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1

Background, Objectives and Method

Engaging Families
1.1 Background and Objectives

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) have partnered with TNS Social Research to conduct research to inform the development of a social marketing strategy and communications campaign aiming to promote parenting approaches that maximise early childhood outcomes.

As a starting point, that forms the basis of what constitutes desirable parenting approaches, are eleven (11) neuroscience principles or “truths” that are now universally accepted as being the best way to optimise child development. However, what is not universally accepted or understood is what parents must do, at an individual family level, to translate the 11 “truths” into parental behaviour.

The objective of the developmental research component of the project is to ascertain, mostly with respect to desirable parenting and parental behaviours, but also with respect to the “truths”:

- Will parents listen? What will make them pay attention?
- Do parents believe it?
- Do parents know what we mean?
- Do parents know or believe if they can do it? What enables/disables them?
- What’s in it for them?
- How can we motivate and activate parents to change how they parent?

The project is significantly informed by the TNS Behaviour Change Framework, to ensure that these objectives are investigated in consideration of the latest and most widely supported thinking around both reflective and automatic behavioural influences, and international best practice approaches to social marketing and behaviour change.
1.2 Methodology

Inception and establishment

Part 1: Desk research and stakeholder consultation

Part 2: Quantitative omnibus (n=1000 parents of 0-8 yrs old children)

Segmentation of the target audience to understand and enumerate variation in attitudes and behaviours relating to parenting, to provide baseline measures and to inform qualitative structure

Part 3: Qualitative developmental research

- 25 in-depth interviews with parents
- 1 online discussion board with parents

Part 4: Concept testing (8 groups with parents)

Part 5: Development of the social marketing strategy

Engaging Families
1.3 Method and Sample Overview

- 25 in-depth interviews with parents lasting 1-1.5 hours conducted in respondents’ homes, with parenting diary pre-task.
- Mix of one-to-one interviews (8), couple interviews (11) and friendship pairs (6).
- Interviews undertaken during April in Regional WA, Sydney and Brisbane.
- Online discussion board running over 4 days involving 14 respondents, with respondents drawn from rural and remote locations across Australia (WA, NT, NSW, QLD and SA).
- Incentive of $100 paid for discussion board and couple interviews. $125 paid to interviews completed with friends or individuals.

- Total of 56 respondents:
  - Mix of Mums (70%) and Dads (30%).
  - All respondents had at least one child aged under 9 years living at home.
  - Spread of children in the following age bands: 0-18 months, 18+ months – 5 years and 5-8 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family size</th>
<th>16 x 1 child</th>
<th>9 x 2 child</th>
<th>14 x 3+ child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family type</td>
<td>20 x couple families</td>
<td>5 x single parent families</td>
<td>5 x blended families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household employment status</td>
<td>12 x both parents working full time</td>
<td>20 x one working full time and the other part time/not working</td>
<td>4 x one parent working part time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- People with a job that involves working with children, people who work in the fields of market research, advertising, marketing and communications, and foster parents and grandparents were excluded from the sample.
The Starting Point ... Neuroscience, the Brain, and the 11 “principles”
2.1 The Eleven Neuroscience Principles

The following “truths” are the starting point, which inform the desired behaviours that parents should perform.

**Over-arching “truths”**
- The first 5 years last a lifetime
- Children are born ready to learn

**“Truths” related to critical conditions for brain development**
- The best learning happens in nurturing relationships
- Children’s wellbeing is critical to brain development
- Good nutrition, health and exercise are critical
- Children’s self-control is critical for learning, responsibility and relationships

**“Truths” related to how the brain develops**
- Brains develops through use
- Children learn through being engaged and doing
- Children learn from watching and copying
- Children learn language by listening to it and using it
- Children are born ready to learn
- Children are born ready to use and learn maths

However, in their current state, the “truths” are not linked to parental behaviour. How are parents expected to react to these principles? What is desired of them, with respect to how they parent? What do they do first?

The challenge for campaign development, is to create and execute messages and activation strategies that are behaviour-focused, rather than focused on the principles or “truths”.

Engaging Families
Context: The World of Parents
3.1 Underlying Assumptions About Parents

There are a number of underlying assumptions about parents that this research has shed light on. These assumptions impact both parents’ behaviour (or indeed their likelihood of participating in the desired behaviours), and the way in which parents seek and filter parenting advice or information, and then process and accept/reject the information. Each of these in turn impact on how we most effectively communicate with parents to encourage behaviour change.

All of these truths are underpinned by the basic desire of all parents that their children grow to reach their potential, and that they are happy and well adjusted adults who can work within and contribute to society.

‘We all want at the end of the day a happy, healthy and motivated child so that they achieve to their full potential and gain the best out of life’

Underlying assumptions about the parents studied in the qualitative research are:

- Parents are well intentioned and are trying to consciously do the “right” thing by their children. However, most parents have a constant, underlying sense of guilt about not doing enough of the “right” thing. Considered together, it is clear that guilt is far from a positive motivator in any communication with parents – it runs an extreme risk of alienating parents, rather than encouraging engagement and consideration of new ideas.

‘I feel that as a parent it is easy to feel guilty about things we think we should be doing and aren't, or sometimes we hear about something great that someone else has always done and it would never have crossed my mind. In parenting I think there is a "mark/standard/target" that you aim to achieve (all your ideals), and then there is the "actual" spot that you are hitting. The further away these two 'spots' are, the guiltier I feel that I'm not being the best parent that I can be’
3.1 Underlying Assumptions About Parents

Not surprisingly, parenting is both fulfilling and frustrating. Parents take joy in watching their children develop and grow, they love to see them happy and fulfilled, and particularly relish special moments spent together. They consider the unconditional love shared between themselves and their children as the foundation for, and the motivation for their role as a parent. However, there are considerable frustrations relating to parenting. Common frustrations centre around meal times, sleeping, tantrums, and finding time to balance all of life’s requirements. In particular, lack of time is a common barrier for all desired behaviours, with parents (and particularly mothers) finding it difficult to find the balance between parenting, responding to the children's needs, as well as their own, and relationship needs. As such, many parents like the proposition of multi-tasking behaviours together (e.g. play, count).

‘I enjoy a lot of things, watching them grow, learn and develop. I just love having conversations with my kids and learning how they think things work’

‘I love seeing my boys reach the various milestones in their lives’

‘Seeing the excitement in their eyes when they see me, just spending time with them doing anything’
3.1 Underlying Assumptions About Parents

- We asked parents to depict and describe how they felt....

'It shows the frustration I would feel when I can't do something or things go wrong'

'I feel like my head is exploding with frustration'

'In moments like these, I just want to sit next to my toddler and scream right along with her!!! :) She thinks life is miserable - I am almost reduced to behaving like her!!'
3.1 Underlying Assumptions About Parents

- Parents don’t necessarily think in years but rather in stages, or milestones. It will be important to reflect this in both the language, and images used in any communication with them.

