



# getting what you want!



*A Peer Guide to Parenting*



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# The Handbook

This handbook has been written by young women who are parents and has been designed to be used by young women who are pregnant and/or parenting to gain more information about parenting.

The *Getting What You Want: A Peer Guide To Parenting* is made up of a number of topics that we thought would best answer questions and address issues that young women have about parenting.

The Handbook can be read and thought about alone or groups of young women may like to use the handbook as a guide for workshops about parenting. The sections titled 'something to think about' can be used as discussion questions for groups (for more information about running workshops

please see *Getting What You Want: A Peer Guide to Facilitating Workshops* and *Getting What You Want: Creating Pathways to Education, Training and Employment*).

This handbook grew out of the work of Young Mothers for Young Women: A Peer Support, Education and Advocacy Network. This is a group of young parenting women who:

- Acknowledge that young women who are parenting need the opportunity for support, information, friendships and education, as well as the opportunity to have fun.
- Recognise that peer support and advocacy are important in assisting young women to maintain safe, healthy

relationships and lifestyles.

- Run a network of young women as part of Coolock – A Resource Centre for Young Women and their Families.
- Organise a drop-in day at Coolock and network meetings from time to time on issues that affect the lives of young women who are pregnant and/or parenting.

The network grew out of a 1994 participative research project exploring the links between gender and violence in the lives of young mothers.

One of the recommendations from this project was to form a network of young women to offer peer support, education and advocacy.

This network is called Young Mothers for Young Women. (YMYW)

YMYW spends a lot of time as peer support workers, talking to other young women and listening to their stories. Many young women struggle with parenting and the judgements that other people make about them as parents. They struggle with knowing what is a healthy approach to parenting and how, with the resources they have available to them, to do the best for their children.

*Getting What You Want: A Peer Guide to Parenting* was designed with these stories in mind, to give young women some ideas about how they might like to go about maintaining a healthy relationship with their children.

### **Aims of Getting What You Want: A Peer Guide to Parenting**

- *To equip young women who are parenting with the skills to maintain healthy relationships with their children*
- *To provide young pregnant and parenting women with the opportunity to access accurate information and appropriate support through their peers*

### **Objectives of Getting What You Want: A Peer Guide to Parenting**

- *Develop confidence and self esteem of young women who are pregnant or parenting*
- *Strengthen their support networks including peer support*
- *Develop knowledge of existing services and resources that young women who are parents and their children can access*
- *Recognise and enhance the strength and potential of young women who are parents*

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# Being Young and Being a Parent



## Background Information

There is much discussion in our communities about the average age of women when having their first child. The average age is often referred to as 27 or over. So if you are under 25 or under 18 then you tend to be considered different to the average woman who is having children today. Many young women report that they are often the target of 'disapproving looks' or rude comments from members of the public when they are shopping or on public transport.

However being young can be an important factor in being a parent. Many young women say they have more energy, they believe they will be closer to understanding what their child is experiencing, particularly in later primary and high school. But there are also difficulties associated with choosing to parent while still young. Many of these difficulties are compounded by the poverty that most young parenting women experience. For many young women parenting is an additional barrier to disruptive education and access to employment and/or training opportunities. Different lifestyles can also conflict with parenting. The use of drugs or alcohol and your peer group all impact on how you cope with being a mother.

You may find being young also creates some emotional conflict for yourself especially if you are not with the father of your child and are parenting alone. It is hard being alone with a child and not having the opportunity to go the places and events that many young people attend. Also if you are not working or studying you are often isolated and meeting others can be restricted to very limited time



### What Some Other Young Women Have Said

*"None of my friends  
came to visit after my  
baby was born"*



*"My friends just  
wanted me to go out  
and party but I had  
to stay home with  
my baby"*



*"I love being young,  
I have heaps of energy  
to do the stuff my  
toddler likes"*

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in any given week. Sometimes the demands of a boyfriend can be in conflict with your responsibility as a parent.

However with planning and thinking things through you can find a way to meet your different needs and meet your responsibilities as a parent. Being proud of who you are and of doing the best you can with your child is an important feeling to hold on to so as to combat the judgement you might find from others. If you choose to make changes in your life, it is never too late.



