

Acceptability of a Social Learning Theory-based Parenting Programme to South African  
Parents

Katherine Wilson

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
Master of Social Science in Psychological Research

Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town

Supervisors: Professor Catherine Ward and Dr Hlengiwe Gwebu

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

## DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree.

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend that it is one's own.
2. I have used the American Psychological Association convention for citation and referencing. Each contribution to, and quotation in, this thesis from the work(s) of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced. Any section taken from an internet source has been referenced to that source.
3. This thesis is my own work, and is in my own words (except where I have attributed it to others).
4. I have not paid a third party to complete my work on my behalf. I have not used any artificial intelligence (AI) programme to complete this dissertation or part thereof (e.g., Chat GPT).
5. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.
6. I acknowledge that copying someone else's assignment or essay, or part of it, is wrong, and declare that this is my own work.

Signed by candidate

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_Date: \_14 February 2025\_\_\_\_\_

**Conflict of Interest:**

I was employed part-time as the study manager for ParentChat, South Africa, but have no vested interest in the outcome of the study.

My supervisor Professor Cathy Ward is one of the original developers of the Parenting for Lifelong Health programmes. She earns no royalties or any other income from the use of the programmes. However, her university receives research grants to study the programmes, and the resultant work boosts her career.

At the time of the study, my supervisor Dr Gwebu was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Cape Town, whose fellowship was funded by the *European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program (Grant Agreement Nos. 737476 and 771468), Research England*. She has continued to work on Parenting for Lifelong Health research grants that benefit her university and her career, but as with Dr Ward, she receives no personal income from use of the programme

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Master's thesis would not have been possible without the many people who have walked this path with me and encouraged and inspired me on this academic journey.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to each one, for their input, patience and support.

In particular, to my supervisors Professor Catherine Ward and Dr Hlengiwe Gwebu, thank you for your generosity in sharing your wisdom and insights and guiding me along the way so patiently. I learned so much from you and you filled me with passion about this topic.

This study was funded by UKRI GCRF and Newton Fund; the LEGO Foundation COVID-19 Playful Parenting Emergency Response; the philanthropic donors to the University of Oxford's COVID-19 Research Response Fund; Oak Foundation Children First Fund, a fund of Tides Foundation; and the UKRI GCRF Accelerate Hub. Thank you for this contribution.

Sincere thanks also to the University of Cape Town Research Committee who paid for the research assistants who did the interviews and translations for me for the qualitative interviews. And a big thank you to each of the research assistants who did my translations and co-facilitated my interviews so ably – I couldn't have done this without you.

Special thanks to Moloko Kganyago who assisted me so ably with the coding – I really appreciated your insights and input and the stories we shared.

To the participants who shared their experiences of parenting and participating in the ParentChat programme with me, thank you for your honesty and vulnerability and for opening a window into your world to me.

And lastly a huge thank you to my two sons Cameron and Robert. You have taught me so much about the joys and challenges of parenting and have been eternally patient with your often absent, ancient student single mother! Three varsity students in one house is a lot, but thankfully the laughter and humour have kept us all going! You have inspired me to always strive to be a better parent, you have accepted my failings, shown appreciation for my strengths, tolerated our crazy adventures together and encouraged me when I wanted to give up. You have both taught me more than you will ever know about parenting, life and love – thank you.

## ABSTRACT

Good parenting practices significantly contribute to child development and wellbeing. Evidence shows that optimal child development occurs in environments where parents are nurturing, warm and supportive, while harsh parenting styles negatively impact children's mental health and developmental outcomes. This study explores the acceptability of the ParentChat programme among South African parents who participated in its pilot implementation. ParentChat, an adaptation of the Parenting for Lifelong Health programme, is a digital, group-based family-strengthening initiative aimed at improving parenting skills, delivered through WhatsApp. Programme acceptability was operationally defined as whether parents had used techniques taught, or were likely to use them. Conducted in four South African provinces, the study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design using quantitative surveys and in-depth qualitative interviews. 286 parents participated in the study; there were 337 quantitative surveys completed by parents over four weeks. Ten initial follow up qualitative interviews were completed by parents in the Western Cape one month after completion of the programme and twenty-seven follow up qualitative interviews were completed by the parents eighteen months after the programme. Template analysis was used to code, describe, organise and analyse the data thematically from the qualitative interviews from the participants' perspective. Findings revealed that despite initial scepticism about the programme's cultural relevance, parents widely adopted and valued the skills taught, such as spending one-on-one time with their children, talking about emotions, praising their children and giving clear and realistic instructions. Findings also showed acceptability for conducting the programme digitally on WhatsApp. Parents reported shifts from authoritarian to a more child-centred approach, reductions in verbal and physical violence, better communication and improvements in family dynamics and child behaviour. The study highlights the importance of adaptations in parenting interventions and underscores the potential of digital platforms to deliver accessible and effective family support in low-resource settings.

This thesis has been written up in accordance with the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) – see Appendix 6 for details.

*Keywords:* Parenting programme; ParentChat; acceptability; digital programme; culturally sensitive; playful parenting.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                       |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>CHAPTER 1: Background, Literature Review and Introduction.....</b>                 | <b>10</b> |
| Reducing harsh parenting practice and empowering parents.....                         | 11        |
| The environment in which parenting takes place.....                                   | 11        |
| Culture and parenting . .....                                                         | 12        |
| South Africa .....                                                                    | 13        |
| Transfer of programmes to different cultures.....                                     | 14        |
| Parenting for Lifelong Health programme.....                                          | 16        |
| ParentChat programme... ..                                                            | 17        |
| Aims of the Research.....                                                             | 20        |
| <b>CHAPTER 2: METHOD .....</b>                                                        | <b>22</b> |
| Research design.....                                                                  | 22        |
| Participants and recruitment process.....                                             | 21        |
| Selecting a sample for initial qualitative interviews in Western Cape.....            | 21        |
| Selecting a sample for follow-up qualitative interviews from different provinces..... | 22        |
| Measures and instruments.....                                                         | 22        |
| Qualitative interviews.....                                                           | 26        |
| Procedure.....                                                                        | 26        |
| Ethical considerations.....                                                           | 29        |
| Data analysis.....                                                                    | 30        |
| Reflexivity.....                                                                      | 31        |

|                                                                                 |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>CHAPTER 3: RESULTS .....</b>                                                 | <b>33</b> |
| Details of survey respondents.....                                              | 33        |
| Findings: Quantitative results.....                                             | 34        |
| Findings: Qualitative results.....                                              | 38        |
| Summary of six main themes.....                                                 | 38        |
| Context of parents interviewed.....                                             | 41        |
| Single parenting .....                                                          | 45        |
| Impact of living in unsafe areas on the use of corporal punishment .....        | 46        |
| Intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment.....                      | 47        |
| Social norms as determinants in the use of corporal punishment.....             | 49        |
| Is there a place for parenting programmes?.....                                 | 52        |
| Skills learned.....                                                             | 55        |
| A gendered approach to parenting.....                                           | 56        |
| Shift in parenting practices.....                                               | 57        |
| Group/ shared learning from other parents.....                                  | 59        |
| Other benefits of programme.....                                                | 61        |
| Activating new skills .....                                                     | 64        |
| Quality one-on-one time spent with children .....                               | 65        |
| Talking about emotions and enhanced communication .....                         | 66        |
| Using praise and complimenting children.....                                    | 67        |
| Shift from authoritarian approach to household rules and routines.....          | 67        |
| Involving the child in discipline.....                                          | 69        |
| A generational shift in parenting style.....                                    | 70        |
| Changing language and adopting positive parenting to disciplining children..... | 71        |
| Challenges of co-parenting.....                                                 | 71        |

|                                                                                           |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Personal growth/ reflection and self-discovery.....                                       | 73        |
| Moving to a digital approach of running parent programmes.....                            | 74        |
| Challenges of the programme.....                                                          | 78        |
| Summary of challenges of the programme.....                                               | 79        |
| <b>CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>                                          | <b>81</b> |
| Recommendations for programme delivery.....                                               | 83        |
| Suggested programme adaptations.....                                                      | 83        |
| Recommendations for future directions for scientific study of parenting programmes.....   | 87        |
| Limitations of this research.....                                                         | 89        |
| Conclusion.....                                                                           | 91        |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> .....                                                                   | <b>93</b> |
| <b>TABLES</b>                                                                             |           |
| Table 1: Overview of ParentChat programme and topics and content.....                     | 19        |
| Table 2A: Bi-weekly survey questions.....                                                 | 24        |
| Table 2B: End of programme questionnaire.....                                             | 25        |
| Table 3: Breakdown of quantitative and qualitative surveys conducted.....                 | 34        |
| Table 4: Demographic description of participants.....                                     | 36        |
| Table 5A: Acceptability vs Likelihood of using specific skills.....                       | 37        |
| Table 5B: Correlation between acceptability and likelihood of using skills.....           | 37        |
| Table 5C: Difference between acceptability and likelihood of using s.....                 | 38        |
| Table 5D: Acceptability of ParentChat skills across four provinces in South Africa.....   | 38        |
| Table 5E: Likelihood of using ParentChat skills across four provinces in South Africa.... | 39        |
| Table 5F: Number of participant responses sorted by acceptability.....                    | 39        |
| Table 5G: Number of participant responses sorted by likelihood of use.....                | 40        |
| Table 6: Main and sub-themes.....                                                         | 42        |

|                                                                                                                                  |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>APPENDICES .....</b>                                                                                                          | <b>114</b> |
| Appendix 1: Parent Chat Topics.....                                                                                              | 113        |
| Appendix 2: Oral Consent script for parents participating in qualitative interviews and permission to record the interviews..... | 117        |
| Appendix 3A: Instrument: Fortnightly ParentChat survey questions .....                                                           | 120        |
| Appendix 3B: Interview schedule for initial qualitative interviews.....                                                          | 123        |
| Appendix 3C: Questions for follow-up post ParentChat qualitative interviews...                                                   | 125        |
| Appendix 4: Self-Referral Form, Emergency Contact Numbers.....                                                                   | 127        |
| Appendix 5A &B: Ethical clearance.....                                                                                           | 128        |
| Appendix 6: Standards for reporting qualitative research.....                                                                    | 130        |
| <b>TABLE OF FIGURES</b>                                                                                                          |            |
| Figure 1 & 2: Example of ParentChat Cartoons                                                                                     | 18         |
| Figure 3: Mind map of what parents learned on ParentChat                                                                         | 134        |
| Figure 4: Mind map of what parents liked about the programme                                                                     | 135        |
| Figure 5: Mind map of different cultural practices                                                                               | 136        |
| Figure 6: Mind map of gaps in the programme                                                                                      | 137        |
| Figure 7: Mind map of changes parents noticed in their children                                                                  | 138        |
| Figure 8: Mind map of running ParentChat on WhatsApp                                                                             | 139        |
| Figure 9: Mind map of challenges of parenting                                                                                    | 140        |

## Chapter 1: Background, Literature Review and Introduction

It has long been recognised by child and family researchers that good parenting practices significantly contribute to child development and well-being. There is sufficient evidence that parents' actions significantly impact and influence children's development (Bornstein et al., 2011; Britto et al., 2015). Parenting is a complex activity that impacts children's self-esteem, their social and academic capability and the morals and values they adhere to (Sahithya et al., 2019). There is strong evidence that optimal child development occurs in an environment where parents are nurturing, warm and supportive; equally, harsh parenting styles negatively impact children's mental health and developmental outcomes (Lachman et al., 2016, Sherr, et al., 2017) ).

Positive parenting practices involving positive reinforcement, open displays of warmth and affection, adopting consistent and fair discipline approaches and where parents are actively involved in their children's lives, result in well-adapted children who achieve well academically, have good self-esteem, interact well with their peers and display less problematic behaviour (Kotchick & Forehand., 2002, Lachman et al., 2016). Indications are that positive parenting practices can offer powerful protective factors to children, even in the face of adverse childhood experiences (Yamaoka & Bard, 2019). Their work found that through programmes such as *Strengthening Families*™, which develops protective factors with high adversity families, "the critical parenting practices protect the children from adversity, while stimulating development that enhances resilience" (p. 531).

Behavioural problems in children and young people are a concerning, costly and frequent problem (Gardner et al., 2003). Once these problematic behaviours and patterns are established, they tend to persist and develop into more serious problems over time (Farrington., 1995; Tremblay et al., 2004). Evidence suggests that these conduct issues are often a result of harsh, inconsistent parenting (Chang et al., 2003). The harsh parenting places young people at higher risk for problems such as delinquency, school dropout, mental illness, low literacy levels, unemployment, partner violence and increased mortality (Gardner et al., 2006; Haslam et al., 2016).

There is compelling evidence that parenting interventions that develop positive parenting skills can strengthen and improve parent-child relationships and reduce problematic child behaviours and child maltreatment (Baumann et al., 2018; Piquero et al., 2008). In the drive to prevent violence both against and by children, parenting interventions are being advocated and implemented as crucial approaches to encourage children's holistic and healthy development (Gardner et al., 2016). This evidence has resulted in international

bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) promoting the implementation of evidence-based parenting programs and their adaption and transfer to communities across the globe (WHO, 2019).

### **Reducing harsh parenting practices and empowering parents**

Parenting programmes are often geared towards removing elements that put children at risk and replacing them with factors that build on and strengthen parent-child relationships and provide a secure context for the children (Masiran et al., Schilling et al., 2021; 2020; Van Esch & De Haan, 2017). The interventions aim to reduce harsh, inconsistent discipline styles and to equip parents with new skills, knowledge and problem-solving methods to respond to the needs of their children in a flexible and caring manner (Haslam et al., 2016). An aim of involving caregivers in parenting programmes is to encourage them to maintain the use of these skills as they see positive results in their children's behaviour, while at the same time empowering caregivers in disadvantaged and challenging environments (Bunting, 2004). Parenting interventions have the potential to improve the mental health and well-being of both parents and children (Barlow & Coren, 2018; Butler et al., 2020).

### **Environment in which parenting takes place**

Parents do not parent in a vacuum but do so in a social, economic and cultural context which influences how they make sense of their experience and shapes their beliefs and practices related to raising children (Bornstein et al., 2011). It is apparent that, amongst other factors, socio economic status, culture, parental stress, and urban/rural differences, will intersect in ways that may impact the approaches parents adopt in parenting their children. Rates of child maltreatment are higher in low- and middle-income countries where risk factors such as economic adversity, social inequality and adverse living conditions prevail (Mamaug et al. 2021). Developing positive parenting strategies is critically important for families which experience ongoing challenges and adversity (Van Esch & De Haan, 2017; Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). For instance, parents in low-and middle-income countries coping with heightened financial and economic stress are often more at risk of maltreating their children and thus parenting interventions have a critical role to play (Mamaug et al., 2021). These parents are likely to have limited resources, work long hours or be unemployed, which can create challenges in maintaining the emotional and practical resources necessary for positive parenting. These stressors, rooted in broader systemic inequalities and economic instability, may increase the risk of strained family relationships and difficulties in managing caregiving responsibilities optimally (Masarik and Conger, 2017). Recognising this, parenting interventions can play a crucial role by providing support,

skills, and resources that empower families to navigate these pressures while fostering nurturing environments for children (Sanders & Turner, 2018).

