Defusion techniques that engage and enable parents to effectively respond to childhood behavioural problems

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Workshop Aims

- Demonstrate a technique for working with Cognitive Fusion experienced by parents
- Demonstrate Defusion techniques that enable parents to employ broader and more flexible and mindful approaches to assisting their children through stressful moments
- Inspire your clinical practice?!
A Bit of Context

The following techniques are used in the Confident Carers-Cooperative Kids (CCCK) Program which is a 9 week ACT guided parenting program created by Greg & Mark (2006-2013).
CENTRAL THEME

How can we engage with parents who have complex lives and feel so emotionally burdened?
What words come to mind when parents describe their experience of dealing with their child’s “unmanageable” behaviours?
Noticing the Struggle

THOUGHTS & IMAGES
- I'm a bad parent
- It's impossible
- Does it on purpose to hurt me
- I can't cope

FEELINGS
- Tired
- Tense
- Exhausted
- Helpless
- Guilty
- Hopeless
- Angry
- Overwhelmed

BODY SENSATIONS
- RED
- Smack

ACTIONS
- Shout
- Yell
- Give up
- Jump in and make assumptions
Aaron
Aaron’s Parents’ Struggle

THOUGHTS & IMAGES

BODY SENSATIONS

FEELINGS

ACTIONS
Theory Behind the Practice

- Identifying the ‘Mind Struggle’ helps parents to sit with the difficult thoughts and feelings that they would usually try to avoid – it is part of a Creative Hopelessness process.
- Getting The Struggle out of their Minds and onto the page begins a process of Defusion – it helps parents to take a step back and notice their thoughts and feelings (mindfully) rather than react or respond to them automatically.
- Through repeated contact with the ‘Mind Struggle’ during different stages of the program, parents are more able to notice when they are caught up in a Mind Struggle, and then step back.
...How can we help parents to find a way through the layers of hurt, anger, guilt, shame, helplessness, hopelessness, fear...
...to re-discover what is most important?
...and to re-connect with ‘the parent they want to be’?
Engagement

- Getting in contact with The Struggle
- RH – RH: Images, videos, metaphors, experiential exercises
- Keeping them in Mind: Holding
- Wavelength: Tuning in
...imagine that you have recently found out that you are expecting your first child...(long pause). Take a moment to bring yourself back to this moment in time. You probably made some open or private promises to yourself about how things will be in your family... What it is that you ideally want for your baby,... The kind of parent you want to be for your child... How you want to be remembered by your child when they grow up... The qualities you want to show as a parent ... What you want to stand for as a parent...
Becoming Aware Of Your Parenting Values

“My Parenting Compass - What’s Most Important”

Q. What kind of a parent do you want to be for your child?

Q. What qualities do you want to show?

Q. How do you want to be remembered by your child when they grow up?

Q. What do you want to stand for as a parent?
PARENTING COMPASS

“What’s Most Important To You As A Parent?”

Write the Values in the segments around the compass.

- Enjoyment
- Show love
- Making self available
- Promote self-esteem
- Be consistent
- Realistic role model
- Model fun
- Being there
- Being patient
- Raising well-behaved children
- Listening
- Valuing children’s opinions
- Openness
- Respect

Confident Carers - Cooperative Kids
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Goals

Values

Actions

“A Goal is a specific achievement we accomplish in the service of a particular Value”

“A Value is something important to us that we head towards in life – a direction”

“Actions are the specific behaviours we perform to achieve our goals”
“Take yourself back to when you’d just had your baby... how did your baby try to communicate with you?”

Grounding parents in pre-verbal relating
“...we leave an imprint in their brains”

Mindful Play

Engagement
How can we help parents to see their child’s behaviour for what it is …

…and not what their Mind tells them?
Bushfire Metaphor

- In this program we find it useful to think of a parent’s experience of dealing with their child’s problem behaviour is like “being in a Bushfire”.

- Sparks of “I want...” or “I don’t want to...”, turn into flames of whinging and defiance that then seem to blaze out of control as full-on tantrums and emotional meltdowns. A parent’s attempts to fight the fire and put things out only seem to “Fan The Flames”. Recovering from the Bushfire is often just as difficult as people’s feelings are hurt and often embers are still glowing leaving parents feeling like another outbreak could occur at any moment...
Bushfire Metaphor

“FUEL”
- Age & Developmental Level
- Social & Emotional Maturity
- Difficult Temperament
- Self-control Problems
- Attention & Memory Issues
- Over-sensitivity
- Intellectual & Academic Difficulties
- Physical & Mental Health Issues

“THE SPARK”
- It’s time to do….(demands/tasks)
- ‘No’ you can’t….

