



# Restorative Parenting

Presented by Kristy Elliott

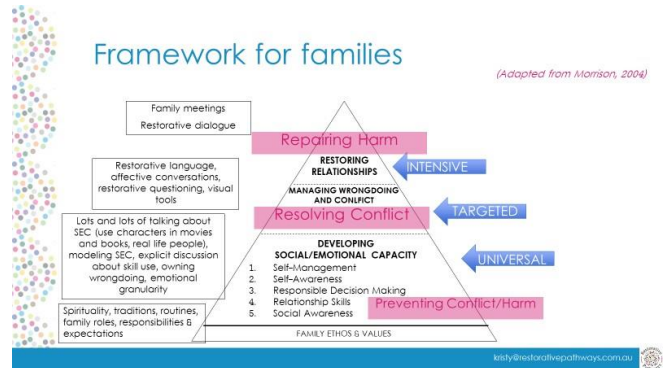
Becoming a parent is one of life's most precious gifts. In the beginning we spend much of our time focusing on the pregnancy and birth without giving much thought to what happens afterwards. Often, we don't realise the extent to which having children can challenge and change us! Having children forces us to see ourselves differently, to develop intellectually and emotionally.

Parents have many hopes and dreams for their child's future and work extremely hard to assist their child to become everything they wish for them. Even with the best of intentions we don't always get this 'parenting' job right. The pressures of daily life, a changing world, financial stressors and our own emotional and mental wellbeing (just to name a few) all add to the challenge of being a parent.

Restorative approaches to parenting involve proactive strategies to build family unity and individual social and emotional capacity as well as tools to handle wrongdoing such that relationships are restored, and the family unit remains intact. The framework opposite demonstrates how much of our time and energy is required at each level of restorative work. The largest part of the triangle includes our family values and traditions as well as the social emotional learning of the members of the family. When we get that right, we spend less time responding to wrongdoing but when we must,

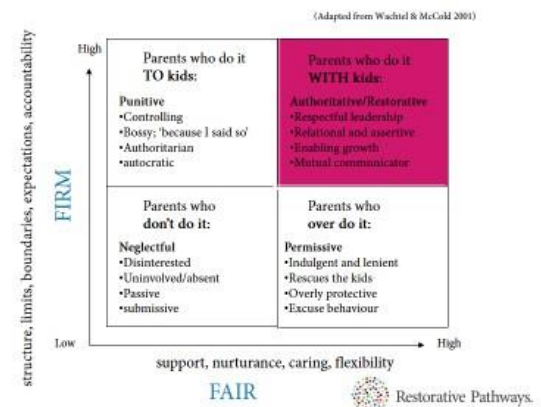
our children are more likely to work with us to resolve the problem.

A helpful way to think about how our children experience our parenting style is to use the following Parenting Styles Window (adapted from McCold and Wachtell). How firm and fair is our parenting style? Remember to think about how our children experience it rather than how we



'wish' we operated. Realistically, most parents spend time in all four quadrants of the window, how long we

## Parenting Style Window



spend there is usually dependent on various factors such as our own health and wellbeing – emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual, etc.

The punitive parenting quadrant is high on firmness but low on fairness, you are the boss. It is about control, rules and punishment. When parenting in this window we hear 'because I said so' and 'who did it?' and 'don't make me come over there'. When rules are broken, punishment is dished out to the wrongdoer who is not required to take responsibility and make amends. Children who are constantly parented within this zone are either 'nervy' or 'confrontational'; they quickly

learn which buttons to push to get mum or dad to 'lose control'.

Punitive measures focus on the wrong doer, ignoring the context in which the behaviour occurred and the complexities of family dynamics which are often contributing factors. Further, punitive approaches do not address the impact of the behaviour on relationships, the emotional harm done to others or the need for behaviour change.

