



# TALKING WITH PARENTS ABOUT DISABILITIES

Training Package  
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## Content

National Competencies	4
Aims of workshop	5
Introduction	5
Group Exercise 1	6
Steps to raising concerns	6
Step 1 – Identifying the concern	7
Step 2 – Identifying whose concern it is	8
Group Exercise 2	8
Step 3 – Identifying who you need to assist you	9
Step 4 – Communicating the concern to the parent/s	10
Group Exercise 3	14
Step 4 – Having a go	15
Summary	15
<b>Overhead transparencies 1- 10</b>	
OHT 1 Aims of workshop	16
OHT 2 Steps	17
OHT 3 Concerns	18
OHT 4 Actions	19
OHT 5 Step 3	20
OHT 6 Step 4	21
OHT 7 Reasons	22
OHT 8 Possible Reactions	23
OHT 9a & b Case studies	24,25
OHT 10 Summary	26
<b>Handouts 1- 8</b>	
Handout 1 National Competencies	27
Handout 2 Aims & Steps	28
Handout 3 Identifying who you need to assist	29
Handout 4 Communicating the Concern	30
Handout 5 Case study	31
Handout 6 Case Study	32
Handout 7 Summary	33
Handout 8 References /Recommended Reading	34

Competencies/elements addressed in this training kit

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National Competencies - children's services

- CHCRF1A            Communicate with family members about their child
- Element 1.** *Establish a relationship with family members*
- Underpinning skills and knowledge:**  
*Diversity of family types and cultures*  
*Basic communication skills such as active listening and questioning*
- CHCRF11A            Work in partnership with families to care for the child
- Element 3:** *Facilitate the transition to child care*
- Underpinning skills and knowledge:**  
*Parental reactions to separation from child and use of childcare*  
*Respect for parents strengths, competence and knowledge of their child*  
*Non- judgemental attitude to different perspectives*



- Present competencies that will be addressed in this workshop. Handout 1.
- Talk through the aims of the session with the group using OHT 1
- Use introduction to assist group to think about talking with parents and as an introduction to Group Exercise 1.

### Aims.

- To identify the working relationship between parents and childcare workers.
- To clarify the communication problems and /or concerns
- To understand the needs and issues of parents
- Develop strategies to promote positive communication between parents and all staff.

### Introduction

As childcare workers an integral role of providing quality care is the interaction and sharing of information about the child in care. Under Quality Assurance principles for Centre based care, Family Day Care and Outside school hours care, the necessity to working in partnership with parents in the provision of a quality inclusive childcare service is re-inforced. Most of the communication with parents often consists of anecdotes of the child's day as well as administrative information. Usually this type interaction is positive, non threatening and often occurs on a regular basis with positive outcomes. It is only when, as childcare workers that we have concerns, that the interaction becomes difficult. While caring for children, childcare workers need to:

- Seek information from parents
- Co-ordinate strategies and ideas with parents
- Share information with parents



- Group exercise 1 can be done in a large group brainstorming. Identify the main issues that get presented to use as “working” concerns throughout the workshop.

- Work through the introduction of Steps. Allow for group discussion

## Group Exercise 1.

***What concerns/issues are likely to be difficult to discuss with parents?***

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***Why is it difficult?***

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Your role in early intervention is crucial to the successful inclusion of each child in your service. Your concerns are often raised when the child deviates from the “norm”. Sometimes it can be difficult to say what it is that concerns you, other times it can be quite obvious. Developing confidence in your ability, can be assisted by bringing your concerns to the parent for validation. Sometimes what is a concern to you may not be a concern to the parent.

### **Steps to raising concerns with parents.**

Usually the times that it is most difficult to talk to parents is when there is problem related to a specific topic. Initially to assist in the interaction, the first rule is to bring it from your perspective as the childcare worker. Including a child into a service that you have concerns about requires you to have additional support and guidance to include the child and provide quality childcare.



