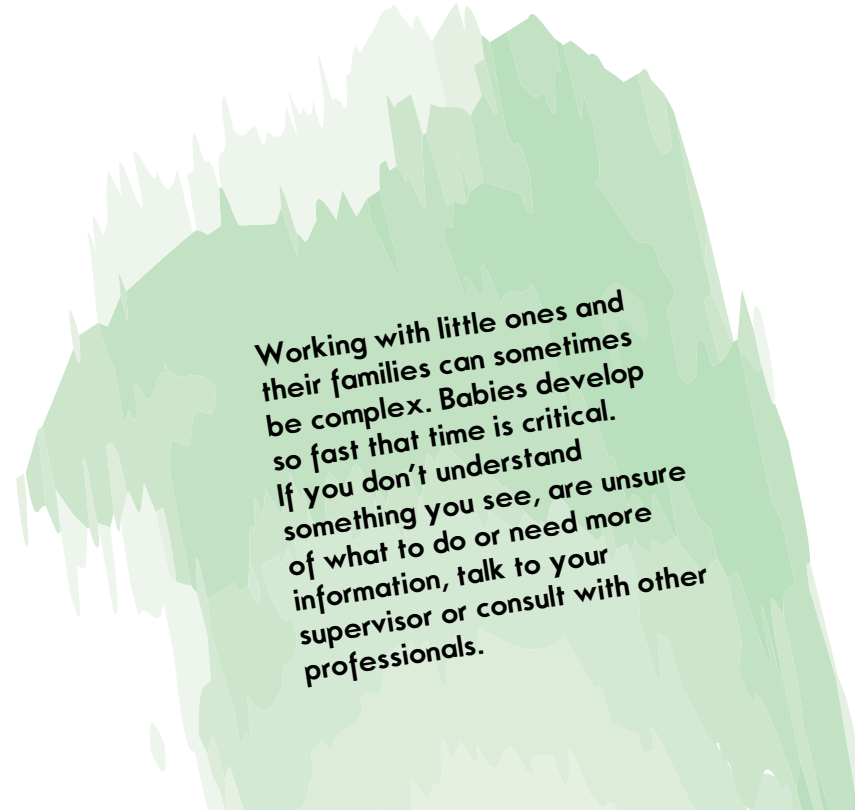
Two-way learning

Two-way learning is about how you share your culture and knowledge with another person. It involves respecting the knowledge, processes and perspectives of the other person while, at the same time, recognising that they are learning about another culture and knowledge system from you: you each share your knowledge and culture with the other.

Two-way learning occurs all the time as you work with families and with other services.



When you are working with Aboriginal families, consult with an Aboriginal Cultural Advisor or Aboriginal Community Worker.



Working with little ones and their families can sometimes be complex. Babies develop so fast that time is critical. If you don't understand something you see, are unsure of what to do or need more information, talk to your supervisor or consult with other professionals.

What does 'tuning in' mean?

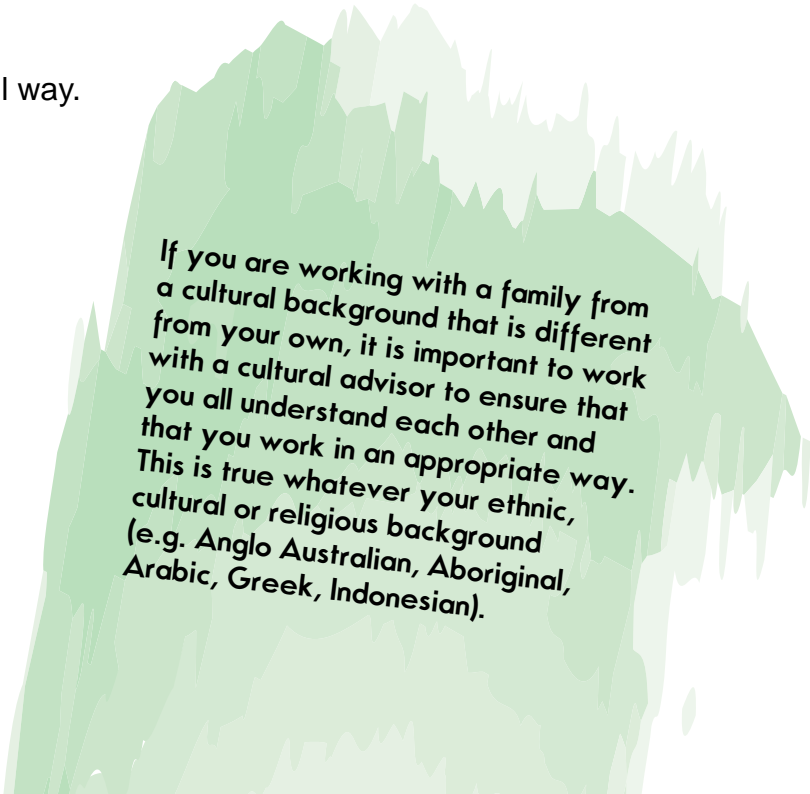
'Tuning in' is about how we listen to, look at, 'feel', imagine and think about the needs of others. If we do this well, we are more likely to understand and respond to people in the best way.

When parents and caregivers tune in to their little one, it can help them to really understand what is going on for them. This can help them to respond in a way that will best meet their little one's needs.

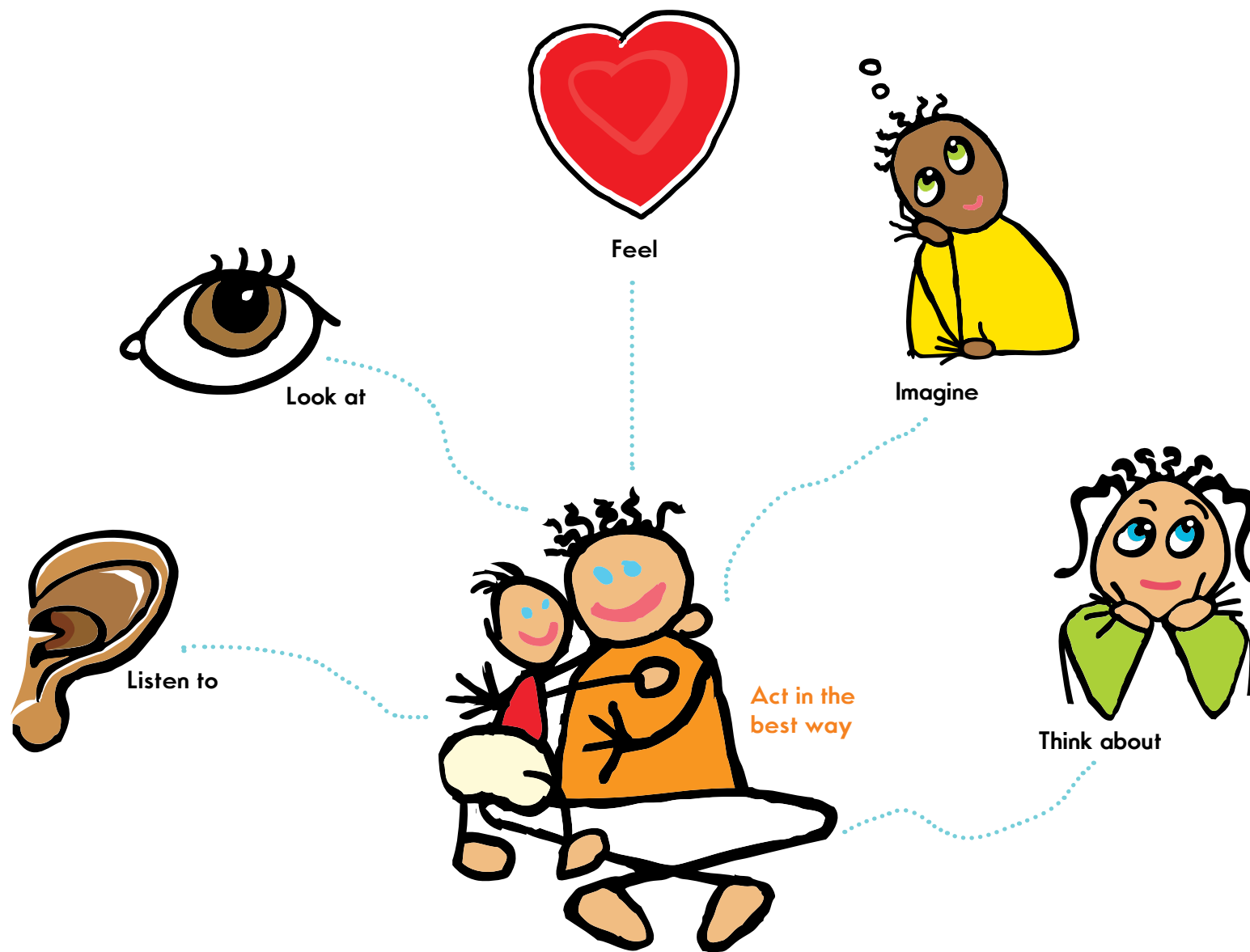
As workers, we also need to tune in to a family's:

- ⦿ needs
- ⦿ strengths
- ⦿ culture
- ⦿ ways of doing things
- ⦿ beliefs
- ⦿ supports
- ⦿ relationships.

This can help to make sure we support the family in a meaningful way.



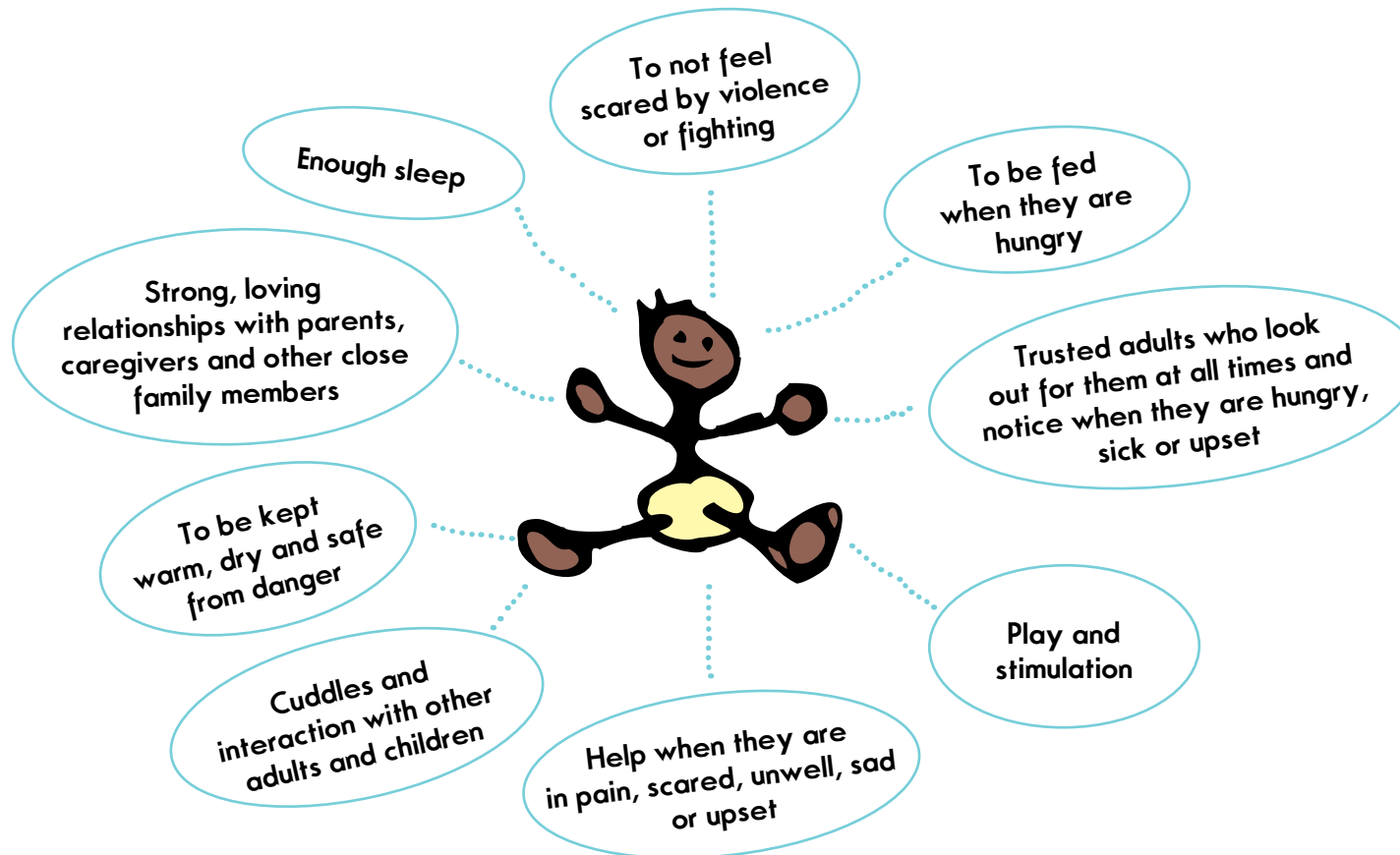
If you are working with a family from a cultural background that is different from your own, it is important to work with a cultural advisor to ensure that you all understand each other and that you work in an appropriate way. This is true whatever your ethnic, cultural or religious background (e.g. Anglo Australian, Aboriginal, Arabic, Greek, Indonesian).



Tuning in can help us to understand and respond well to others

Little Ones: What do they need?

Babies and little ones need love, attention, stimulation and care.