### **Culture and parenting**

One factor that may play a role is cultural background. Culture is a dynamic and complex construct that is fluid, and the rules and patterns of culture tend to change with time and place. As noted by Lansford (2022), parent's cultural identities are multi-faceted – and they may identify with more than one cultural group. Nonetheless, the literature does identify some effects which suggest that cultural norms may impact either parenting behaviours, or the effects of such behaviours. For instance, in a six-country study (China, India, Italy, Kenya, the Philippines and Thailand) by Lansford and colleagues (2022), the cultural acceptability of the use of corporal punishment influenced how often parents utilised corporal punishment. It also impacted the frequency of associated internalising and externalising behaviour problems. While this does not remove the risks associated with corporal punishment (Cuartas et al., 2022; Gershoff., 2013; Heilmann et al., 2022) there was less likelihood of externalising behaviours where corporal punishment was the norm. This suggests that, if parents' beliefs and behaviours are compatible with those of other parents in their environment, this can positively influence outcomes for both parents and children (Lansford et al., 2018).

Cultural aspects of parenting can be more profound than this, however. Su and Hynie (2011) describe how different cultural norms and values are linked to differing parenting beliefs, goals and attitudes about their children's emotional, social and academic development. As an example, childrearing in China is widely influenced by Confucian philosophy and traditions that are hierarchical, and so, in Chinese families, putting others first, showing humility, respect and obedience to parents and parental authority and prioritising family over individual needs is considered important (Su and Hynie, 2011). This contrasts with North American culture and parenting which emphasises self-reliance, independence, challenging authority, expressing emotions freely and having high self-regard (Jose et al., 2000). Even within the US, there are differences: Kumpfer and colleagues (2002) describe how African American families prefer a "family systems change approach, compared to an individual change approach to prevention because of the emphasis on interconnection, reciprocity and filial responsibility" (Kumpfer et al., 2002, p. 242), illustrating that subcultural or ethnic differences related to parenting exist even within a single country.

## South Africa

South Africa has a population of approximately 58 million people of vastly differing socioeconomic statuses, living in 9 provinces, and speaking more than the 11 official languages (Roman, 2014; Statistics South Africa, 2011). South Africa is often referred to as the ‘rainbow nation’ because of the country’s rich diversity of language, culture and ethnic groups (Roman, 2014). There is relatively little literature on South African families, and even less on parenting. What is known suggests that Western approaches to parenting programmes may not sit well with some parents. For instance, in many South African families, there has been a well-developed hierarchical family structure with a strong emphasis on respect for elders (such as grandparents), accompanied by a notion that children should be ‘seen and not heard’; and that harsh discipline produces well-mannered and obedient children, while also serving as a source of protection for children in the face of danger (Dawes, et al., 2005). This value of respect for elders and cultural understanding of parenting may have a significant impact on parenting style. Parents may expect strict obedience and unquestioned respect from children and the children’s views and feelings may not be viewed as important as those of adults (Roman, 2014).

Violence in the community may also increase the risks of harsh discipline strategies. For instance, in the US, Coulton and colleagues (2007) comment that violent environments can interfere with families engaging with community social support systems, such as asking neighbours to babysit one’s children. US studies show that parents who live in a violent neighbourhood are also more likely to use harsh parenting in order to keep their children safe, for instance, to ensure that they are home before dark (Coulton et al., 2007; Lynch & Cicchetti, 2002), which may also play a role in South Africa.

Child maltreatment is particularly prevalent across South Africa (Meinck, Cluver, Boyes, & Loening-Voysey, 2016) and heightened societal risks such as elevated levels of poverty, HIV/AIDS, community and interpersonal violence and drug and alcohol abuse frequently coincide in South Africa, thereby increasing risks of maltreatment of children (Meinck, Cluver, Boyes & Ndhlovu, 2013). Resultant poor mental health and intimate partner violence (which can be associated with neglectful or abusive parenting), suggests a need for parenting interventions in these highly deprived and vulnerable communities of parents. Child maltreatment (physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect: World Health Organisation, March 1999) during early childhood has been associated with increased risk of developing negative outcomes in adolescence and adulthood and is linked to increased child behavior problems (Kim, Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Manly, 2009), which predict

poor educational performance, juvenile delinquency, and criminal activity (Gilbert et al., 2009). Victims of child maltreatment are also more likely to develop depressive disorders and almost twice as likely to develop substance abuse problems as non-affected children (Norman et al., 2012). Child maltreatment is also a major risk factor for victimhood and perpetration of intimate partner violence, as well as other interpersonal violence (Widom & Wilson, 2015). Moreover, harsh and abusive parenting has substantial intergenerational effects; parents who experienced maltreatment as children are also more likely to maltreat their own children. The Optimus Technical Report (2016) showed that one in every three young people had experienced some form of sexual abuse and maltreatment at some point in their lives. Many of these cases occur in the homes, with parents as perpetrators of maltreatment. Parenting programmes have been shown to reduce violence against children, hence the importance of developing appropriate parenting initiatives that reduce child and parent aggression, and strengthen caregiver-child relationships (Knerr et al., 2013). In addition, the preliminary findings of the randomized controlled trial of the in-person version of ParentChat in South Africa by Lachman et al. (2017) show evidence of the effectiveness of reducing the risk of child maltreatment by improving positive parenting behaviour through parenting interventions.

Further, while patriarchal societies are dominant in some cultures in South Africa (Dawes et al., 2004), many families have a well-developed matriarchal structure where there are absent fathers, often referred to as ‘ATM (Automated Teller Machine) Dads’ – “fathers who provide financially, without being physically or emotionally present” (de Oliveira et al., 2022, p. 164). Households are also more fluid than the Western notion of a static nuclear family (Young & Ansell, 2003). This is reflected in the 2022 South African Child Gauge report which indicates that only 34% of children live with both parents and that for children in the poorest of households, only 21% have both parents living with them (Tomlinson, et al., 2022). Furthermore, research by de Oliveira et al. (2022) indicates that almost 70% of Black South African children currently live without their biological fathers in their homes. In addition, there is a collective notion of family, where grandparents, siblings and parents-in-law – the extended family – play a pivotal parenting role, providing financially as well as being responsible for the care of children (de Oliveira et al., 2022). Nkosi and Daniels (2007) highlight how Western family structures emphasise individualism, whereas African family systems are largely centred around extended family relationships and interdependence. The adage of ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ is a reality for many families in South Africa. While there are potentially negative consequences of these family structures, there may also

be benefits for the many children living with non-biological parents - the community of caregivers responsible for raising children reflects a positive impact of culture in supporting family (Richter, 1999; Roman, 2014; Nkosi & Daniels, 2007).

In South Africa, cultural norms around parenting are inextricably intertwined with socioeconomic factors and the history of apartheid, as reflected in the impact of migrant labour on family roles, which influenced parenting and family structures (Roman, 2014). This raises a critical question of whether programmes that are Western in origin, are applicable and acceptable in different cultures (Kumpfer, et al., 2002; Barrera, et al., 2017).

Social learning theory-based parenting programmes have widely demonstrated effectiveness, derive from a model developed in Oregon, USA, and are therefore likely to be Western in orientation (Gardner et al., 2016). There is a plethora of literature and reviews of parenting programmes that are Western in orientation. Cultural beliefs have shaped prevailing views about parenting practices and images of parenting with a Western bias, as much of the research on parenting approaches has come from Western countries (Sahithya et al., 2019). While there are universal parenting principles such as keeping children safe and healthy and ensuring that they feel secure, ‘healthy’ can have different meanings from culture to culture (Rubin & Chung, 2006). For example, in Asian countries, a parenting goal is often to socialise a compliant, quiet and reserved child, which results in acceptance by peers and adults in the child’s social community, whereas in comparison, in North America and Southern Europe, where parents’ goals are to socialise a gregarious, outgoing child, such a goal would result in peer rejection and difficulty for the child in their social context (Rubin and Chung, 2006).

### **Transfer of programmes to different cultures**

Many programmes do transfer successfully to different cultures, as evidenced by the Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) programmes which were implemented successfully in the Philippines, Montenegro and China. In Montenegro, the adaption of the pilot programme showed success and evidence in reducing violence against children to the extent that the programme has been recognised and incorporated into national policy documents (Hutchings et al., 2024). In an adaption of PLH in China, the programme demonstrated promising feasibility and was significantly associated with a reduction in the maltreatment of adolescents (Liu et al., 2024).

Yet there is evidence that some parenting programmes fail when transferred from one context to another. This could be because of difficulties with implementation in the new

context, or it could be a result of a whole set of cultural or contextual issues which fail to take into consideration culture, socio-economic status, family structure, levels of parental stress or violent societies. For instance, Simkiss and colleagues (2013) documented how the Family Links Nurturing Programme, which was first developed in the UK and intended for use in the UK, Wales and North Ireland, succeeded in England. However, when it was run in deprived communities in South Wales, it was not successful in fostering family well-being and more adaptive parenting approaches. They suggest that this could be because the programme was not effective in changing parenting when delivered universally instead of being targeted to high-risk families; or because the contents and approach of the programme needed revising or because the facilitators were not appropriately trained and supervised to present the programme with fidelity (Simkiss et al., 2013). Gottfredson and colleagues (2006), whose Strengthening Families Project was developed in Ohio and showed evidence of success there, failed when transplanted to inner-city Washington DC. No statistically significant positive effects of the parenting programme were found in Washington DC, where (amongst other difficulties) some programme implementers felt that the focus on utilising non-physical discipline approaches was not culturally appropriate to the culture of the participants (Gottfredson et al., 2006).

In the work of Barrera and colleagues (2011), Mexican–American and other Latino youth in Arizona responded positively to video programme materials they produced, while Mexican–American youth in Texas were highly critical of the videos and felt they did not have relevance for them and that they could not relate to the material. Despite the videos starring Mexican–American youths as the protagonists, they said they did not relate to the activities such as break-dancing. This raised the issue that even within clearly defined communities, “it is not easy to determine whether subcultural groups are unique and should be treated separately or when they can be combined” (Barrera et al., 2011, p. 449).

On the other hand, as highlighted by the PLH programmes implemented successfully, some programmes do transfer well when taken to other cultures. The findings of Gardner et al. (2016), reflected positive views of the cross-cultural success of the parenting interventions they studied, suggesting that the fundamental principles of parenting, such as building positive parent-child relationships through engaging in play, being attentive and giving positive reinforcement, are universal across cultures (Gardner et al., 2016). Further evidence of successful transfer is shown in a study by Mamauag et al. (2021), which initiated a process of culturally adapting an evidence-based parenting programme that was developed and tested in South Africa, to integrate it into a cash transfer programme for low-income Filipino

parents. Grounding the modified programme in Filipino values and attitudes, while retaining the Parenting for Lifelong Health content, theory of change and delivery method, resulted in high acceptance of the programme. Their work revealed that interventions can be successfully transported and indicates that “systematic adaptations enhance program acceptability and cultural relevance and sensitivity in specific settings” (p.1214).

### **Parenting for Lifelong Health programmes**

The Parenting for Lifelong Health programmes (PLH), PLH for Young Children and PLH for Parents and Teens were originally developed and tested in South Africa. The 12-session programme was designed to reduce harsh parenting and increase positive parenting of 2-9-year-old children. The researchers reported that post-intervention there were fewer child behavioural problems, less use of physical and psychological discipline and an increase in positive parenting strategies. (Ward et al., 2020). PLH for Young Children showed evidence of effectiveness in the Western Cape, South Africa: Lachman and researchers found that the programme resulted in a reduction in harsh parenting, reducing the risk of child maltreatment through increasing positive parenting approaches (Lachman et al., 2017). This programme was successfully adapted for the Philippines to lower the risk of child maltreatment and improve child well-being (Mamaug et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies in Thailand and Malaysia, detailed below, indicate that the PLH programmes are transferrable across cultures when adapted to address local nuances and cultural sensitivities.

In Thailand, the PLH programme was implemented to assess the feasibility of offering an adapted programme and to examine the effects on child maltreatment and other outcomes. The programme was embedded in the local health system. The study findings showed the programme effectively reduced abusive and harsh parenting, strengthened parent-child relationships, reduced child behaviour problems, increased positive parenting behaviour and positive discipline approaches (McCoy et al., 2021). In a feasibility study in Malaysia, government staff delivered the 5-session Naungan Kasih Positive Parenting Programme, which was developed by merging content from a Malaysian programme with that of PLH to create content relevant to local customs and culture. Results suggest that the programme can reduce child maltreatment, physical and emotional abuse, child behavioural issues and attitudes supporting corporal punishment (Lachman et al., 2023).

PLH for Parents and Teens, a 14-week parent and adolescent programme run in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, was associated with reduced abuse and corporal punishment and improved and more involved positive parenting (Cluver et al., 2018). In a later study in Tanzania, Lachman et al. delivered the programme to teen girls and their caregivers. The

results showed significant reductions in elements such as child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, parenting stress, parent and adolescent depression and adolescent conduct problems (Lachman et al., 2024). Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) has shown evidence in South Africa, the Philippines and Moldova that suggests successful cultural transferability and relevance for the populations they serve (Ward et al., 2020; Mamauag et al., 2021; Shenderovich et al., 2022). Illustrating this, the findings of the study by Jocson et al (2024) who reported on MaPaChat, the Filipino version of ParentChat delivered to caregivers in the Philippines using Viber group chat, suggest that their parenting intervention delivered on a digital group chat by locally trained community service providers was an acceptable and feasible way to provide support to caregivers in a low-resource setting.

### **The ParentChat Programme**

The ParentChat programme is a group-based family strengthening programme for families with children and teens aged 2 to 17 years, based on both PLH for Young Children and for Parents and Teens. The content was moved to a digital format because of COVID-19 pandemic conditions, which did not allow parents to meet in person (Shenderovich et al., 2022) and ParentChat was run and piloted for the first time in South Africa in 2021 alongside pilots in 5 other countries. The programme was delivered via WhatsApp over 8 weeks, from April to July 2021 to parents/caregivers by facilitators from partner implementing agencies. The trained facilitators had manuals to guide them through delivering the 8-week programme to the participants and were supported by meeting weekly on WhatsApp with a coach for mentoring. The format of the sessions entailed the participants meeting twice a week on WhatsApp with their facilitator and fellow participants (16 times) for short online interactive group sessions of 45 minutes to an hour. In these sessions, short videos, illustrative comics (see figures 1 and 2, below), and voice note messages that illustrated parenting skills, such as spending one-on-one time with children, praising children, talking about emotions, setting boundaries and limits and positive discipline, were delivered. At the end of each session, parents and caregivers were given homework activities to practice the parenting skills for that week with their children at home. Between the sessions, the facilitators sent supportive messages to encourage the participants to practice their skills and to support them in their parenting. Content of the programme sessions is provided in Table 1 (below).

Participants were allocated to groups of between eight and fifteen parents/ caregivers. In between the chat sessions, the parents supported each other with WhatsApp messages of encouragement, advice and ideas about how they coped with various challenges and issues.

