Dedication

This guide is dedicated to all Congolese parents bringing up their children in Australia.

“If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.
If a child lives with fear, he learns to be apprehensive.
If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement, he learns to be confident.
If a child lives with acceptance, he learns to love.
If a child lives with recognition, he learns it is good to have a goal.
If a child lives with honesty, he learns what truth is.
If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.
If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith in himself and those around him.
If a child lives with friendliness, he learns the world is a nice place in which to live, to love and to be loved.”

Anonymous
Introduction

As a migrant parent, you may have concerns about bringing up your children in a new culture. You may be wondering how you can reconcile your culture’s parenting values with those commonly practiced by parents born in Australia. Will your children reject or forget their Congolese cultural heritage and language? And will they take up the opportunities available to them in Australia?

It is only natural to have these concerns, but it is important for you to know that your children can grow up to become successful adults in Australia, whilst also learning about their Congolese cultural traditions.

This parenting guide is designed to help you raise your children in a new country.

Having come to Australia, you may lack guidance from relatives who would normally have supported your parenting back home. You may be reluctant to seek the advice of strangers or professionals outside your family. This guide offers help without judging the right and wrong ways to raise your children. We recommend that both mothers and fathers read the guide together.

This course book helps you by informing you about:

- the different ideas, values and fashions your children will be exposed to at school and when mixing with Australian-born friends;
- Australian laws about children, and your legal obligations to protect your children from harm;
- the physical, social and emotional developmental stages your child will progress through as he or she grows; and
- practical exercises for mothers and fathers for solving difficult situations that may arise with your teenagers.

Try not to worry, and remember that many other Congolese-Australian parents who have migrated to Australia before you, have brought up loving and successful children who have become a source of joy and pride to their families and to the whole Australian community.

Spectrum MRC is always trying to improve our services to parents as we help you settle here in Australia. We look forward to your feedback on this guide. You can also find out about our other services through our contact details below.

Best wishes,

Rosemary Kelada
Chief Executive Officer
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## How can I get a copy of this guide?

You can get additional copies of this guide by:

- Printing a copy from our website – www.spectrumvic.org.au
- Visiting us at our main office – 251 High Street, Preston, Victoria 3072
- Contacting us directly via telephone (+61) (03) 9496 0200
Session 1:
Parenting Congolese – Australian children in a new culture
Session 1: Parenting Congolese – Australian children in a new culture

In this guidebook we discuss Congolese values, traditions and practices as they relate to bringing up children.

The Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a large country on the African continent and has a population of 62 million. It is a country of savannahs, valleys and mountains crossed by many rivers and rain forests.

Farming, raising livestock, fishing and hunting have long been traditional occupations. But, during Belgian colonisation, the society was split into rural and urban areas for the mining industry. The Democratic Republic of Congo was formed upon independence in 1960.

Christian missionaries had an enormous impact on Congolese society and Catholicism had the most developed network of churches, schools and hospitals. But traditional beliefs still feature strongly and there are Congolese-Christian-based religions which integrate indigenous beliefs.

French is the official language in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Swahili, Lingala, Ciluba and Kikongo are the four national languages.

Congolese family values

Congolese children are highly valued and viewed as insurance for parents’ future. But Congolese parenting is more social than biological. In the multicultural urban areas, friends and neighbours of the family have a say over children. A newborn child is the responsibility of the whole community, which readily organises a welcome party to honour its birth. Gathering at such an event, people recite the proverb of their ancestors:

“Giving birth is joyful, raising children is a challenge.” Traditionally, the Congolese culture values relationships and solidarity more highly than money. A sense of solidarity is the backbone of the family and the village is a place where parents and children within the extended family live, work and help each other in a spirit of togetherness. Even in the multicultural urban areas, people usually practise a collective outdoor education and neighbourhoods share the responsibility of caring for children.

But, in recent years, traditional concepts of oral culture, time, solidarity, beliefs and family have changed and modern Congolese society is overwhelmed by the notion of money. A family now tends to be more biological than social and can fail to satisfy the material, psychological and social needs of its members.

Congolese cultural values are very strict—the young must respect the old and the people must respect their rulers.

Social status is very important for an individual from birth to death — even a child is treated according to its social rank. Fatherhood and motherhood are social functions and parents must stick to their status and their role.
Congolese think in terms of strength over things or people. A person is weaker or stronger than another, depending upon his or her social status, role and generation. Peers are equal because they belong to the same generation. They play, share meals and share the bed at night. Parents—fathers, aunts, mothers and uncles—belong to the ascendant generation. They represent the seriousness, the ancestor’s values and law on earth. They have authority over their children, nephews and nieces, reinforced by the power of calling down curses upon them.

The father’s authority over his children is always balanced with that of the grandparent, who has authority over his son, the children’s father. He is their confidant, protector, even their accomplice. In the case of a grievance, they report to their grandparent who will settle the matter with their father.

The traditional way of solving problems was once the ‘palaver’. People would gather under the authority of an elder of the family or the community. The aim of the palaver was to reach an outcome that could suit everybody. It might take time, but reaching an agreement that could sustain peace within the community was worth spending time on.

In older times, the villagers shared their wealth and worshipped the same ancestor. Adverse events were attributed to angry ancestors who then withdrew their protection from the faulted person. To recall a delinquent to order, the community had recourse to such social means as irony, mockery, disapproval and even ostracism.

In Congo, some tribes are patrilineal and others are matrilineal. This determines the family structure and the figures of authority. The male authoritarian philosophy has influenced Congolese culture. Even in the matrilineal culture, the uncle is the authority figure for the children.

Males and females in the village are valued depending on who remains in the village after marriage. In both systems, the dowry from a married sister allows the family to ‘marry off’ her brother.

**Congolese family values in Australia today**

While much has changed in recent generations, traditional Congolese values continue to influence family life and parenting styles. While you may not bring up your children in exactly the same way that your parents brought you up, you probably still use some familiar Congolese traditions and practices.

Congolese ways of raising children are sometimes a source of cultural conflict in Australia:

- Congolese fathers and mothers have strong emotional bonds with their children but fathers are usually responsible for disciplining the children. Here in Australia, teachers or others may think Congolese fathers are behaving in an authoritarian or emotionally distant manner, and any comments they make may confuse your child; and
• Congolese mothers develop a close and nurturing relationship with their children. In the Anglo-Australian culture, mothers and fathers share nurturing and decision making about family issues.

Traditionally, Congolese children must obey their parents from birth until death no matter what circumstances arise. But things are changing—in contemporary Congolese society, parents may let their children choose a career, particularly when children have been at school, and their parents have not.

It is a disgrace when a child disobeys and goes their ‘own way’. This brings shame to the family and the parents ‘lose face’ amongst relatives and the community.

“Don’t make me lose face or bring shame to the family” is a common phrase a Congolese parent repeats to their child.

Congolese-Australian children are exposed to Australian values and teenagers may make decisions about their future without consulting you. When their goals and desires are different from yours, you might feel hurt and angry with your children.