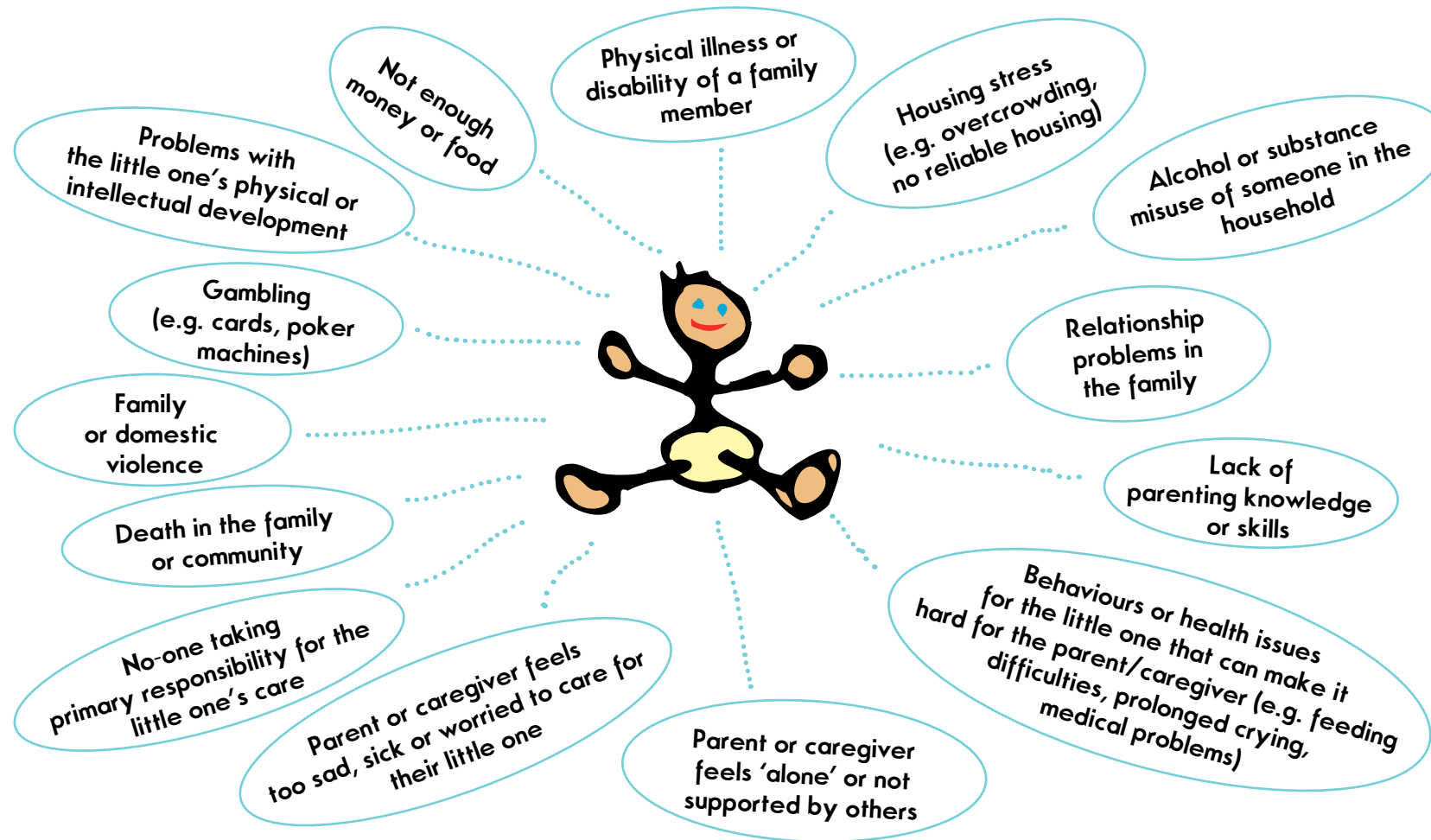


What little ones need

What makes them vulnerable?

Just *being* less than 2 years old makes a little one vulnerable – because they are physically fragile and depend completely on other people to keep them safe and to look after them.

But there are things that can happen in the life of a little one, or of those caring for them, which can make them even *more* vulnerable.



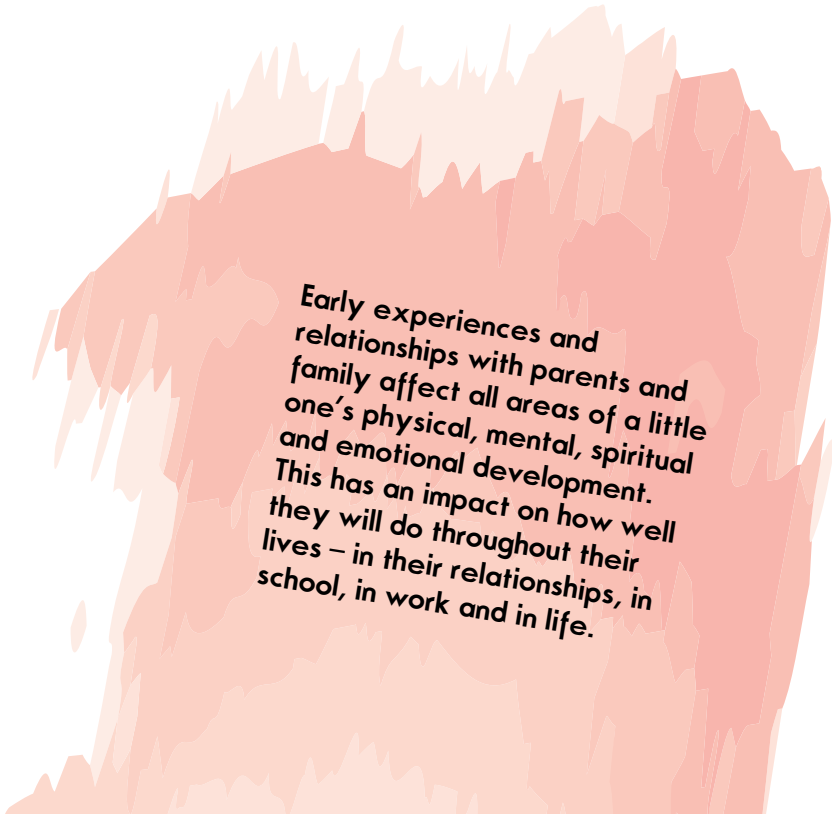
Things that can make a little one more vulnerable

Their developing brain

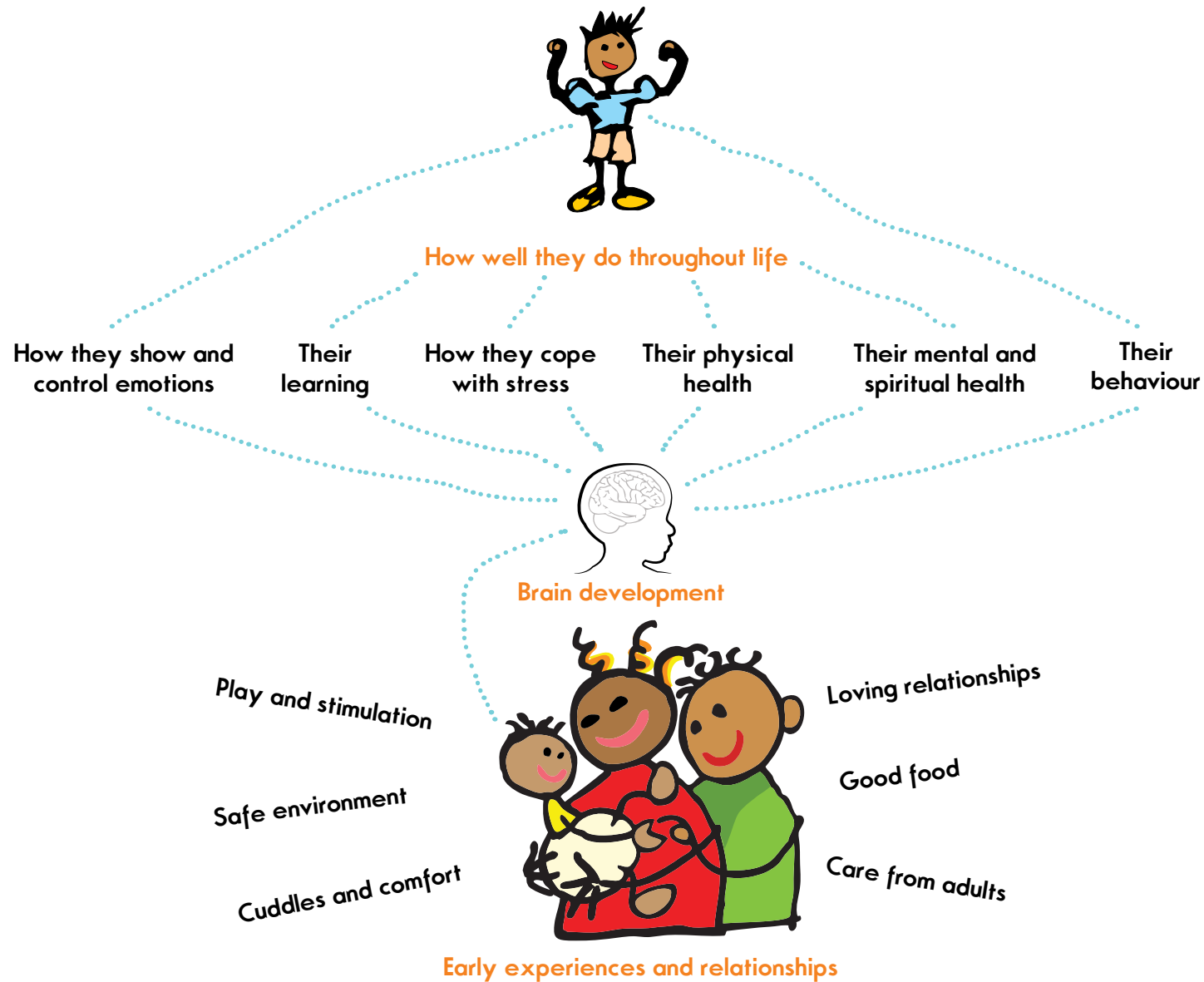
When they are born, a little one's brain is already growing and developing. It is the quality of early *experiences* and *relationships* that affects how well this happens.

Babies and infants who are kept safe, are well looked after and who have secure, loving relationships with their parents and caregivers grow and learn well and cope better during stressful times.

Without caring relationships, they are more likely to have long-term problems with their learning, behaviour and emotions.



Early experiences and relationships with parents and family affect all areas of a little one's physical, mental, spiritual and emotional development. This has an impact on how well they will do throughout their lives – in their relationships, in school, in work and in life.

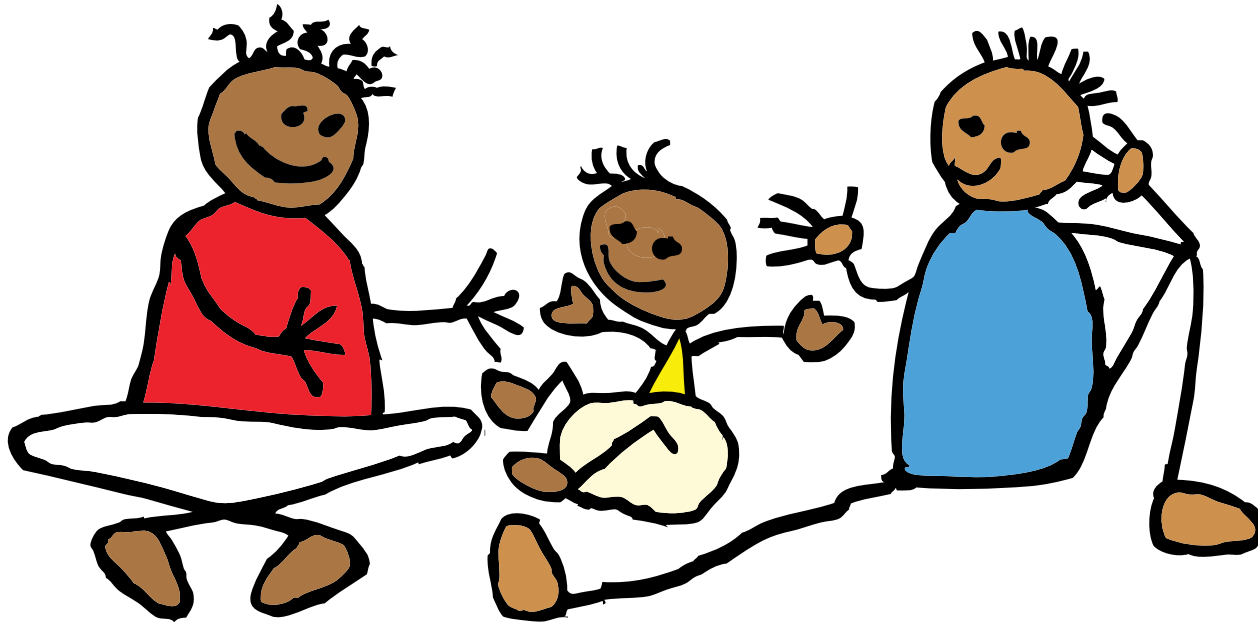


Positive early experiences and relationships lead to the best life outcomes

What helps?

The best way to improve things for a vulnerable child is to support their parents and caregivers to have strong and positive relationships and experiences with them - and the earlier in a child's life that we can do this, the better.

Supporting parents and caregivers **NOW** will have the best results for their little one - now and into the future.