Research demonstrates that punishment only models of discipline (Zero-Tolerance models) have no effect on behaviour change, in fact 'punishment increases feelings of shame and humiliation, and decreases feelings of guilt; and those are exactly the psychological conditions that give rise to violent behaviour' (James Gilligan, 2001). Evidence shows us that using a restorative model has a preventative and significant influence on re-offending behaviour. Furthermore, when we approach conflict restoratively, we are modelling appropriate behaviour and social interaction (teaching acceptable behaviour).

The neglectful parenting quadrant is low on both firmness and fairness. Lifestyle factors are possibly inhibiting your ability to parent; you might be suffering a mental illness, poor health, relationship breakdown, addiction or financial stress. In this zone you are unable or choose not to respond to your children; you ignore behaviours we usually wouldn't. You love your children, you simply don't have the energy or time it takes to parent, at least momentarily.

The permissive parenting quadrant is low on firmness and high on fairness; often called the 'helicopter' parent. In this zone parenting has been replaced with friendship. Behaviours are excused and children are protected from others who might hold them accountable. You are very encouraging and loving but no boundaries are in place and you don't follow through on consequences or expectations. Unfortunately, when things get out of control parents in this zone snap and like a pendulum swing into the punitive quadrant creating confusion for children and later, guilt for parents. Over time, children raised in this quadrant experience a diminished sense of self and

esteem. The drive for structure and consistency is high and they become vulnerable to gangs, cults and bullies who exert control over them.

The restorative parenting quadrant is high on both firmness and fairness and research shows this is the most effective style. In this zone expectations are high, mutual respect exists and poor behaviour is called out and children are given support to fix it. Children are part of the conversation and the solution; setbacks are considered learning opportunities. Everyone belongs to the family unit and honest communication ensures respectful relationships are developed and maintained. Parents model appropriate social behaviour and how to make amends using actions and language.

It is unlikely that any one of us solely parent from the restorative quadrant; we are human after all! However, analysing which situations drive us into certain quadrants will help us understand our parenting styles and assist us in moving towards restorative parenting more often than not.

Restorative approaches work best when we have spent time building family unity (community). Every family will do this in different ways however the following list have been shown to impact feelings of connectedness and belonging:

- Set family traditions (dinner, meetings, holidays, etc.)
- Agree on expectations & responsibilities
- Walk the talk
- Use literature/film to teach social/emotional concepts
- Use your own mistakes as a learning tool
- Use a strengths approach
- Build emotional vocabulary
- Talk about brain development & how this can impact behaviour

The mid and top tiers of the framework are enacted when wrongdoing or conflict has occurred. It is here where the most amount of learning can take place for children and parents if we approach it restoratively and work WITH each other.

How often do we hear our children say, 'that's not fair', and far too often our response to that comes from the punitive parenting zone 'bad luck' or 'life's not fair' or 'I'm the parent and I make the rules'. Our children are more likely to cooperate when they feel that fair process is observed even if the outcome is not what they wanted.

Looking through a different lens we can appreciate that we might have felt the same way in our own lives at one point or another. Perhaps a decision was made in the workplace that affected your role or responsibilities. You were not consulted; simply told the outcome. What was your emotional response to that? When people and children are engaged in decisions that affect them and understand the reason for it the results are better.

Using a restorative approach does not exclude or minimise consequences, in fact quite the opposite is true. Facing those you are in conflict with or whom you have harmed in order to make things right is rarely an easy option. The restorative process empowers those that have experienced harm to speak about actions that would repair the harm for them (this may be different for every person). Consequences are neither predetermined nor imposed but are agreed upon and managed by those directly involved.

Affective statements and conversations are a respectful two-way dialogue that provide the opportunity for both people to speak. The impact of the poor choice is made clear within the context of an affirmative, supportive conversation. The child is valued; the behaviour is not condoned.

Dr. Lea Waters recommends a strengths-based approach to parenting in general and especially when conflict or frustrations arise. Below are some examples of how to turn everyday conversations and questions into strengths-based language.