This table helps explain some of the differences between Congolese and Australian family values and practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional family values</th>
<th>Typical Australian family values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congolese boys are given more freedom than girls to socialise outside the family</td>
<td>Boys and girls are treated similarly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict obedience is shown to parents, especially the father</td>
<td>Children openly question parents’ decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are expected to meet parents’ academic and career goals</td>
<td>Children are encouraged to set their own individual goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers are the decision makers</td>
<td>Mothers &amp; fathers make decisions together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are obliged to provide emotional and financial support to elderly parents</td>
<td>Children are encouraged to be self-reliant and have no obligations to parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are expected to show pride in their culture</td>
<td>Children are permitted to only follow those family traditions that appeal to them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The family’s social standing is based on cultural symbols of high status:
• obtaining tertiary education
• entering an academic related profession

The family’s social standing is based on social and economic symbols of success:
• having children at private schools
• having a house in middle-class suburb
• having a high paying job

Grown up children remain close to parents and continue to obey their wishes, including allowing parents to approve marriage partners

Grown up children are financially independent and choose their own husbands and wives

The community shames the whole family if children do not uphold religious and moral codes

The community judges children — not their family — negatively if they misbehave or come to the attention of the police

Parents use any kind of disciplinary action including physical punishment

Physical punishment is rarely used and is not encouraged

Parent’s cannot play with their children

Parents routinely play indoor and outdoor games with their children

Teenagers spend time with uncles, aunts, grand-parents and elders who play an important role in sexual education that is seen as a ‘taboo’ topic for parents

Teachers and parents teach their children sexual education

Positive parenting

What is the best way to bring up children? Every culture and every family has its own way, and this guide makes no judgement about which way is best. One thing for you to consider is applying the principles of ‘positive parenting’. This means doing things to help your children develop, increase their abilities and control their behaviour. It involves understanding the way your children think, getting them to listen to you and appreciating their many needs at each stage of growing up. Positive parenting can be made compatible with every culture. It involves five important things you can do for your children:

1. Provide a safe and secure home life
2. Help them learn
3. Teach them to deal with conflict effectively
4. Have realistic expectations
5. Take proper care of yourself.
**Being a good role model**

Always remember that one of the biggest influences on your children will be you. Your children will look up to you and imitate how you do things. Think of your own parents—while you may have wanted to be different from them in some ways, there are many ways in which you are very much the same. Being a good role model for your children is a guaranteed way to keep them close as they grow older.

**Resolving problems**

A good starting point to preventing future problems with your children is to think about yourself and the way you were raised. Ask yourself some questions.

EXERCISE TIP: Do this with your husband or wife — it should take less than 1 hour.

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**EXERCISE ONE**

**Thinking about how you parent your children**

Answer the following questions about how you intend to bring up your children. Discuss your answers with your family or members of your discussion group.

1. What did you expect of your own parents?
2. What did your parents expect of you?
3. What do you expect of your children?
4. What do your children expect of you as a parent?
5. What are you proud of in your Congolese culture and traditions?
6. What traditions and cultural values do you think need to be changed to help your children adjust to Australian life?
7. Are you prepared to change them? If so, how?
Session 2 : Understanding how your child develops
Session 2: Understanding how your child develops

Every child is different – but similar

As a parent you will have noticed that every child is unique. They are individuals, just like you and your wife or husband, and their needs change as they grow. But there are five distinct stages of development common to all children.

Five stages of development

Understanding these five stages will help you to recognise your children’s physical, emotional and social needs.

- Keeping your children safe means that you must not physically hurt them by hitting them. In Australia, the law prohibits anyone, including parents, from physically punishing children.

- You and your wife or husband might both work outside the home. Many parents find they are working long hours and when they come home they are busy with other responsibilities like cleaning the house. You might be tired with little time to play or talk with your children or join in family activities on weekends. Discuss with your husband or wife how to balance your working hours and how much time you can spend with your children.

In Australian society, it is considered important for your child to mix with other children of all backgrounds. Attending playgroups, visiting libraries and enrolling your child in a local kindergarten are some good ways to begin mixing with other parents and their young children.
TIP: Invite other parents to bring their children to play at your home after school or during school holidays.

- It is essential that you praise your children when they learn or try new things. You shouldn’t only praise them when they get it right. If they are constantly criticised, scolded or laughed at when trying to do something by themselves, children will stop trying. Your children are praised by teachers when they do something well, make an effort or show improvement in a subject they are struggling with. Even when a child fails at school, their teacher will encourage them and offer suggestions on how to do better and try again. This is so children learn to enjoy working hard at something—such as reading and writing—and keep practising. Once they have learned a skill, they will be given something more difficult so they keep improving. By adopting this approach you are teaching your children that learning is fun and becoming good at something takes persistence and a lot of practice. Do you praise your children?

- Children can be disciplined through positive encouragement. Praise your children whenever they behave correctly and ignore them when they misbehave. They will feel punished when you ignore them. Your children crave your attention even when it is for bad behaviour. By withdrawing attention when your child misbehaves, they will probably stop the bad behaviour.

- Teachers in Australia do not usually contact you when your child is failing or misbehaving at school. You are likely to be contacted by the school only for emergencies like a serious accident, bullying or if your child becomes sick while at school.

- You will be invited to meet with your child’s teachers at parent-teacher interviews. At the interview your child’s teacher will give you a lot of information about how well your child is doing in each school subject and in their behaviour in the classroom and outside in the schoolyard.

PARENTING TIP: Your young child learns best through active play especially if it involves yourself or other children. Watching television should be kept to a minimum and should be supervised at all times by an adult.
### EXERCISE TWO  Meeting your children’s developmental needs

Think of three actions you can take to provide for your children’s needs at each level of development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Level</th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Actions for you to take</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: Dependence</td>
<td>Food, drink, sleep</td>
<td>Example: breast or bottle feeding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 2: Safety and security</td>
<td>Physical protection, a good routine, freedom to explore their environment</td>
<td>Example: put a fence around your swimming pool, teaching road rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3: Love</td>
<td>Affection, social interaction, friendship, intimacy</td>
<td>Example: play games as a family and openly express affection and love</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4: Recognition</td>
<td>Feeling competent and useful, mastering skills, improving self–confidence</td>
<td>Example: praise children for trying at school and in activities which interest them</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 5: Self Expression</td>
<td>Communicating with others in different situations and getting to know themselves and their strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>Example: listen to your children and ask questions about how they see themselves and others around them</td>
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</table>
Keeping your children physically safe

Your children are most vulnerable in the pre-school years. Keeping your children safe through supervision by an adult is something you should always do.

Birth to 3 years

In these years, children:

- are naturally curious and learn by touching, feeling and exploring;
- explore anything that grabs their interest, usually by putting it in their mouth;
- drink anything (no matter what);
- like moving, colourful and musical/noisy toys or other objects.

They are at risk of choking, drowning, being poisoned and burned, or suffering other accidents, if left unsupervised.

From 3 to 5 years

In these years, children:

- stop putting objects in their mouth;
- feel, touch and explore any new places with little thought or understanding of the inherent dangers;
- begin to develop some self control, and begin to follow some rules about eating, play and sleeping;
- enjoy playing games with you and like to play by themselves, imitating some of the things you do like cooking, playing with dolls or toy cars.

Accidental injury is the main cause of death among children in Australia. Such accidents often occur unexpectedly because no precautions were taken. For more information about how you can protect your child from physical danger, visit www.kidsafevic.com.au where information sheets in your language can be downloaded free of charge.

