Tweed yarn up group for indigenous men: a pilot program & evaluation

Sallie Newell

Southern Cross University
Tweed Yarn Up Group for Indigenous Men: A Pilot Program & Evaluation

“It’s like energy for me, like them energy drinks - there’s nothin’ better than comin’ and gettin’ energy from what we have here, in the circle”

(March 2013)

Prepared By: Dr Sallie Newell (Sallie Newell Consulting)
ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the first implementation of the Tweed Yarn Up Group.

As such, it includes information about:

- The development and overall approach of the Yarn Up Group;
- How participants were recruited;
- Participants’ characteristics and engagement levels;
- The objectives, planned and actual contents of each weekly session;
- Participants’ feedback about the group; and
- Observations and reflections about the group’s impact on the participants.

For those interested in a more concise overview, the report begins with an Executive Summary summarising and critiquing the highlights across each of these areas.

ABOUT THE EVALUATOR: Dr Sallie Newell was appointed as Rekindling The Spirit’s evaluation consultant in late 2007. She has qualifications in psychology and behavioural science and over 15 years postgraduate research and evaluation experience across a wide range of fields. She has overseen the many project planning and evaluation consultancies for academic, government and community organisations. She uses a collaborative and capacity-building approach to enhance organisations’ evaluation capacity, as well as the reach and impact of their programs. Her publications can be found at: http://works.bepress.com/sallie_newell/

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The author gratefully acknowledges:

- The men who shared their time and themselves by participating in this pilot group, particularly their trust in allowing the group sessions to be recorded for use in this evaluation. These recordings delivered invaluable insights about the depth and scope of the challenges these men were grappling with and compelling evidence of the triumphs and setbacks along their healing journeys. I feel truly privileged to have been allowed to share their laughter and their tears and offer my sincere congratulations for the tremendous spirit, courage and resilience they continue to demonstrate, often in the face of much adversity, and my equally heartfelt sorrow that such strength continues to be a daily necessity for so many.

- Rekindling The Spirit for their ongoing commitment to Aboriginal people in our region and for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this important initiative.

- The Widjabul People and the Ngundawal Minjungbal People of the Bundjalung Nation. As the original and continuing custodians of the land where we and the Yarn Up Group are based, we acknowledge their Elders, past and present, and pay tribute to the unique role they play in the life of our region.

Rekindling The Spirit gratefully acknowledges:

- The YWCA’s Communities for Children program, Tweed Valley Early Childhood Intervention Service, On Track Community Programs’ Bunyarah-ga Drug and Alcohol program, Tweed Aboriginal Cooperative Society and New Horizons for providing the funding, space and other resources that made the Yarn Up Group a reality.

- The support of the following Elders in shaping the Yarn Up Group and getting it off the ground: Aunty Kath Lena, Aunty Paula Combo, Aunty Dale Williams, Aunty Sharron Tui, Uncle Cliffy Chadburn, Uncle Des Williams and Uncle Jeffrey Smith.

- All the men involved in the weekly groups, from August through to November 2012. Their consistency and trust played a major role in assisting individuals to speak openly and honestly in the groups.

- Stuart Anderson for preparing the program and session outlines for the Yarn Up Group and Sallie Newell for evaluating the group.

After having an opportunity to review and discuss a draft version of this report, the group participants endorsed these acknowledgments while also expressing their own appreciation, particularly to the women who initially assisted in bringing together such a group (namely, Judith Terkelsen and the Aunty’s named above) and to Rekindling the Spirit (namely Greg Telford), Stuart Anderson and Sallie Newell.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE YARN UP GROUP

This report provides a comprehensive review of the first implementation of the Yarn Up group for Indigenous men in the Tweed Heads area. This structured group program was designed by Stuart Anderson (from the Lismore Men & Family Centre) and adapted and facilitated by Greg Telford (from Rekindling The Spirit or RTS) – over a 14-week period from early August 2012.

The Yarn Up group covered the following topics:

- What is violence, control and abusive behaviour?
- The impacts of violence on self, partner, children, extended family & community.
- Self-awareness and emotional regulation (anger).
- Time Out and other methods to avoid violence.
- Intimacy, building trust and listening skills.
- Self-awareness of thoughts (stinking thinking, entitlement).
- Beliefs and ethics.
- Steps to change (manageable goal setting).
- Listening and responding.
- Fathering and child development.

Although there was some variation, most weekly sessions lasted about 2½-3 hours, with a half-hour lunch break included in the middle. As well as the topic-relevant content, each session began with a check-in and ended with a check-out, where each participant, in turn, shared about their previous week and their plans for the coming week. With the participants’ consent, each group session was recorded for use in this review process. As additional participants joined throughout the program, the rationale for the recording was regularly revisited.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Overall, 31 men (aged between 17 and 60+ years) attended at least one group session, with most joining during weeks 1-4, although five men joined in only weeks 8 or 9. Ultimately, 12 men (39%) attended more than 50% of the groups they were eligible to attend (with more than half of these attending at least 75% of groups), while 11 men (35%) attended 20% or less of their eligible groups, with the other eight men falling somewhere in-between. There were a few cases of multiple men from the same family, including brothers, cousins, father and son and, in one case, son, father and grandfather.
The participant feedback included throughout this report clearly demonstrates the need for and value of this type of group for Aboriginal men. Participants expressed their gratitude for the group’s existence at every session, talking about enjoying it and even looking forward to it, with quite a few comments about prioritising coming to group above other activities (including drinking, drugging, training courses and even medical appointments). There was a strong sense that the Yarn Up group filled a real gap in existing services or activities, by offering a unique opportunity for Aboriginal men to come together in a positive way (rather than over drink or drugs). The men frequently expressed feeling accepted and connected, like they belonged and were part of something – all of which also seemed to be relatively unique experiences for many of them. The group was also frequently described as a safe environment, where participants felt comfortable opening up, even about very painful and/or shameful topics.

The group process worked very well, partly due to the high quality facilitation by Greg, but also as the other participating men seemed naturally good at taking turns, listening (even allowing potentially awkward pauses), reflecting back, supporting and offering advice where appropriate. This was particularly impressive as many participants were new to group work. There were quite a few pre-existing relationships among some of the participants (eg: brothers, father and son, cousins), which may have contributed towards this good group dynamic – although they may also have made sharing more painful, family-related histories more difficult.

Listening to the weekly recordings, it was also evident that the participants were very open and honest in their contributions, although some (mostly younger members) were less expansive than others. For a pilot implementation, overall engagement with the Yarn Up group was good – with 12 men (39%) attending the majority of the groups they were eligible to attend (including seven men attending at least 75% of groups). However, another 11 men attended only one or two groups – while most of these were probably just not ready for change, it may be helpful to think and/or ask about their reasons for not returning and any possible strategies for re-engaging them. Although not consistently recorded, it’s also worth noting that a number of the regular participants’ occasional absences were for unavoidable reasons (eg: funerals, court obligations, work or training).

Throughout the weekly sessions, there were many clear examples of how attending the Yarn Up group benefitted the participants. One recurring theme from the men’s feedback was a sense of reinvigoration or renewal, with many comments (and partner observations) about men feeling happier, calmer, lighter after attending groups. Another common theme was about the groups being cathartic, by offering a safe place to air and try to let go of issues. The group process, whereby the men learned from each other’s stories and experiences, also enabled each man to be the ‘teacher’, which served to build their self-worth, by providing an avenue for something positive (others’ learnings) to come from negative things they may have done or experienced in their past. There were many examples of the men putting things learned in the group into practice in their daily lives, particularly using time out and the traffic lights tool.
Consequently, although naturally works-in progress, the weekly check-ins regularly included examples of changes in the men, including:

- Increased awareness of their own behaviour, thoughts and/or emotions;
- Taking more responsibility for and control of their behaviour, thoughts and/or emotions;
- Becoming more understanding and/or compassionate towards their partners or children, including better acknowledgment of their struggles with their own issues and changes in the men;
- Increased awareness of the importance of children’s early years and how experiences then can have impacts throughout their lives;
- Increasing levels of self-confidence, self-respect, pride and trusting themselves;
- Increasing levels of trust in and respect for others, including being more open with their partners;
- Feeling more empowered, energised and/or motivated, with multiple examples of the men getting to grips with things they had been putting off; and
- Feeling less isolated, from seeing others experiencing similar issues.

As with any pilot program, it would now be worthwhile to revisit the program contents and session structures (based on the information included in this report and the facilitator’s own reflections) – although all of the proposed topics were covered, it wasn’t always in the ways or depth proposed. For example, the check-in process usually took up at least half of the 2½-hour session time – which, although unplanned, was a necessary function of the often quite large group sizes (11+ at eight sessions), the staggered entry of men to the program (needing more introduction and history-sharing time across a number of weeks) and the limited availability of other safe and healthy outlets for the participating men. Although clearly important and a necessary adaptation, these longer check-ins inevitably restricted the amount of session time available for directly covering the pre-planned, content-specific activities, some of which also took longer than proposed. The start time and/or overall session length may also need revisiting as there were a few occasions where multiple participants had to leave sessions quite early – although quite reasonable and understandable, it’s always useful to think about any strategies that may help to minimise this, to ensure that all members get as much as possible from the group. One suggestion might be to explore the feasibility of starting the group earlier and finishing with lunch (which was usually done in the middle of the current groups). Given the extra time needed for some topics and as not all content activities could be completed, it would be worth considering extending the length of the overall program, particularly as most participants expressed a strong desire, and even need, for the group to continue. To help consolidate session learnings and allow the facilitator to reflect on session effectiveness, it might be helpful to include a weekly check-out question asking about the main thing participants learned or will take away from each session.

Listening to the weekly recordings clearly highlighted the critical role of the facilitator’s knowledge and expertise in optimising group functioning and impact on the participants. A clear example of this was how Greg managed the longer check-in activities – clearly recognising their importance and being an experienced facilitator who was extremely familiar with the content areas, he was very adept at interweaving relevant content-related comments throughout each group session (even when participant contributions appeared quite unrelated to the topic under discussion) – in relation to the current session topic but also making the most of any opportunities to reinforce previous topics and/or highlight upcoming topics. His experience was also evident in the decision to postpone the Fathering session until
later in the program, as it did provoke some very intense memories and emotions about limitations in how the men were parented themselves and/or how they parented their own children. The other most notable demonstration of Greg’s experience was the nature of his individualised responses to participants’ contributions, particularly during the check-in and check-out activities – regardless of the length, clarity and nature (positive or negative) of each contribution, Greg’s comments inevitably served to simultaneously acknowledge, encourage and further challenge the men, often highlighting what was unsaid as well as what was said, in a sincere and seemingly effortless way. In keeping with RTS’s usual practice, and as recommended by the program designer, Greg was also an active group participant, sharing his own history as well as his weekly successes, challenges and setbacks throughout the program. However, for evaluative purposes, all the quotes included in this report come from other participants.

Some other areas worthy of consideration for future implementations include:

- The feasibility of running a corresponding women’s group, especially for partners of the men attending the Yarn Up group – as the participants often commented about their partners (or other women in their lives) being somewhat confronted by or suspicious of how they were changing, as well as more generally having some need for an opportunity to work through their own issues.
- Considering the inclusion of some other topic areas (either here or in complementary groups) – examples emerging during the program included addiction issues (including gambling) and dealing with grief and loss issues associated with the many deaths and/or relationship breakdowns (with partners, parents, children and others) experienced by many of the men.
- The best ways of managing or accommodating the varied starting points and attendance rates of participants – possibly by including a couple, more general “getting to know each other” sessions before starting into the main content areas (allowing time for those not really ready for group work to withdraw) and/or setting a limit on how far in new members can join the group (with later arrivals being encouraged to wait for the next group cycle). While the self-perceived benefits seemed to motivate many participants’ continued attendance, some kind of ‘graduation’ ceremony (say for those attending 75% or more sessions) might provide some added incentive, while also offering a more concrete recognition of participants’ commitment and/or progress (and one that might also help their efforts in other areas, eg: seeking work or with their parole compliance).
- The need for such groups to be conducted within a broader support environment, allowing for individual-level follow-ups between groups as needed. During this program, these follow-ups included practical and moral support and advocacy relating to housing, employment, legal and mental health issues disclosed during the group sessions.
ABOUT THE YARN UP GROUP

Rekindling the Spirit (RTS) has run weekly Men’s Groups since 1996, initially in Lismore and then also in Tabulam. In 2012, they were asked to run a similar group for Indigenous men in the Tweed Heads area. While the Lismore and Tabulam groups are ongoing and mostly organic (covering topics as they arise), the Tweed group needed to be run as a 10-week program covering more pre-determined topics. Consequently, RTS contracted Stuart Anderson (from the Lismore Men & Family Centre) to develop a structured 10-week group program, based predominantly on the topics and resources used in RTS’s existing Men’s Groups, but also drawing on other relevant literature. Ultimately, the Yarn Up Group sought to cover the following topics:

- Week 1: What is violence, control and abusive behaviour?
- Week 2: The impacts of violence on self, partner, children, extended family & community.
- Week 3: Fathering and child development.
- Week 4: Self-awareness and emotional regulation (anger).
- Week 5: Time Out and other methods to avoid violence.
- Week 6: Intimacy, building trust and listening skills.
- Week 7: Self-awareness of thoughts (stinking thinking, entitlement).
- Week 8: Beliefs and ethics.
- Week 9: Steps to change (manageable goal setting).
- Week 10: Listening and responding.