Praise	Conversing	Discipline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You did your best and blitzed the test. Great job!</li> <li>You're a hard worker (strength) who is naturally curious (strength) and you put in the hours needed to prepare for this test. Let's celebrate your hard work paying off!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How was school today?</li> <li>What strength did you use today at school/in PE/during music? Or, what strength did you see your friend/teacher use today?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stop mucking around at the dinner table, sit down and eat!</li> <li>You've got a great sense of humour, but when you overplay it, you get out of control and it's not a strength anymore. It leads to bad outcomes. What can you do to fix this situation and make sure your humour doesn't get out of control next time?</li> </ul>

A more formal approach is taken when more serious harm has occurred. In that instance all people involved are part of the conversation and specific restorative dialogue and questioning is used.

Restorative questions:

- Are neutral and non-judgemental.
- Are about the person's behaviour.
- Take the person from the past (what happened) to the future (repairing harm).
- Require the person to reflect on who they have affected.
- Are likely to help the person develop some empathy for those affected.
- Seek to build an understanding rather than to blame.
- Assist the parent/facilitator to be seen as objective and respectful.
- Allow the person to tell their story.
- Are more likely to promote responsibility.
- Can be applied in every situation.

Having this dialogue in our 'parenting tool kit' structures what we say (emotional responses are diffused), influences auditory processing (children don't hear 'blah blah blah') and creates a teaching and learning moment. Further, this same set of questions can be asked of both the wrong doer and the person harmed (reinforcing fair process). Use the questions to guide your conversation and modify them to suit the audience. A helpful tool for remembering restorative dialogue is the W.A.R.M acronym (see over).

## Affective Statements

Making a statement that describes what emotion you are feeling and why

When .... happens it makes me feel....  
 When I hear ... I feel ...  
 I feel .... Because you ...

For Example:

*When you don't include me in your games it makes me feel sad*

*When I hear you yell at your brother it upsets me because I know what it feels like to be yelled at.*

*I feel angry because you broke my special toy and now I can't play with it.*

*When you don't clean up your toys I feel frustrated. I end up tripping over them or hurting my feet on them if you leave them out.*

And then follow through with a statement about the desired behaviour or better yet ask the child what they believe is the right thing to do.



## Affective Conversations

*(adapted from Hansberry, 2016)*

After school, Miss 9 was asked to tidy up her bedroom before dinner. Mum notices her playing in her room and not tidying up so she gives a gentle reminder and leaves the room (rule reminder & take up time). About 20 minutes later Miss 9 still hasn't begun to tidy up, Mum is annoyed now and repeats the request this time using choice/direction 'if you tidy up now you'll be able to watch your favourite tv program but if you don't then you will have to tidy up when it is on and won't be able to watch it, please tidy up now'. By the time dinner is served Miss 9 has not tidied up her room. Mum is quite upset by now but decides to try to talk to her rather than yell and make threats. She says:

*"Kara, you have a wonderful imagination and use it well to play creatively with your toys. I didn't like having to keep asking you to tidy up your room but you need to know that when you don't tidy up I end up tripping over your things and hurting myself. I also spend time tidying up your space which is time I really need to use to get other jobs done. I was disappointed because you're usually fairer than that."*

*"Is there anything I need to know about why you didn't tidy up?"*

*"Kara, I can understand that you were tired after school and felt like you needed some relaxation time. That makes sense and I think it's important to relax too, but it's equally important to respect the other people living in our home and realise we all have responsibilities. Next time I ask you to tidy up your room I need you to do that in a timely manner and if you are really tired you can ask me to help. Does that sound fair?"*

1. Affirm your child
2. Challenge behaviour with affect word
3. Reaffirm
4. Give right of reply
5. Partially agree, restate expectations



## One-to-one chat

*Be calm, position yourself at their level, make sure you are both/all ready*

What happened?  
 Or what were you thinking when you...?

Who gets affected by this kind of behavior?

How does this affect others?

What's a fair way to deal with it if this happens again?

What are you thinking about that now that we are chatting?

What will fix this?  
 Would you like my help to do that?