Understanding children’s mental and emotional development

From 0 to 18 months – Developing Trust and Attachment

As a Congolese mother, you would be in permanent contact with your baby, to keep him or her warm in bed, in your hands, in visitor’s hands and on your back. You breastfeed your child at anytime when he or she cries. The gap between you is filled with no objects such as feeding bottle, cradle, teat or toys.

Babies learn to trust and develop a strong attachment to both parents only if their needs are met. They need routines for feeding, sleeping, bathing and playing.

If the home is in chaos, the baby is neglected, or the mother is constantly sick or depressed, the baby could form an insecure attachment with its parents. This could lead to long-term emotional problems like low self esteem, difficulty with
speech, eating disorders, lack of self control, problems maintaining friendships or feeling alienated from parents.

From 18 months to 3 years – Developing Autonomy or Shame

In traditional Congolese culture, when your child is walking you abruptly stop breastfeeding and send your child to join the group of its peers.

A toddler learns that they are a separate person from you, for example they can recognise themselves in a mirror. From 18 months, they start to demand things or refuse things by saying ‘no’. Toddlers try to do things like eating and drinking for themselves. They might say “I can do it” or “let me do it”.

At this stage it is important that you set clear rules for when your child misbehaves especially when they behave in ways that may cause harm.

From 4 to 6 years – Initiative or Guilt

Your child’s brain development will peak during these years. It is the first stage where your child will tackle tasks by themselves from start to finish. Your child will use their imagination and play fantasy games.

You need to encourage your child when they try to learn new skills like eating with a spoon and fork or practising new words. Set clear rules about personal safety when crossing roads, respect for authority figures, good hygiene routines like taking baths or brushing teeth. You can also start teaching them moral rules like not lying to avoid punishment and learning to keep promises.

From 6 to 9 years – Developing Competence

At six years old, a Congolese girl is already called a ‘little mama’. She could replace her mother at home. From her mother, she has already learnt to care for her siblings, even for her father.

In Australia, children in this age group engage with the outside world through school. They are expected to learn to read and write, play with other children and talk to their teachers.

Children who do well at this stage make friends easily and enjoy team games, enjoy school routines and are happy to learn from mistakes even in front of their peers. Children who are not coping well might avoid going to school.

From 10 to 15 years – The Teenage Years

This period marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is likely to be challenging and cause anxiety for you as parents and for the whole family. Your teenager is no longer a child, but has yet to become an adult. Teenagers experience the release of growth hormones that cause physical changes in genital organs, hair, face pimples and voice. The growth hormones affect your teenager’s moods. They are more likely to try risk-taking behaviour like smoking cigarettes or driving a car without a licence that seem very silly and cause fights with you.

Every parent raising a teenager needs to work hard at keeping communication open even when your teenager does not seem interested in talking to you or anyone else in the family.
It is not unusual for your teenager to spend time in their bedroom talking on the phone to their friends or surfing/on the internet. Remember that even if your child sometimes acts as if they do not like you any more, you are still very influential and they still need your approval even if they appear to dismiss your opinions.

Your teenager will want to spend time away from the family and demand more freedom to socialise with their friends. Most parents have to negotiate new rules with their teenager about school homework, going out on weekends and on school nights, attending church or mosque and what they are allowed to wear.

Your teenager may be interested in finding paid work after school so they can save their own money. It is your role as a parent to help your teenager make sensible decisions about all of these things, and ensure that the decisions are consistent with your teenager’s future goals. If they want to do well at school, then you must remind them about the importance of balancing the time they spend in their after school job with their studies.
### EXERCISE THREE

**Supporting your children’s mental and emotional development**

How do you meet your children’s needs for long-term mental and emotional health? Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the questions below.

#### From 0 to 18 months – developing trust and attachment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you:</th>
<th>Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raise your voice around the baby when they cry?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look into your child’s eyes, give them cuddles and smiles?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repeat words or imitate the sounds your baby makes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remain patient towards your baby even if they are crying and you are not able to soothe them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use toys to distract your baby when distressed?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### From 18 months to 3 years – developing autonomy or shame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you:</th>
<th>Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand that your child feels a sense of ownership about his or her toys and may sometimes be unwilling to share them?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Allow your children to explore their environment by touching different objects?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage your child to join in playing with other children?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answer your child’s questions about their bodies?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### From 4 to 6 years – initiative or guilt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you:</th>
<th>Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourage your child to have fun reading, play–acting favourite stories and making their own drawings?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Know that children learn to read and write their own name at different ages?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Praise your child for trying, even if they fail at something?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask your child about why they repeat certain ‘naughty’ behaviours?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teach your children to keep promises by keeping your own?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show your children to help other children when they are upset or in distress?</td>
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</table>

### From 6 to 9 years – developing competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you:</th>
<th>Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with your child each day to let them talk about their day?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen carefully to your child when they express a worry that seems trivial to you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watch your children when they are playing team sports?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage your children to solve problems independently even if their solutions are different to yours?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you:</td>
<td>Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell your teenager you love and accept them unconditionally?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen to your teenager’s particular views which are different to yours?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage your teenager to show how they take responsibility for their actions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support your teenager to set their own goals and steps they will take to achieve them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feel comfortable to calmly say ‘no’ to your teenager when they want something?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrate your teenager’s special achievements?</td>
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Session 3:
Helping your children develop self confidence
Session 3: Helping your children develop self confidence

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is the collection of beliefs or feelings that we have about ourselves. With young children, self-esteem is about how they feel accepted and valued by the people who are important to them.

Children with a healthy self-esteem feel accepted, cared about and safe. Children with low self-esteem do not feel safe or secure with family members and can believe that they are not loved or do not deserve to be loved.

Self-esteem is essential to the future wellbeing and happiness of your child.

Self-esteem in Congolese speaking families

In traditional Congolese culture, the child’s self-esteem is based on how the family is regarded by the local community. The family must adhere to Congolese history, cultural and religious practices, and is extended to the way that you bring up your children.

Many Congolese-Australian migrants have not come to Australia voluntarily. Most fled their homeland as refugees and survivors of war or oppressive political regimes. If you have no choice to leave your homeland, this can have a huge impact on your family’s self-esteem. You might feel these negative feelings reinforced if people treat you differently or as a stranger in your new country or if you are no longer able to live in a traditional way.

Congolese families do not generally place much emphasis on developing their children’s individual self-esteem. In Australia, individuals are expected to succeed or fail on their own merits and may judge themselves harshly if they fail. Your child lives in a culture where their self-esteem and their feelings about their own success or failure are important to their future career.

As parents, you need to be aware of how important it is for children to develop self-esteem.
The table below shows the benefits from helping your children develop self-esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children with positive self-esteem often:</th>
<th>Children with negative self-esteem often:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Feel valued by their family and community</td>
<td>• Feel unloved and unimportant within their family and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Act independently</td>
<td>• Avoid trying new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take pride in their achievements</td>
<td>• Blame others for their shortcomings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cope with frustration &amp; keep trying</td>
<td>• Feel frustrated when things do not go as expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Handle positive &amp; negative emotions well</td>
<td>• Are easily influenced by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take responsibility for their own mistakes and actions</td>
<td>• Place a low value on their own talents and abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feel they have learned from failure.</td>
<td>• Resort to violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As parents you have a crucial role to play in developing and strengthening your children’s self-esteem. It involves treating them as people with their own needs, talking to them about their behaviour and giving them opportunities for experience.