Additional groups were scheduled before and after this 10-week program – the former to provide an introduction to men’s groups and men’s business and the latter to gather participants’ feedback about the program and suggestions for the future. Each weekly session was scheduled for approximately 2½ hours, including a 15-minute tea break. As one session took longer than planned and another was repeated (due to many absences the first time), the program ultimately ran across 14 weeks, from August to October. All groups were facilitated by Greg Telford, a very experienced facilitator and the managing director of RTS.

While providing clear objectives, session outlines and suggested resources for each week’s group, Anderson cautioned that “It is the skills and experience of the facilitators that will determine whether there is successful engagement on these difficult topics. It would be counter-productive and possibly dangerous for inexperienced, unskilled facilitators to attempt to facilitate these groups”. In keeping with RTS’s own philosophical approach, Anderson encourages facilitators to adopt Alan Jenkins1’s ‘ethical journey’ approach, whereby each group member is invited to think about the sort of father, partner and/or man he is trying to become and supported to explore any inconsistencies with his current behaviours. Other key elements of this approach are that each group member is seen as an individual on his own journey to becoming a better person and that facilitators should be consciously on their own ethical journey and join in the exercises to reduce the power imbalance and indicate that all people have to tackle these problems.

With the participants’ consent, each group session was recorded for use in this reflection and evaluation process. As additional participants joined throughout the program, the rationale for the recording was regularly re-visited.

ABOUT THE GROUP MEMBERS

RECRUITMENT METHODS
The Yarn Up Group was initially promoted by On Track Community Programs, Tweed Valley Early Childhood Intervention Service and community Elders – to Aboriginal men who may be interested and benefit from such a group. Word also spread through the Koori grapevine and, as the groups progressed, many participants brought other men along, often their relatives.

PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT
A total of 33 men attended at least one group session, although two of these attended only the pre-program introductory session.

Of the remaining 31 men:
- 5 (16%) attended 8-11 of the eleven weekly program groups;
- 7 (23%) attended 4-7 groups;
- 7 (23%) attended 2-3 groups; and
- 12 (39%) attended only one group;

These 31 men also joined the group at varying stages:
- 7 men first attended at Week 1;
- 7 men first attended at Week 2;
- 5 men first attended at Week 3;
- 6 men first attended at Week 4;
- 1 man first attended at Week 6;
- 3 men first attended at Week 8; and
- 2 men first attended at Week 9.

Consequently, 12 men (39%) attended more than 50% of the groups they were eligible to attend (with more than half of these attending at least 75%) while 11 men (35%) attended 20% or less, with the other eight men falling somewhere in-between.

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS
Men attending the group varied in age from 17 to over 60 years with a few cases of multiple men from the same family, including brothers, cousins, father and son and, in one case, son, father and grandfather. This is noteworthy as RTS has found that an individual’s healing process can be enhanced when attending groups together with other family members.

Only one of the participants had any experience of attending groups addressing issues so close to the heart.

Also noteworthy is that one of the younger participants had never been exposed to the negative childhood experiences or engaged in the negative adult behaviours that were common in most other participants’ stories. This young man’s positive attitude and progress in all areas of his life offered a powerful alternative way of understanding the impacts of violence and what becomes possible in its absence.
**INTAKE AND INTRODUCTIONS**
This session, which wasn’t recorded, sought to introduce the nature of men’s business and the purpose and style of the men’s group, as well as gathering some basic demographics about the participants.

**CONSENT GATHERING**
As a new program, it also sought the participants’ permission for the groups to be audiotaped for use (in de-identified form) in evaluating the relevance and manageability of the proposed content areas, the participants’ responses to the groups and any benefits for the participants. One man was quite suspicious and hostile at the thought of an external evaluator but Greg explained that the evaluation was internally-driven and aimed at enabling RTS to better understand and demonstrate the value of the men’s groups. Most participants were happy with this explanation and approach and the dissatisfied man ultimately decided to leave.

**GROUP GUIDELINES**
The main activity for this session was to develop the guidelines under which the group would operate. Some examples from previous groups were provided and the following were ultimately agreed on as the guidelines for this Yarn Up Group and displayed at each weekly session:

```
Group Guidelines
Respect
Safe, supportive environment
Trust
Confidentiality
Talk from own experience
Equal time for sharing
No Bullshit
No Blaming
No Put Downs
No Rescuing
No Interruptions
No Collusion
Be real, with what you say.
```
SESSION 1: WHAT IS VIOLENCE, CONTROL AND ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR?

**Planned Objectives**

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the group guidelines and which ones are particularly important to them; and
- List a variety of controlling behaviours, the ones they have used and what their response to this knowledge is.

**Session Contents – Planned & Actual (Week 1)**

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<td><em>(10 minutes)</em> Introductions – Facilitators to introduce selves and give an outline of the 10 session program. Then a go-round on name and one thing you are pleased about that happened in the previous week.</td>
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<td><em>(20 minutes)</em> Group Guidelines – Either review from introductory session or open the discussion to forming group guidelines by describing them not as rules that are imposed from somewhere else but as rules that we develop for ourselves as a group that will help this meeting achieve its purpose.</td>
<td>Recording started towards the end of this activity – seemed to have gone as planned and been mostly well received except for one participant who objected to any concept of ‘rules’ and left the group, although indicating that he would return the next week.</td>
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<td><em>(30 minutes)</em> Control Brainstorm – On the whiteboard write the heading “If my wife, girlfriend or partner felt controlled by me, what sort of things might I be doing?” The process of responding to and listing the answers can take at least half an hour. When appropriate, the facilitators should use examples from their own lives.</td>
<td>Very constructive, considered and reflective contributions from all participants (see picture below) – about behaviours they had used and/or had used against them. This activity lasted for over 70 minutes, although this did include the ‘review’ planned for the next activity. It was well facilitated, with good inclusiveness, probing, recapping, group dynamics and facilitator sharing.</td>
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*2 The same guy who was concerned about the evaluation process in the pre-group session.*
**PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

- **(60 minutes) Group Discussion** – Whole group to review what has been put up on the whiteboard and then a go-round on the questions: a) How do you feel / what do you think looking at this list? and b) Which, if any of these behaviours have you used? What generally happened when you did this?

**WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED**

This was done as two briefer go-rounds (about 15 minutes for the first and 2 minutes for the second) but still generated thoughtful and considered reflections. A third question “How do you know when things are going well at home?” was also discussed (for about 15 minutes). The main response themes are included below:

### Feelings When Use Listed Behaviours
- Angry at self
- Sad
- Disappointment
- Shame
- Remorse / sorry
- Aware of how responding to provocation

### Consequences for Partner
- Being fearful
- Feeling unsafe
- Withdrawing from you
- Can’t be themselves
- Diminished relationship quality

### Signs of Things Going Well
- Humour / laughter / smiling
- Communication / acknowledgment / greeting
- Feel comfortable together or doing own things
- Welcoming / eye contact / kisses & cuddles
- Humming / singing / music

### (15 minutes) Check-out – Final go-round on “One thing I have learnt from this meeting” and “One thing I am going to do this week that is good for my own calmness”.

This was done with just one question: “Do you think you have gained anything from doing this?” – for about 10 minutes (see Participant Feedback section for details).

### Handouts
- Typed copy of group guidelines, Control tactics from past groups and photocopy of what has been generated on the board.

**Unplanned Activity:** Brief discussion about how others felt about the guy leaving during Guidelines activity – was mostly disappointment for him with an acknowledgement that he was experiencing complex issues and although coming was a good sign, he may not be ready yet. All expressed support to keep encouraging his participation.

**ATTENDANCE**

Seven men attended this session although two left before the end – one in the Guideline discussion (as unhappy) and the other about two-thirds of the way through the Brainstorm section (for a prior appointment).

**PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK**

The following responses to the check-out question suggest that **this session helped remind participants about the different ways in which they had tried to control others and about progress they had made in curbing these behaviours:**

- I gained a bit more awareness that these things are going on or that you do these things and need to be more mindful.
- It’s a reminder that they are just under the surface and we’ve got to keep reminding ourselves that we do use them and if we’re not thinking about it, they just come out in the natural behaviour, unconsciously.
- One of the biggest things I still work on today is that one about “where ya goin?” and now I’m aware, like just don’t say anything and I actually walk away and I feel to myself “that was good”.
- It definitely helps, just seeing those things up there and you can go through ‘em one by one and have a think.
- It helps to identify them – sometimes you just don’t realise.
- Well, I must be getting pretty grown up now as I don’t see myself getting involved in too much of that stuff now ... I have done but one of the things I had to learn was to get a bit of trust or faith in myself and what I actually believe and be able to explain that harmoniously to other people ... I’ve found that when I’ve learnt those sort of skills, then a lot of this stuff just went away of its own accord.
- It’s all about breaking the cycle.
SESSION 2: THE IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE

PLANNED OBJECTIVES

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of ‘checking-in’;
- Describe the impacts of violence on themselves, their partners, children and the broader community; and
- Reflect on what is involved in becoming more aware.

SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (Week 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-in – One positive from the week and anything that happened that you feel emotional or upset about (can be positive emotions)</td>
<td>With many new men wanting to share their stories, as well as more recent updates, this activity lasted about 1¼ hours but provided a powerful bonding and acknowledgement opportunity.</td>
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<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(60 minutes) Impacts Exercise – Put 5 sheets of paper up on wall with the headings Self, Partner, Children, Extended Family and Community. Explain that we are going to look at the impacts of violence on each person or group of people. We are using violence in the broad sense – acts that harm, traumatis, intimidate or control others. Start the exercise with self (the person using the violence) and say we will be writing these impacts on the paper but we will have time to listen to some of the stories that may come out.</td>
<td>Greg explained the importance of this exercise but also that it was likely to arouse painful memories and/or strong emotions (which the men could follow up with him or Mark, if needed). Starting with the impacts on the self, as a perpetrator, Greg shared his own story and then facilitated a go-round and discussion, which also ended up raising many impacts of violence on children – as most of the men had witnessed it during their own childhoods (see pictures below for the impacts nominated). It was a very emotional session, particularly for men reliving past traumas or realising the full extent of the ongoing impact on their lives. When needed, the group participants supported, encouraged and comforted each other. As this process lasted almost 1¼ hours, exploring the impacts on partners, extended family and the community were held over for next week.</td>
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**SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 3, FIRST HALF)**

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<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Check-in</strong> – With some more new men joining the group, and others wanting to share their feelings about the group (see Participant Feedback section for details), this activity lasted about 30 minutes.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Impacts Exercise</strong> – Greg recapped the previous week’s discussion about the impacts of violence on the self (as perpetrator) and on children and then facilitated a 40-minute group discussion about the impacts on partners, extended family and the community. Finally, Greg did a 5-minute summary, noting how the discussions over the last 2 weeks had highlighted how violence can produce ongoing consequences that need dealing with over a lifetime – reinforcing the critical need to ‘break the cycle’.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Handouts</strong> – See Appendix C.</td>
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**Attendance**

Thirteen men (including seven first-timers) attended the Week 2 session although one left after about two hours (for a prior appointment). Twelve men (including five first-timers) attended the Week 3 session although one left after about 50 minutes (for a prior appointment).