This is because (even when a little one's brain development has been affected or damaged by negative life experiences such as illness or trauma) nurturing, loving relationships can *prevent* further damage to the brain, *lessen* the impact of any damage already done and *improve* its development for the future.

A little one's brain is like a sponge – soaking up knowledge. Positive early experiences and relationships are the best 'food' to help brains grow healthy and strong.



Nurturing relationships

Prevent further damage to the brain

Lessen the impact of past damage

Help the brain develop in the future

The quality of relationships has an impact on past, present and future brain development

Key Messages about Children

These 11 messages have come from research into the growth of the brain and its importance to the development and wellbeing of young children. The *Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story* project* aims to help parents, carers and community understand evidence-based information about early childhood and brain development and so improve outcomes for children.

Keep the messages in mind as you work with little ones and their families.

The first five years of a child's life are crucial and help set them up for life

The development of a child's brain determines who they become and how they behave. The quality, frequency and timing of their early experiences (both good and bad) influence how they learn to control their emotions, get on with other people and solve problems.

Helping children develop self-control is critical for their learning, responsibility and relationships

Children learn self-control and how to manage their feelings by copying the behaviour of the adults around them. Self-control can have long-lasting effects on a child's life chances.

Babies are born ready to learn

The brain develops in stages – new learning builds on what children have learnt already. 90% of a child's brain develops in the first three years. Children learn from the way people treat them and from what they see, hear and experience as soon as they are born.

Children grow and learn best in loving and caring relationships

To develop well, a child's brain needs loving, caring, stable, supportive relationships with parents and carers in their family and community. You can't spoil a baby.

The brain develops through use

A child's brain changes in response to stimulation from their environment. Connections in the brain that are used often become permanent, while those that are not used do not develop.

The key message for parents and carers is to include babies and children in everyday life – where they are loved, played and talked with; where they are safe and well fed; and where they can explore and interact with others.

Children learn through being engaged and doing things

Children are active, not passive learners. Play, more than any other activity, helps them to develop the skills they will need throughout their lives.

Being healthy, happy and safe is vital for a child's wellbeing and development

Children who feel happy and good about themselves and who have supportive adult relationships will reach out, explore and learn to cope with stress.

Good food, health and exercise are really important

A healthy pregnancy, breast-feeding, exercise, regular sleep and healthy food are good for a child's learning, brain development and health. Exposure to harmful toxins such as nicotine, alcohol, medication and pesticides during pregnancy and early childhood can have long-term effects on their brain development.

Children learn from watching and copying the people around them

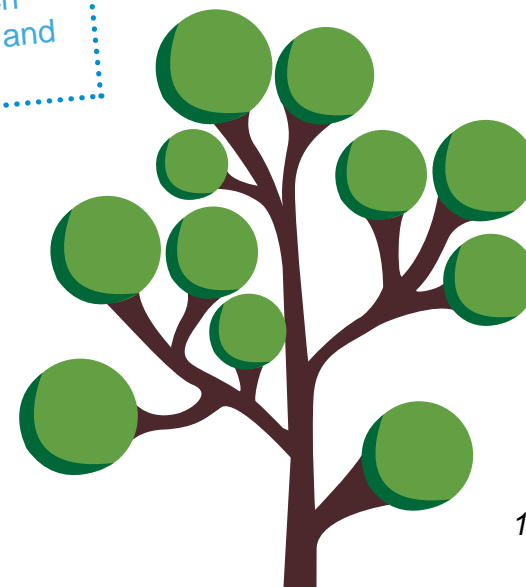
Children learn skills by watching, copying and practice (trial and error). When a child sees an adult being sensitive to other people's needs and feelings, it helps them learn to understand and care about others.

Children learn language by listening to it and using it

Children start to learn and recognise the differences between sounds from birth. Talking with babies and children in nurturing relationships is good for their brain and language development.

Children are born ready to use and learn mathematics

Mathematical concepts and activities such as counting games, rhymes and pouring and stacking games can help children learn.



Families: Who are the parents and caregivers?

The parents and caregivers referred to in this kit include anyone who cares for and has responsibility for a little one.

This can include:

mother father foster carer aunt extended family
uncle brother sister grandfather
step-parent grandmother cousin kinship carer

It is important to consider all the people involved in caring for a little one when you are working with and supporting their family.



Parenting beliefs and practices vary

Parenting beliefs and ways of growing up children can vary a lot across and within families and cultures on many things.

The roles and responsibilities of parents, caregivers and families can also vary from place to place, culture to culture and family to family. Here are some things about which families may have differing beliefs and practices:

- 🌀 sleeping
- 🌀 feeding
- 🌀 learning
- 🌀 discipline
- 🌀 playing
- 🌀 care
- 🌀 mobility
- 🌀 spirituality and religion
- 🌀 sharing
- 🌀 healing practices
- 🌀 supervision.

Use an interpreter or cultural advisor when working with a family from a cultural or language group different from your own.

Remember that there is no single way to raise children. Families learn as they go and are influenced by the way they were brought up, what they have read or heard and what they have watched others do. No particular way is better than another, and each family's beliefs and practices should be respected. The important thing is that the little one is well cared for.

Tuning in

Little ones need parents and caregivers who pay attention, tune in to what they need and then do something positive about it.

Remember that caring for a little one can be hard work, especially if families are facing other pressures. Parents and caregivers facing short-term pressures may just need some extra support. Other challenges may be longer term or more difficult to overcome. In these instances, families may need more intensive help.

What makes it hard for parents and caregivers to tune in?

Some things can make it difficult for parents and caregivers to notice, tune in to and meet their little one's physical, social, spiritual, cultural and emotional needs. These things can make it hard for adults to keep their little ones safe and healthy – for a short time, or much longer.

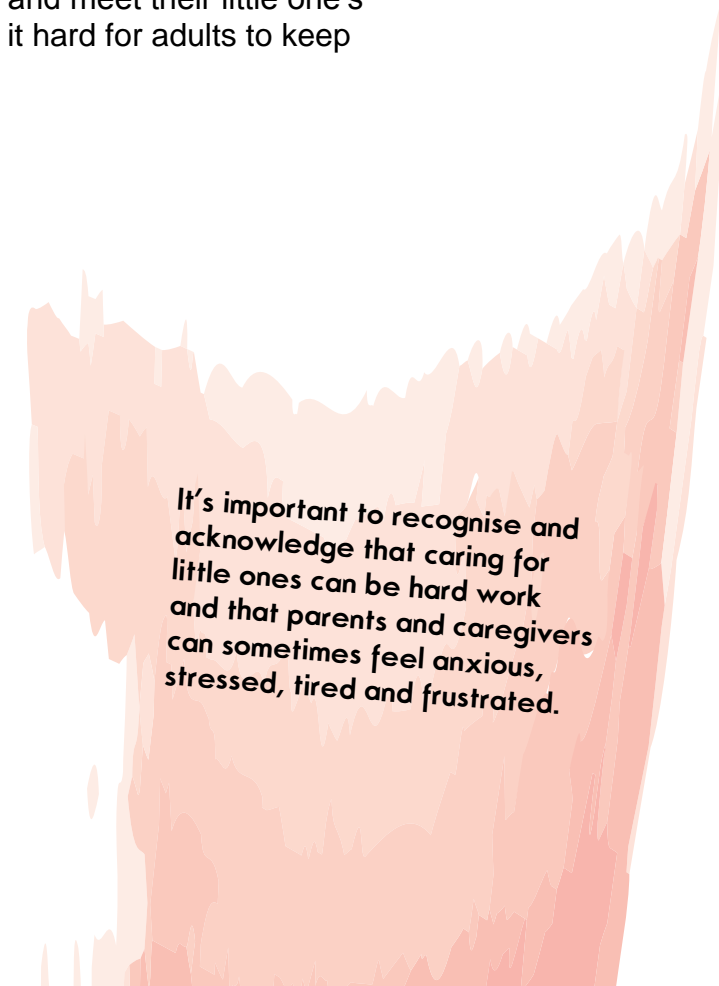
These can include:

- ⦿ substance use
- ⦿ medical problems
- ⦿ family violence
- ⦿ lack of parenting skills
- ⦿ mental health issues
- ⦿ being worried and preoccupied (e.g. about family issues, money, safety).

As a worker, it's important to look at whether these issues are affecting how the little one is looked after.

Some families may be doing fine.

If, however, these issues are getting in the way of the little one's care, then you need to think about the next steps needed to support the family.



It's important to recognise and acknowledge that caring for little ones can be hard work and that parents and caregivers can sometimes feel anxious, stressed, tired and frustrated.

Working together



The best way to support a family is to work closely and respectfully with them.

- 🌀 Be predictable, reliable, respectful and non-judgemental.
- 🌀 Work with family members, extended family and community members to look for strengths and needs of little ones and families, as well as resources that can support them.
- 🌀 Be open and curious about the family's experiences and views.
- 🌀 Understand that the family's view of any issues or problems might be different from information you have been given by someone else.
- 🌀 Involve fathers and male caregivers when you can.
- 🌀 Consult and do home visits with other workers from the local community (e.g. Aboriginal Community Worker, Child and Family Health Nurse, Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Worker, Health Worker, Child Care Worker, Families as First Teachers (FaFT) Worker).

Build strong relationships with each family and work with them in a supportive and collaborative way.


Be aware of your own world view and beliefs and how these might impact on how you see and work with families.

Focusing on strengths

When you are working with families, it's important to focus on the things that parents, caregivers and families are doing well.

When you acknowledge, respect and value their strengths in this way, they are more likely to rely on and use them as they try new things.

- 🌀 Praise parents, caregivers and families on the things they are doing well whenever you can.
- 🌀 Believe in their ability to change and improve things for themselves and their little one.
- 🌀 Work with families to identify:
 - ✓ what their little one needs
 - ✓ what they are doing now to meet these needs
 - ✓ what else they might need to know
 - ✓ what else they might need to do
 - ✓ how you – or someone else – can help them with this if needed.



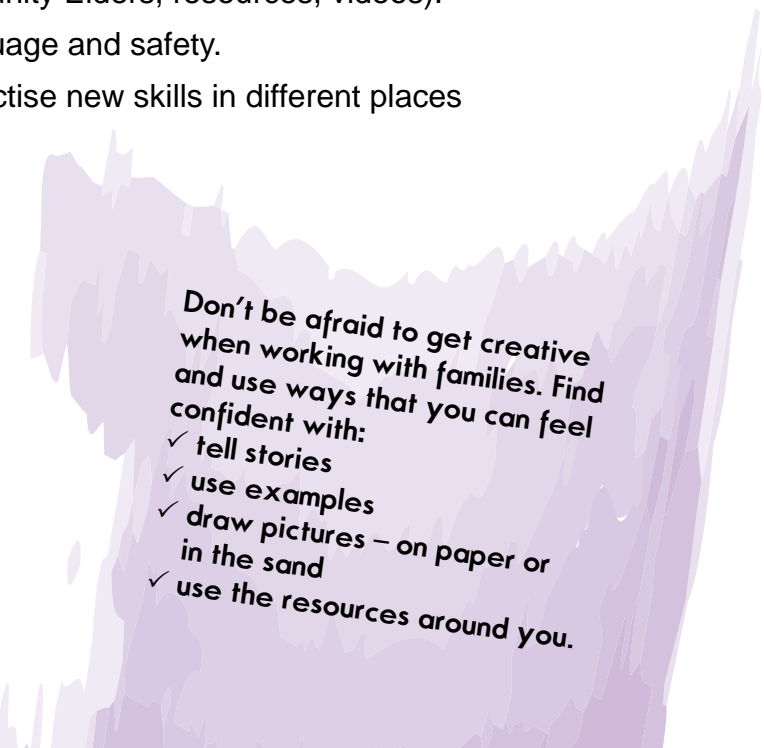
Remember that families are experts in their own lives. It's important to tune in to and respect their views and experiences.

Helping them learn new skills

Families have positive skills and ways of doing things. However, sometimes they can face challenges that make it difficult to tune in to and meet the needs of their little ones.

You can help families learn new ways of doing things by providing information and opportunities for them to learn and practise new skills.

- 🌀 Use simple language to explain things.
- 🌀 Provide information in small chunks.
- 🌀 Help parents and caregivers to understand information as it relates to their own little one and family.
- 🌀 Help families learn new ways to solve problems.
- 🌀 Break difficult tasks into small, easily achievable steps so that families can experience success.
- 🌀 Try to teach skills in the places where families will need to use them (e.g. usually at home, but maybe at the shops).
- 🌀 Use different ways to teach skills (e.g. role modelling, pictures, storytelling, drawing, games, community Elders, resources, videos).
- 🌀 Use play activities as opportunities to model parenting skills, language and safety.
- 🌀 Make time and room for parents and caregivers to repeat and practise new skills in different places or with different materials.



Don't be afraid to get creative when working with families. Find and use ways that you can feel confident with:

- ✓ tell stories
- ✓ use examples
- ✓ draw pictures – on paper or in the sand
- ✓ use the resources around you.

Aboriginal Ways: Tune in to culture

If you are not Aboriginal and you are working with an Aboriginal family, it is important to learn about ways of being and knowing for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal culture is a rich and living culture that has survived in Australia for over 40,000 years. Aboriginal groups across Australia are diverse with traditions, languages and cultural ways that are based on their Law and Dreamtime. Aboriginal Law sets out the relationships and responsibilities for people to live and take care of each other and their environment, with practices associated and interwoven with past, present and future being and survival.

Maintaining strong Aboriginal identity and connections to people, country and practices is still important and even more so since the impacts and influences of colonisation.