**Improving your children’s self-esteem**

There are a number of ways to help improve your children’s self-esteem. Read these tips and discuss them with your family.

**1. Connect your children to their past**

To build your children’s self-esteem, it is important they:

• Know about and have pride in their family’s Congolese heritage;
• Understand how they fit into Australia and its culture;
• Are positive about their future.
EXERCISE FOUR

Developing pride in your children’s heritage and in Australia

You can help connect your children to their past by developing pride in their heritage as well as the positive aspects of Australian culture.

Discuss with your family what stories, photographs, books, songs and movies you can share with your children that will increase their understanding of:

• your parents and grandparents, homeland, ethnic roots, migration and settlement, and the joys and difficulties you encountered;

• your current place in Australian society and your role in the local community;

• your participation in social, sporting, religious or other activities;

• your goals and future dreams for your family;

• your hopes for your children’s future and how these have changed over time;

• your language and cultural practices, and why they are important to you and your extended family.
2. Learn to praise your children

Your children need to hear your encouraging comments so that they feel good about themselves. No child is perfect so remember your child will have both strengths and weaknesses. Always be honest when you praise them and talk to them about areas they need to improve in without being too critical.

Mention their particular strengths, especially if they are feeling silly or having trouble learning something new. Remind them that sometimes it takes time and lots of practice to become good at something, and you will not always reach the top even if you are extremely passionate about it. Gradually your child will become aware of their particular strengths and weaknesses and start to understand and believe in themselves.

You will need to be very giving and generous. Do not forget to praise your children by:

- Saying “I love you, no matter what”;
- Telling them you are happy and lucky to have them as your children;
- Helping them learn how to solve their own problems, even if the problems seem trivial to you.

3. Recognise your children’s achievements

When children work at learning something or are involved in a school competition, do not forget to praise them by saying:

- “Well done. I am proud of you when you try your best.”
- “It is great to see you doing your best.”
- “You are improving all the time.”

But only say these things if they are true. If you praise your children when they don’t deserve it they will not understand what is expected of them. The purpose of recognising their achievements is to show that you notice the value of their efforts, and this will encourage them to keep trying or master new skills.

4. Showing affection

Actions speak louder than words. Showing physical affection or looking happy when you’re with them can give a lot of encouragement. You can show your love by:

- Listening to your children;
- Spending special time together;
- Participating in their games and activities;
- Giving them warm gestures and affection whenever possible (smiles, hugs, stroking their head and hair or back);
- Allowing them to help you around the house and praising them when they do.
Session 4:
Improving your children’s language and social skills
Session 4: Improving your children’s language and social skills

The importance of language and social skills

Australian society places a strong emphasis on individual expression and the ability to mix well with others. This makes it important for your children to communicate well and develop good social skills.

Children learn languages easiest in the first 5 years. This makes it an excellent time to introduce your children to new languages. If you only speak your traditional language at home, this is the time they should also be learning to speak English – and if you speak English at home this would be a good time to introduce them to Congolese language classes or other languages you would like them to learn.

The early years are also crucial for developing social skills. In Congolese culture, large extended families are the norm and many children socialise almost exclusively with their relatives. In a new country where you might not have these extended family links, it is a good idea to introduce your children to as many other children as possible. As discussed in Session 2, playgroups, libraries, kindergartens and Congolese language classes are useful places to meet other children. They also help your children learn important skills, such as how to structure their day and be ready on time.

Why is child’s play important?

Parents may not see the importance of play in children’s lives including play times that involve parents and their children. Do you remember times when you played with your parents? Child development experts tell us that play is about more than having fun; it can help children learn.

• It is a great opportunity for spontaneous learning and makes learning fun;
• Stimulates exploration and curiosity;
• Provides opportunities to mix with other children and learn important social skills;
• Encourages children to develop their interests, abilities and potential;
• Lets children relax, learn how to have fun, be creative and solve problems;
• Helps children learn how to express their feelings.
Your role in your children’s play and language development

Take a moment to consider how you can:

• Encourage your children to play without pointing out their mistakes;
• Join in their games and have fun with them;
• Avoid dominating their games, and give them a chance to lead and enjoy their being the leaders in their own games;
• Encourage them to use their imagination and create new games to play;
• Teach them to adopt the right values as they play, such as sharing, no violence, following the rules correctly, cooperation and honesty.

What happens when children have difficulty expressing themselves?

Children who have trouble expressing themselves may suffer from emotional stress or find it difficult to socialise with other children. So how do you know your child is showing signs of stress?

Children experiencing emotional stress may:

• Become easily frustrated and stop playing when they cannot get their way;
• Throw more temper tantrums;
• Cry easily and find it hard to stop even if you are trying to soothe them;
• Scream or hit you or other children;
• Find it hard to solve disputes;
• Refuse to socialise with other children in their age group.

Children experiencing social stress may:

• Turn out to be quiet, shy, isolated and withdrawn;
• Lack the confidence to try new activities;
• Become passive, timid and an easy target for bullying by other children.
## EXERCISE FIVE

### Ways to improve your children’s verbal expression and social skills

Below are tips to help improve your children’s verbal expression. Discuss them with your family. How many of these things do you do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you:</th>
<th>Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen to your children and encourage them to explain what they mean in their words?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask them simple questions that encourage them to think for themselves?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use every opportunity to encourage them to talk, such as taking them shopping and asking them to search for goods you want to buy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask them to describe what they see and hear during trips on the train, tram, bus or in the car?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe to your children the things and people around them, helping them learn to focus, concentrate and learn from new experiences?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take them to new places like the zoo and ask them to tell you what they see?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage your children to sharpen their senses and practice their language skills while waiting at different places (bus stops, clinics, the bank)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help your children (from 18 months onwards) to understand why one thing follows another? For instance, when you turn on the switch, the light is on.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you:</td>
<td>Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach your children how their behaviour has consequences? For instance, touching sharp knives can lead to cuts, or forgetting to brush their teeth will cause tooth decay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play word games with your children to develop their vocabulary and speaking skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take them to a playgroup, language classes or kindergarten?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage them to speak Congolese languages or other languages you speak with family and friends?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Session 5:
How to communicate feelings
Session 5: How to communicate feelings

Expressing emotions in a new culture

In contemporary Australian society parents from various cultural backgrounds recognise the importance of expressing and talking about emotions and feelings with their children.

Traditionally, in Congolese families the father is not expected to openly express or talk about emotions, particularly when asserting his authority. While these beliefs may have suited past upbringing practices, in today’s society childhood development experts encourage children’s expression of emotions.

Cast your mind back - were you brought up this traditional way yourself?

This may be one of the biggest areas of difference between traditional Congolese culture and contemporary ways of bringing up children. You have come to a society where it is expected that parents will encourage their children to talk about their feelings. Learning how to balance these new expectations to discuss feelings with your children is likely to be very different to what you know or experienced with your own family growing up. It may be one of the most challenging issues you face as a parent.

In some Congolese families, the communication of emotions can be difficult, but in Australia it is not uncommon for teachers and others to ask children to express their feelings or give their opinions about certain things. This can be confusing for children and can potentially lead to tensions within your family, especially with teenagers who may feel that your lack of emotions is a sign that you do not love or appreciate them.

You could discuss with your children how you were raised by your own parents. This may mean that your love and appreciation of them is expressed in different ways like helping them buy a car, or by cooking their favourite dishes.