**Participant Feedback**

The following responses to the check-in and/or check-out questions highlight the strength of desire and need for such a group for Aboriginal men, as well as suggesting ways in which the participants may already be benefitting from attending:

- I’ve been anxious but looking forward to coming for the last couple of days — so pleased to be here and thank you for doing it.
- Happy to be here, to have a yarn about issues — biggest issue is how to get back to culture, especially as have little contact with other Aboriginal men.
- I learnt from last week – as soon as I got in the car, I said to the missus “I’m real sorry I’ve been so controlling with the shopping and the set meals” – how I’m sorry I didn’t understand and still learning to talk to her about stuff – the past is one, as she constantly asks about my childhood and prison – and the wall goes up, I don’t wanna talk about it – so I’ve got to get better at that, at talking about feelings and thoughts – I’m slowly bringing down that wall (from prison & boys’ homes) and I want to stop that cos I don’t need it anymore.
- Life’s too good to waste it and dwell on what if and the past and I just appreciate being here with you guys and this’d have to be the best course I’ve ever been in.
- Knowing what we were going to be talking about this week made me think about what impacts I have on others and now my neighbours, they all love me – I spent a bit of time goin’ round and havin’ a chitty chat with this one, helped another move a couch and all of a sudden, it’s all “hey there <name>”, “hey <name>” – so showing a bit of courtesy and it’s come back to me 10 times over, from all different directions.
- Glad to be here — to learn from each other.
- It’s good to share and there are limited men around — so this group is so good and I’ve been waiting for something like this to happen for so long.
- I’m gonna do a lot of reflection on what happened here today cos I’ve been a bit housebound and too frightened to come out that door – so I’m gonna have a real good look at what I’ve learned today and take on board what’s restricting me from coming out is me — so it’s about the choices I make and I’m gonna start making better choices.
- I’m gonna start respectin’ meself and the people that are out there and appreciatin’ there is help or friends – basically, you don’t have to do it on your own.
- Not blaming other people and not blaming yourself because some stuff you haven’t got control of – there’s only one person that you’ve got control of and that’s yourself.
- Listenin’ to everybody’s yarns and that’s basically what’s happened — either from domestic violence or from society – it has isolated us — from our families, with our communities and what I wanna do is see what we can do about gettin’ that camp-out goin’ – I really enjoyed today, thank you.
- Things that happened last week are still impacting on me — I’ve put some of them things into practice and I’m getting a good response — so thank you guys for letting me come out a bit in this forum, in a safe place.
- Thanks for letting us come along today — I took a lot out of it and probably the biggest thing for me was the realisation that the problems people have during childhood, how much it carries through their whole life and how difficult it is to overcome early setbacks – reinforces that you really need to try to take care of youth and our children and help them have every opportunity they can to get through that stage — because you’re not always aware of what’s goin’ on at that young age and if you are in a position where you’re struggling and you can get to that support, it can really make a difference.
- I’m starting to trust myself to have a go at things that I would never have done before — to open up more — so it’s been good for me and it’s good to turn up today and see so many of the boys here again — it’s like energy for me, like them energy drinks — there’s nothin’ better than comin’ and gettin’ energy from what we have here in the circle — it can’t help but empower ya, make ya stronger.
When <another group member> said we were coming along, I thought “I don’t think so, not for me” – cos me old man was brought up, ya know, “you keep your shit in ya own house”, no coppers, no welfare, nathin’ like that – and actually, after comin’ in the group and, I dunno how it happened but it spun me out, how I opened up … but when I’m away from it too – I took a helluva lot away from it and one of the things was respect and I’m starting to trust the people – I had some dramas lately and these people really showed support for me – and, shit, having people say “no, you’re a good person” – that’s shit I’ve never heard all me life … I had a drama with one of me sons who’d had a blue with his boss and rather than tellin’ him to “rip his fuckin’ head off”, I’m sayin’ “look, just mellow out, you’re not gonna do yourself any good smashin’ the prick, even though he probably deserves it” – so, I’m just tryin’ to talk me son down and it felt empowering – after bein’ here and respectin’ the people here, to come off and say, ya know, violence is not always the answer – yeah, so I really appreciated last week and I took something out of it and I done something about it.

I’ve enjoyed comin’ here to the meetings, so I’ll keep comin’ back.

It’s good to see all these men here – I think we’re gonna get stronger and good support.

Pay my respect to all you brothers for comin’ down – cos we don’t actually understand how much help we get just being around men – so it’s a bit of an outlet for myself too.

(following a reminder about the rationale for the tape recording being done to help with evaluating the group) So if one day, it turns around and they utilise it in a school for young Aboriginal kids out on the missions and that, and it helps them make better choices, then what we do here is so important and worthwhile, it’s not funny.
### Session 4: Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation

#### Planned Objectives
After completing this session, participants will be able to:
- Use the Traffic Lights scale to list their own anger signals;
- Name critical points on the Traffic Lights scale for them; and
- Describe a number of activities that are calming for them.

#### Session Contents – Planned & Actual (Week 3, Second Half)

**Note:** This session was conducted in the second half of the Week 3 group (which had completed the Session 2 content) – so with limited time left, it was a very condensed version.

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<tr>
<th>Proposed Activities</th>
<th>What Actually Happened</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(20 minutes) Check-in – One strong feeling/emotion you had during the week and the scene that went with it. How are you travelling now?</td>
<td>These activities had already been done as part of finishing the previous session.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(20 minutes) Recap – Follow-up from last week, homework and reflection on session. Go-round to include all (OK to pass).</td>
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<tr>
<td>(45 minutes) Traffic Lights Exercise – Anger awareness, go-round on “Last time you felt angry, what was happening around you, what was happening inside?”. Facilitator to note internal ‘signals’ during go-round. Put Traffic Light chart on board, then back to each person to elicit particular signals and what level they should get written at.</td>
<td>This exercise was done for about 20 minutes – mostly focusing on anger signals, but also with some comments about feelings at the lower end of the scale.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Awareness/Relaxation Exercise (facilitator’s preference) – Can include awareness of breath and of the major traffic light zones (eg: stomach, throat, shoulders, jaw, skin).</td>
<td>This activity wasn’t done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Group Discussion – Go-round on ‘calm and content’ (in the green) signals, earliest anger signal (the subtle ones) and one activity that is good to bring oneself down the scale. Explain using the TL for both emergency and maintenance.</td>
<td>First part partially covered in above activity. Second part done as go-round on “Something you do to calm yourself?” (other than doing drugs or grog). Most suggestions were around getting away from the situation and physical activities (eg: gardening, going for a walk or ride, swimming) but some also mentioned thinking, self-talk and/or reading the bible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-out – Final go-round on “One thing I’ll do this week that keeps or gets me to ‘the green’” and “One thing I am grateful for”. Homework – fill in blank TL form.</td>
<td>Not done explicitly but first part similar to previous discussion. Homework was introduced briefly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts: Traffic Lights instructions, Blank TL form, Anger as an emotion, Relaxation/awareness process.</td>
<td>See Appendices D and E for the first two but don’t think the others were distributed.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Attendance
Eleven men (including five first-timers) attended this session.
# Session 5: Time Out and Other Methods to Avoid Violence

## Planned Objectives

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe their own Time Out process and how they have used it in their home;
- Indicate the Traffic Light signal that would trigger Time Out for them;
- Describe why it is important to negotiate Time Out with partners and family; and
- List the possibilities for Maintenance Time Out for them and for their partner.

## Session Contents – Planned & Actual (Week 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Activities</th>
<th>What Actually Happened</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-in – One thing you did that was calming during the week. How are you travelling now? (use a feeling word)</td>
<td>With several more new men joining the group and a few others needing longer debriefs about their week, this activity lasted an hour. It included some useful group feedback and examples of past learnings being put into practice (see Participant Feedback section for details).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Recap – Review last session, who filled in TL chart? What did you notice regarding anger during the week? Any other comments? Go-round to include all (OK to pass).</td>
<td>Greg put up the previous session’s Traffic Light notes and briefly recapped the signals covered. No go-round was done but one participant commented that, in a provocative situation, he’d found doing the homework a helpful calming activity in itself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(25 minutes) Time Out Exercise – Facilitator gives own examples of taking time out and invites a go-round on each person’s own strategies and practices (eg: going out for a smoke, going for a walk, smoking weed, counting breaths, etc). Discuss these things, the advantages and disadvantages. Discuss why take Time Out.</td>
<td>This activity was done for about 30 minutes, with a variety of strategies nominated, including: going for a walk, yarning with others, being in nature (bush, beach, river, etc), fishing, listening to music, being creative (eg: wood turning, renovations) and helping others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20 minutes) Group Discussion – Describe Emergency and Maintenance Time Out, how this links to the check-out ‘doing good for self’ and to the Traffic Lights. Go-round on the personal signal (how far up the lights and what it is) and what each man thinks is best for him to do.</td>
<td>Greg briefly covered the first part but there was no go-round, possibly due to time limitations given the longer check-in activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30 minutes) Handout Discussion – Work through each handout, with men reading out points in turn (OK to pass, be sure not to shame those that can’t read well). Discuss good points, challenges, etc.</td>
<td>These activities weren’t done, possibly due to time limitations given the longer check-in activity. However, the handouts were distributed at the end of the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Mid-way evaluation – Go-round on how this course is going: what is good and what could be better. Write up points and discuss.</td>
<td>This was done asking the participants to focus on how they were feeling as the session came to a close – for about 25 minutes (see Participant Feedback section for details).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-out – Final go-round on “One thing I am going to do this week that is good for me”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handouts: Time Out, Negotiation Guide.</td>
<td>See Appendices F and G.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ATTENDANCE

Fourteen men (including six first-timers) attended this session, although three left after about two hours as they had to collect a child from day-care.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

The following responses to the check-in and/or check-out questions highlight that the group is meeting a real need for the participating men, as well as providing some evidence of the information being put into practice:

- I've only been down here, this is my third time and it’s amazing how safe I feel, how easy it is to open up.
- Had a good week and then got to the weekend and the fuckin’ missus started again and I thought “oh, for fuck sake, will you drop off”, ya know and then I was thinkin’ about your chart, the 1-10, and I started focussing on that then, rather than gettin’ angry and I got through that ... without this group, I probably would’ve lost the fuckin’ plot by now.
- <partner> says I look a lot happier, talkin’ a lot happier – she can notice the anger gone out of me voice.
- It’s good to sit down and have a bit of a yarn, it’s my time out up here – it’s helpin’ me out and I’m gonna keep goin’ to this one – it’s a good little group.
- This is the first men’s group I’ve been to – it’s givin’ us a lot of info to help down the track.
- It’s good cos I’d walk past some of these men in the street and not know they had the same problems.
- I was a bit nervous about coming here but I feel a lot happier now.
- I feel different – it’s took a bit of the burden off me – feel lighter.
- I’m happy cos the group’s still goin’, everyone’s goin’ strong – I also feel proud that the other brothers were able to join us ... happy to see we’re all here – like it’s worthwhile enough to keep comin’.
- I’m feelin’ happy to be here and to meet this man here, who made me come to this place – and I feel like I’m part of this now.
- I’m goin’ away positive again, knowin’ that if I get angry with a few things, I can look at it a bit differently, ya know – try to control me environment a bit more than it controls me.
- Feelin’ a bit sad but another part of me feels really pleased that I’m here ... I still find things a struggle, a big struggle but it’s like they say, “a journey of 1000 miles starts with one step” and that’s why I’m here.
SESSION 6: INTIMACY, BUILDING TRUST AND LISTENING SKILLS

PLANNED OBJECTIVES

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Discuss different types of listening;
- Feel some confidence in guessing what others were feeling;
- Describe what intimacy is for them; and
- List own behaviours that may bring more closeness and trust to their family.

SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNPLANNED ACTIVITY:</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unplanned Activity:</strong> Greg asked what participants recalled about the previous session, then put up the Traffic Lights notes and recapped about the signals associated with the different levels and how it’s best to try to start time out processes lower down, before things escalate too far – this took a little under 10 minutes.</td>
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- **(5 minutes) Before Check-in** – Describe different ways of listening and that this check-in exercise is about listening for feelings. A brief go-round will happen after each man checks-in and in this, each person is asked to name one feeling they heard in the story. OK to pass, not OK to analyse, to give advice, to discuss the story, if possible just one word that is a feeling/ emotion word. These are sad, happy, excited, frustrated, fearful, etc. They are not bullied, vengeful, fine, belittled, critical, etc, these words are more about thoughts than feelings. This was done using the simpler question: “Tell us about your week?” and ended up taking the rest of the session (going for over 2½ hours, with a brief tea-break). With the participants all getting more familiar with each other, many check-ins were quite lengthy, particularly for men having experienced a challenging and/or emotionally turbulent week. The go-rounds after each check-in (to nominate the identified feelings) demonstrated very active listening, identified a wide range of appropriate feelings and often provoked quite in-depth feedback and or sharing of similar experiences. Although going against the proposed facilitator instructions, the go-rounds did often include some advice and/or analytic components – but these usually seemed quite timely, providing comfort to distressed men and/or acknowledgement of changes or progress being made. Some program-relevant comments are included in the Participant Feedback section below.

- **(65 minutes) Check-in** – One thing you did that was calming during the week. What were your ‘wins’ and ‘losses’ during the week? How do you travelling now? The person checking-in can respond briefly to the guesses at what feelings were happening, but they don’t have to, they can stay silent. However, the tendency is for a person to want to keep on talking – they feel heard because of the reflecting back of the feelings and want to tell the next bit of the story. Facilitators need to contain this or the time will blow out. The first part of this was touched on briefly during the main check-in activity – with the one man asked admitting having found it a bit embarrassing to have his feelings reflected back to him. Towards the end of the session, Greg noted that a major aim of the group was learning how to listen, to themselves but how this is also useful with partners – this led to some discussion about the difference between hearing and listening, including one comment about how not really listening to your partner is showing a lack of respect for them and another comment about the improved relationship quality that can come from being able to demonstrate that what a partner said was really heard (although they may get a bit suspicious at first – about the changes).

- **(10 minutes) Debrief** – Review the ‘feelings check-in’. What was it like to have your feelings reflected back to you? In what way is this different than the usual chatting? Would there be any place for this sort of listening in your family? How could this happen? Not relevant as feedback not sought last week.