- There is a very strong sense that all children are different, not only across Australia, but within any one family. There is significant resistance to the idea that you can put across one philosophy regarding parenting that will be appropriate for all, with a preference to have room for individualism and choices in parenting methods (both within and across families).

‘Raising kids is not cut and dry, no two situations are identical’

- How parents themselves were parented has a direct bearing and indeed in many cases shapes the style and approach of their own parenting, either in terms of the desire to replicate or avoid. A considerable number of parents consult their own parents for ideas and input, suggesting that grandparents could potentially form an important secondary target group for any communication.

‘I have used my observation of my parents and parents that I aspire to be like. I often talk with my parents and siblings about different situations I have encountered in parenting and what I could do about going about fixing or making better my response. I also get reassurance that sometimes what I’m doing is good and right. Confidence is a powerful tool in parenting’
3.1 Underlying Assumptions About Parents

- While parents don’t like being judged by other parents, it is very common behaviour, and something that they often find themselves unwittingly doing both to themselves, and to others, sometimes unkindly! There is considerable self judgment, with mothers in particular often very self critical about their parenting behaviour, regularly self assessing their day to day “performance”. On the other hand however, parents enjoy, and regularly seek out other parents to share both successes and perceived failures in order to learn and improve, and find this both helpful and validating.

- Daily parenting is an habitual, largely unplanned activity. It is not on the ‘jobs to do’ list. While there is considerable ongoing self-assessment of their performance as a parent, there is not a lot of ongoing conscious thought about parenting as a whole – the importance of different activities, including specific changes or improvements they can make. Parents generally only stop and think about options and change their approach when there is an issue and / or a crisis with a child or within the family. As such, it will be critical that the campaign has a compelling “hook” to ensure that all parents feel they are “in the market” for information, and have the potential to make positive changes. Part of the campaign’s challenge will be to raise the consciousness of one’s own parenting behaviour, before it can be converted to “desirable” behaviours.
### 3.2 Summary and Implications for Campaign Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What parents think....</th>
<th>Implications for the campaign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children develop according to milestones not years</td>
<td>Reflect this in tone and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All children are different – there is not one solution for all situations</td>
<td>Don’t try and suggest one approach as the only solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...about how they were parented – mostly positively, but sometimes negatively; That their parents may have the answer</td>
<td>Consider grandparents as a secondary target group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are well intentioned, but many have an underlying sense of guilt about not doing enough of the “right thing”</td>
<td>Guilt is not a positive motivator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t like to be judged, but still find themselves doing it</td>
<td>Do not be judgmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That other parents have lots of good ideas</td>
<td>Use parent testimonials and anecdotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are not in the market for information until they have an “issue”</td>
<td>Create a compelling hook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Desired Behaviours

Engaging Families
4.1 The TNS Behaviour Web

*Response efficacy – do I believe that the suggested behaviour/skill/action actually work?  
*Self efficacy – am I capable of (or can I be capable of) performing the desired behaviour?  
#Heuristics – mental shortcuts or decision defaults, usually used unconsciously or in an unplanned way
4.2 Understanding Parents’ Reactions to the Desired Behaviours

- The TNS Behaviour Web was used at both data collection and analysis stages to understand parents’ reactions to the ten desired behaviours:

  **PLAY**
  - Playing with your children
  - Encouraging your children to play

  **LEARN**
  - Reading to your children
  - Counting with your children

  **ENGAGEMENT**
  - Being attentive to your children and responding to their needs
  - Spending time talking and listening to your children

  **ROUTINES & APPROACHES**
  - Being consistent in the approaches you use with your children
  - Using established routines for your children around meals, play and sleep times
  - Setting clear limits for your children
  - Being physically active and eating healthily with your children

- The Behaviour Web provided a structured and systematic way of capturing the factors influencing parents’ responses, with the components of the Web used to frame discussion with parents, and researchers listening for and probing the various aspects.
- At analysis stage the framework was used as a means of identifying the key drivers of parents’ responses to the behaviours and clarifying the barriers and potential enablers to behaviour change.
4.3 PLAY Behaviours

**Playing with your children**

- Play is widely accepted as a legitimate activity for children – ‘just what you do’.
- There is confusion about the importance of playing with children versus children playing on their own.
- What is included? Play covers a whole spectrum of activities including outdoor play, arts and crafts, toys, imaginative play – some describe being ‘playful’ with children but may not class as ‘play’.
- Some parents, and fathers in particular, enjoy this aspect of parenting, whilst others find it tedious and struggle to engage consistently with play.
- There is evidence that ‘playing with’ is the first thing to drop off the daily agenda due to competing demands such as doing the housework with limited time and energy. This is a source of emotional conflict which leads to a sense that they ‘should’ be doing this more and an underlying/nagging guilt.
- Ideas and resources for play will be welcomed – both stage appropriate and generic. Some mentioned resources e.g. Be A Fun Mum on Facebook.
- Campaign role is to LEGITMISE, MOTIVATE/INDUCE and ACTIVATE.

**Encouraging your children to play**

- Some are puzzled by this, as it is not necessarily seen as something you need to actively encourage children to do, as play ‘comes naturally’ to them.
- It does however, bring to mind encouraging children to play rather than watch TV.
- Parents also describe ‘getting children started’ with play activities and then leaving them to play independently – there is value seen in children being able to play on their own for both the parent and child.
- Only (single) children may need more encouragement – it is a stated benefit of larger families that children encourage each other to play and ‘entertain themselves’.
- Not regarded as very onerous/demanding for parents, especially when compared with reactions to ‘playing with’.
- Risk of parents opting out if not counterbalanced with importance of active parental engagement in play.
- Campaign role is to VALIDATE / REINFORCE.

Summary of findings

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I think this one could make women feel guilty. I feel guilty every day that I don’t sit down and play with my children for hours and hours on end [...] but I think play should be directed around your life not a child’s’</td>
<td>‘I’ve never been very good at playing with my kids to be honest, but I have always included them in everything I do. I do think they have enjoyed singing songs whilst folding clothes, getting dirty gardening [...] we did always ‘play’ hairdressers’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Turn the television off and go outside – I do say that quite frequently!’</td>
<td>‘I wish that I wasn't so fazed about the house that I could spend more time with them doing colouring, drawing and craft’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I think that one could be received negatively by some parents as they might want to spend more time with their kids but they can’t necessarily devote as much time as they’d like to and then you’ve got the guilt factor’</td>
<td>‘I am aware that I don’t play with my children enough! There are always so many things to do! I am also acutely aware though of the benefits of playing with them’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 LEARN Behaviours

Summary of findings

**Reading to your children**

- Well accepted with strong legitimacy – high value placed on this with no need to ‘make the case’ for reading to your children.
- High self-reported compliance across the sample although may not always be every day.
- Reading routines evident e.g. bedtime story.
- Many benefits reported, for both children and parents.
- Valued by some parents as being a ‘finite’ activity, and therefore easily fitted into a busy day/schedule – an efficient as well as effective activity.
- However the time required can still be an inhibiting factor for some e.g. lower compliance amongst larger families, working parents and some single parents.
- For some it evokes positive emotions and nostalgia about their own childhoods - rather ‘romantic’.
- Some regard this as a ‘gift’ for your child i.e. instilling a lifelong love of reading/books.
- Campaign role is to REINFORCE (VALIDATE) AND REMIND.