### Something to Think About

*Do you feel others judge you for being young and being a parent?*



*Are you being judged for being a parent or being single and a parent?*



*How do you handle these judgements?*



*How does age impact on parenting?*



# Looking After Yourself



## Background Information

Most parents find bringing up their children very rewarding, but also very demanding on your energy levels. This is made worse if there are extra problems to cope with. Some of these problems could include relationship difficulties with your child's father, a new partner, parents, cramped and inappropriate housing, unemployment, or a lack of money. If your childhood relationship with your own parents has left you angry or worried you may also find this impacts on your parenting. These stress factors can make it difficult to parent the way you had planned.

Children of all ages take up a huge amount of your energy and patience – sometimes more than you feel you are able to give. Never forget that you have your own needs to take care of as well, and sometimes it can be hard to balance your needs with those of your children and/or partner. You can be ready to go shopping and you smell that you need to change your baby's nappy yet again, or your toddler throws a massive tantrum right as you wait next to the lollies and chocolates at the checkout. Three or four more things like this happen during your day and by the end of the day you've had a huge fight with you partner and your head feels like it will explode. This is why you need some strategies about how you can take care of

### What Some Other Young Women Have Said

*"When I need a break, its great to talk to my friend, even just on the phone"*



*"It's great to get some time out once a month, even more would be great."*



*"A bubble bath works wonders for me"*



*"I grab the stroller and walk – it's a great stress relief"*

yourself and avoid as much stress as possible.

There are some good strategies (listed below) that you can use to avoid stressful situations and keep relaxed. You can never completely remove stress or stressful situations from your life. Sometimes no matter how well you have prepared yourself, the unexpected can happen and you will find yourself feeling like you can no longer cope and you may smack or say something harmful to your child. This is when you must contact or talk with someone who can help. Professionals such as doctors, counsellors or Parent Hotlines are good places to start (See Help and Support in this booklet). If the person you see first cannot help you, they will be able to put you in contact with someone who can.

You may have a wonderful friend or family member who is great for unloading your worries, if this is what helps then be sure to do it regularly.

- **Set Goals**

Work out what you want to achieve for yourself and with your children. Set some goals for the next week, next month and the next year (We've left some space at the back of this booklet for you to do this).

- **Take time off**

Make sure you find some time for yourself – every day if you can do it. YOU ARE AN IMPORTANT PERSON TOO. If you're really having a difficult time, make yourself a promise that you will treat yourself to something special.

- **Try to relax**

Discover what helps you to relax. For some of us it is an afternoon nap, it may be your favourite CD or movie, or a can of coke. Whatever works for you, discover it and find time to do it for yourself.

- **Congratulate yourself**

When you achieve something special, no matter how small, tell yourself you are doing a wonderful job. When you have coped with something difficult, praise yourself. You have a right to feel proud,

regardless of what other people might think.

- **Look on the bright side of life**

Think about what you like about being a parent, think about what you like most about yourself as a woman. Think about when your child did exactly as you wanted them to, when they made you really proud. Think about the funny things your children have done and LAUGH OUT LOUD.

- **Get help**

This is a really positive thing to do, it is NOT a sign of weakness. Don't assume that just because you are a parent you have to have it all worked out. Always remember that you're not the only parent who feels that outside help can be useful. If something is in the way of your higher goals - getting help can change things.

### Something to Think About

*What are the things you really like about yourself? As a woman and as a mother.*

★★★

*What are some of the things you do now to cope with the stresses you face?*

★★★

*What are some other things you could try?*

# Choosing Discipline



## Background Information

Most parents worry about getting it right, of course there is no such thing as the perfect parent. All parents struggle at some time and all parents worry about the effect they are having on their children. Especially for young women who seem to begin their parenting in a world of negative images about being young and being a parent. One of the things that most parents worry about is choosing the right discipline and how to get their children to behave as they want.

Everyone has an opinion on how to get children to behave and what is the best method of discipline. Generally these opinions are expressed openly to young parents as instruction and rules for raising children successfully, as if when you choose your own method everything will fall apart. There isn't only one right way, you need to work out what works best for you, your child and the rest of your family.

As young parenting women, we have tried many methods for getting our children to behave, some of these have worked while others have not always been successful. We have found the most important rule when deciding upon discipline is to be consistent, and work towards your own goals for your child's behaviour. While setting these goals be realistic about the resources and support that you have available to you.



### What Some Other Young Women Have Said

*"You should see her  
smile when I praise  
and cuddle her –  
its huge"*



*"It's really  
frustrating when he  
doesn't listen"*



*"It took a lot of  
trial and error, but  
I think I'm getting  
the discipline thing  
worked out now"*

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How you choose to discipline is a decision that only you can make, but many parents find that a positive approach is often the most successful. This means praising and encouraging the behaviours you want, and giving lots of attention and praise when your children do things well. It does not include smacking, hitting or shaking.