Facilitators who delivered the programme (one per group) were from partner implementing agencies (Clowns Without Borders South Africa, local NGOs and the Department of Social Development). They were given extensive training by Clowns Without Borders South Africa (a theatre arts non-governmental organisation which has been a PLH trainer since the beginning), and trainers from the Universities of Cape Town and Oxford. Many of the facilitators had been involved in running in-person PLH programmes before.



Figure 1: Example of a cartoon about spending one-on-one time together



Figure 2: Example of a cartoon about praising your child

**Table 1. Overview of the ParentChat programme topics and content** (adapted from Cluver et al., 2020)

| Topic                                                 | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Spending One-on-One Time with your child           | <b>spend one-on-one time</b> with their children away from work and household duties and other people, they create space to <b>be available</b> to their child, to get <b>more involved</b> in their lives, and to <b>build trust and communication skills</b> .                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2. Talking about Emotions                             | The importance of accepting, naming and exploring a range of emotions with their children. They learn techniques that will help them to do this effectively. The primary objectives for this week are parents learning and practicing how to talk about their own and their children's feelings.                                                                                                                                                            |
| 3. Keeping it Positive with Praise                    | Praise is an expression of approval or appreciation. It's a very useful tool for parents because everything we do is more likely to happen again if it is rewarded in some way. When caregivers reward good behaviour with praise or other simple rewards, children are encouraged to behave that way more often in the future. By the same token, as we will see in later weeks, behaviour that is ignored or not rewarded is less likely to happen again. |
| 4. Giving Specific, Positive & Realistic Instructions | This looks at how parents can be more effective at getting their children to follow their instructions. When parents give specific, positive instructions, children know exactly what behaviour is expected from them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5. Household Rules & Daily Routines                   | <p>Parents sometimes get frustrated at their children for being noisy or not tidying up after they have played, throwing their food on the ground or staying out way too late. Often children don't understand why these things are important. Establishing and explaining household rules helps to give children guidance around the behaviours that are expected of them and why. Rules also establish clear boundaries that help children to feel safe and secure.</p> <p>Routines also help children to feel safe and secure. Routines such as mealtimes and bedtimes can help create a stable environment for children. This is especially important for those who are living in hectic or unsafe environments because of stress or factors such as those relating to COVID-19, which has made school and workplace routines unstable.</p> |
| 6. Positive Discipline                                | <p>Using Redirecting and consequences for managing behaviour. Redirecting is effective with younger children: you distract a child when they are misbehaving by turning their attention to something positive. Redirecting as another way to ignore negative behaviour. It works especially well if you can then praise your child for positive behaviour.</p> <p>Consequences are the results of actions or behaviours, for example: Not cleaning the dishes will result in not having a clean plate to eat from. When we use them to manage behaviour, then they are the unwanted results of certain behaviours that parents want to discourage, for example: Staying out past curfew means you cannot go out the following night. Children therefore learn that their behaviour is unacceptable and results in a consequence.</p>            |
| 7. Responding to Difficult Situations and Crises      | Responding to tantrums/ bad behaviour and to crisis situation such as illness/ abuse, sexual abuse, rape or violence in community                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 8. Problem Solving with Children and Final Reflection | <p>Involving children in solving problems.</p> <p>The key building blocks for Problem Solving are:</p> <p><b>Know it:</b> Identify the problem</p> <p><b>Solve it.</b> Think of possible solutions and what their results would be.</p> <p><b>Try it:</b> Choose one solution and try it out</p> <p><b>Test it:</b> Did it work? Great! If it did not work, then try another solution.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

This thesis took advantage of the pilot study of the ParentChat programme, delivered digitally by WhatsApp, in South Africa, to explore the acceptability of both the parenting skills taught by the programme, as well as delivering the programme digitally, as opposed to in-person.

### Aims of the Research

The study explored the question of whether the ParentChat programme, a social learning theory-based programme, is acceptable to South African parents from a non-Western culture, delivered by WhatsApp. This entailed examining participants' perceptions and

experiences of the programme, including whether parents thought that the skills learned in the parenting programme were helpful and appropriate for them, whether they were likely to use the skills as they parent, which had not been explored in depth in previous studies of the PLH programmes. The acceptability of the programme content was operationally defined by whether parents had used the techniques and skills taught, or whether they were likely to use them. In addition, the change from in-person groups to digital delivery also raised the question of whether this programme delivery method was feasible and acceptable to parents.

## Chapter 2: Method

ParentChat was piloted in South Africa from April to June 2021, with 286 caregivers and 14 facilitators, in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, and the Free State. In the Free State, the programme was started, however the social workers who were facilitating the programme felt that there was inadequate time given to them to run the programme, so the entire province withdrew from the study. Because of the early withdrawal of the programme in the Free State, programme participants were not included in this study.

### Research Design

This study followed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design using quantitative and qualitative data from the ParentChat pilot study, as well as an additional series of interviews conducted 18 months after the end of the programme. There were two sources of data, the quantitative surveys that participants completed during the programme, as well as the two sets of qualitative interviews which were done one month after completion of the programme and another set eighteen months after the programme had ended. During the programme, the participants were asked to fill in bi-weekly surveys on the acceptability of the programme and skills learned. One month after the programme's completion, we conducted initial qualitative interviews with ten parents in the Western Cape, where we asked questions about the acceptability and usefulness of the programme and ParentChat skills. This was followed by qualitative interviews implemented across the four provinces a year and a half after completion of the programme. The quantitative data were used descriptively to examine how acceptable the parents found the skills and techniques taught and whether they were likely to use these skills. These descriptive quantitative data were combined with the two sets of qualitative data to examine the acceptability of the ParentChat programme and its adaption from an in-person programme, to a digital one. Questions on acceptability and measurement of which specific skills were most likely to be used, provided impetus for further questioning during the qualitative interviews on why specific skills were, or were not utilised. For example, initially parents indicated on the quantitative questionnaires that they did not utilise praising their children. When asked in the qualitative interviews why they did not use this skill initially, they responded that praising a child could make them 'too big for their boots'. Drawing together the quantitative and qualitative data enabled creating a richer understanding of the reasons for utilising or not utilising skills such as keeping clear boundaries and handling crises. It also enabled the researcher to portray the broad themes of issues faced by parents, the relevance of the programme, the benefits perceived by them and recommendations and suggestions for future iterations of the programme.

The quantitative survey questionnaires were translated into isiXhosa, isiZulu, seSotho, Setswana and Afrikaans and were pilot tested by research assistants to ensure validity. Participants then answered the bi-weekly surveys and those who struggled with connectivity issues or going through the questionnaire were assisted by research assistants fluent in the languages of the participants.

## **Participants**

Parents were recruited into the pilot study through the NGO Clowns Without Borders South Africa and the Department of Social Development. The study's inclusion criteria, outlined in the study protocol were as follows (Cluver et al., 2020, Cluver et al. (2021): individuals aged 18 years or older who were parents or caregivers of children aged 2 to 17 years old; had ongoing interactions with the child, spent time with the child at least twice a week; had access to a smartphone and were willing to join an online parent training group. Additionally, parents needed to give informed consent to take part in the study. There were 286 parents who participated in the study, drawn from four provinces in South Africa, namely: Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. The languages spoken by the participants were isiXhosa, isiZulu, seSotho, Setswana and Afrikaans. In terms of the demographics of the participants, they were all Black South Africans: mostly Black African parents, except in the Western Cape, where there were several Coloured<sup>1</sup> parents.

To select participants for the initial interviews, the sample was categorised into 'high engagement' (parents who attended between six to eight sessions) and 'low engagement' (parents who attended between three and five sessions), on the basis that this would provide a range of different perspectives and attitudes about the acceptability of the programme. Drop-out from the programme was defined as occurring when participants attended only one or two sessions and then did not continue with the programme. Participants were then selected randomly for interviews within those categories. If a selected parent could not be reached after three attempts to contact them, another parent from that category was selected.

For the final interviews at 18 months post-programme, participants were grouped by province, and random sampling was then used to select participants from each of the four

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms "Coloured" and "Black African" are identifiers created under Apartheid. While it has been 31 years since the demise of Apartheid, Apartheid continues to have an impact in terms of access to jobs and other resources and speaks to the stress parents face in their lives. Use of the term does not imply support for racial categories. Posel, (2001), Burger et al., (2016)

provinces. South Africa has 12 official languages, but, aside from English and South African Sign Language, these tend to be clustered within provinces. For instance, isiXhosa is most spoken in the Eastern and Cape Provinces, while isiZulu is most spoken in KwaZulu Natal. This selection strategy represented an attempt to select parents from different languages and thus cultural groups. The relationship between language and culture is complex and there does not appear to be a definitive answer as to how they are specifically related, however, it is largely accepted that language is a part of culture, playing a significant role in defining it, while language also reflects culture while concurrently shaping it (Jiang, 2000). Wardhaugh (2002) comments that “the structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world...the culture of people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain way, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do” (p220). Where there were participants who were not available or refused to participate, I contacted the next participant on the list.

## **Measures**

### ***Bi-weekly Surveys***

We could not identify a suitable instrument in the literature for assessing acceptability of the parenting skills taught in the programme, and therefore I developed a measurement instrument that attempted to do this. These questions, on a Likert scale of 1 to 10, were included in the bi-weekly surveys completed by the participants, starting in week one of the programme. Two questions per skill asked how acceptable the skill was to the parent, and how likely they were to use it. These questions are listed in Table 2. At the end of the programme, parents were asked three questions about each skill: how often they used a skill, if there were things that prevented them from using it, and if so, what those things were.

Table 2A: *Bi-weekly survey questions*

| Fortnight                      | Topic                                      | Question                                                                                                                                        | Scale                                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1st Fortnight (Week 1)</b>  | One-on-One Time                            | How acceptable was the strategy of one-on-one time with your child when you first heard about it?                                               | 1 = Not at all acceptable, 10 = Extremely acceptable |
|                                |                                            | How likely are you to use the strategy of one-on-one time with your child?                                                                      | 1 = Not at all likely, 10 = Extremely likely         |
| <b>2nd Fortnight (Week 3)</b>  | Talking About Emotions                     | How acceptable was the strategy of talking about emotions with your child when you first heard about it?                                        | 1 = Not at all acceptable, 10 = Extremely acceptable |
|                                |                                            | How likely are you to use the strategy of talking about emotions with your child?                                                               | 1 = Not at all likely, 10 = Extremely likely         |
|                                | Praising Your Child                        | How acceptable was the strategy of praising your child when you first heard about it?                                                           | 1 = Not at all acceptable, 10 = Extremely acceptable |
|                                |                                            | How likely are you to use the strategy of praising your child?                                                                                  | 1 = Not at all likely, 10 = Extremely likely         |
| <b>3rd Fortnight (Week 5)</b>  | Keeping it Positive                        | How acceptable was the strategy of keeping it positive and giving clear and realistic instructions to your child when you first heard about it? | 1 = Not at all acceptable, 10 = Extremely acceptable |
|                                |                                            | How likely are you to use the strategy of keeping it positive and giving clear and realistic instructions to your child?                        | 1 = Not at all likely, 10 = Extremely likely         |
|                                | Keeping Your Child Safe (Rules & Routines) | How acceptable was the strategy of keeping your child safe: rules and routines for your child when you first heard about it?                    | 1 = Not at all acceptable, 10 = Extremely acceptable |
|                                |                                            | How likely are you to use the strategy of keeping your child safe: rules and routines with your child?                                          | 1 = Not at all likely, 10 = Extremely likely         |
| <b>Last Fortnight (Week 7)</b> | Positive Discipline                        | How acceptable was the strategy of positive discipline: using redirection and consequences with your child when you first heard about it?       | 1 = Not at all acceptable, 10 = Extremely acceptable |
|                                |                                            | How likely are you to use the strategy of positive discipline: using redirection and consequences with your child?                              | 1 = Not at all likely, 10 = Extremely likely         |
|                                | Handling Crises                            | How acceptable was the strategy of handling crises with your child when you first heard about it?                                               | 1 = Not at all acceptable, 10 =                      |

|            |                                                                                              |                                                      |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
|            |                                                                                              | Extremely acceptable                                 |
|            | How likely are you to use the strategies of handling crises with your child?                 | 1 = Not at all likely, 10 = Extremely likely         |
| Reflection | How acceptable was the strategy of reflection with your child when you first heard about it? | 1 = Not at all acceptable, 10 = Extremely acceptable |
|            | How likely are you to use the strategies of reflection with your child?                      | 1 = Not at all likely, 10 = Extremely likely         |

**Table 2 B: End of Programme Questionnaire**

| Topic                                                      | Question                                                                                     | Response Options                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>One-on-One Time</b>                                     | How often do you currently use the strategy of one-on-one time with your child?              | <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Always |
|                                                            | Are there things that stop you from using this strategy?                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                                                                                                         |
|                                                            | If yes, what are the things that stop you from using one-on-one time with your child?        | Free response                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Talking About Emotions</b>                              | How often do you currently use the strategy of talking about emotions with your child?       | <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Always |
|                                                            | Are there things that stop you from using this strategy?                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                                                                                                         |
|                                                            | If yes, what are the things that stop you from using talking about emotions with your child? | Free response                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Praising Your Child</b>                                 | How often do you currently use the strategy of praising your child?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Always |
|                                                            | Are there things that stop you from using this strategy?                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                                                                                                         |
|                                                            | If yes, what are the things that stop you from praising your child?                          | Free response                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Keeping it Positive &amp; Giving Clear Instructions</b> | How often do you currently use this strategy?                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Always |
|                                                            | Are there things that stop you from using this strategy?                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                                                                                                         |
|                                                            | If yes, what are the things that stop you?                                                   | Free response                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Keeping Your Child Safe (Rules &amp; Routines)</b>      | How often do you currently use this strategy?                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Always |

|                                                             |                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                             | Are there things that stop you from using this strategy? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                                                                                                         |
|                                                             | If yes, what are the things that stop you?               | Free response                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Positive Discipline (Redirection &amp; Consequences)</b> | How often do you currently use this strategy?            | <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Always |
|                                                             | Are there things that stop you from using this strategy? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                                                                                                         |
|                                                             | If yes, what are the things that stop you?               | Free response                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Handling Crises</b>                                      | How often do you currently use this strategy?            | <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Always |
|                                                             | Are there things that stop you from using this strategy? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                                                                                                         |
|                                                             | If yes, what are the things that stop you?               | Free response                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Reflection</b>                                           | How often do you currently use this strategy?            | <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Always |
|                                                             | Are there things that stop you from using this strategy? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                                                                                                         |
|                                                             | If yes, what are the things that stop you?               | Free response                                                                                                                                                    |

### Qualitative Interviews

Questions in the initial interviews conducted in the Western Cape, one month after completion of the programme, included asking participants about their overall experience of the programme; what they found helpful/ useful from the programme (see Appendix 1); what skills they found did not work; what stopped them from using some of the skills learned; whether they felt the specific skills fit in with their culture; and whether the programme had changed anything in the way that they relate to their children (see Appendix 3B for the interview schedule). Questions asked in the final follow-up qualitative interviews, which took place eighteen months after completion of the programme, across all the provinces in South Africa were similar to the ones asked in the initial interviews in the Western Cape, however, they had a stronger focus on ascertaining whether the types of skills and tools taught were acceptable and aligned with the participant's cultural beliefs and practices. They aimed to determine whether parents utilised the skills taught; where some skills and tools were not acceptable and why these were not acceptable; and whether the skills learned had impacted family life (see Appendix 3C).