**Counting with your children**

- Well accepted and legitimate, although parents do not see a long term benefit for children, so this needs to be communicated.
- High self-reported compliance across the sample.
- No evidence of a counting routine as such, but reported to be a regular unplanned activity that is integrated into other activities rather than stand-alone e.g. when out shopping, folding washing, measuring while cooking, fingers and toes when getting child dressed, eating.
- Not as ‘onerous’ in terms of time commitment as reading.
- Appears less ‘emotionally charged’ than reading – parents less competitive about whether a child can count compared to their progress with reading.
- Campaign focus is to MOTIVATE (INDUCE) for those not doing (enough) and REINFORCE.
4.4.3 Reactions to LEARN behaviours

‘It’s the nice time you have with your kids before they go to bed and they are happier to go to bed after you’ve read them their story. It’s our time and we really like that time at night’

‘You make it fun for them, that works well. You can count even when you’re out shopping, count out carrots and potatoes, it makes a boring outing a bit more fun’

‘It’s the one thing I can do every day to give them and it doesn’t take very long, 15 minutes out of my day to do it and ultimately the outcome and the gain from doing it is so much more than not doing it’

‘Not sure if earlier starts are more beneficial to development or academic achievement [...] but I do hope to give her a head start maybe’

‘Reading is finite, there’s a beginning and an end [...] you can make such a difference with reading in just 5 minutes, you can eradicate so much guilt in just 5 minutes!’

‘I count with her when she’s handing me books, or pushing her shapes through the correct holes [...] We sometimes count cars in the parking lot when out and about. She also has lots of counting books that she likes to read’
4.5 ENGAGEMENT Behaviours

**Summary of findings**

**Being attentive to your children and responding to their needs**
- Parents interpreted ‘needs’ in the first instance as physical needs e.g. being safe, food – there was some further discussion around balancing children's ‘needs’ vs. ‘wants’.
- Responding to needs was considered absolutely critical in the baby stage, with a gradual tailing off as parents encouraged more independence.
- Parents could sometimes feel overwhelmed by children’s needs, particularly those with larger families.
- Some needs, such as safety, were critical but there were concerns about ‘spoiling’ children by responding to their every request or ‘demand’.
- This is perhaps best understood in the context of parents feeling busy, pressured and tired, thereby not always well placed to respond and give attention.
- This behaviour also appeared to hit a nerve amongst some in relation to the balance of power between parent and child, and whether the parenting approach should be child-led or parent led.
- Campaign role is to LEGITIMISE.

**Spending time talking and listening to your children**
- Parents readily identify a number of short and long term benefits, such as helping develop communication skills, ensuring your child feels valued and developing a long term trusting relationship with your child.
- However some feel that you could spoil children if overdone and make them too ‘needy’ rather than resilient.
- Day-to-day pressures, distractions and feeling impatient can also get in the way of really listening – especially for working parents.
- Those parents exhibiting this behaviour successfully tend to build this into their day e.g. talking in the car on the way home from day care or school, after lunch, whilst having dinner together and at bed time.
- Without these kind of markers in the day to prompt the behaviour it may easily slip off the agenda, as it is a less tangible activity – helping parents to create opportunities therefore appears important.
- Campaign focus is to MOTIVATE (INDUCE) and ACTIVATE.

Engaging Families
4.5.3 Reactions to ENGAGEMENT behaviours

‘That one sounds a bit sucky, like you are crawling to your children like you are going to create a child fed with a silver spoon, wrapped in cotton wool. Kids need to know that as important as they are, they are not the be all and end all’

‘It’s very important. I always tell my kids if you need anything just tell me, Mummy will always be here for you. They need that in their life’

‘You need a balance with this, children need to know they can’t have your attention all the time’

‘Listening and talking to your kids is essential. My boys will get frustrated at various times and if we are busy and not taking the time to listen to their issues it can really blow out. It helps them to be able to talk about what’s happening in their lives. I think it also helps them to listen and talk to others’

‘I think its hard to find the time, you just don’t stop with the dinner and the dishes, but it makes a huge difference when you do it, actually sit down and have that chat time’

‘We do it in the car on the way home from day care or when they go to bed I lie down with them, read a story and have a chat. I feel more giving at this time of day as the children are almost asleep, woo hoo!’
4.6 ROUTINES & APPROACHES Behaviours

**Summary of findings**

- These two behaviours were considered to be two sides of the same coin, with setting limits being the ‘theory’ and applying them consistently the ‘practice’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting clear limits for your children</th>
<th>Being consistent in the approaches you use with your children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents do not always consciously decide what their ‘limits’ will cover although it was considered important.</td>
<td>The majority found this to be an area of some struggle, although considered important; the few who felt able to be consistent at all times (Mums and Dads) were particularly determined characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits were typically set around safety, eating certain foods, TV time, computer time and bedtime; also mentioned were limits on behaviours in public and ‘manners’.</td>
<td>Being consistent could be undermined by both personal and contextual issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some limits had a degree of flexibility, whilst others (e.g. safety) did not.</td>
<td>Personal issues included being tired and stressed which lowered parent’s emotional energy, patience and memory, poor assertiveness and guilt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This was a moral issue for some parents e.g. teaching right from wrong, preparing child for adult life - that if you did not do this you could be storing up trouble for later by producing a ‘wayward’ teenager.</td>
<td>Contextual issues included certain settings that made you more likely to ‘cave in’, such as being out shopping/in public, and certain key ‘battlegrounds’ e.g. school run, bedtime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The challenge of adhering to limits at all times was noted, such as limiting certain foods and behaviours when out of the house.</td>
<td>Some people noted the importance of parents working as a team, as sometimes one contradicted the other, undermining consistency. This can be a major problem in step families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also mentioned by some were grandparents overriding limits e.g. buying the child something whilst out shopping when the parent would normally refuse.</td>
<td>Campaign focus is to MOTIVATE and ACTIVATE through support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign role is to MOTIVATE and ACTIVATE through support.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Engaging Families
4.6 ROUTINES & APPROACHES Behaviours

Summary of findings

Being physically active and eating healthily with your children

- There was high legitimacy for this behaviour – the message about healthy eating and physical activity has been heard, if not always acted on.
- The familiarity of this kind of message means that it risks being diluted and lacking impact.
- Healthy eating brought to mind ‘fruit and veg’, which most claimed to promote, although several had fussy eaters which undermined this.
- Some also used ‘treat’ foods as a bribe or reward which they found a useful tool.
- Physical activity was often something children did more regularly on their own, although there were examples of being active together e.g. family bike ride, kicking a ball.
- Some parents reported that they struggled to find the time and energy to be physically active with their children and cook healthy meals, especially working parents – and there was guilt about this.
- There was evidence of contradictions e.g. stated support for healthy eating as kids eat McDonalds or very sugary foods/drinks in view of researcher.
- Campaign role is to MOTIVATE and ACTIVATE.