Developing good communication with your children

You can begin to develop good communication with your children by:

- Listening to and observing your children as they express their emotions with their friends or older sisters and brothers;
- Talking to your children and learning to ask them questions;
- Learning to not interrupt your child when they are talking to you.
Here are some useful tips.

Start listening to and observing your children:

1. Arrange a time and a quiet place to listen to your children. If you are busy, honour your promise of listening to your children later.

2. Pay full attention to your children when they talk.

3. Tell your children that you understand what they are saying by repeating back a summary of what they have told you.

4. Look them in the eye, smile and nod when listening to your child.

5. Ask questions which allow your children to answer in their own words, such as: “Tell me in your own words, how it happened?” or “How do you feel now?”

6. Squat down and listen to young children so that you are physically at their level.

7. Avoid criticising, teasing, ridiculing or judging your children as failures. Try using positive language and regularly refer to good things they have done.

8. Listen with sympathy to what your children say, explain that you understand them and that you used to have similar experiences at their age.

9. Try to understand and accept your children’s feelings without becoming upset or uncomfortable with them at the time or else they will avoid showing or expressing their feelings with you.

To talk to your children in a way that will get the best response:

1. Hold discussions with your children from as early an age as possible to help train them about how to engage in discussion.

2. Ask your children about topics of interest to them, such as school, friends and sport.

3. Get involved in your children’s daily activities and ask them questions about these activities.

4. Use words of encouragement and praise when your child puts in strong effort or shows improvement.

5. Avoid embarrassing your children or asking them difficult questions in front of others.
Using ‘I – messages’, not ‘you – messages’

One of the best tips for talking to your children in a way that will help their emotional development and self-confidence is to use ‘I’ instead of ‘you’ messages. You might not have heard of this before but it is a very good way of communicating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I–message:</th>
<th>You–message:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I am disappointed when you watch TV without doing your homework first.”</td>
<td>“You are useless and lazy. You only want to watch TV all day and not do your homework.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘I – messages’ can be used to:

• Share your values, feelings and thoughts;

• Let your children know what you think and how you feel.

Be aware that ‘you – messages’ can:

• Create fear and belief that you do not love your children;

• Be hurtful and provoke a resentful and defensive response.

**EXERCISE SIX**

**Using ‘I – messages’ in your family**

Over the next week, keep a record of the occasions you use ‘I–messages’ and ‘you – messages’ towards your children.

Discuss with your family which was the best way of getting your children to behave properly and be happy.
Session 6:
Stop the fights with your children
Session 6: Stop the fights with your children

Resolving conflicts with children is one of the toughest challenges any parent can face. What’s the best way? The traditional way in many cultures is to scold or hit.

Today most childhood experts oppose such methods, seeing them as old fashioned, unnecessary and damaging to a child’s social, emotional and psychological development. This issue is widely debated among parents across all cultures and there may never be one single correct answer. This guide makes no claim for the superiority of one method over another. It simply gives you some alternative ways of resolving conflict with your children.

Six practical steps for resolving conflict with your children

The following exercise is a model for resolving conflict between you and your children practised in many contemporary societies and recommended by international childhood experts. It involves six steps and attempts to make both parents and children the winners by encouraging cooperation. We suggest you give it a try and see if it works for you.

EXERCISE SEVEN

Solving conflict

Step 1: Define the problem, your needs and your children’s needs

The most important step in solving a conflict is usually recognising that a problem exists. Without your children being present, discuss with your family or other adult members a discipline problem you have been having with your children. Write the problem down below.

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........................................................................................................................................................................
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........................................................................................................................................................................
Now discuss some important questions:

- Are you emphasising ‘I-messages’ to express your needs and expectations to your children?
- Are you listening to your children when they try to explain their needs or plans?
- Are you expressing your negative feelings (such as anger) without yelling or criticising your children?
- Are you reassuring your children that:
  - you are looking for a solution to the problem that will meet both your needs?
  - both of you can ‘win’ if you resolve the issue without anger and by trying to see all sides to the problem?
  - you are imposing discipline because as a parent you are responsible for their best interests and will always love your children and care for them?

**Step 2: Brainstorm possible solutions**

Now you need to think through the best ways to resolve your conflicts with your children. Take a couple of days to think about the problem you outlined above and then write down four or five different ways you think the problem can be solved without creating further conflict. Here are some useful tips:

- Avoid ridiculing or harshly criticising your child’s proposed solutions;
- Come up with a number of alternative solutions;
- Remember that your aim is not to ‘win’ but to work together.
Step 3: Evaluate possible solutions

You and your children should now work out together what you think are the best solutions of those listed above. Each of you should tick one solution from your answers in step 2, and then discuss your choice.

Remember to:

• Be honest when examining each possible solution
• Analyse thoroughly the arguments for and against each solution
• Ask practical questions about how each solution would be implemented
• Test each possible solution to identify any defects
• Consider whether the outcome of each solution is fair to both you and your children.

Step 4: Decide on a mutually acceptable solution

Now that you’ve discussed thoroughly the best options, decide which one to choose and write it down below. If two solutions are compatible, write down both. Some tips are:

• Choose the solution you both agree on;
• Avoid imposing your solution on your children without explaining your reasons;
• Ensure that you both understand the consequences of the chosen solution.
Step 5: Implement the solution

Discuss how to implement the solution immediately after a solution is chosen. Write down some practical steps below. Here are some suggestions that may help the agreement work:

- Discuss who does what and by when;
- Do not express doubts about your children’s intentions or dwell on negative consequences;
- Confront your children with ‘I-messages’ if they fail to honour the agreement;
- Offer suggestions to help your children play their part;
- Avoid nagging, trying to control or raise your voice with your children; this will potentially lead to resentment and the reappearance of conflict.
**Step 6: Evaluate the solution**

After a suitable period of time (either several days or weeks) discuss with your children whether the solution has worked. If you need to make amendments to the agreement, write them down below. Here are some suggestions to follow:

- Make it a pleasant experience – perhaps over a meal or family treat;
- If the solution has worked well, acknowledge the effort and progress achieved;
- If the solution hasn’t worked fully, rather than reject the solution out of hand, think of modifications that may make it work better;
- Again, listen carefully to what your children are saying;
- Be open and honest. Pretending the problem has been solved when it hasn’t will only lead to more issues down the track.

If you found this exercise too difficult or unsuccessful, remember that you can attend one of our ‘parenting in a new culture’ training courses or get expert advice from one of our parenting consultants by calling (03) 9496 0200.
Session 7 :
How to discipline your children
Session 7: How to discipline your children

Like resolving conflict, applying discipline to your children can be an enormous effort. It involves constant judgement. Don’t be surprised if you find it confusing, most parents do. Despite this difficulty, discipline is something you will have to address at some stage. It is important to be aware that while there is no single agreed best way to discipline your children, applying discipline is not the same thing as punishment. Discipline teaches children acceptable behaviours, such as right from wrong and respect for the rights of others. It develops confidence in a child, allowing them to feel secure, loved and able to control their impulses. Punishment on the other hand, is reactive and focuses on penalising children for unacceptable behaviour. In Australia, legal action can be taken against parents who punish their children too severely by hitting or abusing them.