Kinship System

The Kinship system is very important to Aboriginal families and is the basis of all social relationships. It sets out the obligations and relationships between people, the land and its plants and animals. These are all vital to Aboriginal culture.



Use an interpreter to help you work with families if you need to.

Who has the job of 'parenting'?

In Aboriginal families, many people might have daily responsibility of caring for children; growing them up may not just be the job of parents, and little ones may have a network of caregivers.

Roles and responsibilities can be shared by, and move between, a number of people such as mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings and other children. Grandparents, aunts and uncles from both sides of a family often have significant roles in helping children learn about cultural practices, moral behaviour and traditional knowledge, values and skills. Children might move amongst, and spend time with, different members of extended family within and across communities.

In Aboriginal kinship systems the term 'mother' may also refer to aunts or others who have a mothering role and responsibilities. This means that the 'mother' of the child might not be the biological mother.

If you are unsure about who the caregivers are in a little one's life, ask the family about who has the main job of looking after the little one and making decisions about their care.



Aboriginal ways of growing up little ones

There are some beliefs and practices about ways of being and belonging to people and country that are shared by many Aboriginal groups. However, these may vary from place to place and family to family. A little one's cultural and social environment affects how they grow, learn and communicate their needs and feelings, so it's important to be aware of these as you work with families.

How children are viewed

Babies come into the world with an already identified and valued place in, and link to, family, community and country. From birth, they are learning about the Law, family and culture, as well as who they are, where they fit and what is expected of them.

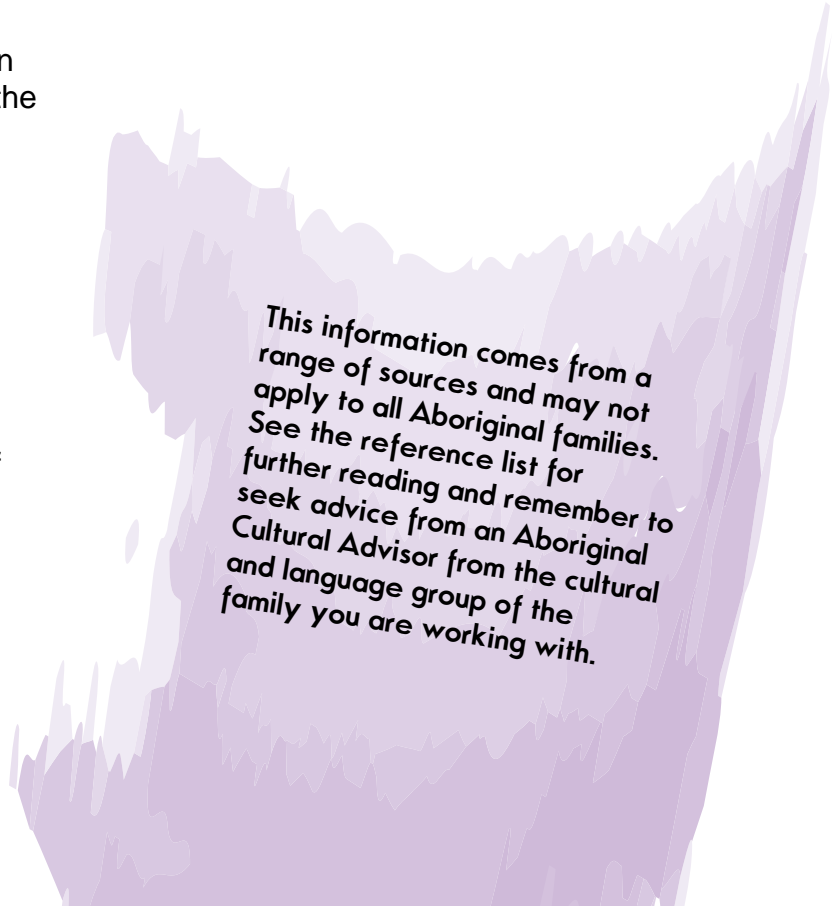
Babies are born with a set of needs which they communicate to others; when they let families know that they need food, sleep, comfort or attention – it is the family's duty to respond.

It is the role of family to let children know who they are in relation to their family, kin, people and environment, as well as to the living spirits of their ancestors and land.

Family and community

Babies and little ones are taken everywhere with the family and are a part of everyday community activity, including ceremonies and celebrations.

Family life may be influenced more by community activity than by individual routines or 'Western' concepts of 'time'; family responsibilities such as meetings, funerals and other ceremonies can take priority.



This information comes from a range of sources and may not apply to all Aboriginal families. See the reference list for further reading and remember to seek advice from an Aboriginal Cultural Advisor from the cultural and language group of the family you are working with.

Communication

From a very early age, little ones learn to communicate in non-verbal ways using their hands, face and bodies. They are taught this through repeated modelling and by being helped to make hand signs and gestures.

Families use stories to help their little ones learn about relationships, places, Law and responsibilities. They may use 'scary' stories to help little ones learn about danger and to keep them from harm.

Health and development

Babies and children feed whenever they are hungry.

Babies and toddlers fall asleep when they are tired and wherever they are, usually with their mother or the larger family group and rarely in a room on their own.

Families may know how a little one is developing and growing, but may not see this in terms of their chronological age.

The strong connection between physical and spiritual health may mean that families use complementary forms of healing.



Aboriginal ways of growing up little ones

Care of little ones

Babies are always with other people and rarely, if at all, spend time on their own (e.g. to sleep).

Once they are walking, little ones spend more time with older children, who are encouraged to look after them, show them the good things and keep them safe.

Once children are older, adults tend not to interfere in their activities, unless they are in distress, danger or have upset another child. Instead, they may keep an eye on children unobtrusively from a distance, so they don't detract from their sense of independence.

Families sometimes leave it up to little ones to decide about when and what they want to eat, when to sleep, what to wear and what to play with.

Learning and teaching


Children are encouraged at an early age to learn, think and do things for themselves and to judge their own ability. This may mean that little ones can be independent and adventurous at an early age.

Children are encouraged to learn through observing, imitating and using 'trial and error', rather than through being given information or instructions on what to do; few verbal restrictions are placed on their play and explorations.

Unselfishness and compassion are highly regarded, and families tend to give children what they need and want. This models generosity.

Similarly, children rarely have their own possessions and are expected to share things such as food, clothes and toys; they are actively encouraged to give away an object if another child wants it.

Humour and making fun of life is used to help children learn to cope, to become strong and to be humble. Babies tend to be given lots of physical contact and social interaction, rather than toys and objects to play with.



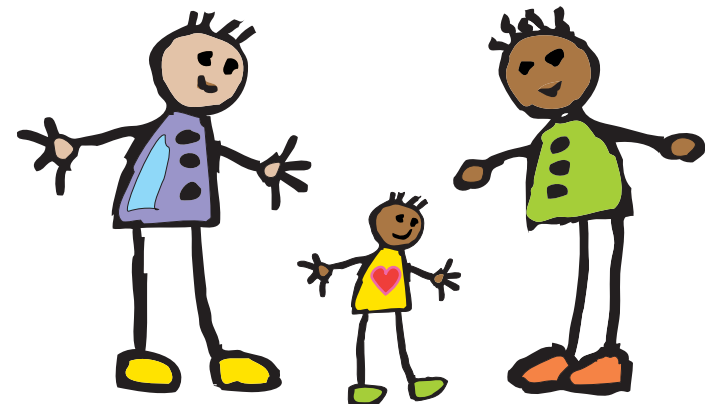
Aboriginal children may be encouraged to become physically independent at an early age.

Working together



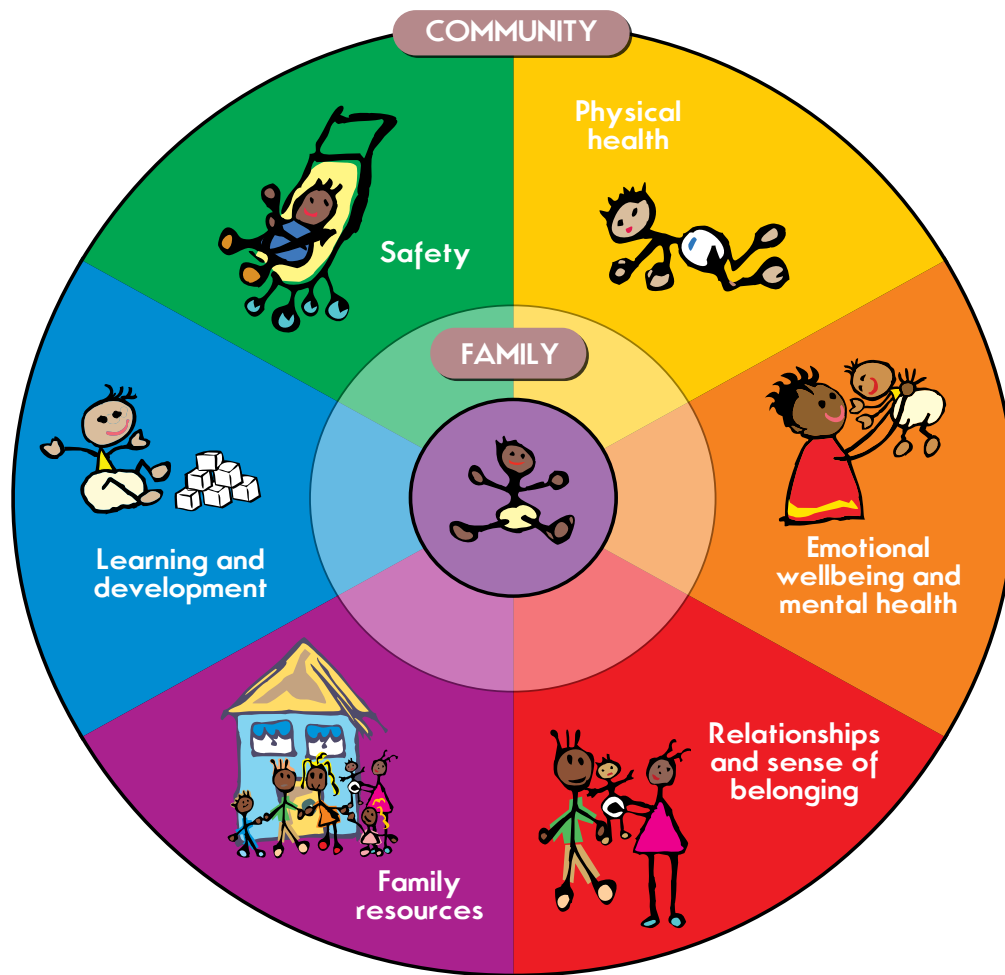
These ideas can support you to work positively with Aboriginal people.

- ☉ Sit with families in a place where they feel comfortable and talk with them about how they do things.
- ☉ Be careful about making assumptions and try to understand cultural differences (e.g. about ways to grow up children, the roles of boys, girls, men and women, and about kinship structures and avoidance relationships).
- ☉ Use community Elders and other strong and resilient parents and caregivers to model and discuss parenting issues and ways to support families.
- ☉ Understand that family stories about child rearing can be an important source of parenting information.
- ☉ Be mindful of Aboriginal ways of communication (e.g. non-verbal communication, hand signals and language).
- ☉ Be aware that Aboriginal children are encouraged to be independent early.
- ☉ Build trust, be honest and respectful and don't make promises that you cannot keep.
- ☉ Be comfortable with long pauses and allow time for family members to think and talk about issues.
- ☉ Aboriginal people may not look directly into your eyes while talking to you.
- ☉ Consider family expectations of the little one's development in addition to developmental milestones.
- ☉ Allow time for families to get to know and trust you.
- ☉ Regularly check that you understand each other.
- ☉ Share stories and experiences.



The Wheel:

Tuning in to the whole of the little one's life



Adapted from work done by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth 2010.

There are many parts to a child's life.

In some of these areas a child might be well cared for and safe.

But in other areas, or at different places or times or with different people, they might be vulnerable.

The individual personality and behaviour of a child, along with their family, extended family and community, all have an impact on their wellbeing.

When you are looking to see whether a little one is vulnerable and needs support, it is important to consider their needs across all aspects of their life, as in this coloured wheel.

The Wheel helps us to tune in to all of the important areas of a little one's life. Each of the six areas overlaps and affects the others.

Using the Wheel


The following sections work through each area of *The Wheel*.

Each section outlines some things to look for when you are tuning in to whether a child might be vulnerable.

Included are some ideas of how you can work with families and support them to tune in to and meet the needs of their child.

Use *The Wheel* to help you:

- 🕒 look at all areas of the child's life
- 🕒 identify all the people involved
- 🕒 identify the needs, strengths and resources of the child, their family, their community and other significant people.

When you see a symbol like this  you know that in that area a little one is being well cared for. You can encourage and support the family to keep doing the things that are working well as they care for their little one.

When you see a symbol like this  you know the family might need some extra support in that particular area.

At the end of each section you will see a box titled **Resources**. Write down the names of any websites, local services, supports or resources that you can use with families in your area.

Sometimes things happen that can make it hard for a family to care for their little one (e.g. problems in the relationship between parents and their teenager; or illness or death of a family member). When this happens, you may need to support the family to work through this issue so they can continue to tune in to their little one.

Think broadly about the people and services in the community who can support the family. They could include strong family members, playgroups, clinics, community Elders, child care services and multicultural organisations or groups.

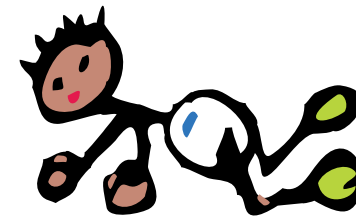
Physical health

Good food, being healthy and having enough sleep and exercise all help a little one and their brain to develop and their body to grow and repair itself.

