



Government of Western Australia
Child and Adolescent Health Service



Parenting Support Group in Early Intervention Rehabilitation at Perth Children's Hospital

A Pilot Intervention

Dr Daphne Su
Senior Clinical Psychologist
Daphne.Su@health.wa.gov.au

Sarah Sayers
Clinical Psychologist



Compassion

Excellence

Collaboration

Accountability

Equity

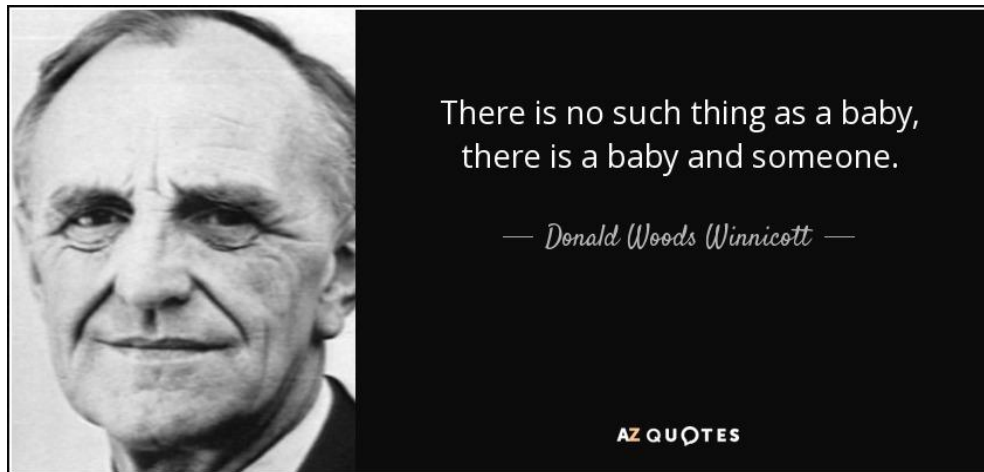
Respect

Early Intervention Service at Perth Children's Hospital

- Infants with complex neurodevelopmental disorders at risk of long-term disability requiring multi-disciplinary tertiary early intervention
- Infants at high risk of cerebral palsy
- Multi Disciplinary Team (OTs, Physios, SP, social worker, nurses, clinical psychologist and doctors.
- Parent Support



Growth Through Experience



Parenting Support Group

Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)

(Barlow et al., 2006; Dickinson et al., 2020, Byrne et al., 2021, Whittingham et al., 2022).

- Normalises and validates life's 'reality slaps';
- Encourages:
 1. Acceptance of what is out of control;
 2. Experiencing all emotions (no good or bad);
 3. Commitment and actions towards rich and meaningful lives.
- Increases Psychological Flexibility.





Goals of Shared Journeys

1. Connection
2. Safe space for parents to process their parenting journey;
3. Identify family and parenting values;
4. Experience and learn strategies to sit with uncomfortable feelings;
5. Create a flexible working 'compass' for parenting journey ahead.



Balancing the Lines

- 6 Weeks, Close Group
- Maximum of 5 Families
- Face to Face, but with Telehealth options if they cannot attend
- Encourage both parents to attend
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Parental suicidal ideation; Severe Mental Health Diagnosis of Parents
- **Measurements:**
 - Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-2)
 - Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS-21)



Values, Connection and Goals

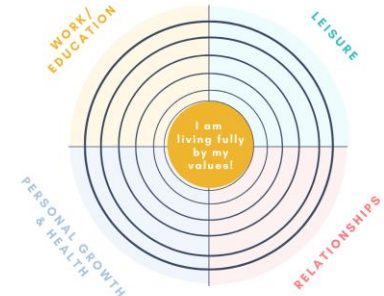
Pre-Group work:

- Intake and Risk Ax
- Preparing Parents
- Baseline measurements



Values Bulls Eye

Are you living by your values?