Traditional discipline

As a Congolese-Australian parent you may encourage your children to uphold your culture, values and traditional practices and to maintain your family’s unity and reputation. Like many parents you will expect your children to obey you and follow your advice when it comes to important life decisions such as education, career choices and marriage. Some Congolese-Australian parents still employ fear, threats and physical punishment to discipline their children. Such practices may have suited past times and may still be accepted in some African countries but things have changed in many societies. These days, child abuse and harsh punishment can attract the attention of government child protection authorities and the police, and you may even have to defend yourself in court.

In Australia, children are taught that they have rights and they are not expected to automatically follow the demands of their parents. They are also taught that physical punishment is unacceptable. Your children will be exposed to such ways of thinking and you need to be aware of how these different messages may confuse your children about your role as a parent.

Discipline in contemporary Australian culture

In contemporary societies discipline is generally understood to be about creating understanding and mutual respect between parents and children, not about the threat of punishment. This is often referred to as ‘positive parenting’. Children are expected to understand the difference between right and wrong behaviour, to respect their parents’ wishes and to develop the right values and attitudes.

Childhood experts suggest that the most effective ways to discipline your children include:

- Making children aware of the consequences of their behaviour;
- Giving children ownership for dealing with the problem;
• Discussing with your children your rules about discipline;

• Allowing children to keep their dignity intact when they disagree.

**Smacking children**

Parents in many cultures think smacking is acceptable and that the occasional light smack can sometimes benefit the child. But if smacking is the only form of discipline, it can escalate into more serious forms of violence. Children may copy this behaviour at school by hitting other children as a way to solve conflict. Punishing your child by scolding or by light smacking should only be used as a last resort, and only in an emergency when your child’s misbehaviour can cause harm to themselves or other children. Discuss the issue of smacking within your family and agree on whether or not you will use it to discipline your children.

**Avoiding child abuse**

In Australia parental abuse and maltreatment of children is a serious offence that is monitored by government agencies in every state and territory. Remember, child abuse can be interpreted in many ways. If a child is seriously harmed by parents whether physically, psychologically or sexually, this may trigger intervention by government authorities and the police. In extreme cases, government agencies can remove children from the parent’s home and take the parents to court.

**Understanding Australia’s child protection laws**

You need to understand Australia’s child protection laws. Remember, Australia has different rules and standards of child protection than many African countries.

**What is child abuse?**

‘Child abuse’ or ‘maltreatment’ is the causing of physical, sexual or emotional harm to a child by parents, or any other adult that cares for the children. Abuse can be a single incident that causes serious harm needing medical attention, such as physically belting, punching, shaking or burning the child. Alternatively the abuse may be repeated on a regular basis causing long term physical, mental and psychological harm to the child. Maltreatment can include not feeding a child properly, telling a child to leave home, or neglecting the child’s need for warmth and clothing. Children should also not be exposed to violence between adults in the family home, which may in the long term harm them psychologically.

**What are Australia’s child protection laws?**

In Australia, child protection laws are the responsibility of the state and territory governments and laws vary slightly depending on which state or territory you live in. The laws define the meaning of child abuse and neglect, outline how and when child protection services can come to your home, and the legal processes for prosecuting parents who neglect or abuse their children.
Who is responsible for child protection in Australia?

In Australia, child welfare is the joint responsibility of parents, the community, and the government. Child protection matters are usually dealt with by professional social workers in state and territory government departments. The police and government social workers are responsible for visiting the family home to investigate each case and report to the relevant government Minister.

What are the legal consequences of child abuse?

Child abuse can have serious legal consequences. Courts can order that children be removed from their parent’s care and placed into government care. This may mean another family relative or a foster family approved by the government is asked to care for the children. In circumstances of extreme child abuse, child protection workers may take a child in need of protection into safe custody without waiting for a court order. In the most severe cases, parents can be convicted and imprisoned.

The impact of severe physical punishment on families

- Children running away, family disruption through couple separation, or divorce;
- Reports by neighbours to the police, who may then visit the home to investigate;
- Mental and emotional problems in later life, including lack of self-confidence, low academic achievement and aggressive behaviour, and difficulties in forming relationships with others;
- Children suffering from physical disabilities and chronic health problems; and
- Social isolation for the family.

For more information on facts about child abuse, go to the Australian Childhood Foundation’s website www.stopchildabuse.com.au.

What is the best way to discipline children?

Generally speaking, there is no one right way to discipline and raise children. But there are a number of effective parenting styles that incorporate different discipline techniques. Parents may prefer a style that suits their own cultural values. Regardless of which methods you choose, it is important that you are consistent.
EXERCISE EIGHT

What method of discipline do you choose?

Studies into parenting and child psychology list three broad approaches to discipline. These are summarised below.

Read the summaries and discuss with your wife or husband which method or combination of methods you are using.

- **The authoritarian style**

  Authoritarian parents believe in ‘absolute obedience to authority’. They command what their children can and can’t do, leaving little room for creativity and thinking. Misbehaviour is strictly punished.

  Although still practiced by some parents within the Congolese community, this style is no longer accepted or tolerated by the Australian community or in the majority of migrant families.

  Children raised in this way may become vulnerable to the influence of undesirable peers, or become depressed.

- **The permissive style**

  In this style parents are lenient, take a ‘hands off’ approach, do not set limits for their children’s behaviour and allow them to learn from the consequences of their actions. Misbehaviour may be ignored or treated as a joke. Some parents treat their children as their friends and refuse to take responsibility when their children have caused harm to themselves or others.

  Children raised in this way are generally creative and original, but may feel insecure and can sometimes make poor decisions. They often have difficulty dealing with authorities and lack the self-discipline required for study or long term employment.
The assertive democratic style

Parents who use this style delegate responsibilities to their children according to their abilities, clarify issues and give reasons for limits. Children are guided and given lots of practice in making choices. Misbehaviour is met with appropriate consequences or by problem solving, taking into consideration the child’s needs. The defiant behaviour of out-of-control children is not tolerated.

This style is widely practiced in contemporary societies and is regarded as ideal by Australian teachers, child psychologists and paediatricians.

Children raised in this way learn to accept responsibility for their poor behaviour, fit in with others at school or at work, succeed in their marriages and make wise choices.

Tips for effectively disciplining your child

Some general tips: Here is a list of techniques that have been found to be effective in disciplining children. If you haven’t heard of these already, try them and see which works for you.

- Be firm when punishing or rewarding your children. Do not argue with them about the punishment they are being given. Do not laugh or smile at your child if they are misbehaving or they will become confused about whether they are misbehaving at all.

- Be consistent both parents must agree to impose the agreed discipline rules every time without fail.

- When your child is beginning to misbehave remind them of the rules and the consequences. For example, you might say “If you make pen marks on the wall, you know the rule is that you will have to stop playing with your favourite toys”.

- Punish or reward your children immediately according to their actions and behaviours. Act quickly to connect the action with the outcome and apply the appropriate discipline.

- Stop inappropriate behaviour with a firm “no”, said in a calm voice and with a simple and clear explanation.

- Set up a daily routine and make every effort to stick to it.

- Do not offer choices in circumstances where the child has to comply with your rules. For example, say “It is time to go to bed” … don’t ask “Would you like to go to bed?”.

- Use ‘time out’ as an alternative effective punishment technique by setting aside a place for the child to reflect on their bad behaviour for a specific period of time.