Sometimes we are told that our children

will become out of control if we do not smack them, but this is not true.

The more you show love and respect the more your children will want to please you. This approach often ensures punishments can be a last resort. (See Tip Sheets in this booklet). It is not the norm for anyone to want to harm their child, but harm can happen if we don't pay attention to what we do.

Particularly, when we are stressed and/or affected by the use of drugs or alcohol.



***A FINAL NOTE: We are young parenting women, we are not parenting experts and therefore we do not have all the answers, if you feel things are getting out of control it is important to contact someone who can give you further advice and help (See Help and Support in this booklet).***



### Something to Think About

*What's important to you about your child's behaviour?*



*What are some of the goals you could set for your child's behaviour?*



*What are some of the things you are already doing that work?*



*What are some things you can do to achieve your goals?*

# Other Relationships in Your Life



## Background Information

One of the big changes for young women in becoming parents is the number of relationships that you seem to be in the middle of managing. Your old friends from school, your parents and siblings, your child's father, your partner's friends, your partner's family, or maybe even a new partner. If you are not in a relationship with the father of your child or children then you will also be negotiating access visits for him and his family and their relationship with a new partner when the time comes. All this can be very exhausting and many young women say that they feel overwhelmed by it. If you talk to someone to work out how to balance these relationships, like a friend or a professional then it may not feel so overwhelming. Parent Hotlines offer over the phone support and advice. They are often a really good way to talk and problem solve when managing all the relationships that come into your life because you have become a mother. On the other hand some young women say that suddenly no one wants to visit them or be involved in their life because different people may not like each other or family members do not want to accept or deal with you becoming a parent at a young age. Often this can change over time. But if family

members do not accept your decision to become a parent, it can make your relationship with them even harder to maintain.

Remember yourself and what you want, what you can handle and let that be your starting point. Try not to make absolute rules for yourself, and as things change and your child gets older you can begin to think about working things through and exploring different opportunities for you and your child.

Remember what you want for you and your child. Whilst you may want to have intimacy and a partner to share the responsibility of parenting with, no one

### What Some Other Young Women Have Said

*"My mother gave me hell when I was pregnant, but fell in love with my baby as soon as she was born – things started to get better then"*



*"I find it really hard to juggle the time that my new partner and my daughter need"*



*"My brothers and sisters didn't know how to treat me any more, I'm still their little sister, but I'm a mum too"*

who really loves and cares for you would want to stop you from being the mother you want to be. If your partner expects you to be a different parent to what your own goals tell you to be you may want to reconsider the relationship or seek help to work on your relationship.

Many couples find that they need to seek help to work on problems in their relationship. There are many places you can go to talk with an independent person about the difficulties you are facing as a couple. It is completely normal for people who are parenting together to need to do this, this is regardless of your age. The amount of stress that parenting places on a relationship can not be underestimated. Take some time out together and seek help when you need it.

Sometimes you might have to make hard decisions, but you can seek help and support even if it is through a stranger. Doing what you want for your child is what is most important for your own wellbeing and that of your child.

You may be tempted to think that you cannot give your child all the fancy stuff that is advertised as necessities but if you can do things your way and even if you go without, what is most important is how you relate to your child and not

### Something to Think About

*What are the competing relationships in your life?*

★ ★ ★

*How do these relationships impact on your parenting?*

★ ★ ★

*How do you handle them?*

★ ★ ★

*How can you keep your children safe when negotiating new relationships?*

★ ★ ★

*How have your relationships changed through pregnancy and parenting?*

just what you can buy for them.

Whether you are with a partner or by yourself you can be “good enough’ to parent your child.

Some experts say that the most important thing when raising children is that kids have one stable and consistent person in their lives.

Regardless of the other relationships you or your children have in life, it is this one consistent relationship that can make the difference. You are this person for your child.

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# Your Community



## Background Information

We all live in communities; even if at times you feel like you never get out of the four walls of your house. You and your child need to have a connection with others in your neighbourhood whether that is friends, shopkeepers, family, professionals who provide a service, or other mothers. Being isolated is a depressing experience. It is important to try and find out what is happening in your local community so you and your family can participate.