Using established routines for your children around meals, play and sleep times

- Whilst all were very familiar with the concept of a routine, it was quite polarising with some people strongly in favour and others less so.
- For those in favour, the benefits were for both parents and children - a ‘management tool’ for parents to create some kind of order out of what would otherwise be chaos and providing a sense of security for children.
- Those less in favour did not necessarily reject routine outright, but preferred a ‘flexible routine’ that was less restrictive and allowed for spontaneity – people therefore had different interpretations of ‘routine’.
- This was a somewhat controversial area where some parents responded defensively about their choice – it therefore has potential to incite comparison and judgement both of oneself and other parents. For example some cited ‘routine queens’ who were ‘control freaks’; others wanted more of a routine but found it hard to enforce e.g. bed times, leading to feelings of failure.
- The need for routine around play was questioned.
- Campaign role is to LEGITMISE and MOTIVATE.
4.6.5 Reactions to ROUTINES & APPROACHES behaviours

‘Consistency makes kids feel secure. They know where they stand. Routine makes life easier for the whole family and also gives a feeling of security [...] Limits are very important [...] Again, I think it makes them feel cared about and secure’

‘With limits children know what to expect and what is acceptable and unacceptable’

‘Children have to learn that no means no. If you don’t do this you’re making a rod for your own back, but it can be tiring’

‘Consistency is hard! And something to work on, it’s hard to be consistent when you’re tired or busy, but I do try, as I understand children thrive on routine and a few expectations and boundaries’

‘Sometimes it’s anything for an easy life [...] there should be something for mothers to learn this stuff and enable them to ask for help and have a break to recharge your batteries, to keep up the energy levels so they can remain consistent’

‘I know we could be more consistent with the healthy diet in particular [...] I also think I get a little relaxed with consistency, my husband and I may disagree, we differ in opinions sometimes’

Engaging Families
4.6.5 Reactions to ROUTINES & APPROACHES behaviours

‘Sometimes if they won’t eat their tea I’ll just make them a vegemite sandwich or give them a chocolate frog just for the peace and quiet. I know it’s not the right thing to do but whatever gets you through the day’

‘I believe that consistency and routine are the only way that you can have stability for your children because otherwise it’s just chaos. It’s good for them and it’s good for you as you get your time to yourself in the evening’

‘We’re not very active with the kids. We don’t prioritise it as much as we should and that comes down to time constraints, we are both on 12 hour shifts’

‘I try to keep the routines flexible so we can still take the opportunity to get out of the house and socialise. Other mothers I know are missing out, both for themselves and their children, on social and play opportunities as they refuse to be flexible or their child simply can’t cope with change’

‘I’ve started to walk and go to the park every day with them, as I felt very unfit. It was hard to get them out at first but now they seem happier [...] if you just lie on the couch the kids will copy that’

‘With the sleeping, it would work for a while and then one child would fall sick and I’d start getting up with them again in the night and throwing them into bed with us. I know it’s the wrong thing but I’m so chronically tired I do what I can to get some sleep’
Reactions to the Neuroscience “Truths”
5.1 The 11 ‘Truths’

Summary of findings

- A previous research study commissioned by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA) has quantified parent reactions to the neuroscience principles. In contrast, this research focused on reactions to desirable parenting behaviours that are consistent with the neuroscience, and the likelihood of engaging, motivating and activating parents to adopt the desired parenting behaviours.

- It was however also important to canvass reactions to the neuroscience “truths’ to establish what part, if at all, the “truths’ could or should play in a social marketing / behaviour change communication strategy.

- The previous study therefore provides a useful reference point from which to analyse our findings – the extent to which they confirm previous findings (add weight to the evidence) and/or provide new evidence that extends the understanding of how the neuroscience “truths” may be adopted into everyday parenting practice.

- Whilst the previous MCEECDCYA study and this research are not directly comparable due to different methodologies and respondent types, there appeared to be broadly similar reactions to the truths.

- Our research extends the understanding of how to best translate the neuroscience “truths” into action, and what if any role the concept of brain architecture might play as part of the communication device.

Overall there appears to be reasonable congruence between both research studies.
5.1 The 11 ‘Truths’

Parents across both samples recognised the importance of most of the truths. In this research the truth ‘Children are born ready to learn maths’ was rejected by many and in the MCEECDYA study little was said explicitly about maths.

Although important, across both samples parents acknowledged that putting the theory into practice could be challenging, for example eating healthily and consistently being a positive role model for your child to watch, copy and learn from.

In this research, some people commented on the familiarity of some of the truths which reflected things they might have read about and/or heard from health professionals.

This research also identified a number of truths that were potentially sensitive territory. Several appeared to risk inducing feelings of anxiety, guilt or failure amongst some respondents – these were ‘The first five years last a lifetime’, ‘Good nutrition, health and exercise are critical’ and ‘The best learning happens in nurturing relationships’.

Across both studies, the link between the truths and the ‘story’ of children’s brain development was not well understood. Further, amongst parents of 0-5 years their focus on and interest in ‘development’ is focused on social and emotional development rather than ‘brain’ development. At present, ‘brain’ development is strongly and almost exclusively linked to academic achievement.

If the campaign is framed around the concept of brain development it will therefore be important that this captures the multi-dimensional nature of children’s brain development beyond developing academic/educational capabilities.

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**Summary of findings**

- Overall there appears to be reasonable congruence between both research studies.
5.2 Overarching Truths

Summary of findings

Extent to which findings support previous research

The first five years last a lifetime
- As with the MCEECDYA study, parents recognised the significance of the first five years on children's long term development.
- There were some similar comments in relation to ‘laying the foundations’ and setting personalities.
- Similarly, knowledge was general rather than detailed or specific to neuroscience.

Children are born ready to learn
- The concept of learning from birth was supported in both studies, such as learning to crawl, walk and talk.
- Common terminology was used by respondents in both studies i.e. children are like ‘little sponges’ absorbing everything.

Additional findings (TNS study)

The first five years last a lifetime
- In this study some respondents misinterpreted the statement, understanding it as the first five years feels like a lifetime to parents i.e. it is hard work.
- The first five years statement was also considered daunting by some, especially new and inexperienced parents – some commented that in the early days of parenting you are focussed on getting through the day/week and would find it hard to take this on board.
- There was also resistance and guilt from some parents, especially those who recognised that their children had has a less than ideal first five years; they needed to believe that they could undo/compensate for that in later years.