- **(5 minutes) Recap** – Facilitator response (if any) to the evaluation/feedback from last week. What will change, what can’t change, etc.
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<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>(25 minutes) Intimacy Brainstorm</strong> – Discuss the word “Intimacy”. Does it mean</td>
<td>Held over to the next session but mentioned briefly – in preparation for the next session.</td>
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<td>sex? What else does it mean? “If my partner (or children) felt closer and more</td>
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<td>trusting of me, what sort of things might I have been doing?”</td>
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<td>• <strong>(15 minutes) Brainstorm Debrief</strong> – Go-round on response to this exercise.</td>
<td>This activity wasn’t relevant, as the brainstorm wasn’t conducted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>(15 minutes) Check-out</strong> – Final go-round on “One thing I am grateful for” and</td>
<td>This wasn’t done as no time left.</td>
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<td>“One thing I will do that is good for me”.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Handouts</strong>: What other men’s programs have put in Intimacy brainstorm, Ways</td>
<td>These weren’t distributed this week, as the associated activity was held over for next week.</td>
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<td>of listening.</td>
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### SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 6)

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<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Check-in</strong> – This</td>
<td>This was done as a go-round for about 25 minutes, with the following suggestions: Intimacy, Building Trust, Listening Skills, Not going out by</td>
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<td>was done using the</td>
<td>myself, Invite Partner to come out, Ask what she would like to do Better Communication, Honest, Open and honest, let her know what I am thinking,</td>
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<td>question: “How was</td>
<td>Share her's around home with children, Be there for her, when she needs you, Try to do something special for her, Just listen.</td>
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<td>your week?” and</td>
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<td>lasted about 1½</td>
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<td>Feedback section</td>
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<td>• **(25 minutes)</td>
<td>There was also some discussion about the need for a similar activity to support women, especially the partners of the men attending this group – as</td>
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<td>Intimacy Brainstorm** – Discuss</td>
<td>as many were expressing some confusion or suspicion about the ways the men were changing (especially in relation to not responding to usual triggers).</td>
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Tweed Yarn Up Group for Indigenous Men: A Pilot
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Activities</th>
<th>What Actually Happened</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(15 minutes)</em> Exercise Debrief – Go-round on response to this exercise.</td>
<td>This wasn’t done, possibly due to time limitations given the longer check-in activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(15 minutes)</em> Check-out – Final go-round on “One thing I am grateful for” and “One thing I will do that is good for me”.</td>
<td>This was done asking only about something good participants would do for themselves over the coming week that, in keeping with the intimacy brainstorm, could also nurture someone else – for about 20 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts: What other men’s programs have put in Intimacy brainstorm, Ways of listening.</td>
<td>See Appendix H for the first one but don’t think the other one was distributed.</td>
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</table>

**Attendance**

Eleven men attended Week 5 and twelve men attended the Week 6 session, although four left after the Week 6 check-in activity (which lasted 1½ hours). The Week 6 session included one first-timer, who stumbled on the group about 30 minutes in, on his way to something else – Greg invited him to join in and started to explain about the group, with most other group members chimping in about the benefits of the group and encouraging the newcomer to stay, which he did.

**Participant Feedback**

The following responses to the check-in and/or check-out questions highlight how members were actively supporting each other and ways in which the group and/or topics covered were making a difference to members:

- Congratulations for sayin’ what you say, to have the strength to let everyone know what’s goin’ on – that’s one of ya main steps to movin’ forward and to healin’ certain parts of ya life – startin’ to understand what those feelins are, why they’re there, that you can actually let people know that you’ve got those feelins, thinkin’ this stuff – gotta lotta admiration for ya, brother.

- Over the last few weeks, actually since coming to men’s group, at home I’ve started communicatin’ with me boys a lot better, even the daughter – she still goes off and I said “if you wanna treat me like that, don’t bother talkin’ to me” and she went off but she ended up, later, comin’ back and sayin’ “sorry I shouldn’t have talked to you like that” … and before men’s group, I’d have just said “well fuck off then” – so, it’s helpin’ me a lot, I know that.

- Since we been doin’ this men’s group, me head’s bin swimmin’, even more than it normally does, ya know, I’ve got a million ideas in me head and this is startin’ to trigger off those things that I’ve been thinkin’ about for a long time and bringing them into reality.

- I’m not havin’ confrontations at home – I’m walkin’ away, have a sit down and think about it, take the dog for a walk.

- Been pretty down, stuck in a prison of my own mind – but finally got it up, <another group member> helped me and feelin’ better now … love comin’ here and appreciate I’m allowed to be here.

- From a guy having had a very difficult week (with serious emotional and financial stressors) who twice came very close to reoffending (with violence and stealing) but talked himself back from the brink both times: Went to the pub this mornin’ and was gonna get drunk but thought “no, fuck it, I’ll go to group” cos I know last time I came I felt better and I listen to youse lot and it takes my mind off my fuckin’ shit – so when I leave here today I won’t feel like goin’ and killin’ some cunt. … I coulda hit ‘im and nearly did but I walked away – I think I’m worthless sometimes but I think I’m fuckin’ somethin’ now and I wanna help others.
SESSION 7: SELF-AWARENESS OF THOUGHTS

PLANNED OBJECTIVES

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the difference between Build Up and Calm Down thoughts; and
- List own Calm Down thoughts that may help stop their abusive behaviour.

SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 7)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>(25 minutes) Check-in</em> – Any significant things that happened during the week. How I went regarding staying calm and building trust. One time I was emotional during the week, what that emotion was and the thoughts that went with it.</td>
<td>This was done using the more general question: “How was your week?” and lasted about 80 minutes, partly as so many men to check-in. Again, there was some quite in-depth sharing and really relevant individual feedback (from Greg and others). There were also further examples of how the group was supporting and/or benefiting the participants (see Participant Feedback section for details).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(10 minutes) Presentation</em> – On the difference between thoughts and feelings, how they co-generate each other.</td>
<td>Covered briefly in introducing the following exercise and more so during the exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(30 minutes) Build Up Exercise</em> – Put Traffic Lights chart on board, fill in some of the signals and then invite people to name the different thoughts they might have at different levels of anger. Without naming it, put these thoughts in two columns, (Build Up and Calm Down). At some stage, declare what you are doing (or ask the men to guess why the different thoughts have been separated). Describe Build Up thoughts and ask for more examples of this “stinking thinking”. Make sure that labelling people with derogatory words (eg: Bitch, Prick) is included. Facilitators must feel at ease discussing the most derogatory swear words. Have a discussion on why these thoughts tend to increase anger and the movement toward violence. What happens when we have these thoughts? One of the characteristics of these thoughts is Victim and Blaming. Go-round on ‘favourite’ Build Up thoughts.</td>
<td>This exercise was done for about an hour – with Greg putting up the previous Traffic lights notes about feelings and a new sheet to record the thoughts associated with the various levels (see picture for details). There was some general discussion followed by a go-round covering both Build Up and Calm Down thoughts simultaneously as this was how most participants reported experiencing them (as duelling internal voices).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(10 minutes) Awareness Exercise</em> – Guided ‘scan’ of body and mind, followed by a debrief.</td>
<td>This activity wasn’t done, possibly due to the limited time remaining.</td>
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**PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

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<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Calm Down Exercise – Describe what Calm down thoughts are and how one 'trick' is to replace the stinking thinking with these, rather than just trying to stop build up thoughts. Go-round each person to give an example of an emotional situation that is reasonably common for them, the stinking thinking that might go with this and some attempts at formulating some calm down thoughts.</td>
<td>This was covered in conjunction with the Build Up exercise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-out – “How successful have I been in establishing regular practice of calming, 'good for my emotional health' activities?”. What can I do to improve this? (be realistic) What will I do this week?</td>
<td>This was done asking about how participants were now feeling and something good they would do for themselves over the coming week – for about 15 minutes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handouts: Build Up / Calm Down thoughts.</td>
<td>See Appendix I.</td>
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**ATTENDANCE**

Thirteen men attended this session although one had to leave after about half an hour (for another appointment) and three left during or after the lunch break (after check-in).

**PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK**

The following responses to the check-in and/or check-out questions highlight the perceived value of the group for the participating men, as well as suggesting ways in which they are benefitting from attending:

- From a guy feeling a great sense of loneliness and self-enforced isolation (as his way of avoiding potentially provocative situations): *When I come here, these groups, they mean a lot to me, cos it's the only chance that I get, where I feel acceptance and connected – I feel like I belong, I can fit in, ya know, the judgements, no-one has to pass judgment.*

- I just think to myself every day, I'm happy comin’ here, this one day out of the week is my day and <partner>’s there wavin’ me goodbye, sayin’ “take as long as ya like” – cos I think she can see some of the changes in me, specially when it comes to trust and some of my fears – sometimes my mind goes too fast on me and I create problems when there is no problem and so, for me, this is my mental health.

- Yesterday, me and me partner was good and then by the end of the day we were arguing, for a good half an hour, but to me, that was a healthy argument cos we were able to have an argument and then come back later and, ya know, give each other a cuddle – and it was weird to have an argument and for it not to end in disaster like.

- I just love comin’ here and <partner> just notices that little bit of change in me every time I go home – like I'm happier for longer, I don't come home whinging or angry no more.

- Like others sayin’ about change, you just don’t notice yourself – like, I've been comin’ along and certain things, I'm slowin’ down a bit on the yarndi, it's a start ... and a lot of the stuff we're learnin’ here, it does sorta go through ya head when you're out and about.

- I'm starting to get control of a lot of stuff, whereas I used to just fly straight off the handle and smash things, ya know, get very angry very quick ... but I'm startin’ to communicate with the kids a lot better now, whereas before I couldn’t, I was just gettin’ straight angry.
SESSION 8: BELIEFS AND ETHICS

PLANNED OBJECTIVES

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Discuss some of their own beliefs regarding what is right and wrong and ways they have tried to demonstrate these
- List some personal ‘roadblocks’ to behaving as they would like to

CAUTION (FROM STUART ANDERSON): This session is for a reasonably mature group. If some members were struggling with build up thoughts, etc then it may be best to choose a different theme.

SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 8)

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<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
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<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-in – How I’m feeling right now and anything that stirred me up during the week.</td>
<td>These were both covered in the check-in go-round, which lasted about an hour, with a couple of new participants – including one member’s son who was visiting from Queensland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(20 minutes) Recap – Review last week. Anyone notice build up thoughts? Anyone notice or use Calm Down thoughts? Go-round on this and write up Build Up and Calm Down thoughts from this and perhaps last week if only have a few examples.</td>
<td>This exercise was done, seeking volunteers to share stories – two men spoke at length (sometimes on-topic but often about more general issues), with some group discussion and Greg regularly prompting participants to reflect on the beliefs, ethics and/or morals involved. It lasted about 45 minutes and concluded with Greg suggesting they revisit it next week with a larger group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(50 minutes) Regret Exercise – “A time I regret what I did”. Each to tell a story of a time when they wish they’d behaved differently. The facilitator will be asking what are the ethics/morals underlying the regret. These will be listed as the stories get told as well as in a discussion after each sharing. These will generally be positive beliefs (eg: “Yelling at people doesn’t help the situation”, “Children grow better with love”).</td>
<td>This wasn’t done as a separate exercise but was touched on a little during the Regret exercise.</td>
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<td>(45 minutes) Roadblock Exercise – In the story of a regretful time: “What got in the way of us acting according to what we think is right? What was the roadblock?” Go-round on each person’s story and whole group working to try to figure out what got in the way (eg: ‘got too angry to think straight’, ‘she hurt me so I wanted to hurt her back’, etc) – these are written up as well. Facilitators to draw out ideas of entitlement if possible. Discussion on this.</td>
<td>This was done asking something good the participants would do for themselves over the coming week – for about 5 minutes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(5 minutes) Check-out – Final go-round on “One thing I will do that is good for my emotional health”.</td>
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<td>Handouts: None this week.</td>
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SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 9)

Note: This session was repeated due to having only a small group last week.

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<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-in – How I’m feeling right now and anything that stirred me up during the week.</td>
<td>This was done just about how participants’ week had been – it lasted about an hour, with many men sharing about some challenging weeks and how the group and/or their learnings from it had helped them (see Participant Feedback section for details). Again, Greg, and sometimes others, gave quality, individualised feedback after each check-in.</td>
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<td><strong>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(50 minutes) Regret Exercise – “A time I regret what I did”. Each to tell a story of a time when they wish they’d behaved differently. The facilitator will be asking what are the ethics/ morals underlying the regret.</td>
<td>Before the exercise, Greg led the group through a 5-minute brainstorm about why they needed to talk about beliefs and ethics – resulting in the following thoughts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(45 minutes) Roadblock Exercise – In the story of a regretful time: “What got in the way of us acting according to what we think is right? What was the roadblock?”</td>
<td>Greg initially sought volunteers to share Regret stories and then facilitated a go-round with the others – regularly prompting participants to reflect on the beliefs, ethics and/or morals involved and, to a lesser extent, the roadblocks. It lasted about 45 minutes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(5 minutes) Check-out – Final go-round on “One thing I will do that is good for my emotional health”.</td>
<td>This was done using the proposed question – for about 10 minutes. The four remaining participants planned to strengthen connections with family members and/or being more positive about themselves.</td>
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<td><strong>Handouts:</strong> None this week.</td>
<td>None given out.</td>
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**ATTENDANCE**

Five men (including two first-timers) attended the Week 8 session although one left about ten minutes into the Regret exercise (as getting a lift with someone). Eleven men (including one first-timer) attended the Week 9 session although two left before checking-in and another 3-4 checked in but left after lunch and before the Regret exercise (for reasons unclear).

**PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK**

The following responses to the check-in questions highlight the perceived value of the group for the participating men (particularly in relation to ongoing challenges associated with change), as well as demonstrating examples of group learnings being put into practice and suggesting ways in which the men are benefitting from attending:

- **From a guy who’d brought his adult son along to a group for the first time:** I wanted to see him come to the group to see what we do and that – there’s a lot of pressure comes off you – as I’ve tried to explain to him, like, you can talk, you don’t have to be raised like I was and the way I raised them – to be a tough cunt and not express your feelings and things like that – cos, ya know, the last six weeks, I’ve avoided bein’ angry and violent and just startin’ to turn the corner ... so, really relieved when he said he’d come to the meeting cos, like I was sayin’ about this “I’m not fuckin’ comin’ here” and then when I did, it’s one of the best things that happened to me.

- **Had a good week till Sunday but then had no smokes so had the shits all day – I went through the traffic lights, I went from green all the way up to red, but then I went through the calming process again and I thought about it and I thought “nah, it’s no-one else’s fault but me own, I shouldn’t be handin’ out smokes” – so I calmed down ... when I got like that, I just started <partner> noticed the difference, that I was gettin’ agitated and she was goin’ “you’re starting to worry me” and I went “well, I better settle down then” – so, I sat down, had a water and calmed down.**
• I had a marriage and that didn't work out, then I had another relationship and that didn't work out and then, like work, I had a good job and that didn't work out, I got a Uni degree and havin' that didn't really change anything and, ya know, you keep goin' and goin' ... but then comin' here, this works, for me this works — all those other things and all those other people that have been in and out of my life, it didn't work for some reason, but this, for me, works — ya know, here I've got my manhood back, I feel equal and it's the best place for me to be ... it's once a week and sometimes you wish it was more, but it's enough to make me not do stupid things, it's enough to pull me up so I survive from this week to next week and I don't hurt somebody, or hurt myself.

• I want to develop this up cos we have a lot of young men out there that need help and they need older men to be able to speak into their lives ... and it gives us older fellas a purpose, makes us feel useful for a change.

• I've been doing this course, which is why I missed last week — but this week, I though “nah, I'm not missing it again, they'll just have to sort it out” — I just felt like I better get down to the group cos I missed that last group and that sorta connection, hookin' up with everyone that does come to the group.

• Finally done a few things I been puttin' off, just procrastinatin’ — so I sat down and went through a lot of the stuff we've been goin' through and made meself a list there of short-term goals, and long-term — just to keep a check on meself, keep meself motivated — that's why I said comin' here has been pretty good.

• Me niece and her boyfriend started havin' hassles with some other crowd [including threats of violence against them] so I had to try and sort that without goin’ up the traffic lights — but I did, I went up the traffic lights and went back down to green, I had to go through the traffic lights otherwise I would have been pumped up and threw ‘em in the cars headfirst, ya know — my head started goin’ tingly and I felt the rage buildin’ up inside me and I thought “no, don’t do this, you do it now and you're goin straight back to hospital [psych ward] mate and you don’t want to go back there and no-one wants to see you go back there”.

• I go away with knowledge every single time — from stories just as we go around the group and I pick up little things that I can do to make myself calmer.

• From a guy who'd had a really difficult week with lots of repetitive family dramas going on around him, despite his best efforts to help resolve them: 'I've had nothin’ but positive come out of this meetin', I always feel a bit better than the day before, ya know, the good stuff that comes out of it — the person I've started to become, respectin' meself a lot more and actually believing what people say about me — I am a good bloke and all that.

• Came back from Sydney and the missus is there and everything was good for a couple of days, really beautiful and then, I dunno, I just didn't feel like talkin’ or somethin’ and I told her but a bit later she goes “what’s wrong?” and I'm goin “stop tryin’ to create a fuckin’ problem in me, there’s nothin’ wrong, I told you I’m feelin’ quiet and I don’t feel like talkin’” and that ended up creatin’ a bloody argument and two days later it's still goin’ and I’m still not talkin’ to nobody — so now I’m thinkin’ there is a problem and so I’m goin’ out and sittin’ by the river and listenin’ to me thoughts and tryin’ to work out what’s wrong with me? Why am I moody and don’t feel like talkin’ to anybody? And it was like you said, brother, when they lock you up, you don’t realise till you spent a lot of time in there, that psychologically it affects you — so when she said “what’s wrong with you?”, I said “I’m not angry at you, I’m not angry at anybody, I have no problems” but I just went real cold — on everybody and every thing, on all the positive thoughts, on my painting and had the old “fuck this shit, what am I doing this shit for?” ... so that went on for 2-3 days and it was last night that I realised I don’ know what to do about that, that because of jail, there’s a period there where I go fucked up — I used to cry about it, thinkin’ there was somethin’ wrong with me and now I know that when that comes along, I might just need to go for a walk somewhere for a couple of days — so I don’t know if I can fix that ... and she goes “when you’re like that, I feel like it’s me and I need to fix you and that I should be doin’ somethin’ more” and so last night I said “babe, we gotta keep talkin’ cos I love ya and I care about ya but I wanna share with you about sometimes how I feel – I don’t know why but I know that jail has affected my brain psychologically but I notice that it’s not all the time – I notice that I have a little lull every now and then, I go real cold and I don’t really like it but I know what it is and I accept it but I have to realise that I have a partner there and that you can make someone hurt just by not talkin’ – and I may not have been verbally abusive but I realise that I was abusive in my silence ... we talked a bit more and went to bed and I woke up this morning and back to positive thinking, ya know — got up, had breakfast and went to the gym cos those things make me feel good and I did give her a cuddle and let her know that I loved her.
SESSION 9: STEPS TO CHANGE (MANAGEABLE GOAL SETTING)

PLANNED OBJECTIVES
After completing this session, participants will be able to:
- Describe the key factors in personal goal setting; and
- Have set a personal goal for the coming week.

SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 10)

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<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-in – How the week was, what I noticed regarding my feelings, thoughts and beliefs.</td>
<td>This started with the topic “something good you did for yourself during the week” but became a more general check-in, with quite a few men sharing their challenges with trying to change, and maintain the changes, particularly when their environments and some family members were still having quite detrimental effects on them (see Participant Feedback section for some examples). It lasted for about 1½ hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10 minutes) Presentation – Introduction to goal setting (see Lee et al1). Emphasis on specific, concrete, time limited and interpersonal.</td>
<td>Assume at least the presentation happened (from the first notes page below) but there was a gap in the recording – so can’t comment further or say how long it went for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10 minutes) Goal Brainstorm – Does anyone have examples of setting a goal and perhaps achieving it? Stories of goal setting. Go-round on possible goals.</td>
<td>Recording resumed part-way through the first of two participants’ goal setting exercises – with constructive suggestions, queries and cautions from all group members – to establish steps towards achieving their overall goals of losing weight and getting a place to live. The recording lasted 30 minutes but guessing it went for at least another 10.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(30 minutes) Goal-setting Exercise (1) – Work with 1 or 2 people on setting a realistic goal for next week.</td>
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### Proposed Activities

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<tr>
<td>(10 minutes) Awareness/ Relaxation Exercise – Facilitator’s choice.</td>
<td>These activities weren’t done, possibly due to time limitations given the longer check-in activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(45 minutes) Goal-setting Exercise (2) – Go-round on possible goal for each person. Choose one or two more (the less defined ones) and work with them.</td>
<td>This was done around the single question of what the participants would do to look after themselves in the coming week – it lasted about 15 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-out – Final go-round on “One thing I appreciated in this session”, “One thing I am grateful for” and “One thing I will do that is good for my whole self”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts: Goal setting.</td>
<td>See Appendices J and K – an extra handout on the challenge of change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Attendance

Eleven men (including two first-timers) attended this session although one after the check-in (for a medical appointment) and three others left about half-hour into the goal-setting exercise (for other commitments and car sharing issues).

### Participant Feedback

The following responses to the check-in question again highlight the enduring nature of the challenges these men face and how the group is helping them to cope with things:

- From a guy having had a very up and down week: *Been havin’ trouble sleeping and feel the need to talk to someone but who do you call at 1 or 2 in the mornin’? – so I’ve been sittin’ on things but that’s not good, so feelin’ a bit vulnerable for the last week or so ... but one of the good things is come Wednesday, I know I can come here and get another dose of support and strength from just bein’ here – it’s like peace and lightness, just the people that are here, makes me feel more at peace with myself, even if I have still got a long way to go.*

- From a guy with a lot of ongoing dramas within his extended family: *These men’s groups have changed me a fair bit – there’s a lot more compassion, a lot more understanding for me missus, but all I’m getting back is grief – like, the other day, I got dinner on the table cos I knew she was workin’ the night after she done the day shift, so making a bit of an effort and all I was gettin’ was fuckin’ grief, making me just wanna fuck off – I wanna get better but it’s one step forward, two steps back, up and down, up and down ... mum’s seen the change in me and me brother’s seen the change, friends have seen the change and I think the missus knows the change but I don’t know if she can handle it – I feel the change and feel it’s for the better but sometimes it really makes you fuckin’ doubt it.*

- *I love comin’ here, I love listenin’ to youse and I learn a lot from comin’ here and thanks for listenin’ to me, I love youse.*
SESSION 10: LISTENING AND RESPONDING

PLANNED OBJECTIVES

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Name their own feelings in a variety of situations using appropriate language;
- Attempt to gauge their own feelings when listening to someone else; and
- Describe what ‘taking responsibility for feelings’ means to them.

SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(5 minutes) Before Check-in – Same listening for feelings exercise as before but include own feelings as well as guessing of what feelings might be in the story. Facilitator will again keep these to a feeling or emotion word and stop analysing or advice-giving.</td>
<td>This was introduced the same as the Session 6 check-in process, with listeners asked to feedback the feelings they heard during each check-in. However, they naturally often included their own feelings, in keeping with the extended nature of the proposed activity. Again, there were some quite lengthy check-ins covering a variety of ups and downs from the previous week, but providing further examples of how the participants were benefitting from the group (see the Participant Feedback section for details). There was also quite a lot of additional discussion after each check-in, including some sharing of similar experiences, congratulating about progress made, encouragements about rectifying setbacks and some advice. In most cases, the reflecting back was quite insightful, as evidenced by the often strong emotions it prompted in the original sharer, often leading to further sharing. This activity took the whole 2½ hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(50 minutes) Check-in – Any events during the week with reflecting back of feelings and acknowledging own feelings from each. Include how the goal setting went.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10 minutes) Check-in Debrief – Go-round to see how people felt doing the check-in.</td>
<td>This activity wasn’t done, as no time left.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30 minutes) Group Discussion – Facilitator to clarify that often just naming your feelings is enough for people to understand you more and for more trust and closeness to develop. Give examples from own life and encourage discussion. Story that demonstrates that our feelings are our responsibility and that we are the ones that have to respond to them, not others (necessarily).</td>
<td>These issues were covered well during the main check-in activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20 minutes) Listening Brainstorm – Go-round on types of listening and discussion on which ones are useful in what situations.</td>
<td>These activities weren’t done, as no time left, and this wasn’t to be the last session – as the fathering session was held over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20 minutes) Check-out – This is the final session of course (except post evaluation). Final go-round on “One hope for my own future”, “Something I have learned today” and “One thing I will do that is good for me”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts: None for this week</td>
<td>There was a handout given about listening (see Appendix L).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TWEED YARN UP GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS MEN: A PILOT

27
Seven men attended this session although two left after about two hours (for another appointment). An eighth man visited before the session started to deliver a written apology to Greg for some inappropriate sharing at last week’s session (which Greg later shared with the group) – having gone away and realised that his language and approach had breached most of the Group Guidelines.

**ATTENDANCE**

**PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK**

The following responses during the check-in activity reinforce the changes experienced by the participants, while also highlighting that change can be a difficult and bumpy journey:

- From an older guy frustrated by a lack of time with his partner, due to a major care-taking role for their grandkids (although very happy to see the kids blossoming): Comin’ to this group has improved me, but every time I come, it stinks me, cos somethin’s gone wrong – whether it be the missus, or the kids, whatever – makes ya think “is it for better or for worse?”, ya know – but I can feel it in meself, I’m becomin’ a better person and a lot of things I’m turnin’ around – like, it’s turned my attitude around, taken a helluva lot of my selfishness away.

- This has changed my mind, changed my patterns and it’s also changed me in the way I’ve raised my kids now – rather than raisin’ ‘em with anger, I’m raisin’ ‘em with “have a think about what you’re gonna say first”, ya know – like, “if you want to have a yell at me, I’m not interested, go away, I’m not playin’ that game”.

- From the guy setting the weight loss goal last week – in response to revisiting the nominated steps (see previous session for details): Me diet and shoppin’, I’ve been gettin’ stuff that’s healthier and I haven’t eaten pizza this week, eating breakfast – I have been except for this morning, I’ve had fish this week, I’ve drank more water.