Phase 1 (Sessions 1-2)

Parenting journey story
sharing
Parenting values
identification

Phase 2 (Sessions 3-4)

Mindfulness
Cognitive diffusion practice
Conscious consideration of
parenting values

Phase 3 (Sessions 5-6)

Achievable actions
Content consolidation
Bolstering ongoing support



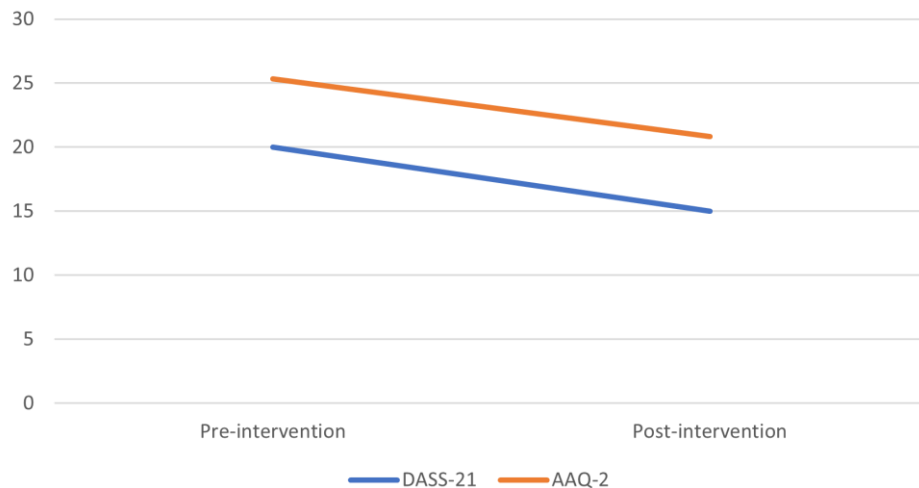
Post Group work (usually within 2 weeks):

- Obtain qualitative feedback
- Provide quantitative feedback
- Debrief

Mean Quantitative Results

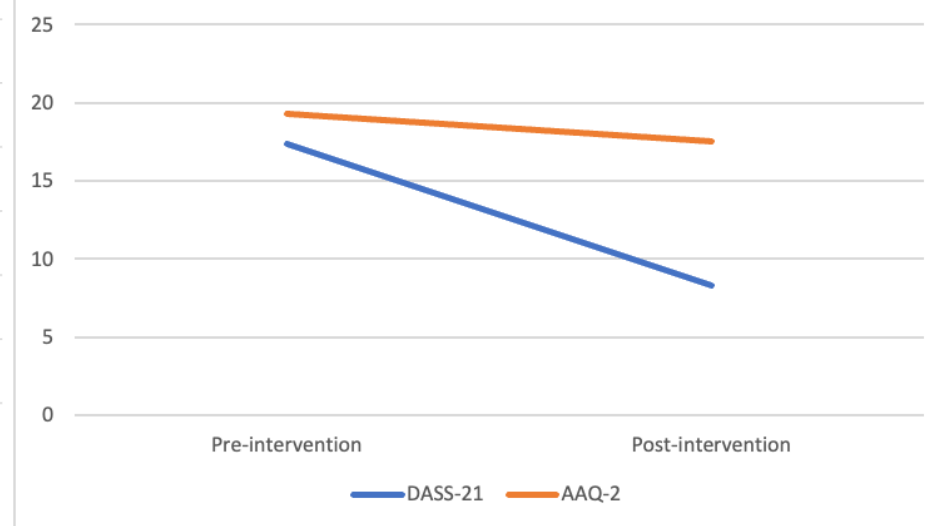
Group 1 6 parents

Mean changes following Shared Journeys



Group 2 7 Parents

Mean Changes Shared Journeys - Group 2



*Decrease in DASS indicate less negative emotional symptoms

*Decrease in AAQ-2 indicate higher psychological flexibility

Qualitative Feedback

Q. What aspects were most helpful for you personally after participating in group?

"Group activities (mindful biscuit exercise)"

"The honesty and transparency of parent discussions. This doesn't always occur at other parent groups"

"Group validation of the difficult emotions felt when parenting a child with a complex health condition"

"Learning parenting values. This was unexpected but beneficial!"