Children are born ready to learn
- Observing your child as they learn and develop was considered one of the joys/more pleasurable aspects of parenting, with happy milestones along the way e.g. baby’s first smile, first word.
- Some made the point that although the child might be born ready to learn, they have different capacities for learning and develop at different rates.
5.2.1 Reactions to Overarching Truths

‘They learn a lot of the life skills by the age of 5 but I don’t think everything is set in stone’

‘Yes they are born ready to learn, but they do learn at different rates’

‘I feel really bad as my kids didn’t have the best first five years [...] that’s your foundation, but I’m hoping its not the be all and end all, that it’s not irretrievable’

‘Absolutely. Children are like little sponges, they soak everything up’

‘That’s where the brain gets programmed and if you screw that up you’re in trouble’

‘Right from birth they learn to suckle, to roll, crawl, walk, talk, toilet train’
5.3 Truths Related to Critical Conditions for Brain Development

Summary of findings

Extent to which findings support previous research

The best learning happens in nurturing relationships
- As with the MCEEDCYA research, the importance of nurturing relationships for your children's development was emphasised.
- Similarly, this was considered important to give children a sense of security from which they could trust and have confidence, grow and blossom.

Children’s wellbeing is critical to brain development
- In both studies this statement was accepted as important.
- Wellbeing was interpreted in relation to emotional development and adjustment in both studies.

Additional findings

The best learning happens in nurturing relationships
- For some this statement brought to mind the relationship between parents, rather than between parent and child. The learning for children here was around observing an adult relationship – those with violent/abusive relationships were therefore anxious about what children had learned from this.
- This was also considered in relation to relationships between children and day care staff/teachers.

Children’s wellbeing is critical to brain development
- The use of the word ‘critical’ in this statement drew comment from several people. It was felt to be too harsh and gave the impression of being ‘ordered’ which was jarring.
- The physical aspects of wellbeing and brain development/learning were also emphasized e.g. the importance of being ‘well fed’, having breakfast.
5.3 Truths Related to Critical Conditions for Brain Development

## Summary of findings

### Extent to which findings support previous research

#### Good nutrition, health and exercise are critical
- This was well supported in both studies, although the respondents in this research did not discuss alcohol and smoking, as the MCEEDCYA respondents did.
- Both sets of respondents supported the importance of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- It was also mentioned by both groups that other priorities/needs interfere with the ability to achieve this, such as giving sweets as a bribe or struggling with fussy eaters.

#### Children’s self-control is critical for learning, responsibility and relationships
- Both sets of respondents accepted that children’s social and emotional development is critical, for example to be able to survive and thrive at school. The concept of self-control/self-regulation specifically was not necessarily top of mind however.
- In both studies the long term process of children learning self-control was highlighted.

### Additional findings

#### Good nutrition, health and exercise are critical
- Again, the use of the word ‘critical’ drew comment from some people as it felt harsh and directive. Parents felt this sounded judgemental/pressurising in an area they felt they were trying their best, which was considered counterproductive.

#### Children’s self-control is critical for learning, responsibility and relationships
- The statement caused confusion amongst some respondents as it was too ‘wordy’ and complicated.
- The concept of self-control was considered a little too generic by some for the 0-5 age group, as it means quite different things for a baby versus a 5 year old.
- Again, the word critical was negatively received by some.
- This truth also has potential for inducing guilt, as parents reported struggling with developing their child’s self-regulation, particularly dealing with tantrums.
5.3.1 Reactions to Truths Related to Critical Conditions for Brain Development

‘Time is a factor, when you both work you need to cook something quickly and that doesn’t always mean the best possible nutrition’

‘Well, this is very true because children become obese and overweight. Once they become overweight when they are young it also affects their health when they become adults.’

‘In the first couple of years it’s really hard to achieve self-control with your children as they have no self-regulation. They don’t get there until about 4 or 5’

‘How can you teach a child if you don’t want to nurture and love them?’
5.4 Truths Related to How the Brain Develops

**Summary of findings**

**Extent to which findings support previous research**

**Brain develops through use**
- In both studies there was acceptance that the brain develops through use with ‘if you don’t use it you lose it’ a common response.
- There were also respondents in both samples who felt that television could play a role in learning and development.

**Children learn from being engaged and doing**
- Both sets of respondents strongly agreed with this truth, with ‘hands on’ experience of children considered important.

**Children learn from watching and copying**
- Both sets of respondents strongly agreed with this truth and conveyed their sense of being a role model to their children.

**Additional findings**

**Brain develops through use**
- This statement reminded some people of conversations with health professionals and also toys marketed specifically for children’s learning and development.
- The truth as stated was considered somewhat fragmented and also generic, rather than specific to children - it therefore lacked impact.

**Children learn from being engaged and doing**
- The challenge of engaging children with activities they don’t enjoy was mentioned e.g. homework.
- Another barrier is the amount of patience parents need to engage children so that they can learn, which was sometimes in short supply due to tiredness or other demands.

**Children learn from watching and copying**
- This was particularly engaging for some people who spoke with warmth and humour about children copying their own mannerisms and becoming a ‘mini me’.

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5.4 Truths Related to How the Brain Develops

**Summary of findings**

*Extent to which findings support previous research*

**Children are born ready to use and learn maths**
- This truth appeared to be less supported than others by both sets of respondents.

**Children learn language by listening to it and using it**
- This truth was well supported by both sets of respondents.
- Respondents in this research did not always make a clear link to reading to children however, but tended to reference children absorbing and copying language more generally.

*Additional findings*

**Children are born ready to use and learn maths**
- Respondents rejected this truth the most strongly due to a belief that maths is something you have an innate aptitude for, therefore some children may be very ready to learn maths and others much less so.
- This had sometimes been ‘evidenced’ by parents’ experiences of varying levels of engagement with maths by their different children.
- The truth therefore appeared rather confusing and counter-intuitive.
- ‘Maths’ was also considered a somewhat baffling term in the context of babies as it brought to mind more advanced numeracy as opposed to simple ‘counting’.

**Children learn language by listening to it and using it**
- This truth was a point of hilarity for some parents as they relayed children saying a ‘naughty’ word they had let slip inadvertently.
5.4.1 Reactions to Truths Related to How the Brain Develops

‘I’m not into children being overstimulated too young by pushy parents. Babies start responding to you at about 3 months old, before that it’s just eat, sleep, crap. So you can’t see their brain being used until you get some response or reaction’

‘Hmmm. Children are all different, some are more tuned into maths than others’

‘Definitely – they watch and copy the good stuff and the bad stuff!’