- From a guy having grappled with choosing between a long-standing yarndi addiction and a new, healthy relationship: I’m a little bit not all there in the head today cos I’ve got one little vice left and that’s marijuana and I’ve been smokin’ that for a long time and now I’ve met this woman I’ve been with for six months and three days ago, we sat down and had a talk and she said some things I didn’t wanna hear – pretty much told me what I’m like when I’m on pot and what I’m like when I ain’t got pot – how she has to walk on eggshells and I don’t wanna hear that cos that’s my vice which was around long before you come along and it come to a head because she basically said, ya know, it sounded like an ultimatum – but I accepted it and the last three days, I haven’t picked up any yarndi, I threw the bong away and so, ya know, I feel a bit shit, a bit cloudy in the head … but I was about to pack my bags and leave her, I actually did pack my bag and then I sat down and said to myself “hey, you can pick the marijuana or you can pick this woman” and for about a day there, I struggled with that thought and, ya know, that’s my only vice, I love my marijuana, but it had to go — she shined a light on my behaviour, shown me things that other people probably wouldn’t have been game enough to say – so I told her “I choose you over the pot” and the last three days have been shit, like when you’re coming off anything, but I know it’s gonna get better … and this mornin’, I woke up real down on meself, just this voice in me head sayin’ ‘you useless cunt, what you doin’ this for?, you’ll never be no good” and then I just burst out cryin’, like full-on bawlin’ and not really knowin’ why, and the missus was real concerned and ended up sayin’ “look, just go and get a smoke, here’s $20” and I looked at her and thought “you want me to stop and now you want me to go get a smoke?” but I didn’t say it, I just said to her “no, I don’t wanna smoke, these are just normal physical symptoms that I’m gettin’ cos I’ve had this addiction for 20 years” and, bless her cos all she was tryin’ to do was help me, she was goin “how can I help you?” – the main thing was once I made up my mind that I didn’t wanna smoke, once you make up in your mind that you don’t wanna drink, then it can be achieved … when it’s just me and her, I’m like a little kid again, can drop all the masks and be soft, just laughin’ together and muckin’ around – I want to get back to that happy-go-lucky guy I used to be as a kid and when there’s no-one else [but her] around, he comes out and then someone knocks on the door and it’s like “aww, I gotta put him away again”.

- From a guy with a history of difficulty controlling his temper and prone to extreme violence: Had a pretty pissed off week – everything me cousin said would just set me off but, like, I did the traffic lights – I’d just walk up and down me kitchen and got over it and sat down and talked about it … so gettin’ angry but calmed down – seems like nothin’ pisses me off any more.
SESSION 3: FATHERING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

PLANNED OBJECTIVES

After completing this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe some of the behaviours involved in children attaching or bonding;
- List some of the causes of insecure attachment; and
- Give an overview of stages of child development.

SESSION CONTENTS – PLANNED & ACTUAL (WEEK 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Check-in – One feeling/emotion you had during the week and one thing you noticed about your, or other, children. (If no contact with children during the week, they can think back over the past month or two)</td>
<td>This was a more general weekly check-in but with reference to kids included – after the ‘recap’ and ‘presentation’ activities described below. The brief talk about the impact fathers have on their young children triggered painful recollections, or recognition, for many participants – about the poor quality, or lack of, bonding experienced with their own fathers and/or of their own shortcomings as fathers, although most older men recognised the better connections they now had with the young children in their lives (eg: grandchildren, nephews, nieces or friends’ children). However, the group included a more positive example – a younger guy who was already on a very positive life path, personally and professionally, sharing about having a great upbringing and relationships with both parents. There was also discussion about the high rates and impacts of suicide in the community, after one man shared about the suicide of a close relative in the previous week. This activity lasted about 1½ hours and included some evaluation-relevant comments (see Participant Feedback section).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20 minutes) Recap from past two sessions – Remind what we did, any further handouts and go-round on thoughts/feelings since then</td>
<td>The session began with Greg asking if the men recalled what they covered last week, which they did (describing it well), but this took only a minute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30 minutes) Hopes Exercise – Go-round on specific hopes/dreams for your own children/nieces/nephews, friends' children.</td>
<td>This activity wasn’t done, possibly due to time limitations given the longer check-in activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) Presentation – On child attachment and development: stories of children that have been fed and washed but never held or talked to – that they died. What is involved in attachment? Secure and insecure attachment. A little on stages of child development. Show segment of DVD giving great example of child seeking eye contact.</td>
<td>Before check-in, Greg spoke for four minutes to introduce the topic of bonding and attachment and the particular importance of the father’s role in children’s early years. He recommended and read from a book: “The way that a father interacts with his baby can shape the structure of the baby’s brain: the effect of a dad simply playing around with his child can alter the pathways formed by the neurons in the brain of that growing infant – so fathers playing peek-a-boo are not wasting time but doing the real stuff of parenting”. He also spoke about the Romanian orphans (as proposed), how baby’s still in the womb are primed to hear their father’s voice when born but also how they have been shown reacting to violence against their mother – at the time of the incident and by being born with more nervous energy. There was no mention of either DVD being played.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 “So Now You’re a Dad” Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle.
6 “Skills and Strengths of Indigenous Dads, Uncles, Pops and Brothers” Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle.
### PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>What Actually Happened</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(30 minutes) Group Discussion</strong> – Go-round on thoughts about own childhood: what happened and what didn't happen. Facilitator to make notes/drawings on whiteboard as stories told.</td>
<td>Greg facilitated a go-round on the positives and negatives of how each man had been fathered – for 45 minutes. All participants nominated both positives and negatives about their own fathers, with many talking about how they'd tried to learn from both aspects – e.g. keeping the positives but trying to avoid the negatives. However, many men also expressed considerable anger, pain and/or frustration about how many of the negatives did keep perpetuating from generation to generation (see Participant Feedback section for some examples).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(10 minutes) Summary</strong> – What we have covered, give handouts and ‘homework’: to read notes and name one child that you know at each stage of development.</td>
<td>This activity wasn’t done, possibly due to time limitations given the longer check-in activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(15 minutes) Check-out</strong> – Final go-round on “One thing I appreciated that happened in this session” and “One thing I am grateful for”.</td>
<td>This was done around the single question of something good participants would do for themselves in the coming week – it lasted about 10 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Handouts:</strong> Attachment – secure and insecure, Child development – stages and needs.</td>
<td>Greg distributed a handout on fathering (see Appendix M) and commented that he’d bring the Bonding one next week but didn’t mention the child development one.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ATTENDANCE

Six men attended this session.

### PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

The following responses during the check-in activity and the group discussion highlight how change is an ongoing and cross-generational process and:

- From a guy feeling unsupported by his partner (in his changes) and, in the week, had got angry when she questioned his having a drink, resulting in an argument: *I said “it was only one beer – you could’ve just ignored it” – she acknowledged she could have handled it better but said “well, did you ever think I might be worried you might be goin’ back on a path to self-destruction and I might be tryin’ to help you? Cos every time you go really good, you go really bad and I seen the results over the years – and with men’s group, I seen you got really good and, ya know, it’s just, for me, tryin’ to accept the changes” and I said “fair call” and I thought about it and we actually had a discussion about it."
- *This is probably good for me to come here, cos you got to practise it every week – you can’t reach a stage and say “that’s enough”, cos it only takes the slightest thing to change and it all goes back to square one – and that scares me, cos I don’t wanna go back to who I was."
- From a guy adopted as an infant who had experienced serious violence while moving between a series of boys’ homes and relatives: *In hindsight, that’s probably why I was never there for my kids – I didn’t know how to be responsible and I was just angry – I grew up too quick."
- *It’s like fuck, fuck, fuck – what do we do to each other at times, especially as dads … and the worst is we repeat the fuckin’ process – and then ya son’s repeatin’ the process and you’re sayin’ “it’s wrong” and they’re sayin’ “you fuckin’ taught me” and I’m sayin’ “yeah, well I’m wrong” and I’ve told ‘em I know I was a bad fuckin’ father and I’m tryin’ to swing it around now to where my kid’s not gonna repeat my shit, ya know."

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**TWEED YARN UP GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS MEN: A PILOT**

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30
**Aim**

The aim of this session was to gather participants’ feedback about the program and their suggestions for the future.

**Attendance**

Eight men attended this session – four having attended 9-11 of the weekly groups, three having attended 6-7 groups and one who had attended only three groups (the last of which was in Week 5).

**Participant Feedback**

The group started with the usual check-in about each participant’s week (lasting about 1¼ hours), with many men spontaneously offering some program-relevant feedback, including another indication about the potential need for a corresponding women’s group:

- I’ve had the shits all week but basically come out of it – I just sat there by meself and stewed on it and basically got over it ... coming to group is good – gets me out of the house, <partner> says I come home happier, there’s a better vibe in the house.
- I enjoy comin’ here – it’s that time out.
- From a guy (with some heart health issues) having had a difficult week, trying to support family and friends experiencing some serious emotional challenges: I was sposed to go the doctor’s this morning but I put it off cos I wanted to come here – cos what they’re goin’ to tell me isn’t really gonna make that much difference in the short-term but these groups, they do make a difference – because I get a chance to talk about these things, so I can let it go and not be so isolated ... making the decision was easy because this medicine is far more important to me than their medicine – cos what I get from the brothers here, it’s just magic and it’s what I missed out on when I was a kid, ya know – being part of something, really feelin’ I belong and I think that’s why our culture is based around circles – we sit in a circle and it’s the energy, you’re not on the outer, you’re a part of something that’s happening and that’s special.
- From a guy who’d had a very frustrating week, with ongoing relationship issues and new bureaucratic hurdles threatening his main income source: I went 0-10 in one go and had to go the doctor’s, then went back on the fuckin’ score sheet here, the traffic lights, and said “well, turn it back down, what are your positive thoughts?” and I said to meself “well, this’ll turn around” – I’ve had that many ups and downs, it’s not funny ... so I’ve gone from goin’ to try to kill meself to “don’t worry, you’ll kick a goal, you’ve landed on your feet every time, something’ll come up”. (and later that same day, he did get a call from with another potential work opportunity)
- Following more discussion about the recent funeral attended by some group participants (following the latest in a string of suicides in the same family): How long do we sit and just talk about it but not doin’ nothin’ – and that’s one thing I’m proud of, you fellas all bein’ here and we’re not just talkin’ about it, we’re actually doin’ it and little do we know, we may think there’s only a small amount here at the meetings, but there’s a lot of people out there in the community that know what’s goin’ on and are lookin’ – they’re really happy for this to be happenin’, ya know – basically, we’re the foundation to get some stuff happenin’.
- From a guy making much progress but still grappling with some long-standing behavioural and thought patterns, while also navigating a relatively new relationship: I love comin’ here, so I hope, I dunno if this is your last day brother, but hopefully we’ll be able to keep goin’ ... it’d be silly not to really cos, for me, a selfish thing, but I see the benefits ... yeah, it’s like <partner> actually does trust me so why don’t I trust meself and bein’ left to me own devices? I feel like I’m still learnin’ how to act but this time, when she left [to visit relatives interstate], I wasn’t as scared and it’s like it’s alright for her to go and me to sit here by meself, maybe work on some things in my own self ... and she really like me goin’ to men’s group although last time, when I got back home, and I felt really good, because before I left I was feelin’ a bit depressed and I came back feelin’ all good and she turned round and started cryin’ and said “you’re alright but what have we got?, what have the women got?”.
After this, Greg briefly recapped the titles of the sessions covered during the previous 11 weeks and started saying that during the weekly check-ins, he could hear things the men had picked up as they spoke – before he could really ask for suggestions, the men joined in, nominating the following things they felt they had gained during the program:

- **Strengthenin’ of relationships and communication in relationships** – that’s really stood out for me – just listening, I could see, it’s been powerful.
- **Yeah, I been reflectin’ back on a lot of stuff we covered.**
- **I seem to go through the traffic lights every time I get that uneasy feeling – so I got that skill for life now – so I can actually slow down and stop at the traffic lights, instead of runnin’ through ‘em.**
- **I’ve learnt the value of support and friendships, like real ones.**
- **About different variations of intimacy – it’s not just sex, but friendship eh, and connections together.**
- **Different ways of communication’ and the skills to do that – comes in a lot of different forms.**
- **Rather than blowin’ up at the bitches, you try and understand the for a bit, but at the end of the day, you might still walk away – like the value of time out.**
- **Self-esteem, that’s somethin’ I’ve noticed grow in some of us**
- **Responsibility – as men, as fathers, to our siblings really – because it goes from father, son, brothers, sisters, grandkids, right across the board, everyone we come in contact with, eh? And responsibility to ourselves too.**
- **Whatever brought us to be who we are today is really important to acknowledge and to own and then, when we have little ones in our lives, whether it be our own or grandkids or nieces and nephews, it shows the importance of what we’ve learnt and to be able to teach them, to share it with them.**
- **Learning our women need love too, is it love or compassion, affection, intimacy and sometimes good old-fashioned sex too.**
- **Self-management, whether in the family or in relationships.**
- **Prioritising and future planning.**
- **And like <another guy> mentioned, there’s a lot of positive stuff out in the community about this group – like, when I’m walkin’ around, they always mention it, like “how’s it goin’?”, there’s been a lot of positive feedback.**

This discussion lasted about 15 minutes but may have continued longer, as the tape stopped quite abruptly (possibly due to a battery issue).
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: HANDOUT – GROUP GUIDELINES

Rekindling the Spirit
Group Guidelines

(These are an example of guidelines generated by the group itself, therefore these are only a demonstration as to what can be included)

- Respect: Whether it is listening or how you are speaking, be respectful.
- Confidentiality / Privacy: Who you see here, what you hear here, remains here.
- Talk about your own feelings and experiences.
- There are no right answers, only options for you to choose.
- Everyone in this group is equal, sitting in a circle allows all to be part of the meeting.
- Take responsibility for your own actions
- Support each other
- Ask for permission before giving advice,
**APPENDIX B: Handout – Controlling Behaviours**

