

Children's Wellbeing Manifesto

Policy initiatives promoting healthy emotional development in children

<http://www.our-emotional-health.com/manifesto.html>

PREAMBLE

All societies are profoundly shaped - for better or worse - by how we rear children. This has been the overwhelming conclusion of recent ground-breaking research across a range of disciplines. A new consensus is emerging on how we should care for our children. Throwing new light on how best to help children flourish, this knowledge offers compelling evidence as to the kinds of social policies that will help all parents in their vital task, thereby reducing a host of societal dysfunctions, improving public health and social sustainability.

The following propositions are based on the best initiatives that have been tried and tested in numerous countries, and/or withstood rigorous tests of cost-benefit analysis. Such investments in the wellbeing of children, psychologically as well as physically, have been convincingly shown to yield economic as well as social rewards far exceeding the investment. More significantly, they are measures aimed at supporting what is most important, irreplaceable and ultimately not measurable: familial love and emotional wellbeing.

The main source of children's emotional wellbeing comes from *relationships* – from their deepest attachments to mothers, fathers, grandparents and a few cherished others. Early childhood in particular is a time when children's wellbeing and capacity to flourish are overwhelmingly about love, attachment and connectedness, and so it is a time they should spend mostly in the presence of these vital attachment figures. In recognition of this universal truth, social policy must re-orient itself towards supporting young children's right to remain, for the first two to three years, as much as possible in the presence of their 'attachment' relationships.

In a world increasingly driven by imperatives of profit and market forces, we hold that parental and family love matters most, it is at the very centre of human and social wellbeing; and thus we propose the following ways to support parents in the most important job in the world.

The manifesto addresses the following 15 points;

1. **Establishment of new community 'hubs' for parent support called: 'Parent and Child Support Centres' in every municipality.**
2. **Increased support for early-intervention initiatives, particularly for disadvantaged populations.**
3. **Encourage hospitals to increase their focus on the *psychological* needs of mothers and infants surrounding labour.**
4. **Provide support for mothers to aim towards full-term breastfeeding (as recommended by the World Health Organization and UNICEF).**
5. **Extend Medicare health care cover**
6. **Encourage and expand support for non-profit, community based or co-operative childcare.**
7. **Improve the quality of existing childcare.**
8. **Support Children's Right to Play**
9. **Introduce maternity and paternity leave with pay.**
10. **Support fathers' involvement in children's lives.**
11. **Workplace Reform: encourage mother/father-friendly workplaces.**
12. **Free re-training and remission of education expenses for all primary caregivers on re-entry to workplace.**
13. **Universal free, non-compulsory Preschool for 3 and 4 year olds.**
14. **Legislate against all corporal punishment of children.**
15. **Prohibit television, print and in-school advertising and marketing that targets children under 12 .**

1. Establishment of new community 'hubs' for parent support called: 'Parent and Child Support Centres' in every municipality.

Parenting is best done in company - in a convivial community of other parents and caregivers. Children flourish in connected communities, where social infrastructure is provided via a 'hub and spoke' model:

Beginning with pre-natal visits to connect new parents-to-be to a community hub (the Parent and Child Support Centre) which provides contact with the local community of parents, connecting them with a broad range of social networks, services and

facilities for parents and other caregivers. These 'hub' centres should include 'spokes' – i.e. outreach to specialist support services where necessary.

Some existing similar examples: Danish 'Folk' centres housing children's services and networks, the Parent Support Centres of Boulder (Colorado) and Vermont USA, toy libraries, playgroups, Bub Hubs, babysitting clubs, child care cooperatives, homework clubs staffed by retired volunteers.

2. Increased support for early-intervention initiatives, particularly for disadvantaged populations.

Attachment-oriented home visits for all parents with a new baby, additional for 'at-risk' families. Visits to be continued after birth to assist new parents, providing practical advice and support when necessary and assessing the need for additional healthcare services. A range of combined measures can be utilised, including income support, parenting support and high quality, childcare programs of a specialised nature (such as the Perry Preschool) and parenting support programs such as Newpin and H.I.P.P.Y (NZ Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters).

3. Encourage hospitals to increase their focus on the *psychological* needs of mothers and infants surrounding labour.

Beginning with supporting and respecting mothers' autonomy and right to choose, this can include: increased support for home-like birthing rooms adjoining hospitals, encouragement of natural birthing methods and home-births except in cases of clear medical risk.