## Procedure

Participants completed a baseline and demographic survey before commencing with the programme; bi-weekly online surveys during the programme, and a post-test survey on completion of the programme, all on a survey weblink using Open Data Kit (ODK). As highlighted by Bokonda et al. (2019), ODK was designed for use in developing countries: the software is open source, and data can be collected offline for later upload (Bokonda et al., 2019). It has been used widely Africa, Asia and the Caribbean (Bokonda et al., 2019).

Quantitative data was collected from bi-weekly surveys from all participants in the study across South Africa. I designed the questionnaire that went into the bi-weekly survey and collated this data. Where participants were unable to do assessment surveys on their own (as a result of phone or mobile data issues), data assessors did telephonic interviews and completed the surveys by entering the data on behalf of the participants.

In the Western Cape, in September 2021, shortly after completion of the ParentChat programme, initial qualitative interviews were carried out telephonically, by an interpreter, with ten participants, who showed different levels of engagement (high, low, dropout). These initial qualitative interviews were conducted in the participants' home languages, recorded and then transcribed and translated back into English by the research assistants who were trained in qualitative interviewing skills. I drew up the questions for the qualitative interviews and assisted in training the research assistants to give them a comprehensive grounding in the research objectives, tools and ethics. These interviews were undertaken to gain more in-depth input and understand caregiver experiences of programme content, satisfaction with the programme, and barriers to engagement.

The follow-up qualitative interviews conducted eighteen months after the programme were conducted with participants in four different provinces across South Africa because within each province, the programme was delivered in slightly different ways, in different languages and by different implementing partners. This variation may have affected the way the programme was presented and the acceptability of the programme, which is why it was important to survey participants across the provinces and determine any discrepancies in acceptability. The questions asked during both sets of qualitative interviews used cognitive interviewing processes to explore how parents understood the question, "How acceptable is...?". Cognitive interviewing combines cognitive psychology, which studies brain processes related to how people think and process information, together with survey research methodology, providing a helpful approach to understanding how participants perceive and interpret questions and also to identify any potential misunderstandings that may occur in the

interpretation (Drennan, 2002; Beatty & Willis, 2007). Interviews were conducted by experienced research assistants fluent in English and isiXhosa/ isiZulu/ seSotho/Setswana, who are acquainted with the research tools and processes. I did many of the interviews together with the research assistants and participated in some of the interviews to probe further to get more in-depth input from participants and to get clarification on their responses.

The follow-up qualitative interviews were conducted telephonically with a sample of approximately 20 caregivers (four to five people per province), across the four provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape and the Western Cape. Data saturation was the basis for determining the data collection cut-off point. These interviews were done to assess what the parents' experience of the programme was, whether they found the programme relevant and useful, what they enjoyed and did not like about the programme and skills and whether and how the parents had adopted and used the skills learned on the ParentChat programme. The aim was also to assess the acceptability of the programme skills and tools and to provide some sense of whether there was variation across the different provinces and language groups. Furthermore, because of the time elapsed since the running of the programme, these interviews aimed to assess whether there was sustained use of the skills and tools taught and whether there had been a shift in parenting approaches. Trained research assistants/translators, who were fluent in the various languages, worked with me to conduct the interviews. We conducted the interviews jointly: the research assistant asked the questions outlined and once they had an answer, they translated the answer for me, and then where needed I probed further or asked for more in-depth answers. Chiumento and colleagues (2018) suggest that this is the most feasible way to manage language differences between the researcher and participants and suggest several ways to make the process flow well, which I utilised, as described below.

First, I introduced myself and the interpreter to the participant at the start of the interviews and ensured that the participant was comfortable with interacting with people they had not met before (Chiumento et al, 2018; Pitforth & Tejlilingen, 2005; Shimpuku & Norr, 2011; Wallin & Ahlstrom, 2006). The interviews were recorded, and we explained to the participants what roles would be played by myself, the translator and themselves as the participants. Where the participants felt uncomfortable with having myself and the translator present on the call, they were given the option to have only the translator there, asking the questions. The benefit of doing the interviews in this way was that, as the researcher, I was able to get richer data by probing further where the participants only gave superficial answers, and with my thorough knowledge of the programme, I was able to ask more in-

depth questions (Shimpuku & Norr, 2011). The challenge of doing a three-way interview was that the participant could have felt intimidated or become frustrated by the translation between myself and the translator. This process had the potential to make the interview disjointed and cumbersome (Shimpuku & Norr, 2011) and could have inhibited the free flow of conversation in the interview (Pitchforth & Tejlilingen, 2005). To overcome this challenge, I ensured that the translator was well-versed in the programme and had a thorough understanding of the research aims and objectives (Shimpuku & Norr, 2011). Chiumento suggested that researchers and translators conduct practice interviews prior to conducting the interviews to rehearse strategies for managing challenges in online interviews (Chiumento et al., 2018), which is what I did with some of the research assistants. We then assessed the process and continued with the other interviews once the process had been assessed.

Despite these limitations, this was the most feasible way to conduct the interviews. I explained to the participants that there would sometimes be a delay after they had answered a question so that the interpreter could translate what they had said and allow me to formulate further questions for the translator to ask.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethics clearance number PSY2020-056 was previously granted for baseline, demographic, bi-weekly and post-test surveys as well as the initial qualitative interview in the Western Cape. Ethical approval was obtained from the respective research ethics committees of the participating institutions before the inception of the original study, including the quantitative data collection and initial qualitative interviews. I applied for further ethics clearance for the follow-up qualitative interviews done with participants from each of the provinces across South Africa. Ethics approval clearance number PSY2023-011 was granted by the Ethics committee (see Appendix 5A & B).

Each research assistant who conducted the interviews went through the informed consent procedures with the participants over the phone before starting the interview (see Appendix 2 for the informed consent form). An oral consent script with detailed information about the study was read and explained to participants in their home language to ensure they had a clear understanding of what the study would entail and why we were conducting it. We outlined to the participants the mechanisms by which we would ensure confidentiality of the process: specifically, that we would use unique study ID numbers for them, instead of names, on all questionnaires and other research instruments. It was clarified that all electronic data from the participants would be encrypted and stored on password-protected servers. It was

also clarified that participants could receive social services and health information even if they were not actively engaging in the study.

For the follow-up qualitative interviews, I obtained the consent of each participant by going through the oral consent script with them before starting the interviews. I requested permission from each participant to record their interviews in order to transcribe them and advised them that the interview content would be confidential.

I expected there to be few risks to participants, although there was a possibility that reflecting on and exploring their personal experiences and challenges of parenting, some parents may experience distress. In the initial round of qualitative interviews, where participants showed anxiety or distress, the facilitators provided referral advice and details for counselling and other appropriate services to support them. (See Appendix 4). I followed these same procedures in the follow-up interviews. The potential benefits to participants who participating in the study included enhancing and growing their parenting skills and repertoire, improving their relationship with their children, building supportive parenting networks with other parents and enhancing child wellbeing and welfare.

### **Data Analysis**

This was a new study that had not been done before. As the project manager of the study, I was responsible for working with the facilitators, overseeing the collection of data from the participants and doing an analysis of the data, which had not previously been analysed. The acceptability data was explored in the quantitative questionnaires and the qualitative interviews.

Quantitative analysis of the bi-weekly surveys entailed graphically representing the acceptability of each skill and the likelihood of parents using those skills. The acceptability and likelihood of use data were then explored further in the qualitative interviews. The correlation between the acceptability of the skills presented and how likely parents were to use them, was also calculated.

I used template analysis to code, describe and explain the initial and follow-up qualitative interviews, from the participants' perspective. Template analysis is a very flexible approach that can be easily adapted for the specifications of a study and is a useful way of making sense of data (Brooks et al., 2015). Brooks & King describe how template analysis is a technique for organising and analysing data thematically, allowing the researcher to produce a list of codes which are the template, that represent the themes found in the data (Brooks and King, 2012). This approach is frequently used in health research where it is beneficial in assisting the researcher to move from extensive and complex data in real world settings, to

produce a clearer understanding of their participants' experience (Brooks et al., 2015).

Template analysis has been used in similar settings to this study - it was successfully used to understand the lived experiences of parents caring for chronically ill children (Rodriguez & King, 2009) and also in a study examining strengths and weaknesses of service offerings to at-risk children and orphans (Ferguson & Heidemann, 2009).

This approach clarifies themes before analysis ('a priori themes') which can connect to the research question being studied (Brooks & King, 2012). King describes how this approach allows the researcher to "develop themes more extensively where the richest data (in relation to the research question) are found" (Brooks & King, 2012, p. 4). I went through the transcripts, familiarising myself with the data and got a 'feel' for the emerging themes, looking for differences within and between transcripts. I did an initial coding of the findings, identifying the themes and starting with some tentative *a priori* templates. This framework organised the data, creating themes and sub-themes that emerged. I then re-analysed the initial qualitative interviews to look for skills/ strategies that were not acceptable to participants and extended this explicitly in a set of interview questions with the participants in the follow-up qualitative interviews. This analysis involved searching for patterns of meaning and themes that recurred across the 10 initial qualitative interviews. Template analysis was appropriate for the primary analysis of the data, as this stage of the analysis focused on identifying broad categories of meaning and examining how the parents/ caregivers experienced the programme. I collated themes emerging into clusters, examined the relationship between them and set up coding templates.

I then grouped together the significant extracts into the themes that I had identified, and thereafter I analysed this framework and themes. I recognised that template analysis draws heavily on researcher judgement; however, I believed that this approach helped to organise and manage the data through a process of summarisation that results in a themed matrix. I worked together with a research assistant to ensure input from a different source. I followed this same process for the follow-up qualitative interviews which were done eighteen months after the programme. This process allowed for identifying and interpreting salient themes within the data and the deductive nature of the process allowed for working with the data with an open mind. Once the codes had been identified, they were then related to broader conceptual issues. These templates were then utilized to address the research question, and as highlighted by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), this did more than merely summarise the data, it offered a way to analyse and make sense of the data. I utilised these themes to create

descriptive abstracts which outlined the broad frameworks and themes. Mind maps illustrating the initial analysis of the data can be found in the appendices, Figures 3 to 9.

**Table 3: Breakdown of quantitative and qualitative surveys conducted**

| Number of participants on ParentChat programme | Number of quantitative surveys analysed: 4 fortnightly surveys | 1 month post programme qualitative interviews | 18 month post programme follow up qualitative interviews              |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 248 parents                                    | 337 surveys                                                    | 10 Western Cape participants                  | 27 participants:<br>KZN: 4<br>Gauteng: 11<br>E. Cape: 3<br>W. Cape: 9 |

### Reflexivity

Qualitative research methods have, as a central tenet, the idea that researchers play an active role in the research, co-creating meaning and influencing the process. I recognise that I, as the researcher and co-interviewer with an interpreter, shaped and contributed to the data. I am cognisant of the impact that I had on the focus and direction of discussion in the interviews, and therefore on the data and information generated. A researcher's demographics can influence the quality and type of information the participants offer in an interview and what they chose to share about their story (Eagle, Hayes, & Sibanda, 1999). For example, the fact that I am a white UCT student could have affected the power dynamics and the ways that black parents spoke about parenting issues to me. Some parents could have been uncomfortable discussing some parenting approaches, experiences and opinions in my presence. I aspired to ensure that parents felt comfortable enough to talk about their parenting experiences openly in front of me, while realising that some parents may have felt embarrassed or ashamed to admit certain parenting practices. This could have been mediated by the fact that I myself am older, and a single parent, who has an authentic understanding of some of the challenges, successes and failures of being a parent. I used these as a way of engaging with the parents I was interviewing.

## **Chapter 3: Results**

### **Participants**

As can be seen in Table 3 (below), of the twenty-seven participants who took part in the qualitative interviews, three were male and twenty-four were women. They were from four provinces in South Africa, namely KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape. Thirteen described themselves as single, four as unmarried, seven as married, two as separated and one as widowed. In addition to biological parents, there was one aunt, one uncle and two grandmothers who attended the programme and were respondents in the interviews.

In terms of the age of respondents, two were in their twenties, eleven were in their thirties, nine were in their forties, three were in their fifties and two were in their sixties. The children who the respondents were parenting, ranged in age from two years old to seventeen years old.

Twelve respondents indicated that they were currently employed, seven that they were unemployed, and the remaining did not indicate their employment status.

The educational and literacy range of the parents being interviewed ranged from having some high school attendance to completing high school, some completed college, to only completing a few years of primary school. In the interviews, some parents/ grandparents mentioned that they struggled to assist their children with homework and battled with the CAPS curriculum taught at schools.