Children enjoy time at the park, going to activities such as school fairs or activities in the shopping malls. As an adult you too can look at what interests you in

the community and include your children when appropriate or see if you can get child care so sometimes you can go alone to an event or activity that you enjoy. Have a look in local newspapers (this is usually free) to find out what's happening in your area.

Finding things to do in your community is a great way to meet other people, maybe there is a group for young pregnant and/or parenting women in your community. Neighbourhood Houses, Community Centres and Child Health Clinics are a good starting point to finding things to do or groups to join. You can find Community Centres under 'C' in the Yellow Pages.

### What Some Other Young Women Have Said

*"Before I went to drop-in day I didn't know any young parents, spending time with them helps me feel normal"*



*"I was really lonely, but the Neighbourhood Centre had so much info, and there's always something going on there"*



*"The kids love going to the park, they love playing with other kids who are there, and it gives me half an hour just to sit and relax"*



*"I felt a bit scared going to playgroup the first time, but once I was there it was great. They really welcomed me"*

## getting what you want

Some areas have support groups or playgroups specifically for young pregnant or parenting women. Often, these groups provide a space for young women to come together and talk about their life and experiences. Being able to share with other young women who are parents can reassure you that you are not alone, sometimes the best people to talk with for help and support are people in the same position as yourself. Women's/birthing hospitals & Child Health Clinic's may be able to tell you where you could access a group for young parenting women.



### Something to Think About

*What have you found to enjoy in your local community for your children?*



*What are some of the things you can do in your local community for yourself?*



*How can you find out about what is happening in your community?*



*What are some of the things that stop you going to activities?*



*What would make it easier to join in with activities in your area?*



# Help and Support



## Background Information

Every parent needs help and support. We find this in many different ways. Some young parenting women find the support they need through their partners, parents & friends, but not everyone has this kind of support available to them. Even when it is available it may not be providing you with all that you need.

As young parenting women, there are probably areas of your life where you could do with some help. You may want to access help/support in regards to you relationships with others, an addiction, parenting, or many other reasons. Whatever the reason you feel you need support, don't be afraid to find it.

Many supports are available within your community. Sometimes it may take some effort to find support you are happy with in a location which is convenient to you. It is important that when you feel you need these supports that you don't hesitate, lots of us need support. You may not be happy with the first place you go. Don't give up, keep trying other services.

Be honest, being a parent is a huge, important job. Sometimes some

### What Some Other Young Women Have Said

*"I went to a counsellor and I hated her, I asked to see someone else and now its going really good"*



*"I didn't realise the service I was going to wasn't keeping my info confidential, so the next time I went to a service I asked them about confidentiality before I went."*

#### PLEASE NOTE:

*Different services have different rules and guidelines about confidentiality, it is best that you ask about confidentiality right from the beginning.*

support from people other than your immediate networks can assist you to continue with the job of parenting.

Here are some good **starting points** for finding support, or you could try your local council. If the person who answers the phone can't help you ask for the number of someone who can, and keep asking until you find what you're looking for:



## Something to Think About

*What things worry you  
about accessing support?*



*What things stop you  
from accessing support?*



*What's been helpful to  
you when you've had  
help and support?*

### *Hotlines for parents*

Queensland:	1 300 301 300
NSW & ACT	132 005
South Australia	1 300 364 100
Tasmania	1 800 808 178
Western Australia	1 800 654 432
Victoria	132 289

*Lifeline* 13 1114

24hr Crisis telephone counselling

*Relationships Australia* 1 300 364 277

National relationship based counselling,  
gambling abuse counselling, financial  
counselling, and relationship education

### *Child Health*

*Call the following numbers and ask for the number  
of your local Child Health Clinic*

Queensland	07 3862 2333
ACT	02 6205 1277
NSW (Department of Health)	02 9391 9000
South Australia	08 8303 1500
Tasmania (Department of Health and Human Services)	1300 135 513
Western Australia (Health Info Line)	1 300 135 030
Victoria	132 229
Northern Territory (Department of Health & Community Services)	08 8999 2400

# Goals



## Goals

Goals don't have to be huge. They just need to be relevant to your life and what you want to achieve. Be realistic, and remember to put down some information about how you can begin achieving these goals. Writing down your goals can help you keep focused and be a reminder when it's all a bit overwhelming.

*My goals for the next week:*

*My goals for parenting in the next week:*

*My goals for the next month:*

*My goals for parenting in the next month:*

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*My goals for the next year:*

*My goals for parenting over the next year:*

*My long term goals:*

*My long term parenting goals:*





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