- Present steps on OHT 2 one point at a time and allow for discussion and participant input.
- Present OHT 3. (Concerns)
- Present OHT 4 (Actions)

- Step 1. Identifying what the concern is.
- Step 2. Identifying whose concern it is.
- Step 3. Identifying who you need to assist you in addressing the concern
- Step 4. Communicating the concern to the parent.
- Step 5. Having a go.....

### **Step 1. Identifying the concern.**

Caring for children enables us to observe in specific settings the child's developmental progress. The concern about how a child is doing only raises the "alarm" buttons when:

- The child deviates from the "norm"
- The child's behaviour creates disruption within the group
- Something tells you that things seem "different" with this child (the child may not be a disruption to the group and in fact may be very placid)

When these "alarm" buttons go off it is important that the childcare worker:

- Records observations of the child
- Identifies whether there are other factors contributing to the concern i.e. environment, staffing, high expectations of child
- Identifies whether the concern is raised as a result of differing philosophies between staff and parents.



- Group Exercise 2. Work through some examples identifying whose “problem” it is. Either parent, childcare worker or both

## Step 2. Identifying whose concern it is.

Parents and children’s services attempt to compliment and support each other in the care of children. Parents aim to select a service that respects and has similar childcare practices. In some instances due to availability that matching can sometimes not be as close. Parents and Childcare workers have different priorities and tolerance. The situation that the childcare worker may view as important may seem relatively insignificant to the parent. Your values and philosophy may differ greatly. A parent may feel that ignoring the concern will help the child to feel “normal” whereas you need to work with parents in regards to the disability to ensure that you can provide the best possible care.

It needs to be noted that after all your best attempts, a parent may not be receptive and eager to work collaboratively with you. You may have to accept that you may have to “work with what you have got” without the support of the parent.

### Group exercise 2.

Using the examples from group exercise 1 list who has the “Problem”

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- Using the issues identified work through step 3. Present OHT 5 for those not mentioned

### **Step 3. Identifying who you need to assist you in addressing the concern**

This is an important step in the process of talking with parents about their child.

There are a number of “resources” which support your role as a professional.

- You do have a professional responsibility to inform parents of concerns you have about their children no matter how difficult this is.
- Share your observations with other staff to enable you to clearly identify what you are observing. Other staff will see what is occurring from a different perspective.
- Document your observations and concerns. This enables you to put your concerns into context and assists in raising them with the parent.
- Identify other professionals who you will be able to refer parents to or utilise the expertise to assist you in the day to day care of the child.
- Ensure that the director is aware that you will be raising the concern with the parent. Never act in isolation.
- Maintain confidentiality - you don't want the parent to find out about your concerns from another parent.
- Be professional by letting parents know that you aren't the "expert" and provide numbers and contact names of other support services.



- Present A- G points in Step four. OHT 6 Working through each one allowing for discussion on each point
- Talk through how each one of us perceives information. Give your own example to assist with the concept of differing perceptions on receiving information

#### **Step 4. Communicating the concern to the parent.**

- A. Identifying the Perceptions
- B. Giving information
- C. Clarifying your need
- D. Consider the reasons why parents Respond negatively/inappropriately
- E. Consider how parents may react
- F. Pick an appropriate time
- G. Understand/acknowledge your reluctance to deliver the message

Every time we see a parent we are communicating with them - directly and indirectly. Not all interactions with parents have the desired outcomes. It has a lot to do with perceptions.

#### **A. Identifying the perceptions.**

People experience the world through senses. People are very rarely aware of how they store the information. Penny Low Deiner states: (Resources for Teaching children with diverse abilities Harcourt Brace 1993 Chapter 22, Techniques for working with Families)

*“For some people this is visual, for others it is auditory. We each prefer to receive information through one of our senses rather than others. These preferred modalities are important in communication especially under stressful conditions. If you do not match the modality of people you are communicating with, Auditory people may tune out Visual people will not picture what you are discussing. Tactile people cannot get a feel for what is going on.”*

Listening to cues may assist in determining how people store the information. People use specific sense words such as “ *I can’t really picture Jane having a disability. I see it your role to discipline her when she is in your care.*”



- Continue working through each point with group.
- Allow for group discussion.