**Table 4: Demographic Description of Parents**

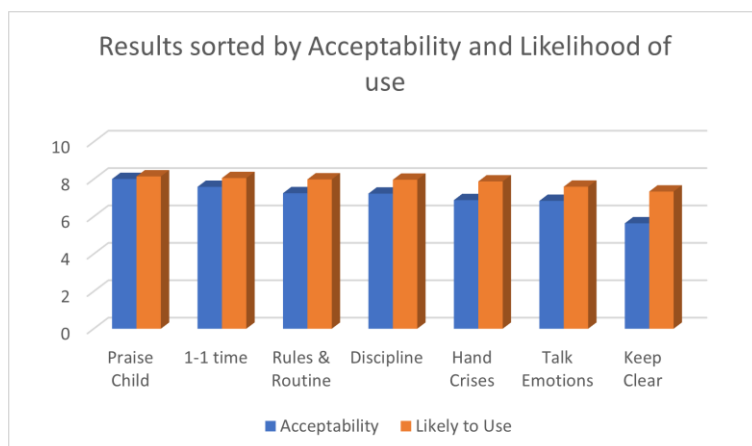
| Participant | Participant age | Male/<br>Female | Lang     | Province | Marital Status        | Child age | Sex of child | Employed |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|----------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------|----------|
| P1          | 52              | F               | isiZulu  | KZN      | Single                | 12        | F            | -        |
| P2          | 38              | F               | isiZulu  | KZN      | widowed               | 16        | F            | -        |
| P3          | 41              | M               | isiZulu  | KZN      | Married               | 13        | M            | Yes      |
| P4          | 46              | F               | isiZulu  | KZN      | Single                | 16        | F            | -        |
| P5          | 31              | F               | isiZulu  | Gauteng  | Unmarried             | 2         | M            | yes      |
| P6          | 49              | F               | isiZulu  | Gauteng  | Single                | 16        | F            | yes      |
| P7          | 25              | F               | -        | Gauteng  | Single                | 14        | F            | No       |
| P8          | 44              | F               | isiZulu  | Gauteng  | Separated             | 11        | M            | yes      |
| P9          | 35              | F               | isiZulu  | Gauteng  | Single                | 13        | M            | no       |
| P10         | 52              | M               | isiZulu  | Gauteng  | Single uncle          | 14        | M            | no       |
| P11         | 45              | F               | isiZulu  | Gauteng  | Unmarried             | 15        | M            | No       |
| P12         | 37              | F               | Sesotho  | Gauteng  | Married               | 8         | M            | Yes      |
| P13         | 51              | F               | -        | Gauteng  | Single Aunt – adopted | -         | -            | No       |
| P14         | 35              | F               | isiZulu  | Gauteng  | Unmarried             | 5         | M            | Yes      |
| P15         | 60              | F               | -        | Gauteng  | Single Grandmother    | 14        | F            | Yes      |
| P16         | 39              | F               | isiXhosa | E Cape   | Single                | 14        | M            | No       |
| P17         | 47              | F               | isiXhosa | E Cape   | Married               | 12        | M            | Yes      |
| P18         | 36              | F               | isiXhosa | E Cape   | Married               | 10        | M            | Yes      |
| P19         | 42              | F               | isiXhosa | W Cape   | Unmarried             | 17        | F            | Yes      |
| P20         | 32              | M               | isiXhosa | W Cape   | Single                | 12        | M            | -        |
| P21         | 65              | F               | isiZulu  | W Cape   | Single Grandparent    | 10        | M            | No       |
| P22         | 38              | F               | isiXhosa | W Cape   | Married               | 16        | F            | Yes      |
| P23         | 31              | F               | isiXhosa | W Cape   | Married               | 6         | M            | Yes      |
| P24         | 28              | F               | isiXhosa | W Cape   | Single                | 12        | F            | No       |
| P25         | 33              | F               | isiXhosa | W Cape   | Single                | 16        | F            | -        |
| P26         | 42              | F               | isiXhosa | W Cape   | Married               | 17        | F            | -        |
| P27         | 44              | F               | isiXhosa | W Cape   | Separated             | 4         | F            | Yes      |

(Dashes indicate where the participants did not disclose their status)

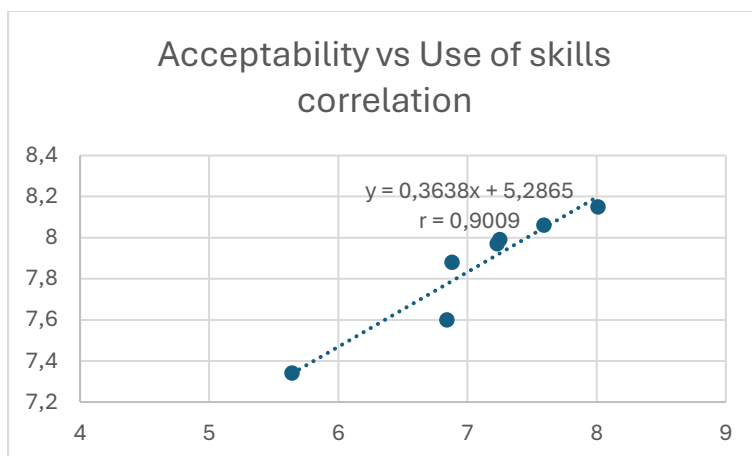
## Findings

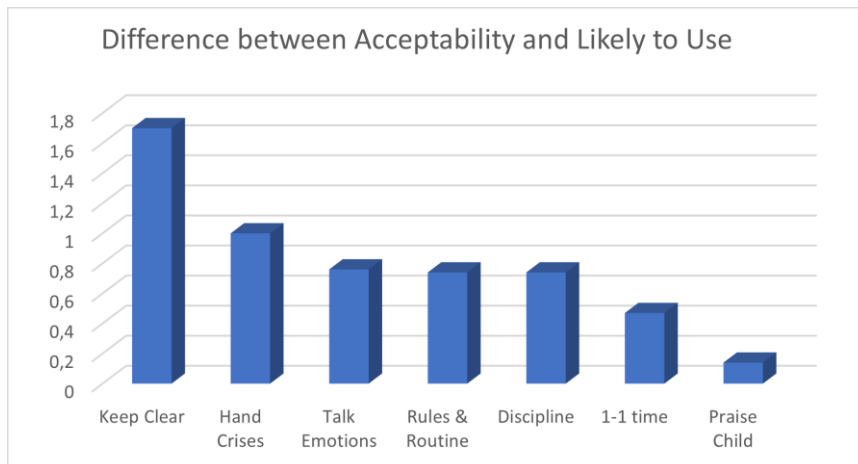
### *Quantitative findings*

The results of the quantitative analysis of the bi-weekly surveys and post-test survey displayed high acceptance of the different skills learned on the ParentChat programme, as well as a high likelihood of utilising these skills, as can be seen from Tables 4A, B, C, and D below. Tables 4E and F reflect the number of participants who responded to the bi-weekly survey questionnaires about the skills learned.

**Table 5A: Acceptability vs likelihood of using specific skills learned**

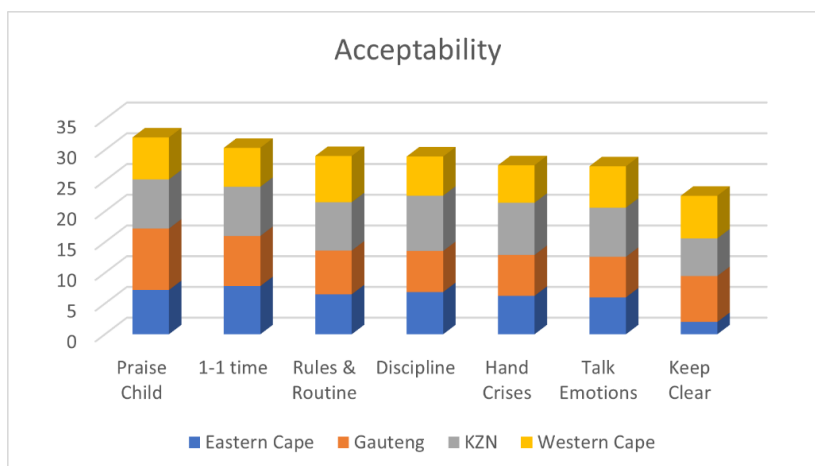
The table above reflects the difference between the acceptability of the skills learned on the programme, (praising your child; spending one-on-one time with your child; utilising rules and routines; using clear discipline; handling crisis situations; talking about emotions; keeping clear communication), versus the likelihood of use of the skills.

**Table 5B: Correlation between acceptability versus likelihood of use of skills****Table 5C: Difference between acceptability and the likelihood of using skills learned**

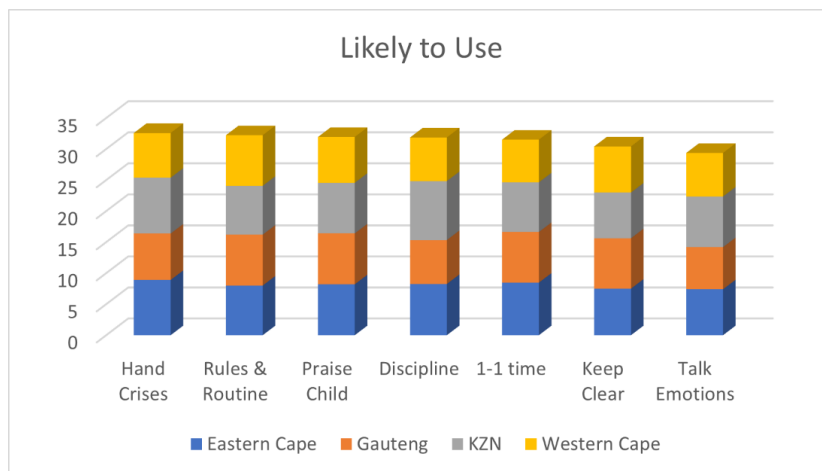


Parents were asked two questions, namely the acceptability of skills learned, and the likelihood of use of the skills. The graph above reflects the difference between the acceptability of skills learned on the ParentChat programme and the likelihood of use of these specific skills such as handling crises, following rules and routines, talking about emotions, using clear discipline, spending one-on-one time with your child and praising your child. As can be seen, the biggest difference between parents' sense of acceptability and the likelihood of use, is with being clear about discipline, with parents both most accepting of and likely to use praise.

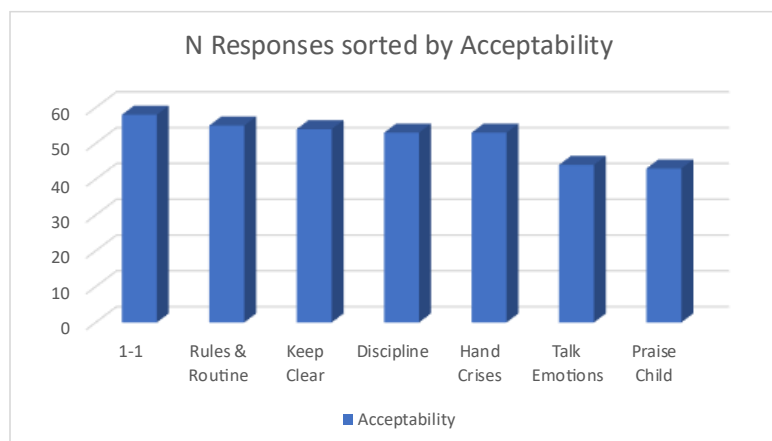
**Table 5D: Acceptability of ParentChat skills across 4 provinces of South Africa**



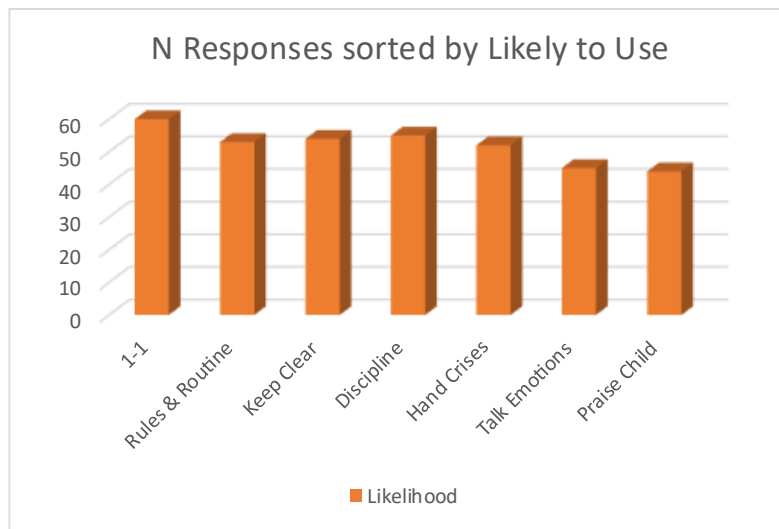
The graph above reflects that there was very little difference in the acceptability of specific skills across provinces and interestingly only the skill of “Keeping it Positive & Giving Clear instructions” showed low acceptability in the Eastern Cape.

**Table 5E: Likelihood of using ParentChat skills across 4 provinces of South Africa**

The graph above reflects equal likelihood of use of skills across all four provinces.

**Table 5F: Number of participant responses sorted by acceptability**

The table above shows response rates, as a percentage, to the questionnaires and the levels of acceptability they indicated for specific skills. One-to-one time reflected as the most acceptable skills, but in fact most of them were acceptable.

**Table 5G: Number of participants responses sorted by likely to use**

The results above reflect that the likelihood of using the skills learned is consistently, though only marginally, higher than the acceptability for specific skills presented, which indicates parents' willingness to try new skills whether they found them acceptable or not. Nonetheless, use closely tracks acceptability.

In terms of the number of respondents who completed the survey, while almost nobody answered all of the questions, the number of respondents ranged from 44 to 60 out of a total of 248 for the different questions about skills. The skills perceived as most acceptable and most likely to be used were praising children and spending one-on-one time together, while keeping clear boundaries and handling crises were indicated as least acceptable and least likely to be used. The graph showing the difference between acceptability and likelihood of using the skills reflects the minimal difference in praising children and also for spending one-on-one time, suggesting that these were the most acceptable skills and the most likely to be used.

What was surprising from the results is that talking about emotions was the second least acceptable skill, but it did show a relatively good likelihood of being used, suggesting that this may have been an area of new learning where parents recognised the benefits. In terms of the variation among provinces, there is an insignificant difference in terms of acceptability of the skills, where praising a child, spending one-on-one time, and using rules and routines were the most widely acceptable skills. Interestingly, in the Eastern Cape, 'keep clear' (giving specific, positive and realistic instructions) was very low in acceptability. The likelihood of using the skills was shown to be high across all provinces, with 'handling crises' (responding to difficult situations and crises), together with 'rules & routines' (setting daily household rules and

routines) having the highest likelihood of use. Talking about emotions reflected as being the least likely skill to use, suggesting that this may have been a relatively new approach presented on the programme.

There was a very high correlation between the acceptability of the programme and the likelihood of parents using the skills, and generally high acceptability. This suggests that even though skills may have been new to parents, they found them acceptable and that there was good uptake of the skills learned. These results reflect strong evidence that the participants found most of the skills acceptable, despite their initial uncertainty about the new skills.

### ***Qualitative findings***

The six main themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews were:

- The challenges of parenting in a low-income setting, incorporating issues such as financial constraints, safety and security, lack of skills and deficit in knowledge about parenting teenagers.
- Social norms reflected different approaches to parenting and generational differences.
- New skills learned on the programme covering the appreciation for new skills as well as a greater self-awareness.
- What shifted and changed for parents since embarking on the programme and how this has impacted family life.
- The digital approach and the advantages and disadvantages of running the programme on WhatsApp.
- What parents enjoyed about the programme and highlighted their appreciation for the shared learning experience with other parents and the opportunity for personal growth.

These six themes, their sub-themes, and illustrative quotes, which emerged from the data, are given in Table 6, below.