‘I think there’s a role for TV in children’s lives, they can learn from it [...] And it’s also for parents too so that you’re a better parent as you get a break’
6

Information Seeking

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6.1 Information Seeking

While not a focus of this research, there was some discussion around information seeking with respect to parenting. As mentioned earlier, information and advice-seeking is mostly centered around milestones and stages, rather than around behaviours or age. The diagram below outlines the key types of information sought at various stages, and the most common sources of information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre birth</th>
<th>Books, doctor, midwife, anti-natal, magazines, friends / family, and to a lesser extent Internet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Books, child health nurse, magazines, mothers’ group, friends / family, Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years 2 to 5</td>
<td>Play group, kindy, childcare, friends / family, Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years 6 to 8</td>
<td>Teachers, school parents, friends / family, Internet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Engaging Families
6.1 Information Seeking

- Given the busy lifestyles, and competing demands on most parents, information is often only actively sought when there is an issue or crisis – be that behavioural, social or medical. When this happens, it is common to source information from a variety of people and places, and filter to what sits comfortably with the individual situation and family.

- Given the extent of information sources and content available to them, there is no consistent pathway to accurate information for parents. The competing sources of advice can be overwhelming, confusing and thus counter productive. Parents are looking for information in clear “chunks” that they can access, absorb and then adopt if it makes sense for their family. This is a particular risk in the development of a web based information campaign, which must not appear to be dictating a ‘one size fits all’ solution.

- It is clear that other parents’ stories are the single most powerful source of information, providing clear tips and tools that have been applied successfully. The power of ‘reliable’ parental testimony cannot be underestimated.

> ‘I generally don't use the internet for parenting information. There's so much information out there, and every time I go to search a topic, I'm a bit overwhelmed with all the information. I prefer to use books or ask friends for advice’

> ‘What do I find most useful? I guess the info from the other parents who I talk to because I know they have suggestions that have worked for them - tried and tested!’

> ‘There are times when you’re at your wits end and you don’t know what’s going on. Thank god there is the Internet and Google!’

> ‘There is always someone out there with an opinion or advice! I remember one piece of advice I was given when I was a brand new mum...listen to what everyone has to say, smile and then do whatever the hell you want to do...it's your kids not theirs!!!’
7

Implications for Campaign and Messaging Development

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7.1 Implications for Campaign Development and Messaging

- As the research interviews and focus groups iterated, it became increasingly evident that it would be very challenging to develop mass communication messages that would resonate with a majority of parents, across the range of family settings that exist in the community, and not be rejected by or objected to, on the basis of conflicting family and parent values.

- It became clear that the eventual need to reduce the messages down to single propositions, as would be required for the creative development process, would severely impede parents’ ability to engage with the campaign. There exists a paradox between the need for the simplification of parenting messages that are inherently complex and highly value-laden, and fact that parents push-back on attempts to simplify parenting advice or information down to a ‘one size fits all’ proposition.

- Approximately two-thirds of the way through the fieldwork, the researchers introduced some communication options for engaging with parents about the various parenting behaviours. The purpose of this area of inquiry was not to explore or test pre-finished messages/slogans/positioning statements (as this comes later, after the creative development process) but instead to seek reactions to broad ways of engaging parents that would resonate across and motivate the diverse parent population.

- For this reason, the following communication options were introduced:
  - The feasibility and role of a website as the main delivery mechanism for the campaign, because the researchers hypothesised that a multi-media, multi-message, two-way engagement medium such as the internet was better able (than above-the-line traditional media such as TV/radio) to provide sufficient detail, flexibility and varied context and family settings to engage and motivate the diverse range of families and family values represented in the Australian population;
  - How popular are parenting and related websites currently?
  - Strengths/weaknesses of message delivery via a website.
  - Broad mass media message ‘territories’ that might:
    - Engage and then drive parents to the website (cut through, engage, motivate to visit the website)
    - Cut through, engage and motivate behaviour change independently of a website, via the mass media ad.
7.2 The Potential Role of the Internet in Campaign Delivery

- The Internet tends to be used more often by the primary carer, which in many cases is the mother. However, it is by no means the primary source of information - indeed some parents never use it.
- Those who rarely or never use the Internet tend not to refer to any “official” sources, but rather seek information and advice from their own parents, and other family and friends.
- Those who use it occasionally generally do so when there is a crisis – either behavioural, social or medical.
- Those who use it regularly do so in a variety of ways – either through one or more preferred sites, or often simply “googling” and following the trail. There are a number of parents who are part of closed discussion groups on Facebook, most often as an offshoot of their mothers’ group.

- Particular websites that are used regularly are:
  - Facebook (Be a Fun Mum; mothers group closed discussion groups)
  - Child and Youth Health ([www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com))
  - Practical Parenting ([au.lifestyle.yahoo.com/practical-parenting/](http://au.lifestyle.yahoo.com/practical-parenting/))

- In order to be considered in the overabundance of information available, it is important for parents to feel they can trust the information they find on the Internet. They prefer websites that are grounded in some sort of science or official testimonial, both from well known children’s authorities (doctors, psychologists, authors), as well as from other parents. It is important that not all information is self generated. There is a clear preference for Australian websites and those recommended by others.

In the context of shaping parent behaviours, a website is a valuable tool to build efficacy in parents, and to provide the detail required for appropriate activation strategies. It is critical that while it be grounded in science, it appear to be parent driven with a range of experiences and options available for consideration by parents.
7.3 Potential Campaign Message Territories

Based on the emerging findings, seven different potential message territories, designed to direct parents to a website containing further information on desired parenting behaviour, were put to participants of the online forum for review. The purpose of introducing these territories was not to test advertising copy, but to explore potential communication hooks that would be more likely to engage, and then motivate parents to act (differently). The territories were developed to address several hypotheses and considerations emerging from the earlier fieldwork:

- The need to validate parents’ experiences and struggles without over-emphasising them, in order to get parents’ attention;
- Preference to engage and activate via positive motivations rather than negative;
- The usefulness of the word ‘neuroscience’ as a communication hook;
- The potential efficacy of legitimising the notions of ‘seeking help’ and ‘learning to parent’ as ‘normal’;
- The potential efficacy of parent guilt as an inducement / motivator to change;
- The potential efficacy of parent competitiveness (with other parents) as a motivator to change;
- The potential efficacy of using problem avoidance, and of using positive gain, as a core benefit to motivate change; and
- The potential to simplify or reduce down the desired behaviours and increase the perceived ease of getting started.

The purpose of exploring reactions to the message territories was to rule out, rather than rule in, some of the potential approaches covering the above considerations. Similarly, the aim was not to find a ‘winner’ at this stage, but rather to understand the relative merit of different hooks and to be able to direct a creative agency with regards to what ‘not’ to include rather than to be prescriptive at this stage with regards to message development.

Having said this, we were surprised to discover that there was one clear preference (depicted in green over leaf), with another four territories having some merit (orange). Two territories, those grounded in the negative motivations, were rejected outright (depicted in red, overleaf).