## **B. Giving information**

Be prepared to make some initial statements about your personal philosophy of care and what inclusion is and why it is happening.

Avoid labelling the child or the child's behaviour. (You are not qualified to do that)

Talk in everyday language using concrete & specific descriptions of behaviour.

## **C. Clarifying your need**

Bring it from the perspective of your need to be supported to include the child rather than that there is something "wrong" with the child. Present the issue objectively and how you feel and how it affects you in your work. Parents may see the benefits of working together rather than concentrating on "what's wrong with the child"

## **D. Establishing a collaborative approach**

Rather than raising the issue as a problem ask if the parent has noticed..... (This is less threatening than a statement suggesting developmental delay) Two heads are better than one. A team approach brings together different ideas, knowledge and skills.



- Present point E. as OHT 7 using the opportunity to brainstorm possible reasons

- Present on OHT 8 after brainstorming thoughts with the group.

## **E. Consider the reasons why parents respond negatively/inappropriately**

- 👉 Most parents may be reluctant to hear or accept negative comments about their child.
- 👉 All parents want the best for their child and have aspirations which may be shattered
- 👉 Some parents may suspect that there is a concern and place the blame solely on themselves
- 👉 Hearing about the concerns may bring despair and disappointment
- 👉 The parent may feel threatened by the information or overwhelmed in how to deal with it
- 👉 Feeling like this they may bypass logical thinking and think defence

## **F. Consider how parents may react.**

- 👉 They may smile or nod
- 👉 Get angry or blame the service " he never does that at home" or not having an understanding of disabilities may think that he has "caught " it off the other children.
- 👉 The parent may think "she doesn't like my child and now uses this as an excuse to remove my child from the service"
- 👉 "They don't know what they are talking about - they just aren't providing him with the right activities"
- 👉 They may take on board what you are saying and be ready to work together to address the issues.



- List point G briefly.
  
- Allow for an opportunity for participants to acknowledge their own feelings

### **G. When should you present it?**

- ✎ Pick your time well. When the parent is hurriedly dropping the child off or picking the child up is not the best time.
- ✎ It may be better to organise a meeting or in some cases offer to contact the parent by phone at night.
- ✎ Give parents the choice of times.

### **H. Understanding/acknowledging your reluctance to deliver the message**

Is it because we:

- ✎ Wait until crisis time
- ✎ Don't feel that we have a good rapport with the parent
- ✎ Feel uncomfortable about being the bearer of "bad tidings"
- ✎ Feel that we may not be correct in our observations? What if I'm wrong?

To reduce our anxiety and apprehensiveness it is important to set the scene. It is better to be pro-active rather than re-active.



- Provide this opportunity for participants to think about the proactive steps they can or do take in the development of effective and positive communication with parents.
- Group Exercise 3 can be done in a large group or small group.
- Allow for feedback of the latter.
- Present examples as handouts as well as OHT 9

## I. Set the scene

- 👉 Check your enrolment procedure. As well as gaining information from the parent at enrolment time clearly outline your services policies and procedures particularly observation procedures and what you do with them. Ideally a service should establish a meeting time 4 to 6 weeks after the commencement of care to allow parents the opportunity to discuss how the care is going.
- 👉 Establish how concerns can be raised by either party. (Parents need the opportunity to be able to raise concerns about their child and the care provided.)
- 👉 Reassure parents that this procedure is the same for all families.

### Group Exercise 3.

#### Deciding to talk to parents about your concern.

Using the steps already discussed let's look at some examples and ascertain how the concerns were addressed.

***What do you think of the staff's approach?  
How could she have done it differently?  
How do you think the parent may feel?  
Do you think the service has established enrolment procedures outlining the services processes?***



- Present step 5 if you have additional time or use in stead of Group Exercise 3.
- Present summary and allow opportunities for additional questions. OHT 10

### **Step 5 Having a go.....**

Having worked through and discussed strategies about raising concerns sometimes it is good to work through some actual concerns you may have. Each group provide a concern. Work through what needs to be established for this concern to be raised.