When a baby or infant does not get these things, or they are exposed to toxins such as alcohol, cigarette smoke or chemicals (including during pregnancy), it can affect their growth, learning and development. It can also change how their brain develops and affect their memory, concentration and behaviour.

If little ones are sick, tired, weak or hungry it can also make it hard for them to communicate their needs to those who care for them. For example, things such as ear infections can make it difficult for them to:

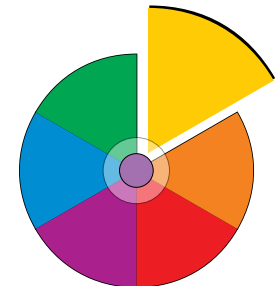
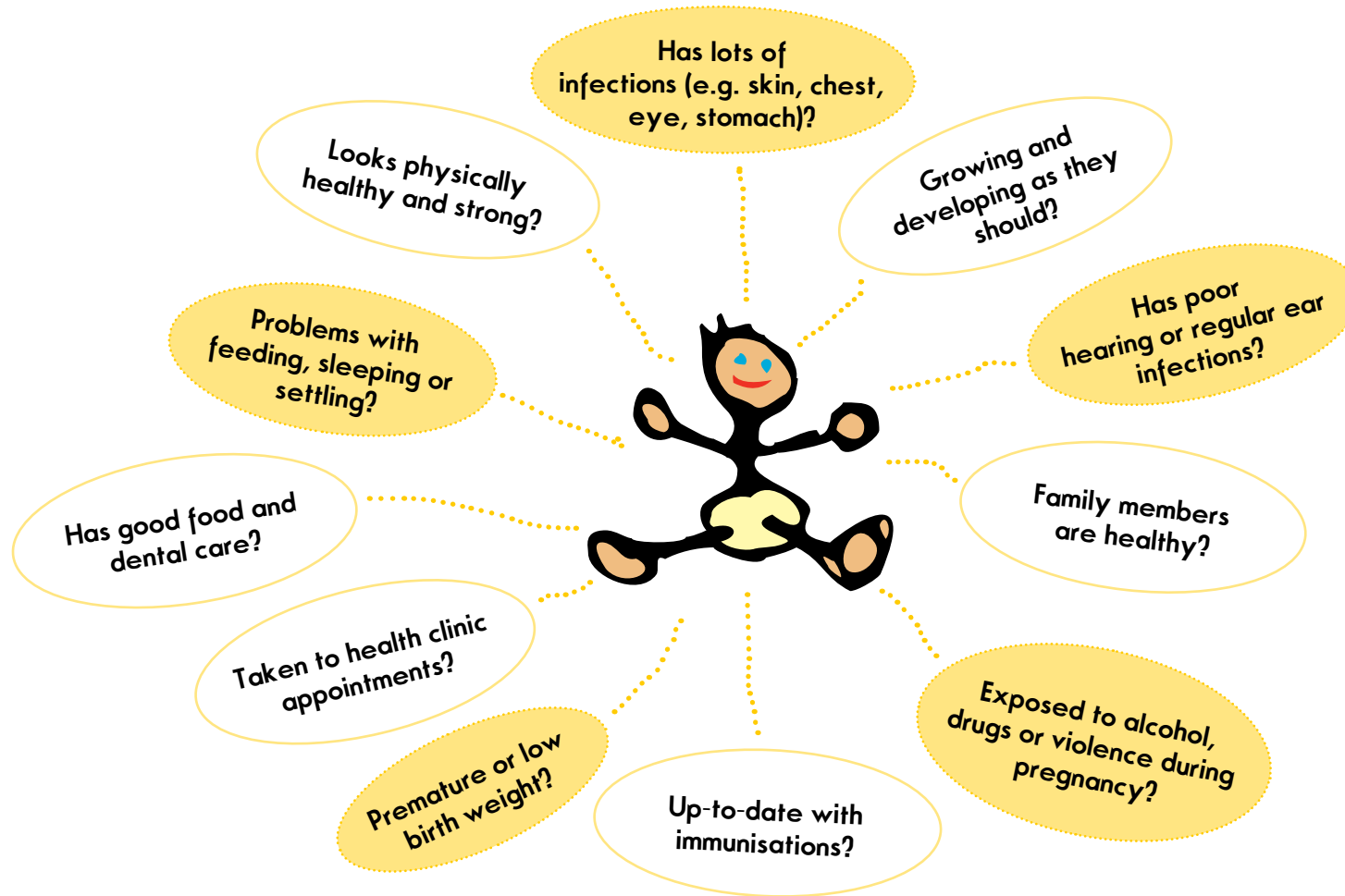
- ☉ learn language and speech
- ☉ talk and play with family and friends
- ☉ understand what's going on around them
- ☉ listen to family stories and music
- ☉ hear instructions and warnings
- ☉ do well when they go to school.



Sometimes little ones don't want to take medicine when they are sick.
Help parents and caregivers to understand the instructions when giving medicine and to feel strong about giving it to little ones when needed – or to find a person in their family who can do this. Their little one might not like it, but with encouragement they may get used to it – and it will make them better.

See the Tune in to Little Ones 'Extra Concerns and How to Help' booklet for more information on signs of things like Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD), Shaken Baby Syndrome, Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and Failure to Thrive.

What to tune in to



How to support parents and caregivers to tune in

Listen and talk with parents and caregivers about:



- the things they are already doing to help their little one grow up strong and healthy
- who can be the 'hard talker' that can help them in caring for their little one (e.g. help their little one to take medicine, wash their hands, sit in their car seat)
- any concerns the family may have about their little one's physical development, health or medical needs, and where they can go for help
- how things such as smoking and/or substance use (including during pregnancy) can affect a child's growth and development, and how substance abuse can prevent people from properly caring for their little one
- people and services they use – or can use – to support them in keeping their little one healthy (e.g. clinic, speech pathologist, psychologist, social worker, family or community member).

Find out about:



- what health providers are involved with the family (e.g. mental health, alcohol and other drugs, health clinic) then work together to support the family
- extra services that could help if required (e.g. Aboriginal Health Workers, paediatrician, occupational therapist, speech pathologist, physiotherapist, dietician, Strong Women Strong Babies workers, Aboriginal Community Workers, environmental health workers)
- any public health strategies in place that can support families (e.g. 'Did ya wash ya hands?' 'Safe food is everybody's business', Healthy Skin Program).

Get medical help straight away if the little one is floppy, very drowsy, pale, dehydrated, not responding, has breathing problems or has head injuries.

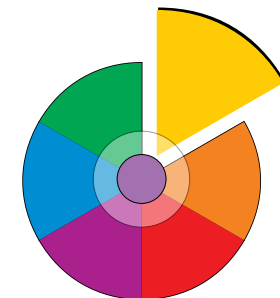
Encourage and support parents and caregivers to:



- ⦿ keep doing the things they are already doing well to make their little one strong and healthy
- ⦿ provide healthy food for their family
- ⦿ help their little ones to wash their hands and brush their teeth and to explain to them why it's important
- ⦿ use bush foods if appropriate
- ⦿ support breastfeeding for their babies
- ⦿ attend the health clinic with their little one:
 - ✓ for immunisations
 - ✓ for health assessments
 - ✓ for support or information
 - ✓ to discuss health or medical issues or concerns.

Resources:

- ⦿ 'Hygiene and Physical Care' section of the *Extra Concerns and How to Help* booklet - **Tune in to Little Ones** kit
- ⦿ *Feeding Babies* booklet
- ⦿ *Early Childhood Oral Health* booklet
- ⦿ *Healthy Skin Story* booklet
- ⦿ *No Germs on Me* handwashing campaign
- ⦿ Environmental Health resources
- ⦿ *Parent tip sheet: Feeding Toddlers* (www.families.nt.gov.au)
- ⦿ _____
- ⦿ _____
- ⦿ _____



Emotional wellbeing and mental health

Babies and young children depend on others to have their needs met. Even before they can speak, they use many ways to attract attention and to send 'messages' to let others know what they need. They do things such as cry, make noises, move their bodies, smile and 'fuss'.

It's important that they send these 'messages', and that caregivers notice them, understand them, and respond in a way that meets their needs.

Sometimes little ones might be too sick, weak or stressed to send out these messages – so adults might not realise that they need something such as food, cuddles, warmth or health care.

At other times, a parent or caregiver might have a mental health issue (such as depression) that can make it hard for them to tune in and respond to their little one's messages. Also, when adults feel overwhelmed, frustrated or like they can't cope, it can affect whether they notice and tune in to their little one's messages.

They might:

- ⦿ not notice when their little one needs something
- ⦿ misread what their little one wants
- ⦿ react in a way that does not meet their little one's needs.

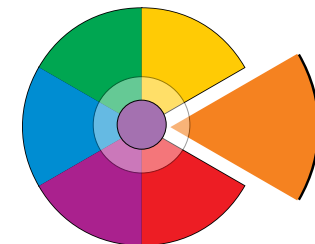
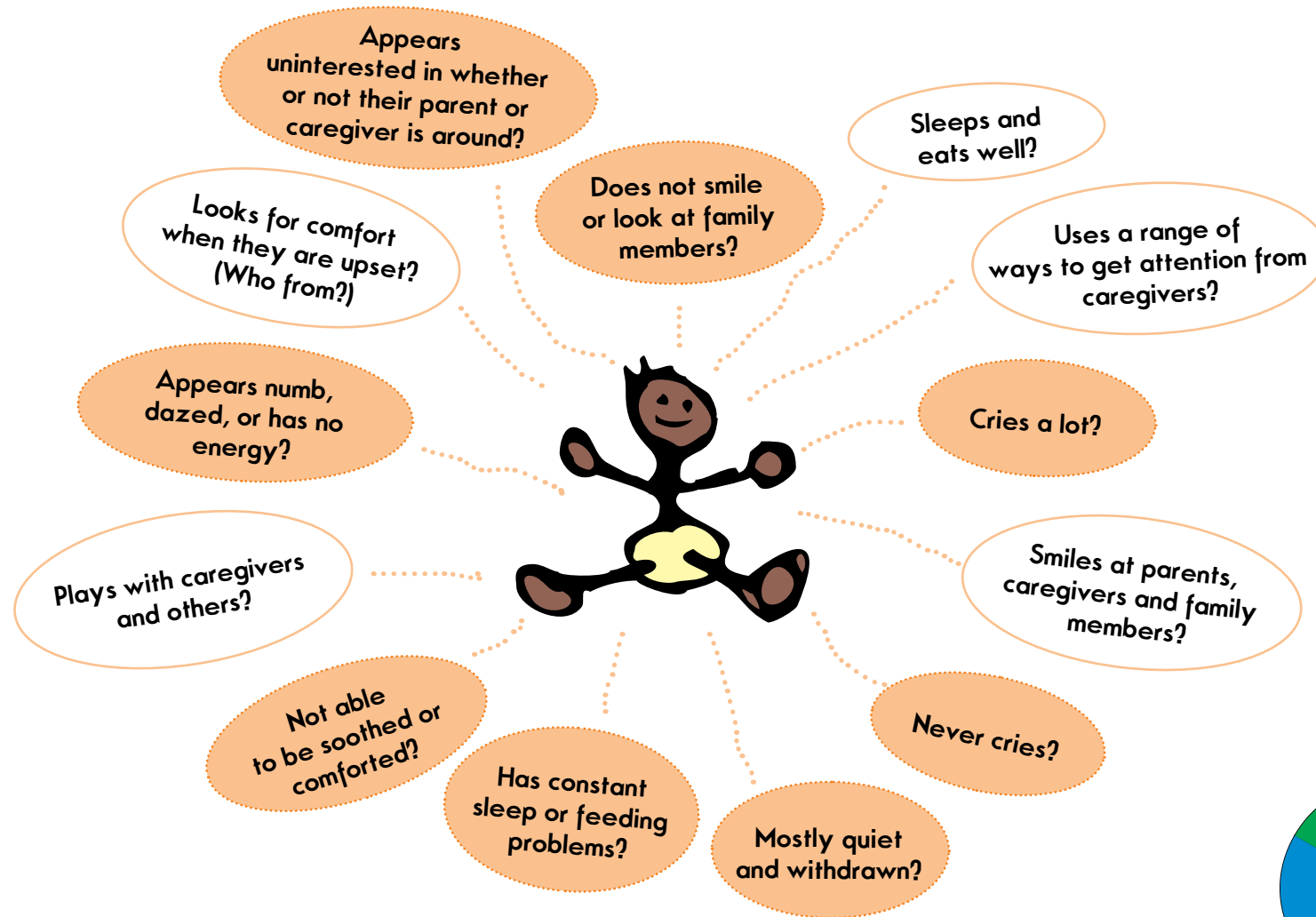
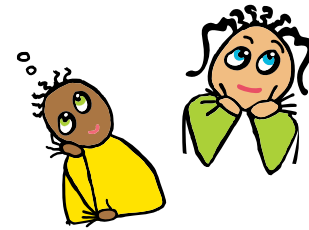
If a little one sends out a message (e.g. cries) and their parent or caregiver does not respond quickly (or at all), it can affect their physical health and make them feel stressed and upset.

This then affects the development of the part of the brain that helps them to experience emotions and learn how to control them. It can also make it harder for the little one to keep sending the messages that will get them the care that they need.