Table 6: *Main themes and sub-themes*

| Theme                                       | Sub Theme                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Quote example                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Challenges of Parenting</b>              | Communication<br>Financial challenges<br>Safety<br>Parenting and support<br>Lack of skills<br>Limited quality time with children                                                                                                                      | <p>“Being a single parent is challenging... you are responsible for everything and the child expects everything from you”.</p> <p>“Sometimes it is difficult for me to provide something for my kids”.</p> <p>“I feel suffocated by my child and want a space or break”.</p> <p>“I have learned that as a parent you have to give your child quality time, even if it is only five or ten minutes”.</p> <p>“I was depressed after my husband was murdered, so I abdicated responsibility of raising my child – I wasn’t there for my child and others took over caring for her”</p> <p>“They shoot all the time here, people get stabbed. I stay near a tavern and you see children go back and forth with alcohol – this makes me stress that my children will do the same”.</p> |
| <b>Social Norms</b>                         | Corporal punishment<br>Older generation<br>New/ different skills                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>“children can’t express things bothering them, so it’s difficult to reason with them and talk things through and corporal punishment is more effective in these situations”.</p> <p>“Hitting them is punishment so that they remember the pain and don’t repeat the same mistake”.</p> <p>“I grew up knowing that they way to correct a child is by beating them with a stick”.</p> <p>“I am old-school, I don’t like my child to talk back to me. I was raised very strictly with corporal punishment. I used to hit my child as a way of showing power, but now I am learning that there are other ways to get respect from my child”.</p>                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Skills Learned on ParentChat</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Teaching children about emotions</li> <li>• Spending quality time together</li> <li>• Collaborative approach</li> <li>• Complimenting children</li> <li>• Self-awareness</li> </ul> | <p>“The facilitators taught us well and were washing us with bleach – changing our bad habits and old-school parenting practices”</p> <p>“The programme has helped me identify my anger issues and taught me how to deal with my child using creative methods, rather than shouting and beating the child”.</p> <p>“I didn’t think talking about emotions would work – but it does and now we practice with the aunts and uncles”.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>What has changed since the programme</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting more fun</li> <li>• Less physical/ verbal violence</li> <li>• Giving child agency</li> </ul>                                                                                                       | <p>“I see changes. The programme raised awareness about things we never thought about, things we overlooked as parents, that sometimes became challenges as times goes on. The questions they asked made us question your own parenting style, to include your children’s feelings and thoughts when raising them. It taught us to create a conducive environment for the child to tell you about their feelings and to be open to talking to you as a parent”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement in child behaviour/ academics at school</li> <li>• Learning</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Family Bonds</li> </ul>                                                                                                    | <p>“Since the programme my child is performing better at school, she is no longer having behavioural issues at school, she has started playing sport at school and has better friends and is not hanging out with bad elements”.</p> <p>“My son was not doing well at school, but since the programme he is doing very well. He was recently nominated as a school monitor”.</p> <p>“I was a dictator. I didn’t have time to listen to my child, but now everything has changed”</p> <p>“The kids saw the changes...usually I would swear and shout at them when they did something wrong, but now I talk to them as if we are equals”</p> <p>“A lot has changed. Being a parent is more fun. We talk, we laugh, we advise each other, we go out and bond”.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Advantages/<br/>Disadvantages of<br/>WhatsApp</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility/ Convenience</li> <li>• Ease of sharing/ anonymity</li> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Different Perspectives</li> <li>• Personal connection of in-person</li> <li>• Practical issues: phones/ data</li> </ul> | <p>“On WhatsApp you can do it in your own free time, you didn’t need to physically attend a programme while short on finances to travel to the venue. WhatsApp eliminated these problems, so online was better”</p> <p>“The ease of talking on voice notes and ease of access for people in remote areas which makes it easier for them to access the help they needed”.</p> <p>“It made it easier for me to answer the questions in my own spare time and to read other people’s advice and approaches so that I can compare them with my own”</p> <p>“You could speak freely about things that you were uncomfortable about sharing about your child’s behaviour ‘cause you know these people don’t see or know me”</p> <p>“I liked being able to catch up and see what was shared if you miss a session”.</p> <p>“In-person opens up a better space for trust”.</p> <p>“It would have been good to have some in-person sessions to read body language and their emotions”</p> <p>“Some people struggled with data issues and having their phones charged”</p> |
| <b>What parents<br/>enjoyed about the<br/>programme</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning opportunities</li> <li>• Shared experiences with other parents</li> <li>• Understanding children better</li> <li>• Personal Growth</li> </ul>                                                                                 | <p>“When you are alone, you do not learn from your mistakes. You learn when you are around others”.</p> <p>“Sometimes as a parent we do things in a specific way, but as you hear from other parents, you learn new methods and you start to try them and ParentChat gave us ideas of how to start and the do’s and don’ts of raising children”</p> <p>“I learned so much about being a better parent. I only knew I didn’t want to be like my parents, but I didn’t know how to go about it. The programme gave me a better perspective and I will forever practice the tips and skills gained. Take a deep breath, calm down, praise your child for good behaviour, give clear and practical instructions, listen to their crisis and offer support, create playtime...”</p> <p>“We play together, talk about their dreams and aspirations and sometimes even give them time to tell me things they don’t like about me. I am enjoying being a parent”.</p>                                                                                                    |

### **Theme 1: Challenges of Parenting**

Parents described numerous challenges in parenting, including the environments of poverty and violence in which they lived, the social norms around parenting that were transmitted to them over generations, the influence of others living around them, financial challenges and single parenting. The parents interviewed named and identified several new skills they had learned on the programme and reflected on the positive impact of these skills for themselves and their families. This indicated strong acceptability of the programme, despite the context where many of the concepts initially felt alien or unfamiliar.

Respondents shared their views on the acceptability of the delivery of the ParentChat programme on WhatsApp, highlighting both the benefits and disadvantages of attending a digitally presented programme. The majority of parents interviewed enjoyed the flexibility of meeting online, not having to travel and being able to share relatively anonymously on WhatsApp. However, there was sentiment expressed that it would have been beneficial to have personal contact and opportunities to engage face-to-face and have some in-person sessions.

#### **Context of parents interviewed**

The context of the parents who participated in the study was a challenging one. The two significant contexts for the parents were their physical living spaces – their neighbourhoods which are impacted by poverty and violence and secondly the social norms around raising children and the use of corporal punishment. Physical safety and economic survival were key concerns for the majority of parents who took part in this study and who live in challenging economic circumstances. COVID-19 also impacted the families significantly with health anxiety, some caregivers losing their jobs, schools being closed, parents needing to assist their children with online learning, and restrictions in movement as a result of lockdown regulations meaning that parents and children were living in constant close confines. The WHO Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children (2020) described how during COVID-19, “restrictions on movement, loss of income, isolation, and overcrowding heightened levels of anxiety and stress in parents, caregivers and children, and cut families and individuals off from their usual sources of support” (pv).

The lived experience of many of the families in the study included high levels of unemployment, crime, large extended families, and living in confined, and densely populated living spaces with limited financial resources. Safety was a significant concern expressed by parents who live in crime-stricken and violent communities where their children are exposed to drugs, substance abuse, gangs and gender-based violence. One parent, who together with

her young daughter, watched her husband gunned down in front of their home, said the following,

“I was depressed after my husband was murdered, so I abdicated responsibility of raising my child – I wasn’t there for my child and others took over caring for her” (P11, Gauteng).

Parents interviewed expressed anxiety about the influence of drugs and gangsterism in their communities and fear that their children would mix with a ‘bad crowd’ and drop out of school, that daughters would be raped, fall pregnant and take drugs and alcohol and resort to crime. This unsafe environment restricted children’s ability to play outside safely and created fear on the part of parents about their child’s physical well-being.

“They shoot all the time here, people get stabbed. I stay near a tavern. You see children go back and forth with alcohol – this makes me stress that my children will do the same”. (P25, W. Cape).

“Where I stay there are too many Nyaope<sup>2</sup> (Mthembi et al., 2018) addicts. Each time your child goes outside, you worry as to where he is and whether he is exposed to the Nyaope or the violence that comes with it”. P7 (Gauteng).

These fears were not unfounded. In an Institute of Security Studies report citing the South African Police Service (SAPS) crime statistics for 2020 and 2021, when this study took place, they indicated that 19, 972 people were murdered across South Africa over one year. There were 46, 214 sexual offences recorded, including 36, 330 rape cases. 143, 393 cases of assault with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm were reported, 119 and 841 cases of robbery with aggravating circumstances. Drug-related crimes totalled 121, 359 and illegal possession of firearms and ammunition were 12, 930. These reflect a violent society, with little respect for human life.

Poverty and high levels of crime and violence frequently co-exist in South Africa, where economic stress can precipitate crime, and violent environments further entrench poverty. Alloush and Bloem’s research (2021) reflects how the poor in South Africa, especially those living in urban areas, exist in neighbourhoods with objectively more violence than those in rural areas and that those living there have higher perceptions of the levels of violence. Their study also showed that families living in urban neighbourhoods with high levels of violence, while poor, was a predictor of future poverty. Research findings by

---

<sup>2</sup> Nyaope is a street drug commonly found in South Africa – a mixture of low-grade heroin, cannabis, antiretroviral drugs and other agents. It is one of the cheapest, most widespread and dangerous addictive substances in South Africa. (Mthembi et al 2018; Khine & Mokwena, K.E. 2016).

Kaminer, et al (2013) in South Africa, indicate that exposure to violence across multiple life domains is a daily occurrence for young adolescents and that they have limited access to safe spaces. This highlights how crime and poverty co-exist in South Africa. This is further emphasised by the WHO report (2020) which states that “conflict settings are often characterized by extreme levels of poverty, high unemployment, crime and violence. Children growing up in such situations are at increased risk of child maltreatment and consequent physical injuries and mental health problems” (p50).

Poverty is a significant family and parenting stressor for parents. Literature suggests varied views on this, and clearly being poor does not correlate to being a violent parent. However, it is more likely that stressed parents could hit their children. This is highlighted by research done by Shenderovich et al. (2023) which examined the effects of the pandemic on the delivery of family support services and showed how increased poverty and stress caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside decreased access to social support services and reduced childcare, elevated the risk of violence against children and harsh parenting. This was evidenced by a 400% increase in calls to the child helplines during lockdown. (Shenderovich et al., 2023). The respondents in their study described challenges arising from families spending increased time together in their homes which were often overcrowded, as a result of school closures and restrictions on movement.

The responses from parents indicate a heightened sense that their children were at risk. Living in areas of gang violence, next to shebeens<sup>3</sup>, there was a very real risk of danger to children living there and the parent’s perception of the threat exacerbated their anxiety. In this study, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of families on the programme were stressed, vulnerable families. In addition to living in violent environments and a challenging context, the Covid-19 pandemic added another layer of financial and economic stress to parents, heightened by restrictions on mobility and living in confined spaces.

While neighbourhood poverty created stressors for families, individually many families also faced financial challenges, unemployment, money and food insecurity and worries about being able to provide sufficiently for children. Financial insecurity was one of the repeatedly emphasized issues mentioned in the interviews. The majority of those interviewed were economically challenged, unemployed or struggling to make a living and support their families. Parents want to give their children everything. Several parents

---

<sup>3</sup> A shebeen is an unlicensed bar or tavern that sells alcohol. The word originated in Ireland and is used in several countries, including South Africa. (Peters, N. 2019).

mentioned that they promised things they knew they could not afford because they did not want to disappoint their children. Others expressed how challenging it is not to overcompensate by giving in to their children's wishes and getting themselves into debt. P3 (KZN) commented that one of his biggest stressors as a parent was finances,

“Sometimes it is difficult for me to provide something for the kids. They have a perspective that I am the parent so I cannot be unable to provide what they want. Meeting those demands is difficult and I had a child before I got married and the stress of having a child out of wedlock, especially the demands of the child's mother is very stressful”.

Adeyefa (2016) explains how attempts to achieve some interim relief from food insecurity might entail parents selling household assets or borrowing money or food from families and neighbours, thereby jeopardizing future income generation potential and increasing debt. This could also mean that parents are compelled to seek employment in a different town or province, and this result in a shift to single-parent, female-headed or child-headed households. In a study by Puff and Renk (2014) into the relationship between parent's economic stress, parenting and young children's behaviour problems, they highlight how research indicates that “the economic stressors experienced by parents are significant predictors of children's emotional and behavioural functioning” (p. 712). Zilanawala and Pilkauskas (2012) found that children in households experiencing material hardship scored significantly higher on externalizing and internalizing behaviours. Additionally, they found that where parents struggled to pay bills, had water and electricity cut off and experienced housing instability, this was adversely related to child behaviour. This was confirmed by a study by McGill et al. (2022), where they found that financial stress during the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with reduced child social and emotional well-being. Their study showed that parenting and financial difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic were associated with higher child socioemotional and behavioural difficulties. Similarly, the study by Shenderovich et al. (2023) showed that the pandemic created new pressures for families and children such as increased poverty, job losses and increased hunger and food insecurity.

What emerged from the interviews with the parents in this study, is that they were already stressed, vulnerable families, living in an environment where violence, crime and poverty predominated. This created fear for parents about their children's safety and impacted their approach to parenting. The social norms about raising children and corporal punishment were influenced by these multiple, intersecting factors. The economic and financial insecurity faced by parents where they lived in often overcrowded homes with large extended families,

was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought with it further stresses and anxiety about health, job losses, schools being shut down and restrictions on movement enforced by lockdown regulations.

### **Single parenting**

Single parenting has been on the rise in recent decades and single parents face multiple challenges such as financial instability, health and social stigma (Jain & Mahmoodi, 2022). The global literature review by Jain and Mahmoodi (2022) shows that single parents have more negative experiences than two-parent families in most cultures across the world. Similarly, research by Chavda and Nisarga (2023) highlights how single parents are often overwhelmed by the responsibilities that two parents usually take on and can lack social support, consequently finding it difficult to make time to spend with their children. A range of studies indicate that single parenting negatively impacts the children of single parents and can result in behavioural issues, and impaired cognitive, social and physical development. (Griffin, 2021; Hakovirta et al., 2021; Ntumi et al., 2016; Rees et al., 2023; Stephen & Udisi, 2016; Tiwari, 2022; Varga, 2021). Most parents interviewed for this study (74%) were single parents. Single-parenting and lack of physical, emotional and financial support were raised as significant challenges by parents, who felt drained and exhausted by parenting alone. They expressed sentiments such as:

“I feel suffocated by my child and want a space or break” (P10 Gauteng);

“The most challenging thing about being a parent is being a single parent raising a teenager. It gets really difficult. There are many obstacles because when you are a single parent you have to do everything by yourself. While being responsible for everything, the child is expecting everything from you. They don’t understand that you don’t have anyone to help you. Sometimes the child wants this, but you can’t afford it. It’s not easy to have enough time for your kids when you are single and have to work”. (P2 KZN).

This comment reflects the social, psychological and financial burden carried by single parents. Many caregivers highlighted how they often wanted a break from the pressures of parenting and that they felt a lack of support for their parenting endeavours.

“Juggling multiple children of different ages is hard”. (P16, E. Cape).

P5 (Gauteng) expressed this, “My working hours are not the same, I don’t have the same time where I am able to spend time with my child – sometimes I can’t spend any time at all with him and I feel that I am not doing enough as a parent because I want to be the one that raises my child in my own way, not in someone else’s way”.

Single parenting brought challenges of an overload of responsibilities as parents managed work, sometimes double shifts, financial constraints and finding time for family life. Thiagarajan et al (2007) showed how work-family role conflict has been related to both health risks and poorer performance in the parenting role. They also found that the potential for increased work-family conflict is greater for single parents than couples because they are solely responsible for managing the competing demands of work and family life. The burden of single parenting, carrying the family roles of both mother and father, uncertainty about what to do about problems and wanting input and sharing of parenting learning, made this group of parents readily open to being part of a parenting programme.

In many of the homes of the participants interviewed, there were multiple children of a wide age range, living in the confines of small home spaces. Juggling multiple children with different needs at different levels was highlighted as a significant challenge by parents. These scenarios add pressure and stress in the home and frustration could result in the ease of using violence to solve immediate issues.