- Role model the behaviour you want your children to copy in all situations.
Some specific tips: Children should learn that their actions have consequences, including punishment if they misbehave. It is your responsibility as a parent to help your child understand the consequences of what they do. Use the table below as a guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>What children understand</th>
<th>Discipline method</th>
<th>Established punishment methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 2 years</td>
<td>Little or no understanding of the effects of their behaviour</td>
<td>Consistent attention to behaviour</td>
<td>Use distractions to get the child’s attention away from unacceptable behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–4 years</td>
<td>Starting to understand the effects of their behaviour</td>
<td>Set very simple rules</td>
<td>Remove the child from the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Take them home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Light spanking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years onwards</td>
<td>Understand the effects of their behaviour</td>
<td>Explain rules and consequences clearly</td>
<td>Withdraw access to toys, TV or games for a long period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Session 8:
Managing family stress
Session 8: Managing family stress

Raising children can sometimes be a very stressful experience. Although it brings happiness and excitement, it is often accompanied by stress regardless of the age of the children concerned. While stress can have positive effects, too much of it can make family life difficult and even make family members ill. Learning how to cope with stress is therefore an important skill for you to acquire.

Stress and migrant families

Family life can sometimes be even more stressful for migrant families. There are a number of reasons for this:

• You may experience stress resulting from the circumstances of your migration to Australia. You may have been a refugee, been separated from wider family networks, suffered from political persecution or the effects of war, or shared shame over tragic events in Africa. Extra stress may be caused by discrimination, the difficulty some Congolese-Australians have in finding jobs or rewarding careers, and by occasional negative media or community attitudes;

• Your parents may have brought you up differently, using different ways of expressing emotions and enforcing discipline. Your own children may not fully accept their grandparent’s ways.

They may want to follow contemporary culture, which emphasises independence, rewards self confidence and encourages the pursuit of individual happiness;

• Many Congolese parents fall back on traditional parenting that may in fact be out of date even in the contemporary Democratic Republic of Congo. This can make the problems outlined above even worse;

• Without your Congolese relatives and friends that you grew up with, your children may lack role models for how to behave in a Congolese family;

• You may not have an extended family to help take pressure off you in times of high stress;

• Traditionally, many Congolese parents regard their children’s misbehaviour as a source of guilt and shame;

• The enormous personal sacrifices you make for your children working long hours to give them a high material standard of living or pay school fees can sometimes mean you have little time to spend with them. This can lead children to feel resentment and parents to feel ingratitude from their children.

But don’t despair. The traditional and contemporary African cultural emphasis on strict family discipline, family togetherness and education have helped many Congolese-Australian young people fit in well and achieve considerable success.
Understanding your children

Understanding how your children develop can help you cope better with family stress. You need to recognise that:

• Your children are unique individuals with different personalities, needs, talents, strengths and weaknesses;

• They grow at different paces physically, emotionally, and intellectually;

• It is unfair and unrealistic to continually compare your children with other children even within your family;

• You are not responsible for your children’s behaviour you are responsible for teaching your children to be responsible for their own behaviour.

Reflect on your own needs

You may need to reconsider your own outlook on family life. There are changes you can make that will help reduce stress. For instance:

• Acknowledge your own parenting skills and strengths;

• Don’t take your children’s misbehaviour personally;

• You should not feel guilty about occasionally taking time off for yourself;

• Your uncontrolled anger can make family stress worse and lead your children to copy your angry behaviour and become even more disrespectful or rebellious;

• You should try to resolve stressful situations before they get out of hand.

Reducing stress and managing anger

Try to develop your own methods for managing stress. Your way of handling stress will have an impact on your children, your marriage and, potentially, your health.

As stress is a natural human reaction to daily life, the goal should not be eliminating it completely but learning how to manage stress effectively.
EXERCISE NINE

Discussing ways to manage stress

The following are some suggestions for managing stress better. Discuss with your family how you can use these techniques.

1. Do some exercise when you feel stressed, for example, go for a walk.

2. Remember that you are not alone. Try to expand your social network. Discuss your concerns with other Congolese parents experiencing similar family stress.

3. Make your extended family members your best friends. Discuss issues with them. Do not try and deal with family problems and stress all by yourself.

4. Seek practical solutions. Identify what you can change as a parent. Identify what you can do to avoid or reduce the causes of stress in your family. Be tolerant and accepting.

5. Don’t over-react to stress. Don’t exaggerate the issues causing your stress. Regard it as a normal part of family life.

6. If you are still finding it difficult to cope, seek professional help, support and advice from parenting experts.
Session 9 :
Dealing with teenagers
Session 9: Dealing with teenagers

Initiation is the Congolese traditional way of learning and teaching. Initiation is a rite of passage.

Depending on the practices of your tribe, young boys go to initiation camp in the bush for one or two years. Initiation aims to end boy’s ‘ignorance’ and sexual ambiguity and to nourish their huge curiosity at this stage. They are taught about traditional values, knowledge, techniques, and marriage.

After this rite of passage, they return to their community as men ready to get married and a festival is held in their honour.

In contrast, girls receive their initiation secretly in their village or in the nearby bush.

Initiation prevents the break out of the social and psychological adolescence crises that could jeopardise the society as a whole.

The transition from childhood to adulthood may be quite different for you and your teenager in Australia.

You and your children will feel the absence of important family members, like grandparents. You are authorised to underline the parents’ responsibility as this Congolese slogan states: “new parents in a new country.”

You may have experienced many challenges when you fled your country, like living for many years in hiding.

Parenting challenges are another hurdle to overcome. As many Congolese have survived the hardships of refugee camps you are capable of resilience as the Congolese proverb goes: “eyes that have seen upwards mountain slopes cannot fear downwards slopes”.

What is inter-generational conflict?

Bringing up teenagers is one of the most difficult tasks any parent can face. Conflict often results, which can disrupt even the happiest families.

This conflict between teenagers and their parents — and sometimes between teenagers and grandparents — is often referred to as ‘intergenerational conflict’. It happens within every family from every culture and in every country, but migrant families face extra pressures. As well as the differences between generations, migrant families have to cope with different cultural attitudes about how to bring up teenagers.

While coping can be difficult, it is not impossible. This chapter will help you understand the problem better. It finishes with some ideas about how to improve communications with your teenagers and get better cooperation from them.
The special needs of migrant families

Before we look at how best to cope with intergenerational conflict, it is helpful to understand the many pressures facing your family.

• You might be part of an extended family that gives grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters joint responsibility for looking after children.

• Alternatively, you may have no extended family or friends to rely on at all and may be unable to get advice from experienced parents on how to cope with your children’s difficult years.

• You might have a large family and find it difficult to get a home big enough to give teenagers the space they often need.

• There might be extra pressure on migrant children to succeed because giving them opportunities may have been one of the main reasons why you chose to migrate to Australia.

Migration involves independence, excitement and new opportunities, but it can also involve considerable costs.
Advantages and disadvantages of migration for migrant families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better educational opportunities for the children</td>
<td>Exposure to lifestyles that cause tension with your traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning a new culture</td>
<td>Conflict about how to bring up children and how much personal freedom they should have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fairer social welfare system, higher incomes and more money to spend on the family</td>
<td>Higher costs for bringing up children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality for males and females, mothers and fathers</td>
<td>Different understanding about the roles and authority of fathers and mothers and between men and women in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom from being expected to follow ‘the old ways’ in raising your children</td>
<td>Being confused about how best to raise your children so they do not forget your culture and the culture of their grandparents</td>
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</table>

**Why is conflict with teenagers so common?**

The most important thing for teenagers is often to ‘fit in’ with their friends and other young people. It is a time of life when teenagers need to form their own identity away from the control of relatives and you as their parent. This can lead to rebellious behaviour and a refusal to listen to and obey you.