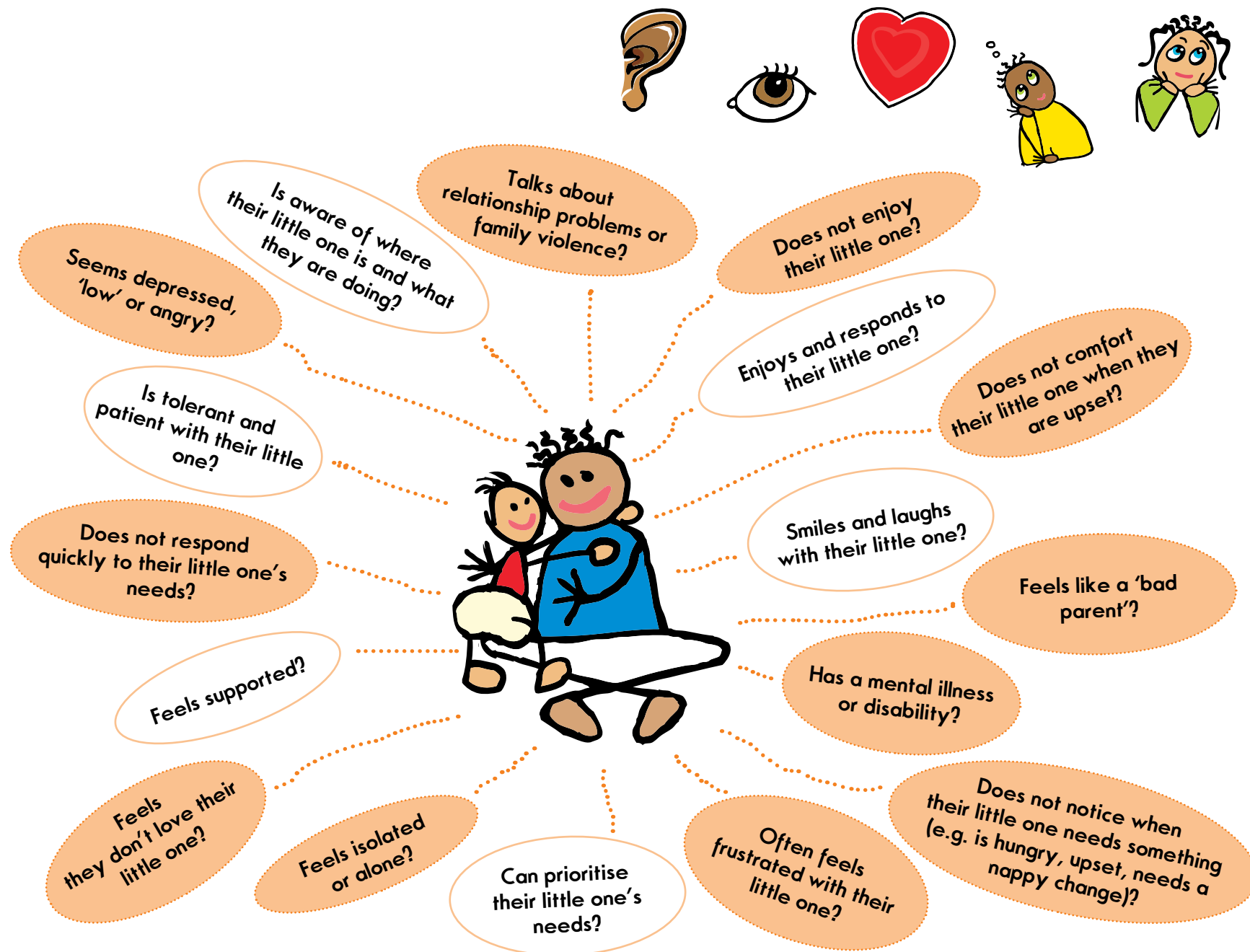


As a worker, you need to tune in to the mental health and wellbeing of the little one AND their parents and caregivers, so you can offer the right kind of support if needed.

The little one: what to tune in to



The parent or caregiver: what to tune in to



Also consider the mother's experience of the pregnancy and birth; was the pregnancy and/or birth difficult?

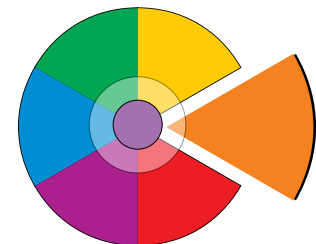
Was the baby wanted?

For Aboriginal families, is the little one a 'wrong way' or 'wrong skin' baby? This may not mean that the little one was not wanted, but it may affect the level of support the mother receives from family members. Talk to an Aboriginal Community Worker to learn more about what this can mean.



Aboriginal families may use smoking ceremonies to make mothers and their newborn babies physically and spiritually strong and healthy.

You may need to help the parent or caregiver find support for themselves first, so that they can then better care for their little one.



How to support parents and caregivers to tune in

Listen and talk with parents and caregivers about:



- ⦿ what they enjoy about their little one
- ⦿ how they feel about caring for their little one; do they have any worries?
- ⦿ how they have fun with their little one
- ⦿ who they feel they can talk to; offer suggestions if needed
- ⦿ places, people and things that are around when things are going well
- ⦿ places, people and things that are around when things are not going well
- ⦿ people who support them when things are going well
- ⦿ people who make them feel strong and help them to get 'back on track' in tough times
- ⦿ what supports they use (e.g. family, friends, community members, services) to help them in caring for their little one. Help them to identify more if required
- ⦿ safe places they like to go to that make them feel good and strong.

Find out about:



- ⦿ any local respite services, playgroups, home visiting support programs, counsellors, mental health services, child care services and multicultural organisations or groups that could help if required.

Encourage and support parents and caregivers to:



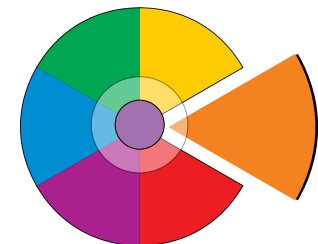
- do more of the fun, caring and positive things they are already doing with their little one
- notice and understand their little one's 'signals'. You could say something like, 'Look, your baby is wriggling and crying – I wonder what she is trying to tell you?'
- enjoy their relationship with their little one: help them to play a game together (e.g. 'peekaboo' or a clapping game), then help the caregiver to notice when their child is having fun
- access mental health services for themselves or their little one (e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Aboriginal Mental Health worker) if needed
- call *Parentline* 1300 30 1300 – a parenting support, counselling and education hotline from 8am-10pm. Workers can call them for advice too.
- make a plan to get help for themselves – or care for their little one – if they feel they can't cope.

Resources:

- Parentline* 1300 30 1300
- Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline* 1800 882 436
- 7 Steps to Safety kit: Step 7 - Make a Care Plan*
- Parent tip sheets: Being a Parent, Being a Dad, Being a Mum, Self-esteem, Children's Mental Health, Dealing with a Crisis* (www.families.nt.gov.au)

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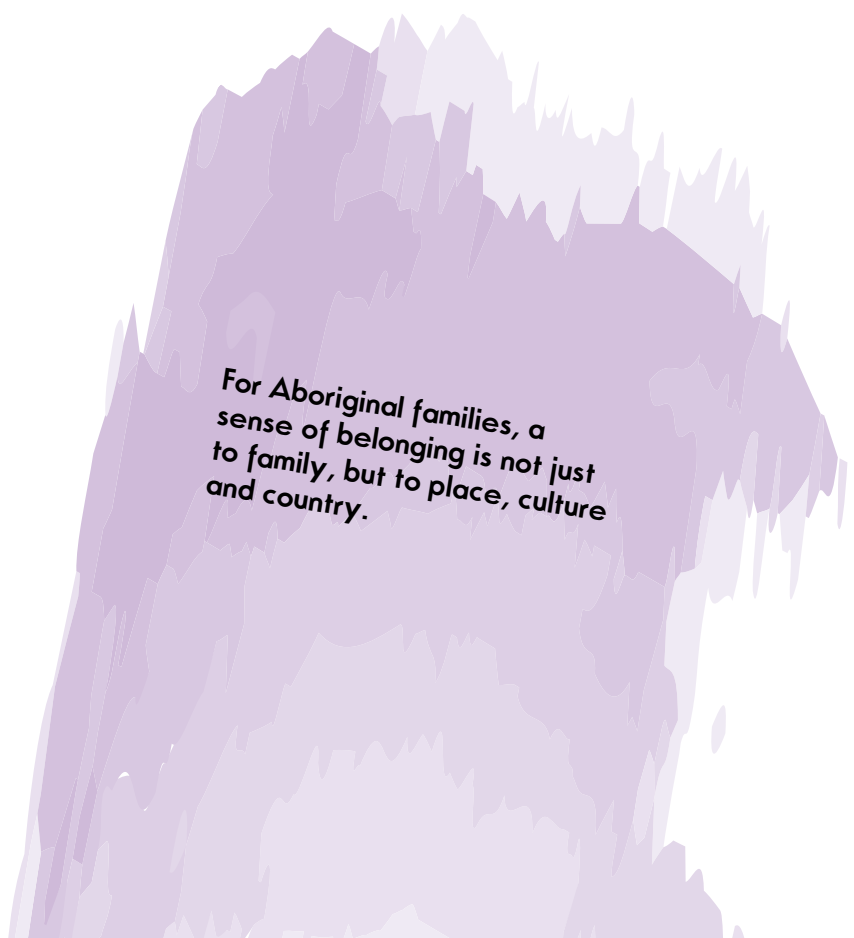
Parents and caregivers can feel frustrated, desperate and angry when a baby cries a lot or is hard to settle.
Help them to make a plan of what they can do to cope – and keep their baby safe.
(See Shaken Baby Syndrome in the 'Extra Concerns and How to Help' booklet to find out more.)



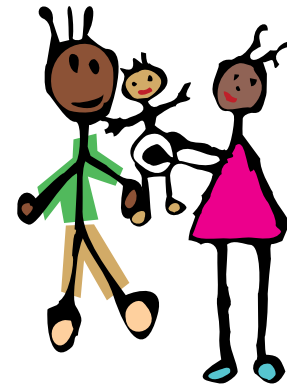
Relationships and sense of belonging

Babies come into this world with identity and belonging – to family and to community.

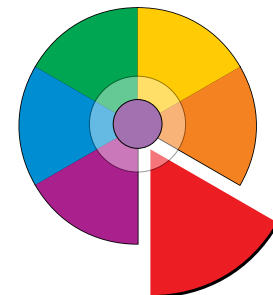
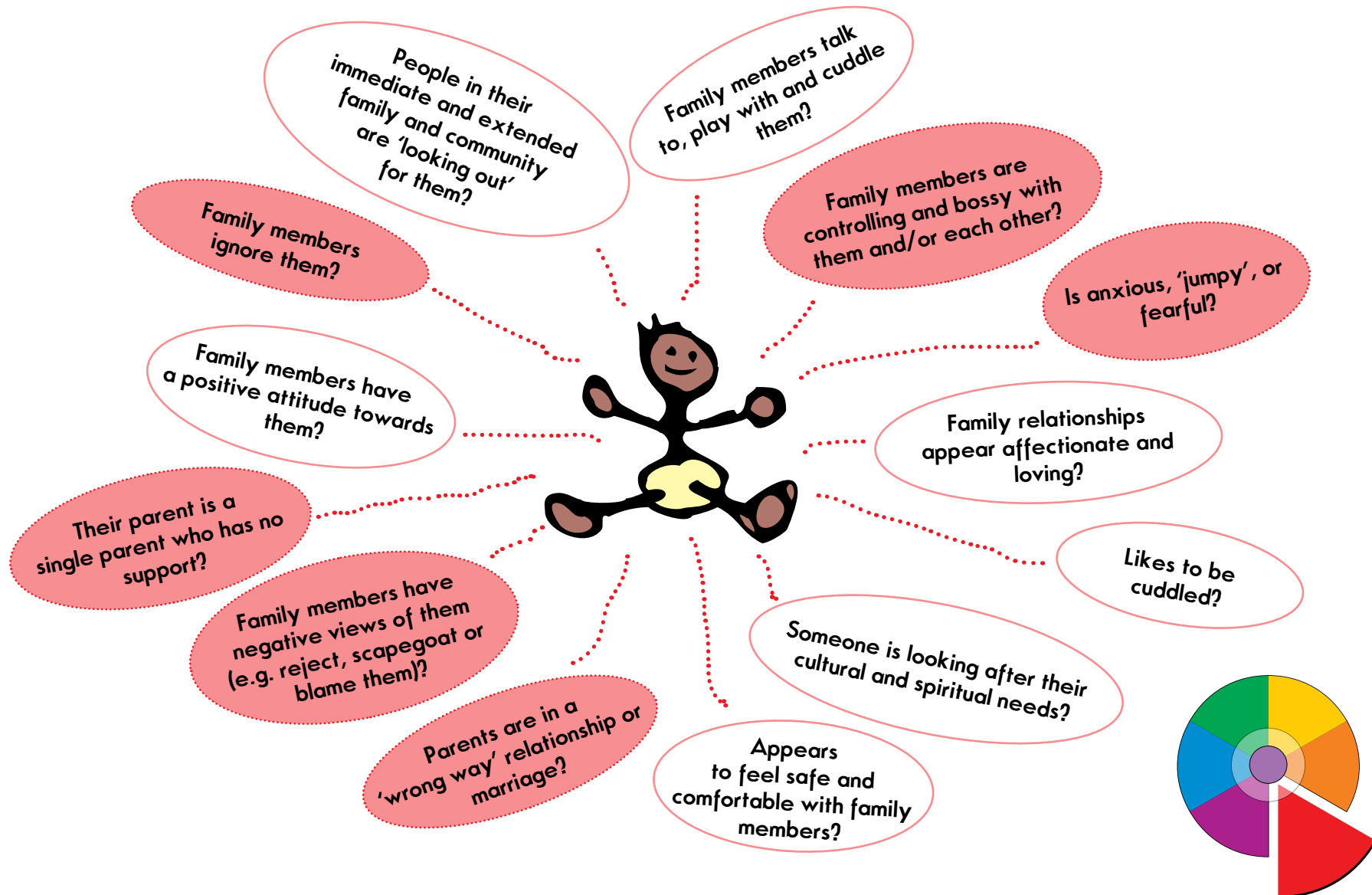
Feeling connected to parents and caregivers in secure, loving and supportive relationships helps little ones to feel safe. It gives them a sense of belonging and confidence and stimulates the part of the brain that helps them to learn self-control and the ability to relate to the feelings and needs of others.