“OXYGEN”
- Yelling / Arguing
- Pleading / Negotiating
- Giving In to Demands
- Over-reacting to Minor Things
- Idle threats (No follow through)

“THE BUSHFIRE”
- Refusing to cooperate / defiance
- Shouting / screaming / swearing
- Hitting / Kicking / Spitting / Biting
- ‘Meltdown’

“HEAT”
- Tired, hungry
- Financial Stresses
- Lack of Parent Consistency
- Drug & Alcohol Misuse
- Lack of Family Support
- Abuse & Trauma Issues
- Lack of Family Rules/Routines
- Physical & Mental Illness
- Lack of Praise, Rewards
- Parent Separation Issues
- Lack of Positive Attention
- Chronic Pain
- Lack of Incentives

“Dry things out like a hot, dry summer”

“Things about your child that make them more combustible”

“Things that heat Family life up”

“Things that fan the flames”

“Individual Factors”

“Family Stress Factors”

“Family Attention Factors”
Bushfire Metaphor

- Facilitates making contact with the parent’s experience (Mind Struggle); and,

- Broadens the conceptualisation of the problem situation (elaborates parent’s relational frames).
How do we help parents to step back from escalating coercive cycles that increase ‘Bushfire Risk’?
Introduction to Power Struggles

- We’ve invited parents to “Step Back” from the situation and look at it “as if” they are an observer to enable them to establish some emotional distance from the problem situation.
- Now we are going to take a closer look at the Oxygen that a parent can unintentionally add during a bushfire.
- We are going to act out a situation between a parent and a child that happens in most families. Notice what Oxygen is given to the child’s demanding behaviour and what effect it has on the developing Bushfire.
...a scene from a typical morning in many families...
Acknowledging the Power Struggle

![Power Struggle Territory Diagram]

- Angry
- Calm

Child Demands
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

Parent Commands
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

Bushfire Risk
- Low
- Medium
- High
Noticing the Mind Struggle

- Thoughts & Images
- Body Sensations
- Feelings
- Actions
Acknowledging Power & Mind Struggles

- **Power Struggle Territory**
  - Angry
  - 7
  - 6
  - 5
  - 4
  - 3
  - 2
  - 1

- **Mind Struggle Territory**
  - Calm
  - 7
  - 6
  - 5
  - 4
  - 3
  - 2
  - 1

- **Bushfire Risk**
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High
Week 2 - At Home Activity:
Monitor your child’s behaviour and notice what is happening when your child does not follow instructions.
Week 2 - At Home Activity:

• What Bushfire Model factors (Fuel, Heat & Oxygen) are influencing the times when your child is not following instructions?

• Describe your Mind Struggle experience during the times when your child is not following instructions.
The Rest of the Story...
The Confident Carers – Cooperative Kids Program
(Konza & Donovan, 2006-2013)

- Manualised parenting program
- Children (5-11yrs) with behavioural problems
- 9x2hr weekly sessions
- 2 trained facilitators
- Integrates concepts from:
  - Acceptance Commitment Therapy
  - Attachment Theory
  - Neurobiology
  - Social Learning Theory
The Confident Carers – Cooperative Kids Program (Konza & Donovan, 2006-2013)

Program Goals:

- Being Aware of Your Parenting Values
- Strengthening Relationships
- Encouraging Positive Behaviour
- Preventing Misbehaviour
- Managing Misbehaviour
Further weeks of the program...

- Wk3: Mindful Play & Describing
- Wk4: Praise & Rewards
- Wk5: Household Rules, Clear Instructions, Ignore-Distract-Praise
- Wk6: Natural Consequences, Removal Privileges, Time-out
- Wk7: ‘Virus X’ & Being the Parent You Want to Be
- Wk8-9: Behaviour Action Plans
Reviewing ‘Engagement’

- Getting in contact with The Struggle
- RH – RH : Images, videos, metaphors, experiential exercises
- Keeping them in Mind : Holding
- Wavelength : Tuning in
The Wrap Up

- ACT provides a way to engage with parents so that they can re-engage with their children and then apply proven social learning theory strategies.

- Compasses, Bushfires and Power/Mind Struggles provide RH images and metaphors that enable parents to navigate through the turbulent times of family life.
Thank You
Any Questions

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