Single parenting thus adds considerable stress to the task of parenting, where parents do not have a partner to share the childcare and financial responsibilities. Many parents struggled to meet the basic needs of their children, including food, clothing, school fees and other personal requirements. John and Shimfe (2020) found that most parents in their study on single parenting in Nigeria were faced with “economic, emotional and social problems which translate into greater risk of embarking on dangerous behaviours by their children such as drugs, alcohol and criminal activities” (p. 5891, 2020). This suggests that the children of single parents could be more at risk than children where there are two parents or other support structures.

### **Impact of living in unsafe areas on the use of corporal punishment**

The stress of living in unsafe, high-risk areas has been shown around the world to be associated with corporal punishment, as parents desperately attempt to keep their children safe (Durrant, 2018; Gershoff, 2002; Lansford & Dodge, 2008). When children break or disobey rules, parents may resort to physical punishment to remind the child not to repeat mistakes. This could also be the parent’s need to adhere to well-defined routines and create order in the chaos in which their families live. Durrant (2018) confirms this, indicating that parents in high-risk environments resort to corporal punishment, to manage the stress and dangers posed by the environment. She comments, “evidence indicates that the combination of fear for children’s safety and a belief in the protective benefits of strict discipline can lead parents to employ corporal punishment as a way to keep children ‘in line’ and reduce

perceived risks in dangerous communities” (p295). The report by UNICEF (2020) and the World Health Organization also highlights how corporal punishment is often more prevalent in areas with higher crime and violence, where parents feel additional pressure to control children’s behaviour under challenging conditions.

For parents living in communities with high crime rates and violence, corporal punishment appears to be viewed as an incisive approach to ensuring obedience and a way to prevent their children from engaging in risky behaviours that could expose them to harm. Walker et al (2022) describe how positive attitudes about corporal punishment could provide fearful parents with a sense of power and control, alleviating fearfulness about being an ineffective parent. Parents’ use of violence could be partly a way to solve problems when they are under duress. This is reflected in the following comment from P27 (W. Cape),

“Children can’t express things bothering them, it is so difficult to reason with them and talk things through and corporal punishment is more effective in these situations”.

The need to keep children safe in dangerous environments is reflected in the comments from the following parents,

“I hit my children because I know it’s good for them – that is what they need to stay away from certain things”. (P22, W. Cape).

“Hitting them is punishment so that they remember the pain and don’t repeat the same mistake”. (P7 Gauteng).

“The problem is that I struggle to be consistent with my implementation, sometimes I just revert to my old ways, and I can’t help it. However, I always realise after a while that I have departed from what I learned from the parent chat program”. P9 (Gauteng)

Despite the challenges of fear and living in unsafe areas, as well as being habituated to ingrained corporal punishment parenting approaches, it was encouraging to see that even though parents reflected that it was not always easy to adopt new methods of positive discipline and despite slipping back into old habits at times, there was motivation and drive to implement what was learned in the ParentChat programme.

## **Theme 2: Social Norms: Intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment**

Corporal punishment tends to be transmitted intergenerationally. Wanga, Wanga and Xinga (2018) describe the process by which “purposively or unintentionally, an earlier generation psychologically influences the parenting attitudes and behaviours of the next generation” (p34). Their research indicated that harsh parental discipline is transmitted across generations. The participants interviewed in this study commented how the majority of the older generation believe in corporal punishment as the norm. They were harshly disciplined

and hit as children and some parents commented that they believe that is an appropriate way to teach respect and good manners. The examples cited by participants below highlight the impact of intergenerational transmission of norms:

“I was raised by my grandmother, I did not know my mother and I felt I was always being punished since my mother was not here. My grandparents failed in communication and just hit me”. (P17, (E. Cape).

“I grew up in a home where my parents and teachers hit us”, P14 (Gauteng)

“My father beat us with a sjambok<sup>4</sup> –he said if you are under my roof, you do as I say”. (P 10, Gauteng).

P19 (W. Cape) said she grew up knowing that “the way to correct a child is by beating them with a stick”.

P8 (Gauteng) explains, “I grew up in a very strict house. If you didn’t do your chores, you would be beaten. It was their way or the highway”.

In South Africa, extended and multi-generational families living in one house are the norm. Often grandparents/ aunts and uncles raise children whose parents may live in different areas/ provinces (Lachman et al., 2016). This can create tensions where generational differences in approaches to child-rearing and discipline arise. In a study in the USA by Klevens et al (2019), when they asked participants why they used spanking, they replied that it was a result of modelling how they were parented and that they were unaware of alternate methods. The Child Gauge report (Hall, 2024) indicates that many children in South Africa do not live with their biological parents and instead are raised by family members such as grandparents. Many parents see their children only infrequently and are likely to have different parenting styles from those with whom their children live. P2 (KZN) explained how she could not afford to hire a caretaker to babysit her child while she was at work, so she sent him to her parents from Monday to Friday and could only spend time with him on Saturdays and Sundays.

However, despite the pervasive influence of previous generations’ approach to discipline, throughout the interview responses in the ParentChat study, parents reflected a desire to shift away from corporal punishment, to adopt a different approach, and to put the child’s needs first. This feedback highlights the generational difference in raising children

---

<sup>4</sup> The sjambok is a heavy leather whip. It is traditionally made from adult hippopotamus or rhinoceros hide, but it is also commonly made out of plastic. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sjambok>

and the fact that despite the approach taught on ParentChat being different from how they were raised; parents were willing to consider adopting new parenting practices.

Another factor that could influence parenting methods and the adoption of corporal punishment, is adverse childhood experiences. Parent's own adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) could impact how they parent their children and result in reliance on spanking. (Afifi et al., 2022). Parents who had been spanked as children may view spanking as an appropriate way to discipline their children. Parents who experienced ACEs, and had traumatic childhood experiences, may have insufficient resources to know how to manage difficult behaviour in their children. A study by Chung et al (2009) found a high correlation between mother's experiences of ACE's and their use of infant spanking. Their findings suggest that trauma such as childhood abuse, extended exposure to "violence in addition to childhood physical abuse, cumulative violence exposure, including sexual abuse, verbal hostility, domestic violence, witnessing a shooting, or knowing a victim of shooting, predisposes mothers to infant spanking use" (p283). A systematic review by Lorec, Lester, Sutcliffe, Stansfield and Thomas (2020) examining interventions designed to assist and support individuals who had experienced adverse childhood events found that while individual interventions to mitigate ACEs, have merit in addressing the ACEs, there is a need to address the social factors of material disadvantage and social isolation and they recommend community interventions to address the consequences of ACEs. This is where parenting programmes such as ParentChat could play a valuable role.

### **Social norms as determinants in the use of corporal punishment**

Violence against children, including corporal punishment, has been found to have a significant impact on children's development and well-being. Corporal punishment itself can be a risk factor for other serious forms of physical abuse (Quail and Ward, 2022). One of the main aims of the ParentChat programme was to reduce violence against children and to offer parents alternative positive parenting methods for disciplining their children. In the section below, I explore some aspects impacting parents and why they choose to adhere to corporal punishment strategies. These are: social norms that impact the use of corporal punishment; adverse childhood experiences (ACE's); limited awareness of alternatives to corporal punishment; intergenerational transmission of this approach and living in unsafe areas where there is a heightened need to instil discipline and protect children.

Fleckman, Taylor, Theall & Andrinopoulos' study (2019) highlighted the role that perceptions of social norms play as determinants for the use of corporal punishment. They found that the majority of parents who perceived high approval of corporal punishment by

neighbours, were more favourably disposed towards utilising it. This is confirmed by a study by Ganz and colleagues (2020) in South Africa, which describes how most parents overestimated how common and accepted violent parenting practices were in their community and underestimated the use of alternative non-violent approaches. This mistaken perception of the prevalence influenced parents' own behaviour. This suggests that parents are more likely to use corporal punishment on their children if they perceive that their neighbours are using this approach. Conversely, those parents who perceive less predominance and support for violent parenting, will probably not adopt these approaches. (Ganz et al., 2020). This provides strong support for running parenting interventions, which disavows misconceptions and provides alternate parenting practices.

While community norms and the perception of what other parents are doing impact approaches to corporal punishment, often faith-based communities add complexity to this issue. Many people have a relatively simplistic view of religious texts as being prescriptive of how to discipline children. Phrases such as 'spare the rod; spoil the child' are often used as justification for using violence to promote the best interest of the child. Corporal punishment is frequently normalised by parents' social groups, and therefore is a widespread form of violence against children (Michaelson, 2023). She describes how faith leaders have often played a critical role in the normalisation process by stressing "interpretations of texts that are rooted in colonial patterns of power and control" (p68). However, the church can also play a positive role in parenting, as evidenced by P25 (W. Cape) who said,

"I learned my parenting from my mother and the church. My church apostle is very good in parenting teachings for kids".

One of the older participants on the programme P15, Gauteng, (a grandparent) described the experience of 'learning the latest education'. This grandmother expressed how she only had a background of Bantu education<sup>5</sup> and said that her parenting style was outdated and that the programme allowed her to be knowledgeable and learn more about new methods of parenting as taught by the facilitators and other parents. Quail and Ward (2022) highlight how the use of corporal punishment often persists because of limited awareness of alternative positive discipline approaches. They stress how "nonviolent options offered to caregivers and teachers must be effective in addressing challenging behaviour or they may be rejected in favour of a return to physical punishment" (p620).

---

<sup>5</sup> So-called "Bantu Education" was part of Apartheid in that black South Africans living under Apartheid only had access to poor quality education that was intended to fit them only for manual labour. (Gallo, 2020)

Concerning discipline and corporal punishment, below are some of the comments of participants which reflect varying attitudes to corporal punishment:

“Children can't express things bothering them, so it's difficult to reason with them and talk things through so corporal punishment is more effective”, (P27, W. Cape).

Another parent, says, “For discipline, some children respond well to talking and others not – so I shout then”. (P14, Gauteng).

“I am old-school, I don't like my child to talk back to me or to repeat myself. I was raised very strictly with corporal punishment. I used to hit my child as a way of showing power, but now I am learning that there are other ways to get respect from my child”. (P19, W. Cape).

“I used to shout at my child when they made a mistake and didn't think talking calmly would work but I tried it and it works”. (P6, Gauteng).

The realisation of the harmfulness of using corporal punishment is revealed in the following comments by parents on their reflections on moving away from corporal punishment:

“My neighbour was beating her daughter excessively for walking with a boy, but I spoke to her and told her it will only make her daughter more determined (P25 W. Cape);

“I am embarrassed because I beat my first child badly (P16 E. Cape).

The complexity of the context of parenting reflected in these respondent's attitudes toward corporal punishment needs to be acknowledged. For some parents, adopting corporal punishment is seen as necessary for safety and survival when parenting in a dangerous context. P9 (Gauteng) commented,

“I don't hit them in a violent manner but sometimes I think it is necessary to make sure that they learn a lesson and don't get into trouble”.

At the same time, many parents expressed a desire to move away from using violence against children and to adopt different ways of parenting. “I listen to my children a lot now and guide them accordingly, rather than screaming or criticizing or shouting at them when they do something”, P26 (W. Cape) and “I have changed my language and no longer swear and use harsh language, threatening to beat my son”, P16 (E. Cape).

We are at a juncture where attitudes to corporal punishment differ significantly. Some parents, many of the older generation, and some religious institutions believe that corporal punishment is necessary, for safety reasons and to instil discipline and teach respect. On the other hand, there is a new emphasis on child rights and an understanding that violence against

children does significant harm and does not work as a discipline strategy. In this study, it was apparent that although many of the parents initially struggled with the cultural differences of the ParentChat approach, there was a strong drive to move away from violent disciplinary practices. This resulted in a shift from an authoritarian style of parenting to parents enjoying a more playful parenting style, where they enjoyed time with their children and where communication skills were enhanced.

### **Is there a place for parenting programmes?**

In answer to the question as to whether there is a place for parenting programmes, the evidence from the programme and the evaluation responses suggests a resounding yes, that there is a place for parenting programmes. Not only does a programme such as ParentChat bring about significant changes in families and aid in solving problems, but it is also visible to others. Other families in the community reportedly commented on changes and wanted tips on how to handle their problems. P2, (KZN) described how other parents in the community approached her about the changes in her daughter and she was able to use the skills she had learned on ParentChat to empower other parents. One parent revealed how her son was no longer hanging out with bad characters and smoking, and another how teachers had noticed dramatic changes in her daughter, who was more engaged at school and starting to get involved in sports and other activities at school. The wider network such as aunts/uncles and teachers also noticed the changes and differences in children. By enhancing children's outcomes such as improved school performance and involvement in positive sporting/ extramural activities, as well as encouraging better friendships, there is the capacity to avoid the negative spiral of being troublesome at school, failing, dropping out, taking drugs and resorting to crime and violence. While parents on the programme expressed that they initially had reservations about the programme not fitting with their perceptions of social norms and internalised ideas about parenting, it is clear from the responses that they appreciated ParentChat and adopted the new skills eagerly.

Given the range of attitudes of parents to corporal punishment, it is important to examine how the parents experienced the ParentChat programme. The parent's interview responses indicated that they learned through ParentChat that they do not have to use corporal punishment. They said they learned new options they had not previously known anything about and that before the programme they had not known what else to do when disciplining their children. P14 (Gauteng) commented,

“The facilitators taught us well and were washing us with bleach, changing bad habits, old school parenting practices”.

This analogy about altering parenting patterns that were not helpful is powerful – the image of bleach, an agent that is good at removing stubborn, tough stains reflects a shift away from ingrained patterns of parenting and discipline.

P7 (Gauteng) said, “ParentChat advised us not to beat our children and said we must sit down and speak to them in a conducive and respectful manner and find creative ways to deal with them. This has been difficult for me with my anger issues, but I found it helpful that the programme helped me identify my anger issues and when it takes over, especially in relating to my child. The programme taught me how to deal with my child using creative methods, rather than shouting and beating the child”.

These comments highlight the extent to which the ParentChat programme had an impact in raising awareness of negative patterns and providing alternatives to corporal punishment practices passed down through generations. Despite the banning of corporal punishment in schools in the 1990’s, it is still happening in South Africa, with dire consequences in some cases. What is important to emerge from this study is that parents did learn new skills and approaches to discipline their children and appreciated the new skills, adopting them readily for the most part.

While the circumstances of the environment in which parents live, work and parent did not change while they were part of the parenting programme, and they continued to endure financial, economic and safety challenges, respondents expressed how they learned about making their homes a more relaxed and enjoyable place to be, reaping the rewards of a more playful approach to parenting. Parents shared examples of teaching children in non-threatening ways, playing games as a family, going to the shops together and teaching the alphabet through products in the grocery store. Many parents expressed the view that despite the stresses, it can be fun to have children around and that parenting had become more fun and playful since the programme, as reflected in the quote by P8 (Gauteng) who commented,

“We play together, talk about their dreams and aspirations and sometimes even give them time to tell me things they don’t like about me. I am enjoying being a parent”.

P21 (W Cape) expressed, “A lot has changed. Being a parent is more fun. We talk, we laugh, we advise each other. We go out and bond”.

Reflecting on what had changed since the programme, parents highlighted how there was less physical and verbal violence and the realization that using violence and shouting only increased and escalated violence.

“Now we sit down and talk things through and it works without using violence.