**If a man’s wife/partner felt controlled by him what might he be doing?**

This list has been compiled from the contributions from men in men’s groups. The behaviours have been sorted according to the effects on the victim which are:

- Physical restriction
- Fearful or intimidated
- Dependent
- Low self esteem
- Very uncomfortable or helpless
- Obliged or guilty
- Not enough information or ability to decide
- Betrayed
- Losing sanity

### Physical Restriction

- Living in isolated places
- No access to car
- Drugs to confuse or take away self-control
- Lock on phone, no phone
- Being tied up, locked in a room
- Being injured
- Being held against will
- Force to have sex, sexual assault, rape
- Control finances, restrict access to money
- Control access to others
- Ostracise
- Pursuing
- Curtail freedom or rights
- Isolate from friends, friends not welcomed
- Refuse permission to attend functions, school, courses, classes and social events
- Putting limits on situation, placing conditions

### Fearful or intimidated

- Driving recklessly
- Punishment
- Raise voice
- Veiled threats
- Tantrums
- Being loud
- Being heavy
- Destroy things
- Power tripping
- Be oversensitive
- The steely look
- Blackmail
- Revenge

- Physically hurting a person
- Threaten to commit suicide or harm self
- Threaten to destroy property
- Threatening looks, ‘the eye’
- Stern tone of voice
- Be angry, shitty to be around
- Shouting, yelling, screaming
- Intimidating body language
- Threaten to leave
- Tone of voice, clipped words
- Verbal abuse of friends (Shame)
- Emotional blackmail
- Language

- Making threats to hurt them or children, relatives, friends, pets
- Unspoken threats, punching holes in walls, obvious use of punching bag, rattling the knife draw, putting on the jug (to scald with hot water)
- Leave with no information as to when returning
- Scaring the shit out of them – reckless driving, whacko behaviour
- Keeping on checking up on them, phoning often at different times of the day
- ‘Go off’ easily toward others
- Creating a scene
- Being nasty

My trip was controlling. I was pretty good at getting my way by shouting and standover stuff. I had Cathy and the kids pretty well educated in how I thought they should behave. I was the Dad, I was the head of house, I knew what was best for everyone. I’m pretty good at convincing, pretty good at logical arguments. I was pretty good at standing up and shouting and throwing my weight around. This ultimately led to our separating and divorce.  

*Brad, agricultural researcher*

### Dependent

- Create drug addiction
- Keep money to self
- Keep expertise to self

- Withholding sex
- Be the expert

- Setting rigid or distant boundaries
- Make all the rules
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Low self esteem</strong></th>
<th><strong>Very uncomfortable or helpless</strong></th>
<th><strong>Obliged or guilty</strong></th>
<th><strong>Not enough information or ability to decide</strong></th>
<th><strong>Betrayed</strong></th>
<th><strong>Losing sanity</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Put downs/ Trivialise</td>
<td>Putdowns disguised as humour</td>
<td>Choose not to do enjoyable things</td>
<td>Come and go without consulting or agreeing</td>
<td>Not keeping to what was agreed</td>
<td>Mind games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcasm</td>
<td>Use as sexual object</td>
<td>Point scoring</td>
<td>Not negotiating – being the chief</td>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>Lying about events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>Dominating conversations</td>
<td>Put down relatives, friends</td>
<td>Keep changing mind and plans</td>
<td>Inventing jealousy (out of own guilt)</td>
<td>Happy attacks – not real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innuendoes</td>
<td>Continual use of belittling names</td>
<td>Harassing</td>
<td>Ignore others opinions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Game playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly critical</td>
<td>Negative about achievements</td>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>Telling lies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Enlisting others to collude with made up story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expecting too much</td>
<td>Crossing boundaries</td>
<td>Making the decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage drug abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making assumptions</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assuming superiority</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Dismissive, you know…. ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about’. Or ‘You’re not worth it’. Steve, accountant*

*When we talked about indifference. That has just hit me like a blow between the eyes. I’ve just realised how much I’ve used that. It’s been learnt behaviour. I’ve linked it to my father, my father was totally indifferent to anything that happened to me, completely. That made me feel about one inch tall, on a good day. I realised it goes back to childhood. How I go about getting my basic needs met is to be indifferent. I think I seem kind of independent. It’s a defence. It’s a defence against because I’m not able to say ‘Look, I need love, I need support or I need help, I feel like shit’ or whatever. Andy, builder*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Obliged or guilty</strong></th>
<th><strong>Not enough information or ability to decide</strong></th>
<th><strong>Betrayed</strong></th>
<th><strong>Losing sanity</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over generous gifts</td>
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<td>Lying</td>
<td>Mind games</td>
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<td>Over helpful</td>
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<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Playing the martyr</td>
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<td>Happy attacks – not real</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing all the work</td>
<td>Point scoring</td>
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<td>Manipulative praise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enlisting others to collude with made up story</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage drug abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not following through with what I said I’d do. When I have promised Minnie something, even a little thing, and I don’t follow through, that destroys a bit of the trust between us. Simon, artist, craftsman*
**Impacts of violence**  
(Compiled from the contributions from men in men’s groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Kids</th>
<th>Extended Family</th>
<th>Community</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Bed wetting</td>
<td>Take sides</td>
<td>100’s people fighting on road</td>
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<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Physical pain</td>
<td>Pain, physical and emotional</td>
<td>Shock</td>
<td>Happy families myth</td>
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<td>Property damage</td>
<td>Walking on egg shells</td>
<td>Suicide risk</td>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>Elders lost power / role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regret,</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>Judgemental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>Get involved</td>
<td>All adults sitting with a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>What did I do?</td>
<td>Think that fighting</td>
<td>Loss of contact with kids</td>
<td>degree of hurt – on edge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self esteem</td>
<td>Illness, sickness</td>
<td>Is the way to solve problems</td>
<td>Turn a blind eye</td>
<td>No $$ to work with men</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shut down</td>
<td>Self harm</td>
<td>Hyper vigilant</td>
<td>Secrets</td>
<td>Blaming men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowhere to go</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>Wild all the time</td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Hardening</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Hardening</td>
<td>Depression, sadness</td>
<td>Dishonoured – blood shame</td>
<td>Police overload</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>Drink drugs</td>
<td>Fear of police and system</td>
<td>Collude – it’s not serious</td>
<td>Workers burnt out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hurt, Alone</td>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td>Frightened</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
<td>System overload</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Fear / controlled</td>
<td>Drug/alcohol abuse</td>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Let down</td>
<td>Loss of trust</td>
<td>Abuse by system</td>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td>Negative stereotypes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wondering why</td>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Slack practice in health services</td>
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<tr>
<td>“If only” thoughts</td>
<td>Dishonoured</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>Loss of confidence</td>
<td>Dishonesty</td>
<td>Hardening</td>
<td>Increased stigma and racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police in home</td>
<td>Vulnerable to manipulation</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>50 – 90% of police work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justifying</td>
<td>Low self esteem</td>
<td>Powerless</td>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>Courts overloaded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Disbelief</td>
<td>Split allegiances</td>
<td>Elders protecting their own</td>
<td>Frontline worker hardened</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimising</td>
<td>Insomnia</td>
<td>Hiding it, secrecy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose work</td>
<td>Let down</td>
<td>Self blame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self deception</td>
<td>Self harm</td>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrecy</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>Disempowered</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonesty</td>
<td>Hardening</td>
<td>Betrayed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Shame</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trapped/cornered</td>
<td>Revenge thoughts</td>
<td>Revenge thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locked up</td>
<td>Helpless</td>
<td>Helpless</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drink and drug</td>
<td>Emotional frozen</td>
<td>Emotional frozen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withdraw</td>
<td>Disappointed</td>
<td>Disappointed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sorry</td>
<td>Disgust</td>
<td>Disgust</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Broken heart</td>
<td>Broken heart</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide risk</td>
<td>Loss of intimacy</td>
<td>Loss of intimacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of connectedness</td>
<td>Bitterness</td>
<td>Bitterness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared he’ll lose her</td>
<td>Caught up in the game</td>
<td>Caught up in the game</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Lack of connectedness**

**Bed wetting**

**Pain, physical and emotional**

**Suicide risk**

**Confusion**

**Insecurity**

**Think that fighting**

**Is the way to solve problems**

**Hyper vigilant**

**Wild all the time**

**Depression, sadness**

**Fear of police and system**

**Frightened**

**Drug/alcohol abuse**

**Abuse by system**

**Scared**

**Nervous**

**Dishonesty**

**Angry**

**Powerless**

**Split allegiances**

**Hiding it, secrecy**

**Self blame**

**Loss of innocence**

**Keeping up appearances**

**Shame**

**Dislocated**

**Blame selves**

**Hate**

**Wetting bed**

**Blame mum/dad**

**Abuse mum**

**Always drama – no space**

**Bad at school**

**Hard to learn/grow**

**100’s people fighting on road**

**Happy families myth**

**Elders lost power / role**

**Judgemental**

**All adults sitting with a degree of hurt – on edge**

**No $$ to work with men**

**Blaming men**

**Hardening**

**Police overload**

**Workers burnt out**

**System overload**

**Stress**

**Negative stereotypes**

**Slack practice in health services**

**Overwhelmed**

**Increased stigma and racism**

**50 – 90% of police work**

**Courts overloaded**

**Frontline worker hardened**
How violence affects Children

Isolation
- Inability to develop social skills
- Feeling alone and different
- Keeping harmful “secrets”
- Can’t have friends over because of the need to hide the violence
- Not trusting of adults

Emotional Abuse
- Doubting reality
- Fear of doing wrong
- Inconsistent limits and expectations by caregiver
- Fear of expressing feelings
- Inability to learn at school
- Low self-esteem

Physical and Mental Effects
- Children may feel guilt and shame, think it’s their fault
- May regress to early stages of development
  - Cranky, crabby kids
  - Demanding and withdrawn
  - Craves/needs nurturing from anyone

Sexual Abuse
- Shame about body
- Feeling threatened and fearful of their sexuality
- Learning inappropriate sexual talk behaviour
- Children have access to pornography magazines and movies

Sexual Stereotyping
- Copying abuser’s dominant and abusive behaviour
- Copying victimised passive and submissive behaviour
- Unable to express feelings or who they are

Threats
- Learn to manipulate because of their own safety issues due to effects of violence in family
- Expressing anger in a way that is violent, abusive, or not expressing anger at all because of their own fear

Using Children
- Being put in the middle of fights
- Children may take on roles, responsibilities of parents and give up being children
- Children seen and not heard
- Children being used to solve conflicts, asking them to take sides in arguments

What are you going to hand on to your children
TRAFFIC LIGHTS ANGER SIGNALS

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
Traffic Lights - Anger Awareness Tool

How do you know you are angry? This might seem like a ridiculous question, but think about it. When you are angry all sorts of things change in your body and in the way you think. These changes happen in stages as you go from feeling a bit irritated all the way to being in a rage. Men have found that they can get to know the stages of their anger and therefore have more control over it. One way to do this is to use the Traffic Lights Scale.

Traffic Lights have the red light on top, the amber light in the middle and the green light on the bottom. This represents red for rage and green for calm. Or you can use a number scale with one at the bottom of the scale next to green and all the numbers up to ten running up past amber to red. One or Green is when you feel relaxed and happy. Red, nine, ten is when you are so angry that you are losing control of yourself and amber is the warning time.

10  Rage, out of control
9   Very, very angry
8   Almost out of control
7   Serious Anger
6   Angry
5   Pissed off
4   Irritable
3   Unsettled thoughts
2   Calm, relaxed

The idea is to make your own map of the thoughts, feelings and sensations you have at each different stage of rising anger. For example at about three I notice my thoughts have gone into negative circles of blame ‘the selfish bastard!’ and I have a tension across my chest. My guts might be in a knot and further up the scale I might be shaking. We call these sensations and experiences the anger signals.

You’ll see a chart on the other page. This is made up of a lot of different men’s signals. Maybe some of them are the same for you, probably some are quite different. Take a moment now to think back to one of the last times you felt angry. What was happening? Who was around you? What were people saying? As you imagine that time try to pick what you were feeling in your body. It’s likely that you were tense in some places; your jaw? your guts? Perhaps you got pretty wound up, what happens inside you then? Do you get hot or sweaty?

What is your very first signal of anger? It might be going quiet and swear words in your thoughts. Your internal voice saying ‘Bloody this’ or ‘Fucking that’. Maybe calling people names; ‘Little bastard’, Lying bitch’. Some men say that when they are thinking those sort of thoughts they’re at about three on the anger scale.
The idea is to be able to map your own anger signals so that you can recognize when you are starting to go up the anger scale. If you recognize the feelings then you have a choice how to act. You are controlling yourself rather than the feelings controlling you.

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APPENDIX F: HANDOUT – TIME OUT

Time Out

Time Out is a way for you to stay calm enough to make good decisions. You have to talk it through with your family and agree if you want it to work properly.