"The shared experience and comradery – this removed the isolation and loneliness"

"Hearing how other parents are coping / their experiences, what challenges they have faced and what strategies they use to cope. I also liked the sharing of parenting resources/knowledge"

"Empathy from others in similar circumstances"

Qualitative Feedback

Q. How is your emotional wellbeing and daily functioning now since completing the group?

"I have more stable and reasonable thought processes"

"I no longer feel the pressing feeling of isolation and loneliness"

"I'm more mindful of harder emotions when they emerge. I'm now able to better sit with them rather than suppress them"

"I'm mindful of my parenting values so now I practically apply them daily"

"I feel as though my actions are more closely aligned to my parenting goals"

"I'm now able to share my feelings and emotions with more clarity and confidence"

"I'm more comfortable now with feelings and emotions"

Growth and Transformation: Year 2024

Pre group

- New Measures: Impact of Event, CompACT and Self- Compassion
- Maximum of 4 Families
- Preparing families for what they wish to say when re telling their story
- Parent Consent and Information form
- 1.5 hours per session

During

More psychoeducation on emotion suppression vs emotion acceptance

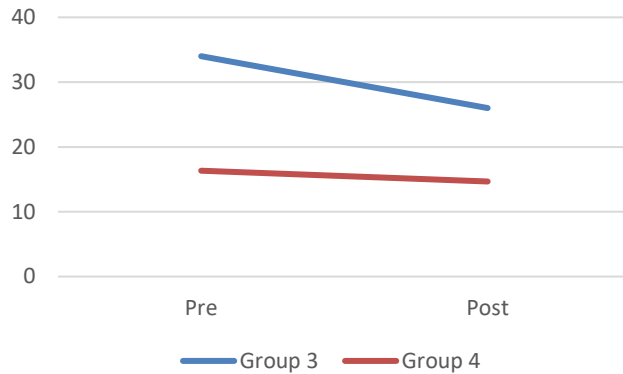
More time explaining homework tasks

Post Group

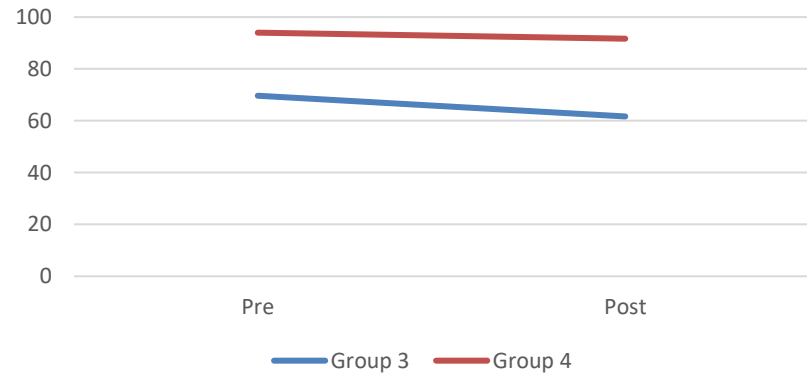
- Obtain feedback of group
- Feedback and Process quantitative results
- Feedback to team