Ask yourselves - what do we do if the parent does not want to talk about it.

List some strategies in how you are going to work with the child.

### **Summary.**

- ✎ Communicating with parents is something we do every day. It plays an integral role in providing quality care.
- ✎ It is important to acknowledge and understand parent's reluctance to hearing the message.
- ✎ It is important to acknowledge and understand staff's reluctance to deliver the message
- ✎ There are steps to undertake for your service to be pro-active rather than re-active
- ✎ It is important to present yourself as a professional which is acknowledging that you are not the expert and that you need assistance to provide quality care from parents as well as support services.
- ✎ Be careful not to provide information on a disability that you really don't know anything about - leave that up to the specialist.
- ✎ Ensure that you have done your homework
- ✎ Recognising that you may not resolve the concerns the way you want and you may need to work with what you have got.

## Aims.

- ✎ To identify the working relationship between parents and childcare workers.
- ✎ To clarify the communication problems and /or concerns
- ✎ To understand the needs and issues of parents
- ✎ Develop strategies to promote positive communication between parents and all staff.



***NOAH'S ARK CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESOURCE UNIT***  
**OHT 1 Aims**

## *Steps*

Step 1. Identifying what the Concern is.

Step 2. Identifying whose concern is.

Step 3. Identifying who you need to assist you in addressing the concern.

Step 4. Communicating the concern to the parent.



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**OHT 2 Steps**

- ✎ The child deviates from the “norm”
- ✎ The child’s behaviour creates disruption within the group
- ✎ Something tells you that things seem “different” with this child (the child may not be a disruption to the group and in fact may be very placid)



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**OHT 3 Concerns**

- ✎ Records observations of the child
  
- ✎ Identifies whether there are other factors contributing to the concern i.e. environment, staffing, high expectations of child
  
- ✎ Identifies whether the concern is raised as a result of differing philosophies between staff and parents.



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**OHT 4 Actions**

- ✎ You do have a professional responsibility to inform parents of concerns you have about their children no matter how difficult this is.
- ✎ Share your observations with other staff to enable you to clearly identify what you are observing. Other staff will see what is occurring from a different perspective.
- ✎ Document your observations and concerns. This enables you to be able to place your concerns into context and assists raising them with the parent.
- ✎ Identify other professionals who you will be able to refer parents to or utilise the expertise to assist you in the day to day care of the child.
- ✎ Ensure that the director is aware that you will be raising the concern with the parent. Never act in isolation.
- ✎ Maintain confidentiality - you don't want the parent to find out about your concerns from another parent.
- ✎ Be professional by letting parents know that you aren't the "expert" and provide numbers and contact names of other support services.



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**OHT 5 Step 3**

- A. Identifying the Perceptions
- B. Giving information
- C. Clarifying your need
- D. Consider the reasons why parents respond negatively /inappropriately
- E. Consider how parents may react
- F. Pick an appropriate time
- G. Understand/acknowledge your reluctance to deliver the message**



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**OHT 6 Step 4**

- 👉 Most parents may be reluctant to hear or accept negative comments about their child.
- 👉 All parents want the best for their child and have aspirations which may be shattered
- 👉 Some parents may suspect that there is a concern and place the blame solely on themselves
- 👉 Hearing about the concerns may bring despair and disappointment
- 👉 The parent may feel threatened by the information or overwhelmed in how to deal with it
- 👉 Feeling like this they may bypass logical thinking and become defensive



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**OHT 7 Reasons**

- ✎ They may smile or nod
- ✎ Get angry or blame the service " he never does that at home" or not having an understanding of disabilities may think that he has "caught " it off the other children.
- ✎ The parent may think "she doesn't like my child and now uses this as an excuse to remove my child from the service"
- ✎ "They don't know what they are talking about - they just aren't providing him with the right activities"
- ✎ They may take on board what you are saying and be ready to work together to address the issues.



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**OHT 8 Possible Reactions**

Penny: Hi Steve, glad you could come earlier today. I need to talk to you about Billy.

Steve: Well I really can't stay. We have an appointment. What's happened to Billy?