**Talking it through questions**

- Do you both think that taking Time Out could be good for the relationship?
- What do you both agree will be said or signalled when Crisis Time Out is wanted by either of you?
- What do you both agree is a good length of time to be away?
- What do you both agree can be done when you are taking time out? What won’t you do?
- What do you both agree will (is best to) happen when you get back?
- What sort of situation do you both like for talking things through?
- Can you both agree that Crisis Time Out will not be challenged so you both can feel safe?
- Can you both agree not to use Crisis Time Out in order to avoid talking through things?
- What other things need to be considered? Weather? Kids? Commitments?

There are two types of Time Out: Crisis and Regular

**Crisis Time Out**

- As soon as you notice that your anger is rising, you are going up the Traffic Lights and you think you might act abusively, signal clearly that “I’m feeling angry and I need to take time out”
- Leave for the agreed time
- Don’t drink, drug or drive angrily
- If you seem to be getting more angry, remember the calm-down thoughts or your own strategies to calm down. Take control of your thoughts and feelings rather than allowing them to control you. It takes 5 to 10 minutes of thinking calming thoughts for your mood to change, be patient with yourself.
- Do something physical; walk, run, ride a bike, do work that will burn up the aroused energy. Don’t do activities which could escalate your anger. Punching bags are not a good idea if you start imagining hurting others – that encourages more Build Up thoughts.
- Come back at the agreed time. This should have given you enough time to cool off. You are in control of you. Let your family know you are back. This will help build trust.
- If you are not ready to come back at the agreed time then phone or get a message through somehow that you will need more time. Try to be exact about how much time you need.
- When you get back, maybe you can talk about how and when you will discuss the issue that set you off in the first place. Maybe the problem is too big for the two of you to sort by yourselves. Maybe you don’t feel confident that you will be treated fairly. It might be best to ask a friend or a counsellor to set up a situation that helps you both to communicate.
Remember that Time Out does not deal with the causes. The issue does not go away just because you have handled your anger well.

Time Out provides safety for your partner and children and enables you to be in charge of yourself.

Time Out is different from running away. It is announced and it is for everyone’s benefit. It builds trust.

Time Out is hard to do, many people believe that it is cowardly to walk away from a fight. In this case the opposite is the truth, it takes courage and determination to stick to your commitment to a respectful relationship in which no one gets hurt.

Remember, Time Out only works when both people have agreed to it, be sure to show your partner this and talk about it. Use the questions on the other page to help you get clear.

**Regular Time Out**

Regular Time Out is something all people need in order to stay in good emotional health. It only works if your family has agreed to it.

Talk with your family about each person having Time Out at agreed times once or twice a week.

The points below might help you get clear about how to set up Regular Time Out:

- Do something you like doing that calms and settles you, that makes you feel good about life. Try to find enjoyable things that do not depend on other people.

- Try and make your Regular Time Out happen at a time that works well for everyone. Not being around in the evening when the kids need plenty of attention might not be the best idea. This isn’t about avoiding family responsibilities.

- Be clear about the amount of time you need. For example; you might be tempted to say that you only need an hour per week for practicing golf, but you know that by the time you get there, chat with a friend and so on, it is going to be two hours. If you keep coming back late you’ll destroy trust. Be straight from the start.

- Keep to the times, don’t change agreements without checking if it’s OK to.

- Express your appreciation to your partner and family when you have had a break.

- Make sure your partner also takes Regular Time Out - keep it fair. You may have to talk about how both of you can take turns to support each other to have Time Out during the week.

- Remember that your Regular Time Out will not always happen as you expect it to. Don’t get hung up on this, it is part of the unpredictability of family life.

Regular Time Out is about you feeling comfortable to have your own space and to take responsibility for your own mental and emotional health. It is also good practice if you ever need Emergency Time Out.
**The Negotiation Guide**

1. Regardless of how angry or hurt I feel I agree to remain nonviolent.
2. If I disagree with another family member's position I agree to still be respectful toward them.
3. I agree to remain seated during the discussion.
4. I agree to not yell, scream or use my voice in an intimidating manner.
5. I agree to not threaten them in any way.
6. I agree to not use put-downs, call them names or be sarcastic or belittling.
7. I agree to not bring up past incidents to prove a point.
8. I agree to avoid blaming or shaming statements.
9. I agree to strive not to get defensive.
10. I agree to listen to other family member's positions and refrain from interrupting.
11. I agree to commit to work toward a compromise or a win/win solution.
12. I agree to be willing to explore my own issues and take responsibility for the mistakes I have made.
13. I agree to respect other family member's wishes to suspend the discussion and will make another time with them to continue it.
14. I agree to be honest.
15. I agree to talk about my feelings but will not use them as a way to manipulate others.
16. I agree to not impose these guidelines on others but will suggest that others think about them.
If I want to be close with my partner, to build respect, trust, intimacy and love I could….

This is a combination of a few lists from men’s groups.

Be sensitive to her,
Be emotionally honest,
Encourage her
Acknowledge her feelings
Be aware of potential times of stress
Allow time for regaining trust
Stay put, be present,
Eye contact
Give compliments,
Encourage self-esteem, build confidence
Keep to what I agreed, e.g., punctuality
Ask to be heard, don’t presume
Offer assistance
Stay emotionally healthy
Receive compliments

Use tenderness
Give with no strings attached
Let the past hurts go
Understand what I can’t change and what I can
Be humble
Be a life-long learner,
Be attentive, non judgmental.
Listening without interruption.
Listening without ‘fixing’.
Talk about us, our past and core issues.
Listen to her deeper feelings, beneath what she is saying, and reflect these back to her.
Come home and noticing what she has done (around the house, to herself)
Be a passionate / generous / sexy lover.
Try to understand.
Listen to how her day was.
Be spontaneous.
Be kind, patient, caring, and considerate.
Making her a cuppa.
Caring for her when she is sick.
Acknowledge differences.
Act maturely.
Admit mistakes.
Negotiating what will happen when you/she is emotional.
Being trustworthy / reliable.
Following through with what I promise.
Turning up no matter what.
Owning my own feelings, wants.
Saying 'I love you' and telling her in lots of ways.
Asking for help.
Share my feelings.
Allowing my vulnerability.
Being real.
Be a rock.
Share the parenting.
Give gifts without strings attached.
Being strong in myself.
Making special moments.

Being romantic - making dinner, baths, candles, flowers, petals, walks
Asking for help.
Being 'present' for the shit.
Spending special time with the children.
Being responsible with my time.
Allowing her to 'be a little girl'.
Tell her she is beautiful.
Cleaning up my own mess.
Build Up / Calm Down thoughts

Do thoughts create feelings or do feelings follow thoughts? What comes first? Perhaps you’ve already noticed that either might come first and they’re sort of muddled, each one can follow the other. Sometimes we think that situations or what other people do creates our feelings.

“If she hadn’t been so critical I wouldn’t be so pissed off”

But there’s always a gap between what we see/hear and the thoughts we have about it. The gap is so small that we usually don’t see it. We don’t notice that we’ve created a meaning. (“She hates me, I’m no good”) Then our feelings follow.

At other times we might be in a certain mood and that mood seems to call in particular thoughts. I might be feeling depressed and I think; “Nothing works, no one likes me, the world’s fucked”. When I think that, I feel worse and around I go.

It’s almost impossible to force your feelings to change directly, but we can make ourselves think different thoughts and this will change our mood (mostly).

The first step is to notice that the negative thoughts (Stinking Thinking) have got a hold of us. Thoughts that make us more angry are called Build Up thoughts. These might include:

- She doesn’t care
- It’s never good enough
- You fucking idiot
- I’m doing it all, the lazy pricks
- How dare you
- Here we go again

It might be worth writing out or telling someone else what your common Build Up thoughts are. You’ll recognise them as Build Up thoughts more when you’ve spoken or written them.

The next step is to replace those thoughts with Calm Down thoughts. Here’s some examples, but really, you have to find your own, ones that seem right for you.

- Does it really matter?
- All the things she’s done for me
- She’s probably had a hard day
- I can handle this
- What does the bigger picture look like?
- They’re not worth it
- It’ll pass
It will take about 5 or 10 minutes of effort to change your thoughts before you notice your mood shift. During that time you might feel like you’re bullshitting to yourself, it can feel fake. The strange thing is that after a while the ‘fakeness’ goes and your mood will lighten. This can be hard work, you will probably need to be by yourself to do it. It does get easier with practice.

Why do this? Well for a start, life is shitty when you feel bad. Wouldn’t you prefer to feel more light and happy? Another reason is that thoughts and feelings lead to actions. Negative thoughts tend to create negative actions, then everyone around you can get hurt.

This is just one method to change your feelings, there are many other ways:
— talking it over with someone else,
— drinking,
— doing something different,
— self harm,
— getting some rest,
— eating well,
— drugging,
— giving yourself a treat,
— exercise,
— therapy,
— actually being listened to by people who have been hurtful,
— prayer,
— spiritual exercises,
— and more.

Your choice....
Goal Setting

Setting your own goals is a very powerful way of achieving what you want in life. It is not as simple as it sounds. Goal setting takes a lot of careful thought.

You must make your goals achievable. You don’t want to set yourself up to fail. Make sure the goal is realistic. Usually this means it should be a small goal.

If you think you are biting off more than you can chew then try to break the goal into smaller steps. The first step should be your goal. It can take quite a bit of thoughts to break the goal down to smaller parts.

If you are setting goals in a men’s group you may want to make the goals relevant to improving relationships, creating more trust, respect and love in the home.

Use the points below to check whether your goal is on track. Your goal should be:

- **Achievable** - Small enough to be able to do it reasonably quickly
- **Personally meaningful** - This has to be useful to you
- **Interpersonal and observable** - In other words, another person will be able to notice the changes you’ve made in your behaviour. Hopefully, they may be affected in a positive way.
- **Specific** – clear and concise. The goal should be simple, easy to describe and reasonably small.
- **New** - This should be something different, a behaviour that you have not generally done before.
- **Repeatable** – Hopefully you would be able to do it several times a week at least.

Groups can be used to help a person reach their own goals. Often in the Northern Rivers men’s groups we have heard fellahs say:

“I was just about to lose it with my missus when I thought about seeing you fellahs on Monday and what I would say to you. I walked away and took time out”.

Those men are using the group to help them with the changes they want to make in their lives. They care about what the other men think and this means that they put even more effort into achieving what they want to achieve – building trust in their relationship.
THE CHALLENGE

CHANGE & RISK TAKING

In order to bring about changes in our lives we need to take some risks. Making changes to improve the quality of our lives, and of our relationship with others involves recognising some of our controlling, self-defeating behaviours, and some of our thinking patterns.

In order to make positive change, change which gives us choice with our emotions and is more respectful of our partners, we need the courage to risk new ways of thinking and behaving.

To do this we need to be open to feedback and a range of new options and to open the door for risk taking it helps to:

• acknowledge the need for change.
• accept that we can only change ourselves
• accept that change is often difficult and requires practise.
• understand that change is often a long and slow process.
• be able to set small and realistic goals and future plans.
UN LISTENING.

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as it may seem.

Listen! All I asked was that you listen, not talk or do - just hear me. Advice is cheap --- 10 cents will get you both Dear Abby and Billy Graham in the same newspaper. And I can do for myself; I am not helpless. Maybe discouraged and faltering but not helpless.

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and weakness.

But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and can get about the business of understanding what is behind this irrational feeling. And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what is behind them.

So, please listen and just hear me. And, if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn, and I will listen to you.

(Anonymous).
Fathers

“A fathers role with infants, toddlers, children, teenagers and grown-up sons and daughters is the same: To form a close and loving bond so that they feel secure in their relationship with you and are encouraged to explore the world.” Richard Fletcher

There are a thousand different ways to form a close and loving bond with your children. The ingredients are time, attention and putting aside negative thoughts. One way to focus on your child is to try to guess what he or she is thinking. This is a way to tune into them and their world. It doesn’t matter whether you are right or wrong, what matters is the effort that you put into wondering what is going through their mind. “I wonder what he’s thinking right now?”

Rough and Tumble Play.

Both sons and daughters love tumbling on the floor, chasing and being chased by dad or other adults. It seems that this is a particular speciality of fathers, of men. This is not about teaching them to fight. This is about children using all their strength, imagination and energy in bursts of play. They are finding out about themselves by testing themselves against you. Your job is to give them the maximum challenge. You don’t try to defeat them or show them that you are stronger, they know that. The fun is in the imaginative play, it is a time you can call on your creative side. What sort of ‘monster’ are you? Do you have tickle pads? What do you imagine is the scene around you when you rough and tumble? World Championship Wrestling Ring? The Bear Pit?...

Recent research has shown that rough and tumble play is a vital part of child development. Children learn physical, social and emotional skills in a fun (and exhausting) way. Rough and tumble play helps develop your children into healthy young people comfortable in their bodies.

Listening

Most dads can’t wait until their baby begins to speak and interact with them. Recently I read about a father who had found a way to appreciate what their infant was saying before the infant could speak. He tuned into the gestures and noises his baby made and seemed to be able to imagine himself in their world. This dad was sort of sad when this phase passed because he found those earliest years so magical.

Once they are speaking, one way to listen well to your kids is to repeat back to them what you have heard. “You say there’s a bird in the door?” (“It tweets when you close it”) The key is to try to imagine what the world is like for them. As you play with them you’ll find yourself understanding more and more about how they see things. Though this your love will grow stronger.

There are many books on parenting, one that is great for fathers is “The Dad Factor” by Richard Fletcher.