In their desire for independence teenagers often express behaviour that you might perceive as rebellious:

- Teenagers may want more privacy and become more self conscious about their looks, especially in the presence of the opposite sex.
- They may feel pressured to adopt mainstream culture in their appearance and behaviour. They may change their clothes, start to speak only in English, and refuse to follow common African cultural traditions and customs.
Consequences of serious family conflict

Most families manage intergenerational conflict well. But if the conflict is acute and remains unresolved, it can lead to family breakdown. In extreme circumstances conflict can lead to:

• Children running away from home or coming to the attention of the police;
• Your family feeling pressured to return to your country of origin because children have lost their ‘cultural roots’ and are confused about their ethnic identity;
• Violence between parents and children;
• Children swearing or showing disrespectful behaviour towards parents;
• Children using drugs and alcohol or stealing from their parents;
• Children lying to their parents, skipping classes or performing badly at school;
• Parents gambling or spending too much time at work to avoid being at home.

Common causes of conflict

There are a number of causes of inter–generational conflict common to all cultures.

EXERCISE TEN

The usual causes of inter–generational conflict

Read through the following list of common causes of conflict between parents and teenagers. Tick those that have occurred in your family. Have you got a plan in place to help your family cope? Discuss each issue with your husband or wife and plan how to deal with each problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common causes of conflict</th>
<th>Has this happened in your family?</th>
<th>Do you have an agreed set of rules?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Going out at night without your permission</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Your daughters refusing to obey family rules unless their brothers obey these rules also.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Teenagers refusing to attend religious, cultural and extended family special events</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Refusing to eat traditional food</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Common causes of conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Wearing unsuitable clothes or choosing friends you disapprove of.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Having a boyfriend or a girlfriend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Your child may want to marry someone from outside the Congolese community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Avoiding school homework and study for exams and dropping out of school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Smoking or taking drugs and alcohol.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Refusing to speak or learn traditional language and not interested in learning cultural traditions.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Tips for overcoming conflict

Conflict with teenagers is inevitable but when it is handled well, it can lead to healthier family relationships.

There are some general approaches you can take that will help you cope with and overcome conflict with your teenagers:

- Always be consistent about the family’s rules and expectations about how you want your children to behave;

- Set a good example with your children by talking about the rules before they become teenagers, so they know what to expect;

- Learn new ways of communicating with your children by being open and by talking to them about some of the similar difficulties you had as a teenager;

- Take your children’s needs and wishes into account when making decisions about the family;

- Learn how to express anger and other emotions without resorting to unnecessary tears, abusive language or violence;
• Choose which parts of the new culture to adopt and which parts of your original culture to retain. Write a list. Make sure you and your family agree about the cultural rules and traditions that you want the family to practise;

• Be clear about the level of involvement you want in your family from the children’s grandparents and other extended family members; and

• Make sure these new family rules are properly discussed and well understood by all family members and that both parents agree not to contradict each other when enforcing these rules.

Some specific tips

Here are some causes of family conflict from Exercise 10 and some tips for overcoming them.

| Going out at night without your permission | Despite what your children may claim, many families regardless of their cultural backgrounds do not let their children go out whenever and wherever they like. You should set rules and be consistent. For instance, you may demand your children be home by a certain time or that they can only go out with a brother, sister, relative or friend you trust. Another option is that you may decide they can only go out on their own during the day. |
| Different rules for sons and daughters | If you allow your sons to go out at night, don’t be surprised if your daughters demand the same freedom. You are more likely to be respected and obeyed by your sons and daughters if you treat them similarly. If you are extremely lenient with your sons and controlling with your daughters, this may lead to problems and arguments. |
| **Having a boyfriend or a girlfriend** | Don’t be surprised if this happens and don’t over-react. Set a time to discuss it with your children. Listen to them and express your concerns in a calm and caring way. Talk about the values you would like them to adopt and how they have served you and your marriage. Discuss the emotional challenges a relationship may bring them.

Discuss consequences of having a teenage relationship for instance, how it can distract from school work. |
|---|---|
| **Refusing to attend religious, cultural or extended family events** | This is your child’s way of expressing their confusion about their ethnic identity. Discuss your cultural heritage with your children and point out to them that in today’s world, being able to move comfortably between two languages and cultures is a bonus.

If they resist accepting your culture, don’t over-react; children usually become proud of their heritage when they reach adulthood. By over-reacting, you may force them into a position where they reject your culture outright and feel attacked by you. |
| **Choosing friends you disapprove of** | Try not to over-react to this common situation. Do not make nasty and negative comments about your children’s friends. Discuss with your husband or wife whether your children’s friends are suitable.

Give your children good reasons why their friends are not suitable and try to influence them rather than ‘lay down the law’. Remember, your children might challenge you if you tell them not to associate with someone just because of their race or religion. |
| **Refusing to study what you would like or failing to study hard enough** | Many migrants dream that their children will become good students, but it doesn’t always happen. Forcing your children to study will not work. You need to create the right environment and set a good example, like talking about school from the moment they start, not just in the final years. Having books in the house, discussing current affairs, reading books and buying quality newspapers sets a good example for children.

Treat their education as extremely important and remind them that it takes significant work and perseverance to succeed at school and go to university. Take an interest in their school and talk to their teachers regularly. Talk to your children about how wonderful it would be to continue their education, explaining how an education will create great work opportunities throughout their life. |
| **Being forced to translate for parents** | This can cause your children great embarrassment and even shame. Your children may think that the person you are speaking to is making a judgement that the family is stupid.

Do not use your children to translate for you when it involves personal and private issues; always use an adult or professional interpreter.

Help your children to understand the reasons why you have limited English. Assure your children that you are trying to learn the language. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smoking or taking drugs and alcohol</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t be surprised if your child experiments with smoking, drugs or alcohol. This happens to children from all cultural backgrounds. The answer is not to hide your children from Australian society to avoid exposing them to danger, as this is not possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to discuss the problems smoking, taking drugs and drinking alcohol may lead to. Start as soon as your children are old enough to understand. You should establish rules for the whole family. For instance, you may forbid alcohol in your house if it is your religious duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be consistent and don’t abuse drugs and alcohol yourself. It is extremely difficult for you to expect your child not to drink, smoke or use drugs if you yourself do any of these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you think your child may be using drugs or alcohol, take it seriously and see your doctor or a health professional. It is your responsibility.</td>
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</table>
Acknowledgments

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Rosemary Kelada
Chief Executive Officer

Testimonials from participants include:

“As a leader within my community, nowadays, I feel secure as I am aware of the Australian laws, they protect my rights which I found out during some sessions I attended”. “Now I feel I can act as a father, even though I am a step father. We are a much happier family”.

“I am happy to be settled in Australia where I feel comfortable, protected by the law and rights as a father, far from the uncle’s power over my son”. I am experiencing how worthy it is to be a father and gaining the satisfaction of raising my own kids”.

Rosemary Kelada