Quantitative Results

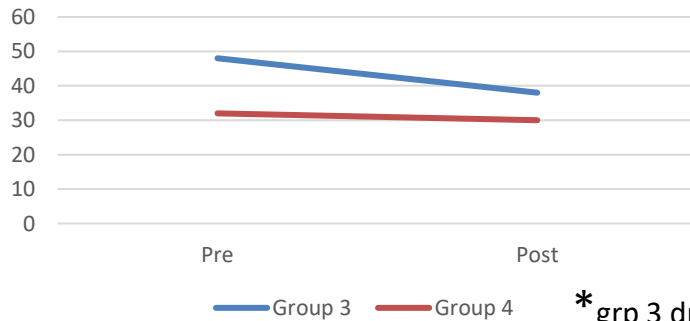
DASS



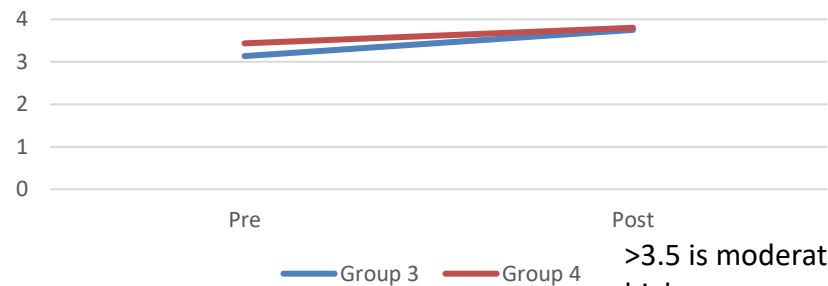
CompACT



IEF-R



Self Compassion



* grp 3 dropped from
Severe to moderate

>3.5 is moderate to
high

* N= 3 per grp

Qualitative Feedback

Q. What aspects were most helpful for you personally after participating in group?

"Identifying my values"

"Being able to reflect in a supportive environment "

"Being able to sit with feelings and acknowledged them"

"Parenting Values"

"The shared experience "

"I am not alone "

"Connecting others mums on a similar journey "

Qualitative Feedback

Q. How is your emotional wellbeing and daily functioning now since completing the group?

"I feel more comfortable and open to speak about big emotions"

"I feel better. My feelings make better sense to me"

"I appreciate being present with my son. For 10 minutes a day, I just sit with him at the park and play"

"I feel better- but realized this is just the start of my journey"

"I have more tools to help me navigate and cope with complex experiences of having a child with disability "

Insights

- Inviting “invisible participants” into the space
- Mixing phone/telehealth options with Face to Face
- Adult mental health versus parental journey and the stress they experience
- Involving fathers
- Gaining psychological flexibility (openness to experience, behavioural awareness, and valued actions) and self compassion takes time.
- 2 parents required further individual support. Majority did not require formal supports.

How about 2026 and Beyond?

- Collecting more data. Follow up?
- Recruitment
- Staffing Will there be a group in 2026?
- How are previous attendees doing?
- Staff Training: Identification of core competencies

Thank you to the EIC
families who trusted and
joined us in the journey.



References

- Barlow, J. H., Cullen-Powell, L. A., & Cheshire, A. (2006). Psychological well-being among mothers of children with cerebral palsy. *Early Child Development and Care*, 176(3-4), 421-428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0300443042000313403>.
- Byrne, G., Ghráda, Á. N., O'Mahony, T., & Brennan, E. (2021). A systematic review of the use of acceptance and commitment therapy in supporting parents. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 94, 378-407. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12282>.
- Dickinson, C., Whittingham, K., Sheffield, J., Wotherspoon, J., & Boyd, R. N. (2020). Efficacy of interventions to improve psychological adjustment for parents of infants with or at risk of neurodevelopmental disability: A systematic review. *Infant Mental Health Journal*. 41(5), 697–722. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21871>.
- Scratch, S. E., Stevens, S. A., King, G., Schwellnus, H., Searl, N., & McPherson, A. C. (2020). Mental health care in pediatric rehabilitation hospitals: A biopsychosocial, collaborative, and agency-based service integration approach. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 23(6), 359-367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17518423.2019.1687600>.
- Whittingham, K., Sheffield, J., Mak, C., Dickinson, C., & Boyd, R. N. (2020). Early Parenting Acceptance and Commitment Therapy 'Early PACT' for parents of infants with cerebral palsy: A study protocol of a randomised controlled trial. *BMJ Open*, 10(10), e037033. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-037033>.
- Whittingham, K., Sheffield, J., Mak, C., Wright, A., & Boyd, R. N. (2022). Parenting acceptance and commitment therapy: an RCT of an online course with families of children with CP. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 155, 104129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2022.104129>.