Across the board, the reference to a website was valued as a source of ideas on what to do more of / better as a parent.

However, references to ‘seeking help’ were universally rejected, and do not appear to be engaging or motivating to parents, who do not want to be told they need help by a 3rd party. ‘Help’ messages were either rejected outright by parents, who perceived this to be a negative judgment of their own parenting (as needing help), or they were dismissed as not personally relevant and thus provided an easy ‘opt out’ of the message.
7.3 Potential Campaign Message Territories

Every parent struggles with bringing up their kids. Children’s needs are constantly changing. Parents doing well ask for help, and learn as they go. Every step of the way. To learn as you go, go to www.xyzzz.org

Neuroscience can now give us the facts about what parents can do to give their children the best start in life. This starts with A, and includes B, C and D. Children that receive these things have a better chance at being the best they can be. Help is available, go to www.xyzzz.org

Every parent wishes their child was born with a toolkit or manual. But parenting is not like that, it’s millions of decisions that you make from birth onwards. Most importantly, it’s about A, B, C, D. Help is available, go to www.xyzzz.org

What makes a great parent? Great parents do A, B and C with their children, from birth onwards. If you do these things most of the time, your child will have the best possible start in life. If you want to check go to www.xyzzz.org

Every day a child is born, grows up, and starts school with a disadvantage in life. This is because their parents didn’t do A, B, C which we know is critical to giving our children the best start in life. To find out how to improve your child’s future, go to www.xyzzz.org

Many children could have a much better start in life, if their parents did 4 important things, from the moment they are born - A, B, C, D. To find out more about clever parenting, go to www.xyzzz.org
7.3.1 Preferred Message Territory

By far the preferred message territory was.....

Every parent struggles with bringing up their kids. Children's needs are constantly changing. Parents doing well ask for help, and learn as they go. Every step of the way. To learn as you go, go to www.xyzzz.org

This message was considered effective and was valued for...
- Conveying empathy and truth i.e. the reference to the 'struggle' of raising children, which people connected with.
- Making parents feel they are not alone, every parent is in the same boat - in this way it conveyed a sense of connection with other parents and a sense of support and encouragement.
- The perceived non-judgmental tone made people want to know more i.e. go to the website, by 'gentle coaxing'.
- Emphasizing the 'learning as you go' aspect of parenting which normalises the need to seek advice and information.
- Acknowledging the changing needs of children, which parents related to.
- Emphasized parenting as a learned skill i.e. always something new to learn as children develop and grow.
- It appeared to take the 'heat' out of seeking help, as every parent needs it.

The wording 'parents doing well ask for help' was questioned by some however as this did not always ring true. Offers of 'help' do not appear to be engaging or motivating to parents (as discussed earlier).

'It gets parents onside by empathising with the struggles of being a parent'

'Very good as it tells people that we all need help at times'

'BINGO! I love this one, I would be inquisitive and want to know more. It is non-judgemental and inviting'
7.3.2 Message Territories with Some Merit

Four message territories were perceived to have some merit, although were not entirely endorsed. The strengths of each direction usually rested in specific language that resonated and engaged. This engaging language is highlighted in orange below.

- Positive components of these message directions were...
  - The mention of a parent and child’s success was valued for being positive.
  - The reference to neuroscience was polarising, seen positively by some i.e. the information is grounded in science and endorsed by experts, but off-putting by others.
  - Mention of a ‘toolkit’ piqued interest amongst some people as they felt this would be very valuable.
  - Parents connected with the reference to making ‘millions of decisions’ as it rang true (but was not necessarily motivating, as it could also be stressful).

Importantly, parents rejected the inclusion of specific parenting behaviours in the universal message direction (the A, B, C etc..) – it was at the inclusion of specific behaviours that parents began to disengage as the message changed, in their eyes, from resonating and engaging them to telling them what to do; from understanding them, to judging them.
### 7.3.2 Message Directions with Some Merit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Orange</th>
<th>Blue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Science always gets me! If there was scientific research I will definitely be interested in the details and get on the website!’</td>
<td>‘My initial reaction is agreement that I sometimes wish I had a manual to fix a problem straightaway’</td>
<td>‘if I hadn’t done A,B or C from birth with my children I think I might feel a bit upset by reading this – that my children missed out and it’s too late’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I don’t really like this style of message. I think each person would have a different idea and approach to how they in their own way would make great parents’</td>
<td>‘I don’t like the use of words like neuroscience. The use of words like this makes me feel that an academic is trying to tell me what to do’</td>
<td>‘I would certainly be interested, although I may be a little turned off by ‘help is available’. It almost sounds like I have a problem that needs solving. I’d probably be more inclined to look it up if it said ‘tips’ or similar’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3.3 Message Territories Rejected Outright

The following two message directions were rejected outright.

The reasons for this were primarily the negative tone conveyed by...

- The reference to children being ‘disadvantaged’ – evokes fear and guilt if you hadn’t done these things and disadvantaged your child.
- A sense of ‘blaming’ parents, making them feel like a failure or lacking in some way.
- A somewhat ‘scaremongering’ tone.
- Feeling judgmental, authoritarian to some people.
- Again, there was also resistance to the ‘one size fits all’ parenting approach which felt too directive and restricting.

However, the term ‘clever parenting’ was regarded positively by some people, as it felt appealing and intriguing.

'I really don’t like this one. This straight out makes parents feel like a failure to their kids because they didn't follow the website. It’s awful'

'Even parents with the best intentions would feel miserable reading these two messages'

'I genuinely hate this, resent it right from the start. Why are my kids disadvantaged? My first thought is ‘Who the hell do they think they are? My kids are not disadvantaged!’ This has a very negative undertone, it is very judgmental and not inviting at all’

Engaging Families
Recommendations
(it should be noted that the following recommendations have been iterated and further developed for Stage 2 – proposition testing research).
8.1 Overview of Three Recommended Approaches

- We recommend consideration of three quite different approaches to the development of a campaign aimed at parents as follows:

1. Campaign primarily focusing on a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of “brain development”
   - Starts at the beginning of the behaviour change process (inform and educate), making the case for the importance of parenting behaviours for the whole child.
   - A long term approach.

2. Campaign focusing on one behaviour only
   - To work, must focus on one behaviour (only). Starts at the ‘activate’ stage of the behaviour change process (behavioural intentions and actions/trial)
   - Immediate approach, potentially only short term benefit (if any)

3. Campaign addressing all ten desired behaviours, via a website as the main communication vehicle
   - The only way to address more than one behaviour is via a website, with the mass communications designed to hook, engage and motivate parents to the website.
   - Short and long term approach.

Each approach is elaborated in the following pages.