Penny: I don't know really but have you ever had him checked out?

Steve: Penny I really can't talk now. Checked out for what?

Penny: Not sure but his development seems to be delayed. He doesn't seem to do the same things as the other children.

Steve: Look I really have to go. Can we talk about this another time?

Penny: Yeh, whenever, nothing really to worry about.

Steve gets Billy and leaves, obviously annoyed. Penny feels that Steve will never do anything about it so why bother.











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**OHT 9 Case Study**

- Fiona: Hello Jane, I was wondering if we could have a chat about Charlotte.
- Jane: Why what's wrong?
- Fiona: There has been some incidents lately that are causing me concern but I also want to talk about how she has been settling in, her overall development, things she likes to do etc etc. so could we organise a time to be able to talk without distractions?
- Jane: What incidents? Why didn't you tell me before. I thought she was getting along fine. She seems fine to me. I haven't noticed any problems.
- Fiona: It's no big deal. I just want to see how you think she is going. We often do this with our parents.
- Jane: I'll have to get back to you. I need to get my diary.

Jane leaves feeling threatened and concerned. Why don't they like Charlotte. Fiona feels that she should have said more but didn't want to talk about it front of other parents arriving to pick their children up.



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**OHT 9 Case Study**

-  **Communicating with parents is something we do every day. It plays an integral role in providing quality care.**
-  **It is important to acknowledge and understand parent's reluctance to hearing the message.**
-  **It is important to acknowledge and understand staff's reluctance to deliver the message**
-  **There are steps to undertake for your service to be pro-active rather than re-active**
-  **It is important to present yourself as a professional which is acknowledging that you are not the expert and that you need assistance to provide quality care from parents as well as support services.**
-  **Be careful not to provide information on a disability that you really don't know anything about - leave that up to the specialist.**
-  **Ensure that you have done your homework**
-  **Recognising that you may not resolve the concerns the way you want and you may need to work with what you have got.**



***NOAH'S ARK CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESOURCE UNIT***  
**OHT 10 Summary**

Competencies/elements addressed in this training

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National Competencies - children's services

- CHCRF1A            Communicate with family members about their child
- Element 1.** *Establish a relationship with family members*
- Underpinning skills and knowledge:**  
*Diversity of family types and cultures*  
*Basic communication skills such as active listening and questioning*
- CHCRF11A            Work in partnership with families to care for the child
- Element 3:** *Facilitate the transition to child care*
- Underpinning skills and knowledge:**  
*Parental reactions to separation from child and use of childcare*  
*Respect for parents strengths, competence and knowledge of their child*  
*Non- judgemental attitude to different perspectives*



**NOAH'S ARK CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESOURCE UNIT**  
**Handout 1 - Competencies**

## **Aims**

- ✎ To identify the working relationship between parents and childcare workers.
- ✎ To clarify the communication problems and /or concerns
- ✎ To understand the needs and issues of parents
- ✎ Develop strategies to promote positive communication between parents and all staff.

## **Steps to raising concerns with parents**

- Step 1. Identifying what the concern is.
- Step 2. Identifying whose concern it is.
- Step 3. Identifying who you need to assist you in addressing the concern
- Step 4. Communicating the concern to the parent.



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**Handout 2 – Aims, Steps to raising  
concerns with parents**

- ✎ You do have a professional responsibility to inform parents of concerns you have about their children no matter how difficult this is.
- ✎ Share your observations with other staff to enable you to clearly identify what you are observing. Other staff will see what is occurring from a different perspective.
- ✎ Document your observations and concerns. This enables you to be able to place your concerns into context and assists raising them with the parent.
- ✎ Identify other professionals who you will be able to refer parents to or utilise the expertise to assist you in the day to day care of the child.
- ✎ Ensure that the director is aware that you will be raising the concern with the parent. Never act in isolation.
- ✎ Maintain confidentiality - you don't want the parent to find out about your concerns from another parent.
- ✎ Be professional by letting parents know that you aren't the "expert" and numbers and contact names of other support services.