4. Provide support for mothers to aim towards full-term breastfeeding (as recommended by the World Health Organization and UNICEF).

Necessary support includes:

- Adequate maternity leave provisions (see proposition # 8) and workplace reforms (see proposition #10)
- Encouraging maternity hospitals to comply with UNICEF's 'Baby-Friendly Hospitals Initiative' designation.
- Medicare cover for breastfeeding support services (see proposition #5)

5. Extend Medicare health care cover to include:

Home visits by Lactation Consultants, Home-birth midwives and doulas, multi-disciplinary care – including psychology and complementary medicine - for maternal and paternal post-natal depression.

6. Encourage and expand support for non-profit, community based or co-operative childcare.

Quality childcare is not compatible with profit-making for shareholders. Expand support for alternatives to corporate childcare, especially alternatives that also support working mothers - such as community childcare services, family day-care, parent co-ops. Provide generous allowances for grandparent carers.

7. Improve the quality of existing childcare.

Present regulations in Australian childcare are inadequate in some areas. Increased funding should be explicitly targeted at improving the quality of existing care. Raise the ratios of caregivers to babies to 1:2, and improve ratios for toddlers. Keep overall size of centre and groups small. Introduce national standards to replace present hodgepodge between states and the Federal Government. Better pay and training for all childcare workers.

8. Support Children's Right to Play.

Childhood is now dominated by the values of a competitive, achievement orientated culture. It is increasingly spent within the confines of institutions - early childcare, school, after and before school care, holiday programs, and structured activities dominated and organised by adults. A child is not simply an investment unit where inputs now promise later returns. All adult caregivers should respect children's right to dream, potter and play freely.

9. Introduce maternity and paternity leave with pay.

European-style parental leave of two to three years, involving the right to return to previous job, as practised in France, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Britain has recently followed suit, introducing parental leave for two years. The Australian Industrial Relations Commission, following the ACTU test case, recommended an immediate extension of parental leave to two years and the right to part time work. Offer parents a choice between home-care allowance or funds for a high-quality childcare place - as in Finland, Norway and France.

10. Support fathers' involvement in children's lives.

No mother should be left isolated and alone with the task of mothering, and no father should be expected to be disengaged from his children and family. Involved fathers help children flourish. The Parent and Child Support Centres should be father-friendly - ie. have posters of fathers and children, not just mothers, and have information on fathering and fathers' networks as a clear message that fathers are essential; that some fathers share the care or are primary caregivers, and are a part of the parenting

community. Introduce paid paternity leave for up to four weeks at time of birth. Also, workplace agreements that accommodate fathers' need to spend adequate time with their families, and fathers' occasional need for carer's leave.

11. Workplace Reform: encourage mother/father-friendly workplaces.

Workplace-based childcare, with guaranteed breastfeeding breaks.

Right to part time work for primary caregiver with children under school age.

Right to work a 6-hour day (with reduced pay) until child is 8 years (as in Sweden).

Expand carer's sick leave.

Introduce the 35-hour week. Families need time all together.

Gradual Transition back to work after maternity or parental leave. The primary caregiver should not be given little choice but to return suddenly to a full working week, with babies in childcare for ten hours a day: an extreme separation model.

12. Free re-training and remission of education expenses for all primary caregivers on re-entry to workplace.

The entire visible economy depends upon the invisible heart: unpaid caring work. All of society benefits from this vital work. Yet caregivers often suffer a life-long 'care penalty' for performing this task. In any just, fair and sustainable society it is wrong to 'free ride' on caring labour while giving little in return. Unpaid work should also be part of the census data.

13. Universal free, non-compulsory Preschool for 3 and 4 year olds.

All pre-schools and childcare centres to have open-door policy to parents, allowing for graduated and child-led separation from parents (as in the Swedish 'open pre-school' system).

14. Legislate against all corporal punishment of children.

Abolish all corporal punishment at home and in all educational institutions, in line with our obligations under 'Article 19' of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has already been accomplished in 19 nations, and there are several more countries preparing to legislate to protect children from violence.

15. Prohibit television, print and in-school advertising and marketing that targets children under 12 .

This has already been done in Scandinavia, and more countries are considering reform to their advertising codes. Children are to be respected as children, not exploited as consumers.

Authored by:

Anne Manne, writer, author of: 'Mothering – how should we care for our children?'

Robin Grille, psychologist, author of: 'Parenting for a Peaceful World'

Kali Wendorf, social ecologist and editor of: 'Kindred magazine'

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