In addition, we recommend the integration of information/education strategies (web-based, toolkits and parenting materials) and service provider delivery and policy together with the social marketing mass media communications strategy if the campaign is to succeed in achieving long term, sustained behaviour change.
8.2.1 Three Recommended Approaches

1. **Campaign primarily focusing on a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of “brain development”**

This approach begins at the education / information stage of the behaviour change model.

- This approach to the campaign would form the foundation for an ongoing discussion with parents on the importance of the desired behaviours on brain development.
- The approach addresses the finding of a legitimacy gap that currently exists when the concept of brain development is introduced. At present, parents only associate references to brain development / neuroscience / brain architecture with academic achievement and this is too narrow a focus to engage parents broadly. A focus on brain development at this stage would be regarded by parents as too one dimensional, and at the expense of valuing the social and emotional development of children – which is perceived to be equally if not more important than academic ability. This is most strongly felt amongst parents of infants and pre-school children.
- In order to introduce and establish a link between parenting/parent behaviours and brain development, the social marketing campaign will need to start right at the beginning, establishing this link to multi-dimensional child development. i.e. ‘how the brain works 101’, depicted and communicated in a basic way that joins the dots for parents between how social, emotional and academic wellbeing are optimised during the early years.
- Initially, the campaign would focus on building awareness, and making the case for brain development. In subsequent stages (years to follow) the campaign could evolve to motivate parents and move to more discreet activation strategies focusing on specific behaviours.
- The strength of this approach is that it is highly positive in tone, and it presents new information which is likely to be highly engaging amongst parents. It would work across a broad spectrum of parents, appealing to those academically motivated as well as socially/emotionally) and leaves little room for an ‘opt out’ by parents, and plenty of room to ‘opt in’.
- As this approach is attempting to present a new fact, the argument must be persuasive and the execution highly visual, engaging and credible, referencing a trusted authoritative source.
8.2.2 Three Recommended Approaches

2. Campaign focusing on one behaviour only

This approach begins at the opposite end of the behaviour change model.

- It is a finding of the research that if behaviours are to be addressed directly through the mass media communications, then messages must focus on one behaviour at a single time. This research supports the case that the first behaviour be “Play with your child”, which represents the ‘lowest hanging fruit’, with respect to the range of behaviours explored (the evidence for which is presented in Section 4.4).

- If addressing the specific behaviour of play, the case does not need to be made to inform or persuade parents why they should play with their children. This behaviour has already established legitimacy. There are three broad groups of parents that can be targeted – those that need motivating and inducement (reminder of benefits), those that require activation strategies (ideas, setting suggestions, and reminders to act) and those that require validation and reinforcement, perhaps to increased the frequency of what they are already doing with respect to play.

- The broad communication objective would be to get ‘playing with your child’ onto the daily agenda of parents (raise the consciousness, turn it from an incidental to a planned activity that is valued like feeding, rest time and homework), and then once on the daily agenda, use messaging to raise it up to the top of the daily agenda so that it has greater likelihood of being achieved.

- Key messages to parents for this particular behaviour need to incorporate:
  - Value time spent playing with your child(ren); and
  - Don’t let play time slip down your agenda / “to do” list.

- Given the support this behaviour already has, the purpose of the campaign will be to increase the urgency and frequency of the behaviour. It is important however, that this be done in such a way as to ensure it is not done at the expense of other desired behaviours.
3. Campaign addressing all ten desired behaviours

This approach begins in the middle of the behaviour change model.

Because of the inherent difficulty in tackling specific behaviours via mass media messaging we instead recommend consideration of a broader behaviour-focused approach that uses a comprehensive, interactive website as the main mechanism for motivating parents to trial new parenting behaviours and a forum that allows them to make mistakes, fail, try again and gain confidence as they go. A website-based delivery has the space to cover each behaviour comprehensively, with options for flexible trial and uptake, and can include video delivery of motivating and activating messages and strategies that will resonate with parents.

The role of the mass media component of the campaign would therefore be to engage and motivate parents to reflect on their own parenting experience/satisfaction/self confidence and visit the website to gain some personal benefit or advantage. The role of the website is to activate parenting behaviour change.

The strength of this approach is that it is comprehensive, and dual-process – tackling beliefs and attitudes via the media campaign, and behavioural intentions and trial via the website. Depending on what stage an individual parent is at, the campaign will accelerate a parent’s progression through the behaviour change process (rather than a more discreet stage by stage, year by year approach which can take many years).

For this approach, the mass media communication objective would be largely about cut-through, getting parents to pay attention and respond to a clear call to action (visit the website, get some tips etc.). To this end, the territories identified in Section X are recommended as starting points for message development.

Language used must not alienate parents, and as such incorporating terms such as “every parent struggles”, “it’s a learning process”, “great parents”, and “toolkit” are encouraged.
8.3 Possible Hybrid Approaches

There are a number of hybrid approaches worthy of consideration, using the recommended approaches outlined on the previous three pages as a basis. In particular, there is merit in combining the first (brain development) approach with a more detailed campaign focusing on all ten behaviours (approach three). Two different hybrid approaches have been outlined briefly below:

a) **Campaign addressing all ten desired behaviours, and incorporating brain development**

- This approach would essentially mirror the third recommended approach (mass media driving parents to a website), however in this instance, the mass media campaign would focus on the “new story” of the importance of brain development, which would provide the hook to drive parents to the website for further information.
- Should this approach be used, it will be important to make the link between the behaviours featured on the website and brain development, to provide a consistent story and lead parents on their behaviour change journey.
- The benefit of this approach is in providing new information for parents, thereby increasing interest and engagement, and maximising potential for a positive shift in desired behaviours. The risks are similar to those already outlined for the brain development approach, which could be overcome through strong creative.

b) **Campaign focusing on brain development, and incorporating a website**

- The primary focus of this approach would be on brain development, as outlined in the first approach. However, rather than being information/knowledge/education focused (only), it would also involve an immediate behavioural call to action, to drive parents to a website with more detailed information addressing the brain story and potentially the ten behaviours.
- In the first instance, this information can be limited to the importance of brain development, and the different ways in which this affects the long term development of children.
- As parents become more comfortable with this premise, the focus can gradually move towards the ten behaviours (linking them all the while to brain development), with more detailed information provided on the website (similar to approach 3).
- The benefit of this approach is that it focuses campaign initially on brain development only, and can potentially introduce specific behaviours gradually. This lays the foundation for the brain development story and provides a consistent messaging platform. The risk is primarily in the lack of a distinct call to action for positive behaviour change in the short term relating to our ten desired behaviours, resulting in the need for greater commitment to a long term campaign.

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Engaging Families

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## 8.4 Score Card - Three Recommended Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wide appeal without dismissal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low / no risk of active rejection and subversive behaviour</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional engagement (empowering rather than guilt inducing)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for sustained (long term) behaviour change</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please note that the data contained in this report has been prepared for the specific purpose of addressing the items contained in the project contract between **TNS Australia** and **ARACY**

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