For Aboriginal families, a sense of belonging is not just to family, but to place, culture and country.



What to tune in to



How to support parents and caregivers to tune in

Listen and talk with parents and caregivers about:



- ⦿ things the family likes to do together
- ⦿ the important people in their little one's life who help the family feel connected and loved
- ⦿ places that help their family feel good and connected
- ⦿ the supports they already have and might need
- ⦿ people within their family or community who can support them if they are feeling isolated, frustrated or that they can't cope. Work out together what sort of support they might need, and where – and how – they can get it.

Find out about:



- ⦿ community celebrations and activities the family can be a part of
- ⦿ other services or groups that can support the family
- ⦿ groups that could help connect the family to their culture.

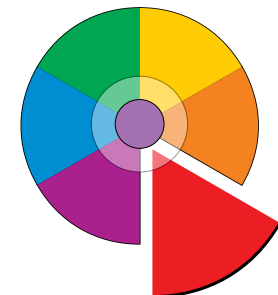
Encourage and support parents and caregivers to:



- ⦿ keep doing the things they already do to help their little one feel connected with family and culture
- ⦿ find different places they can enjoy with their little one and where they can feel connected to others
- ⦿ do things with others who care about their little one
- ⦿ cuddle, rock, read to, play with and smile at their little one
- ⦿ have skin-to-skin contact with them
- ⦿ make eye contact with them
- ⦿ copy their little one's movements, sounds and gestures
- ⦿ identify '5 sets of eyes' that can 'look out' for their little one and who can give them support – these could include immediate family, extended family, community members, Elders, neighbours, clinic, playgroup, church group or child care
- ⦿ find ways to help their little one be, and feel, connected with family, no matter where they are. This is especially important for little ones who have caregivers living away from them or who are in Out of Home Care (see *Extra Concerns and How to Help* booklet - **Tune in to Little Ones** kit)
- ⦿ extend their networks through visiting services such as libraries and playgroups.

Resources:

- ⦿ Parent tip sheet: *Coping Skills* (www.families.nt.gov.au)
- ⦿ Local playgroups
- ⦿ Child and Family Centre or creche
- ⦿ Families as First Teachers (FaFT)
- ⦿
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Family resources

Family resources are the basic things families need to help them to live.

They include:

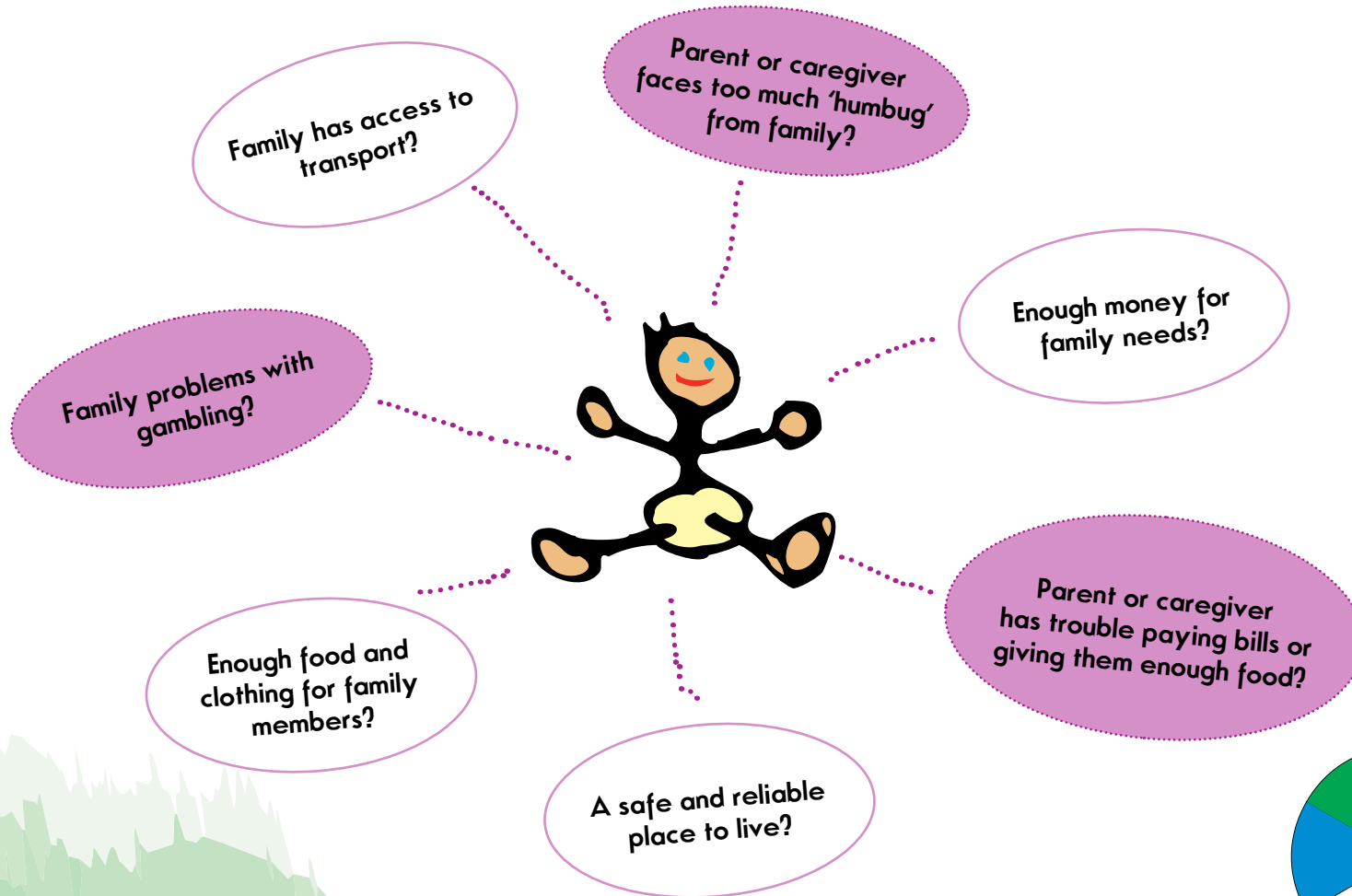
- ⦿ a safe and reliable place to live
- ⦿ enough money
- ⦿ enough food
- ⦿ clothing
- ⦿ transport.

Families can have difficulty getting and providing these things, but still might be able to give their little ones the love, care and stimulation they need.

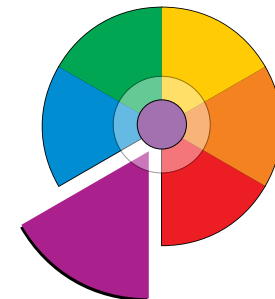
It's important to look at whether these things are stressful for parents and caregivers and whether they are making it hard for them to provide (physically and emotionally) for their little one.



What to tune in to



Lack of resources can make families feel stressed.



How to support parents and caregivers to tune in

Listen and talk with parents and caregivers about:



- ⦿ how money is spent in the family
- ⦿ effective ways that they plan and manage their money
- ⦿ whether they feel they are able to provide for their children's needs in the way they would like to (food, clothing etc.)
- ⦿ any issues that may be affecting their income (e.g. gambling, substance abuse) and how they might be able to deal with these
- ⦿ involving community Elders and others to discuss how they can support the family to best meet their little one's needs if required
- ⦿ whether there are certain times when money runs out, such as when family comes to visit. Help families work out what to do
- ⦿ whether there is a 'strong talker' in their family or community who can encourage and support them.

Find out about:

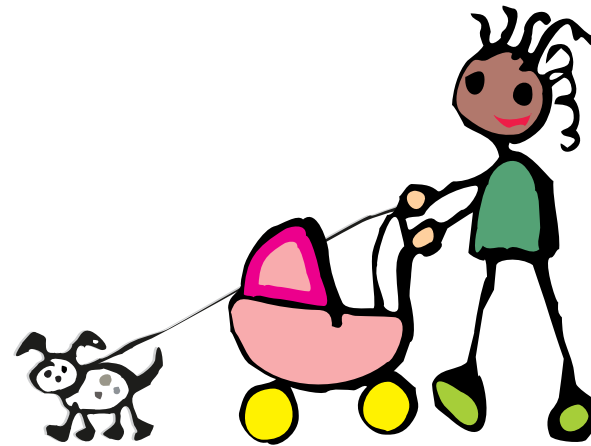


- ⦿ services and resources that could help if required (e.g. Centrelink, financial counselling, emergency relief, income management, Territory Housing, gambling support services, an account with the local store)
- ⦿ any community events such as 'cook ups' the family can be a part of.

Encourage and support parents and caregivers to:



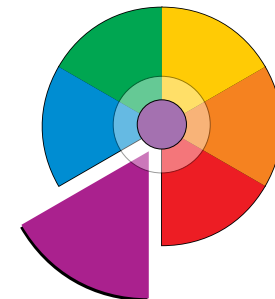
- ⦿ keep doing the things that are working to help them provide for their little one's needs
- ⦿ make contact with support services if needed
- ⦿ work out a daily or weekly budget if they need it.



Resources:

- ⦿ Territory Housing
- ⦿ Centrelink
- ⦿ *National Financial Counselling Helpline* 1800 007 007
- ⦿ *24 Hour Gambling Helpline* 1800 858 858
- ⦿ *Money Smart*
(www.moneysmart.gov.au/managing-my-money)

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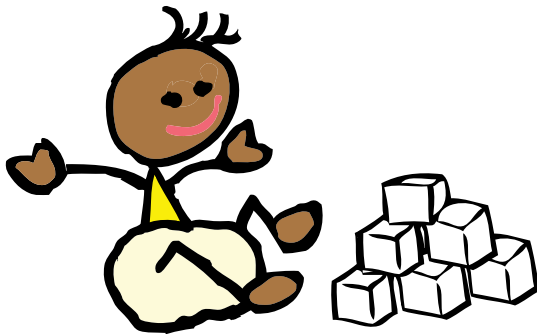
Learning and development

Little ones need to watch, copy and interact with the people and things around them. This helps them to learn and to develop.

If they are supported to do these things, it helps their brain and body to grow strong and healthy.

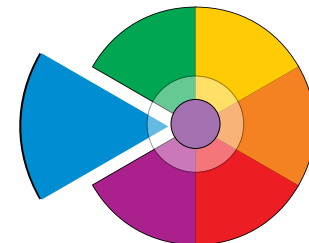
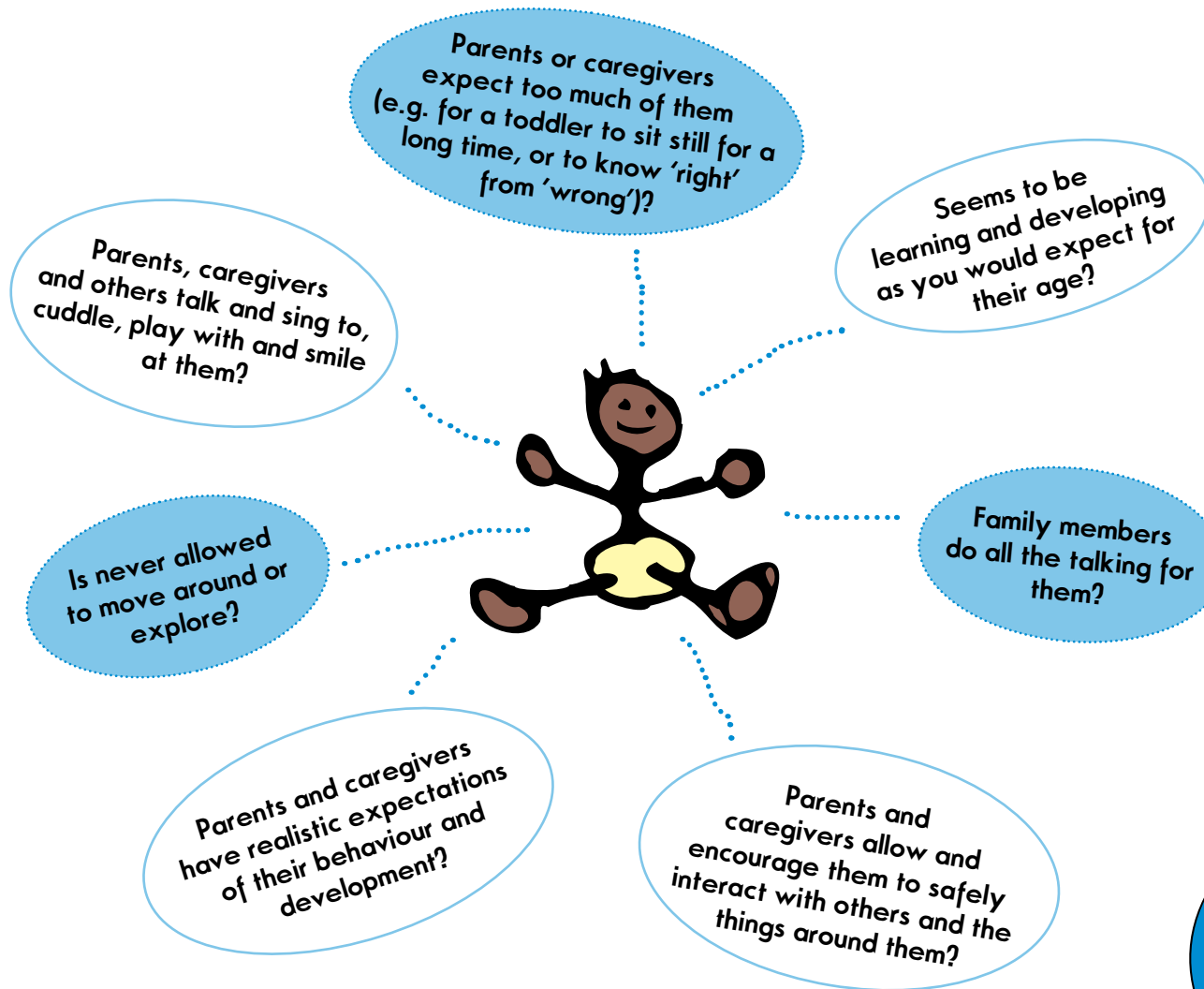
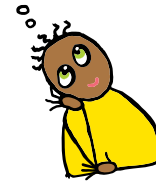
However little ones can become vulnerable if:

- ⦿ their learning and development is slow
- ⦿ they are prevented from interacting with other people or the things around them
- ⦿ their parents or caregivers expect too much of them for their stage of development
- ⦿ they are sick, injured or unwell.