*Thank the child for the chat, offer positive feedback/praise where appropriate*



## A W.A.R.M approach

**Warm in manner, words and approach**

<b>W</b>	<i>What</i> – tell the story
<b>A</b>	<i>Affect</i> – explore the harm
<b>R</b>	<i>Repair</i> – the harm
<b>M</b>	<i>Move forward</i> – prevention

(Adapted from Jansen & Matla, 2011)





Restorative questioning encourages participant solutions rather than imposing ideas to resolve the conflict. Too often as parents we have in mind an outcome for a situation that we would deem acceptable, it's very important to allow our children to determine their own solutions.

This is not a 'soft option', it creates a learning opportunity, empowers children and develops resilience. Quite often children just want an apology and/or a hug from the person who harmed them, who are we to say that is not ok? Again, when we look at conflict through our own eyes, we can see that often when we have been harmed, we want acknowledgement and an apology or an apologetic gesture. Children need time to think about how to make amends and they may also need guidance. It is acceptable to provide examples of ways to make amends and allow children to select one they are comfortable with giving and receiving. In time they will do this autonomously.

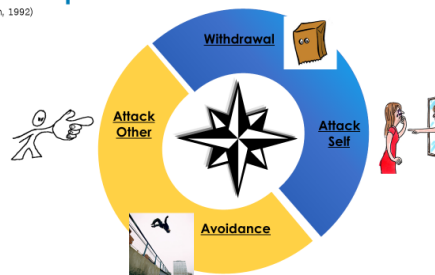
The late Silvan Tomkins coined a biological theory of emotion – Affect Script Psychology or ASP building on the work of Charles Darwin before him. ASP states that mammals are born with 9 innate affects built into the central nervous system, that when triggered result in CNS activity leading to physical responses in the body particularly facial features. At the biological level we experience the same thing as humans however our life experiences build the scripts we play out when these affects are triggered which explains why people react differently to the same trigger.

Once triggered, an affect is experienced biologically in the CNS, past experiences (scripts) guide our reactions and it is a combination of these events that motivates our future actions/behaviours. Tomkins' ASP (and particularly the role of affect shame) helps us to understand why and how restorative approaches work. Affect shame can be seen as a blush to the face/neck, a slumping of the shoulders, the head drops and internally a block in cognitive and affective processing. This explains why children are unable to look up when harm has occurred and why it may take them time to process and talk through what happened.

When shame affect is triggered, we can respond adaptively (soothe the self, acknowledge wrongdoing, repair harm, learn) or maladaptively. Nathanson (1992) describes four poles of responding maladaptively to shame: withdrawal, avoidance, attack self and attack other. Restorative approaches provide a supportive space for individuals to move through shame (and other negative) affect and develop adaptive behavioural scripts. Punitive measures compound feelings of shame leading to maladaptive shame scripts such as those seen on the Compass of Shame.

### The Compass of Shame

(Nathanson, 1992)



The healthy response to shame is to tolerate its discomfort, to self-soothe, acknowledge responsibility/wrongdoing, talk about the event, learn from the experience and empathise with self and others. But these are highly cognitive actions requiring years to intentionally develop. Restorative approaches to wrongdoing are one way to intentionally teach and learn about shame affect and how to respond adaptively to it.

Restorative parenting prioritises relationships and family unity. It demands time to connect with one another, build trust and respect and support each other to clean up the mess that wrongdoing and harm can cause. Time is the most important gift we can give to our children – time to love, to play, to learn, to soothe, to listen, to laugh, to cry, to hug, to support, to encourage, to teach, to restore and to simply be WITH one another. Parenting is a journey; I wish you well on yours.

Recommended resources for parents

Raising Beautiful Kids

Mark Le Messurier & Bill Hansberry

The Strength Switch

Dr. Lea Waters

The Whole-Brain Child

Daniel Siegel & Tina Bryson

*“So, teaching children to do as they’re told is not a good enough aim for behaviour management.*

*Instead what I’d like children to **learn** to do is to think for themselves, what I call to be **considerate**.*

*Not to think what would happen to me if I get caught doing such and such misdeed, but what **effect** would my behaviour have on other people.”*

*Porter, 2002*



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