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**Handout 3 – Identifying who you need to assist you in addressing the concern**

## **Step 4. Communicating the concerns to the parent**

Identifying the Perceptions

Giving information

Clarifying your need

Consider the reasons why parents respond negatively /inappropriately

Consider how parents may react

Pick an appropriate time

Understand/acknowledge your reluctance to deliver the message

### **Possible reasons why parents react negatively/inappropriately**

- 👉 Most parents may be reluctant to hear or accept negative comments about their child.
- 👉 All parents want the best for their child and have aspirations which may be shattered
- 👉 Some parents may suspect that there is a concern and place the blame solely on themselves
- 👉 Hearing about the concerns may bring despair and disappointment
- 👉 The parent may feel threatened by the information or overwhelmed in how to deal with it
- 👉 Feeling like this they may bypass logical thinking and think defence

### **Consider how parents may react.**

- 👉 They may smile or nod
- 👉 Get angry or blame the service " he never does that at home" or not having an understanding of disabilities may think that he has "caught " it off the other children.
- 👉 The parent may think "she doesn't like my child and now uses this as an excuse to remove my child from the service"
- 👉 "They don't know what they are talking about - they just aren't providing him with the right activities"
- 👉 They may take on board what you are saying and be ready to work together to address the issues.



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**Handout 4 – Communicating the  
concern, parents responses and reactions**

Penny: Hi Steve, glad you could come earlier today. I need to talk to you about Billy.

Steve: well I really can't stay. We have an appointment. What's happened to Billy?

Penny: I don't know really but have you ever had him checked out?

Steve: Penny I really can't talk now. Checked out for what?

Penny: Not sure but his development seems to be delayed. He doesn't seem to do the same things as the other children.

Steve: Look I really have to go. Can we talk about this another time?

Penny: Yeh, whenever, nothing really to worry about.

Steve gets Billy and leaves, obviously annoyed. Penny feels that Steve will never do anything about it so why bother.



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**Handout 5 Case Study**

- Fiona: Hello Jane, I was wondering if we could have a chat about Charlotte.
- Jane: Why what's wrong?
- Fiona: There has been some incidents lately that are causing me concern but I also want to talk about how she has been settling in, her overall development, things she likes to do etc etc. so could we organise a time to be able to talk without distractions?
- Jane: What incidents? Why didn't you tell me before. I thought she was getting along fine. She seems fine to me. I haven't noticed any problems.
- Fiona: It's no big deal. I just want to see how you think she is going. We often do this with our parents.
- Jane: I'll have to get back to you. I need to get my diary.

Jane leaves feeling threatened and concerned. Why don't they like Charlotte. Fiona feels that she should have said more but didn't want to talk about it front of other parents arriving to pick their children up.



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**Handout 6 Case Study**

- ✎ Communicating with parents is something we do every day. It plays an integral role in providing quality care.
- ✎ It is important to acknowledge and understand parent's reluctance to hearing the message.
- ✎ It is important to acknowledge and understand staff's reluctance to deliver the message
- ✎ There are steps to undertake for your service to be pro-active rather than re-active
- ✎ It is important to present yourself as a professional which is acknowledging that you are not the expert and that you need assistance to provide quality care from parents as well as support services.
- ✎ Be careful not to provide information on a disability that you really don't know anything about - leave that up to the specialist.
- ✎ Ensure that you have done your homework
- ✎ Recognising that you may not resolve the concerns the way you want and you may need to work with what you have got.



***NOAH'S ARK CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESOURCE UNIT***  
**Handout 7 Summary**

***Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Handbook –  
National Childcare Accreditation Council – October 1993 & 2001***

***Making the Connection – Parents and Early Childhood Staff  
Joan Waters – Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre (Melbourne) Inc 1996***

***Talking to Parents about your concerns  
Hilary Greer – Playworks Melbourne 1999***

***Resources for teaching children with diverse abilities  
Penny Low Deiner 1993- Harcourt Brace College Publishers***



***NOAH'S ARK CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESOURCE UNIT  
Handout 8 References & Recommended  
Reading***