The 'Ages and Stages' tip sheets (www.families.nt.gov.au) and the 'Healthy Development' booklet of the 'Tune in to Little Ones' kit have lots of information and ideas to help parents and caregivers support their child's learning and development.

What to tune in to



How to support parents and caregivers to tune in

Listen and talk with parents and caregivers about:



- ⦿ the things they already do with their little one to help them grow and learn
- ⦿ the important role they play in helping their little one's brain development and learning
- ⦿ what their little one might be learning as they watch and interact with the people and things around them
- ⦿ any concerns they may have about their little one's learning and development
- ⦿ simple everyday things they have already (e.g. plastic cups, bowls and pegs) that they can use to play with their little one.

Find out about:



- ⦿ developmental stages (see the *Ages and Stages tip sheets* (www.families.nt.gov.au) and the *Healthy Development* booklet - **Tune in to Little Ones** kit). These can help you to know what to expect of little ones as they grow and learn
- ⦿ things that can impact on a baby or young child's healthy development (see the *Extra Concerns and How to Help* booklet - **Tune in to Little Ones** kit)
- ⦿ cultural expectations and parenting practices related to child development. Get advice from a Cultural Advisor or Aboriginal Community Worker if you need to
- ⦿ local playgroups, library sessions, toy libraries or other activities that parents and caregivers can go to with their little one
- ⦿ the important role parents and caregivers play in giving their children the best start in life (see *Key Messages about Children* poster and information on page 18 of this manual).

Encourage and support parents and caregivers to:



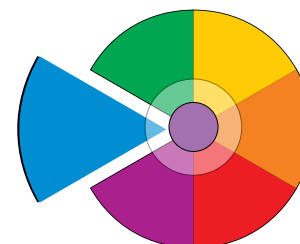
- do more of the things they are already doing to support their little one's growth and development
- access the health clinic or a specialist who can check their little one's hearing, vision and development if needed
- sing and talk to, copy, read to and play with their little one, even as they go about their normal activities such as bathing, cooking and nappy changing
- understand, expect and accept 'normal' behaviour for little ones (remember to consider culture)
- provide different experiences for their little one to help them grow and learn
- access playgroups and other community resources
- use their natural world to help their little ones learn.

Resources:

- Healthy Development booklet - **Tune in to Little Ones** kit
- Ages and Stages tip sheets (www.families.nt.gov.au)
- Extra Concerns and How to Help booklet - **Tune in to Little Ones** kit
- Key Messages about Children poster
- FaFT playgroups
- Parent tip sheets: About Babies, Learning to Talk, Living with Babies, Milestones 0-4 years (www.families.nt.gov.au)

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Remember that Aboriginal children might walk early, and use non-verbal ways (such as hand and facial gestures) to communicate.



Safety

Babies and young children need to grow up in an environment that is physically, emotionally and culturally safe.

Sometimes things can happen in families that put a little one at risk of being frightened, ignored or physically hurt. These include:

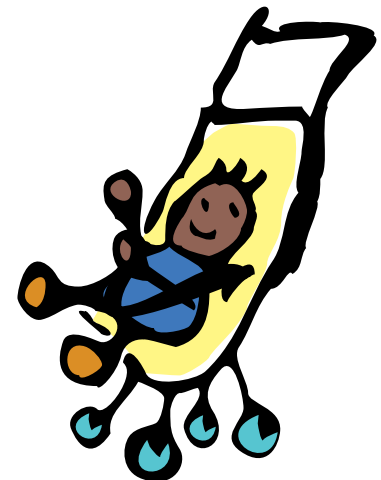
- 🌀 fighting, yelling and abuse
- 🌀 heavy use of drugs or alcohol (including kava or gunja)
- 🌀 gambling.

These things can mean that the family members who are meant to care for a little one are too traumatised by violence, too affected by drugs or alcohol or too preoccupied (e.g. with playing cards or poker machines) to notice what their little one needs and to respond in the best way.

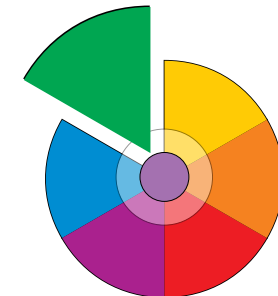
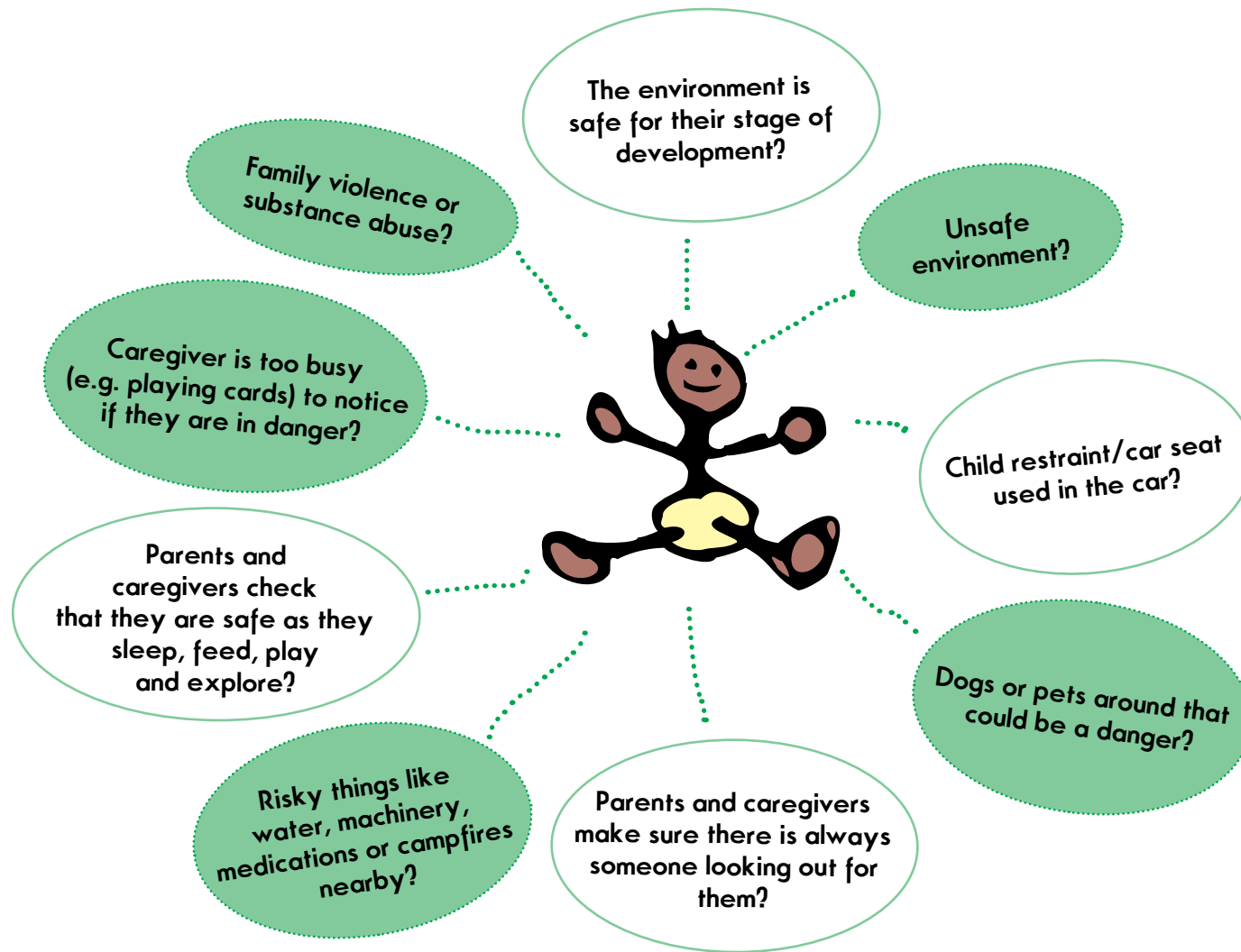
Overcrowding or lots of people coming and going can mean that a little one and their needs are not noticed or that no-one is looking out for them or protecting them.

There might also be things around (like dogs, rubbish, poisonous cleaning products, medication, camp fires, water, drugs or machinery) that make it unsafe or risky for little ones as they grow.

If families are living in a house with lots of people, help them to work out ways to make sure their little one is watched over and kept safe.



What to tune in to



How to support parents and caregivers to tune in

Listen and talk with parents and caregivers about:



- the things they are already doing at home to make things safe for their little one
- things about their baby or young child that might increase the risk to their safety (e.g. their age, stage of development, personality – are they a risk-taker, adventurous, curious)?
- how violence, gambling or substance use by family members might be preventing them from caring properly for their little one. Help them work out what to do
- safe sleeping practices – see the SIDS and Kids *Taking Care of Your Baby* and *Safe Sleeping* brochures and the *Extra Concerns and How to Help* booklet - **Tune in to Little Ones** kit. Remember to consider culture; get cultural advice if you need to.

Find out about:



- services (e.g. local Aboriginal Corporation or Housing Organisation, gambling support programs, Safe Places, Child and Family Health Nurses, Aboriginal Health Workers, alcohol and other drug programs, Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers, Legal Aid/ NAAJA/CAALAS) and what they can do to support families
- Kidsafe NT – use their information on home and car safety to help you work with parents and caregivers.

Encourage and support parents and caregivers to:



- build on the things they are already doing to keep their little one safe
- make sure there is always a responsible adult looking out for their little one
- identify and get support from family, community or services if they need to
- identify people they trust to help them look after their little one
- think about what might need to happen to make it safer for their little one, and how they can do this (use *Step 1: Make your place safe* of the *7 Steps to Safety* kit to help you)
- make a plan for how to keep their children safe if there is substance use or violence. Identify and get support from family, community or services if they need it
- identify people or places they can take their children to if necessary (e.g. family members, Safe House)
- make a plan for where their children can go if suddenly they are not able to care for them (use *Step 7: Make a Care Plan* of the *7 Steps to Safety* kit to help you).

Resources:

- Kidsafe NT - 8985 1085
- SIDS and Kids *Taking Care of Your Baby and Safe Sleeping* brochures (www.sidsandkids.org)
- *7 Steps to Safety* kit - *Step 1: Make your place safe* and *Step 7: Make a Care Plan* (www.families.nt.gov.au)
- 'Family Violence' and 'Safe Sleeping' sections of the *Extra Concerns and How to Help* booklet - **Tune in to Little Ones** kit
- *Parent tip sheets: Safety for Children 0-4 years, Living with Toddlers, Protect Your Child from Paedophiles* (www.families.nt.gov.au)

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Little ones need to **FEEL** safe so that they can grow and learn.



For more information and support

Community Care Centres

Alice Springs.....	8951 6711
Darwin (<i>Casuarina, Stuart Park, Karama</i>).....	8922 7301
Katherine	8973 8570
Palmerston	8999 3344
Tennant Creek	8962 4218
Nhulunbuy	8987 0435

Remote Health Clinics

www.health.nt.gov.au/Service_Locator/Remote_Health_Centres

Health Direct 24/7 health advice and information

Telephone.....1800 022 222

Parentline Parenting support, counselling and education from 8am-10pm seven days a week

Telephone.....1300 30 1300

NT Families Website *Parent Tip Sheets and 7 Steps to Safety kit*

www.families.nt.gov.au

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The ***Tune in to Little Ones*** kit is for people who work with families who have a child under 2 years old.
This *Worker Resource Manual* has ideas and information to assist them in their work.

Other elements of the ***Tune in to Little Ones*** kit include:

Healthy Development booklet

Extra Concerns and How to Help booklet

The Wheel poster

Key Messages about Children poster

For further research,
visit *Department of Children and Families - Publications*
www.childrenandfamilies.nt.gov.au