Talking calmly helps. Hitting a child doesn’t help because sometimes it makes them worse. Sometimes it turns them into violent people”, P13 (Gauteng).

Similarly, P6 (Gauteng) commented, “I used to shout at my child when he made a mistake and I didn’t think talking calmly would work, but I tried it and it works”.

Another learning expressed was the importance of giving children agency and autonomy to make decisions, highlighted in a comment by P9 (Gauteng) who said,

“We share ideas...I stopped that thing where I say my house, my rules...we all contribute to coming up with amicable solutions”.

Parents described an improvement in their children’s behaviour and academic performance.

“My child was wild and all over the place and she used to scare me when she got out of hand. Now she is calmer, listens to me and her behaviour has changed”, (P11, Gauteng).

P21 (W. Cape) describes the academic impact,

“Since the programme, my child is performing better at school, not fighting with teachers and children at school and is making better friends and not hanging out with ‘bad elements’”.

Learning about being a better parent, gaining tips and practical skills, and enhanced communication skills were highlighted as growth areas as a result of the programme:

“I am old-school, I don’t like my child to talk back to me or to repeat myself. I was raised very strictly with corporal punishment. I used to hit my child as a way of showing power, but now I am learning that there are other ways to get respect from my child”, (P19, W. Cape).

Self-learning is reflected in feedback from P17 (E. Cape):

“The thing I found helpful is that I have discovered that I have anger issues, so this helped me to identify this issue and be able to see my anger when it takes over in matters relating to my child. The programme taught me how to deal with my child using creative methods, rather than shouting and beating my child”.

Parents reflected how the combination of new skills adopted and the changes in approach resulted in stronger family bonds, attitudinal shifts and the children being less anxious and more open, as reflected by this parent's response,

"I was strict for no reason and when you raise your child with only yelling, she ends up keeping to herself and not wanting to spend time with me or even have a conversation with me. Now we bake together and she is no longer that child that used to be scared of talking to her mom", (P4, KZN).

### **Theme 3: Skills learned on ParentChat**

We were uncertain how the skills taught on the programme would be accepted by populations with differing social norms, which have established practices of child-rearing. We anticipated some resistance from parents who had been raised by strict parenting practices, where for example children are expected to be seen and not heard, where corporal punishment is the accepted norm and where children are not given a voice. In initial feedback from participants after the first few weeks, some participants said that they thought the programme was too 'white' and Western and that it wouldn't be applicable in their community. Interestingly in the study by Klevens et al. (2019), which recruited participants from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds from five states in the USA, half of the parents believed that they should spank their children and some parents viewed parenting without spanking as a 'white way' to raise children.

Skills such as spending one-on-one time with children, praising a child, and involving the child in decision-making were not initially viewed as culturally appropriate or relevant. When asked whether there were specific skills taught in ParentChat that wouldn't work, P5 (Gauteng) responded,

"Yeah, especially the one where they said you have to ignore kids when they throw tantrums. I was like ah that won't work. I thought most of the skills wouldn't work. I felt like someone was trying to tell me how to raise my own child – what do they know. But it's not really like that, actually they are trying to help you because we didn't have these growing up with our parents".

"There were some things I would doubt would work because we all live different lives within our homes, but when you look at it, the way children are raised needs to be similar. There are things that we believed would not work that ended up working for me. I always believed there were chores for female children and chores for male children but now I see that all children are the same therefore the things that they do at home should be the same too. I also said that girls should stay inside the house and

boys can be outside, but then you discover that girls also like being outside”. (P3 KZN).

### ***Gender-transformative approach to parenting***

In terms of gendered approaches to parenting, P23 (W. Cape) reflected, “I thought there were chores for female children that are different to chores for male children”.

In a systematic review of current large databases, Endendijk, Groeneveld, Bakermans-Kranenburg & Mesman (2016) set out to examine whether gender differences in children’s behaviour occur because parents treat girls and boys differently. Their research which covered papers in English, Spanish, Turkish, Chinese, French and German, revealed how studies published in the 1970s and 1980s reflected parenting attitudes and strategies supporting more autonomy with boys than with girls. Their review led them to conclude that since then there has been minimal difference between the general approach to parenting boys versus girls.

Very little research has been conducted to clarify the effects of differential parenting on child development. A study by Morawska (2020) found that parents communicated differently, played differently and used different socialising approaches with their sons and daughters. Breaking down gender stereotypes and gender inequality and promoting equal opportunities for boys and girls, while encouraging parenting skills that enhance caring, non-violent and more equal family relationships is an important goal for parenting programmes to address (UNICEF, 2023). Gender norms and patriarchal attitudes underlie much violence against children (VAC) and violence against women (VAW), and the hope is that gender-transformative parenting would mean that future generations don’t replicate that. This iteration of PLH was not explicitly designed to be gender transformative. However, the original in-person programmes had been reviewed by gender specialists, and it appeared that they had some success in shifting gender attitudes. Further emphasis on this could strengthen future versions of the parenting programmes to incorporate topics of gender transformation, and thus potentially help to establish more equitable power dynamics in families.

The World Health Organization encourages a gender-transformative approach to preventing violence against girls and women. “Gender transformative interventions engage men and boys to reflect critically on—and then to challenge and change— gender-inequitable attitudes and behaviours” (Brush and Miller, 2019, p1635). Research by Meinhart et al. (2024) shows that although there are as yet few studies of gender transformative parenting programmes, especially in low- and middle-income countries, there are promising examples

such as Safe at Home (Meinhart et al., 2024) and One Man Can (Van den Berg, Hendricks, Hatcher, Peacock, Godana, & Dworkin, 2013). This highlights that it may be feasible and useful for future parenting programmes to have gender transformation as a goal.

The comments by parents interviewed, about recognising the commonality of the needs of their male and female children, reflected a shift in attitude in gender stereotypes and norms.

#### **Theme 4: Shift in parenting practices**

While we expected some changes in approach after running the ParentChat programme, it was surprising to find a fairly radical shift in parenting approaches as described by respondents during the post-programme interviews. Overall, parents revealed that despite the differences in cultural understanding and approach, and the context in which they live of economic insecurity and highly stressful and dangerous communities, they found the programme valuable and grew personally through the process. Contrary to initial scepticism about the relevance and applicability of the programme, several parents shared how other parents in the community had approached them to teach them the skills they learned and to share their parenting approaches. There were also multiple requests to continue running the programme, to run it for other parents who wanted to learn the skills and for refresher sessions to enhance the skills learned. Below are comments from participants about their learnings about specific skills taught in the ParentChat programme:

“I didn’t believe I should have to listen to my child - I believed she must listen to me and I didn't listen to her, but now I have learned to listen to my children and I talk more calmly and don’t use violence”. (P8 Gauteng)

“Didn't think talking about emotions would work - but it does and now we practice with the aunts and uncle” (P18 E. Cape).

“I had doubt about some skills because we live different lives in our homes and I didn’t think talking about emotions, praising our children could work for us. But I realised that children need to be raised in similar ways. Things we believed wouldn't work ended up working for us” (P6, Gauteng).

Concerning talking things through with children, P3 (KZN) comments,

“I didn’t think sitting down and talking/ discussing emotions – but it helped lots and now we have a closer relationship”.

“When we first used one-on-one time it didn’t really work, then when we did it sharing our emotions we both cried which showed it worked”. (P10 Gauteng)

“In the past we learned things, but now changing was hard, it took some time for me because I was inconsistent with using the skills, but when I started doing it consistently, I started seeing change”. (P19 W. Cape)

Respondents described a shift in communication skills and style such as no longer shouting or swearing at children, but listening to their child, asking questions before punishing, teaching children to talk about emotions, learning to engage children who were withdrawn, setting clear ground rules and making expectations clear. P7 (Gauteng) describes the impact of talking about emotions with her child:

“I learned not to ask them when they are angry or sad, but to wait till they are in a better mood and slowly approach them with questions because they are likely to be more cooperative when happy. When he is cheeky I feel like smacking him, but I have learned that he wants a reaction and that the key is to keep quiet and observe, not losing my cool so that I can speak to him later”.

Respondents also highlighted the impact of spending quality one-on-one time with their children, learning and discovering from their child and the importance of making time to spend together, no matter how limited that time was.

“I learned the importance of giving my child quality time, no matter how short the time together is” (P16 E. Cape).

Parents described the impact of developing a collaborative approach to parenting where there is joint decision-making and setting rules, negotiation and shared learning from each other. Complimenting and praising children, and acknowledging good behaviour and success were mentioned as valuable skills learned that enhanced closeness between parent and child.

A systematic overview by Quail and Ward (2022) which examined nonviolent discipline options revealed that a range of evidence-supported interventions exist, which are effective across different cultural contexts in reducing challenging behaviours and increasing more appropriate behaviour. Interventions such as spending one-on-one time with children were shown to have evidence of better self-regulation and higher self-esteem. Talking about emotions showed a decrease in the likelihood of child conduct issues and antisocial behaviour and aggression. Warm, open communication between parent and child impacted negative sexual behaviour and showed a reduction in adolescent substance abuse. Their review showed that significant and sustainable positive outcomes were evidenced when parents adopted these interventions. They concluded that these positive discipline tools need to be promoted for optimum childhood development as well as violence prevention.

### **Theme 5: Moving to a digital approach of running a parenting programme**

As a result of COVID-19, this programme was run on WhatsApp instead of in person. This had positive and negative consequences and while the majority of parents appreciated and enjoyed doing the programme on WhatsApp, others felt frustrated by elements of the digital programme and felt they could have benefited from having some in-person sessions. Parents described the digital approach as parenting in the modern world, using technology for efficiency, highlighting how it accommodated differing schedules, was accessible and allowed for flexibility and was useful for time constraints and transport issues.

The advantages raised included the accessibility and convenience of being able to watch videos and read and give feedback when convenient if they were working, not having to travel to a venue, the ease of talking on voice notes and offering access for people in remote areas.

“It was fine on WhatsApp because you can do it in your own free time, you didn’t need to physically attend a program while short on finances to travel to the venue. WhatsApp eliminated these problems, so online was better” (P8, Gauteng).

Respondents cited that they could share more comfortably on WhatsApp than face-to-face, while others said it would have been easier to build trust and understand other parents’ emotions if they were face-to-face. In terms of the content of the material, respondents said they found the material easy to engage with, they enjoyed the cartoons and videos and they liked being able to share resources. While some parents felt that WhatsApp was good for listening to different perspectives, gaining exposure to different ways of solving problems and benefiting from the power of the shared experience, others expressed that they felt the time wasn’t sufficient and that they were tired and could not always chat or share and that they were concerned about burdening others with voice notes. Some parents struggled with connectivity and data issues, some parents lost or had their phones stolen or felt distracted by multi-tasking and having children around them while doing the programme on WhatsApp.

The men who attended the programme found the digital approach less threatening and found it easier to fit in with the largely female groups. They were able to participate more flexibly while still being the primary breadwinners. A digital programme is also valuable for men who adopt a traditional approach to masculinity and do not necessarily want to be seen to be involved in parenting. They enjoyed the anonymity of WhatsApp, where they said there was less judgement and more privacy. A traditional approach to masculinity, often shaped by cultural, political and economic contexts, impacts what is considered appropriate and acceptable fathering practice. Fathers are seen as primarily the breadwinners and housework

and parenting has often been viewed as the domain of mothers. Hegemonic masculinity traditionally embodies qualities of the father as being strong, successful, unemotional, overly authoritarian, absent, disinterested and emotionally detached (Schoppe-Sullivan, Shafer, & Kamp Dush, 2021; Petts, Shafer & Essig, 2018; Hunter, Riggs & Augoustinos, 2017).

Being able to engage in a parenting programme in a relatively anonymous manner, to read through tips, suggestions and scenarios and feedback and input from other participants, reportedly enabled an easier and less intimidating learning opportunity, particularly for men.

The digital approach is an important consideration because globally there is a shift towards going digital with numerous ventures and initiatives, which are showing positive results. This is evidenced by the successes of programmes such as ChattyCuz, a WhatsApp chatbot intervention which delivered content on healthy relationships, (De Phillip et al. 2023), MoodPrism, a mental health reflection app related to improvements in mental health and well-being (Bakker and Rickard, 2018) and FeelStressFree, a cognitive behavioural therapy-based mobile application in the Philippines that provided promising results of a digital intervention for treating anxiety and depression in students, which is intended to overcome barriers to otherwise accessing CBT (McCloud et al., 2020). All of these digital programmes and apps appear to have had a significant impact in educating, providing support and reducing negative symptoms.

In a review of studies on mental health apps, Marshall, Dunstan and Bartik (2020) found the benefits of the digital approach to be those of portability and accessibility – allowing immediate access to assistance at any time, and that it was also a convenient way of engaging with homework activities, as well as receiving reminders. However, they do highlight that further research into the efficacy needs to be conducted.

Some of the participants' comments highlighting the positive appreciation of running the programme on WhatsApp were as follows:

“I think it was fine, in the modern day we must learn to use technology to learn new skills and embrace it” (P8, Gauteng).

“It makes it easy for people in remote areas to access the help they needed and also it made it easy for me to answer the questions in my own spare time and to read other people's advice and approaches so that I can compare them with my own”. (P16, E. Cape).

“You could even speak freely about the things that you were uncomfortable sharing about your child's behavior 'cause you knew that these people don't see or know me, they're just here to support and advise you. It would've been hard to sit down with

them in a space where some of them might recognise you cause then you'd get wary of them knowing your child's faults. I would have struggled to share if face to face" (P20, W. Cape).

"I wasn't gonna open up about my child's behaviour and gotten the advice I needed, so it was much easier since we couldn't see each other" (P11, Gauteng).

"WhatsApp makes it easy to read others advice and approaches so I can compare with my own and made it easier for me to answer questions in my own time" (P7, Gauteng).

"On WhatsApp you get to evaluate yourself and how you are getting on with skills taught". (P27, W. Cape).

"I liked being able to catch up and see what was shared if you miss a session" (P13, Gauteng).

While there was strong support for running the programme on WhatsApp and the convenience of this method, particularly during the Covid-19 lockdown, some of the criticisms of running the programme on WhatsApp were as follows:

"There wasn't enough time on WhatsApp when we met". (P3, KZN).

"I didn't want to burden others with listening to long voice messages" (P19, W. Cape).

"It was distracting having a child next to you while you were on WhatsApp". (P13, Gauteng).

Having multiple demands being made, is reflected by P20's comment,

"It could be distracting when multi-tasking".

"Sometimes you were weary and couldn't always share" (P16, E. Cape).

"I would prefer in person: sitting sharing and supporting each other as parents"( P22, W. Cape).

"In person opens a space for better trust", (P9, Gauteng).

"Would have been good to have some in person sessions to read body language and their emotions" P24 (W. Cape).

"We would have connected better and in a more personal way in person. Your child is next to you and you still have to attend to the kids as well while on WhatsApp...having that conversation face to face again and connecting on a personal level that was gonna make it much more impactful" (P5, Gauteng).

In South Africa where there isn't always easy and affordable access to data, connectivity and electricity and where some parents share cellphones, there were practical

issues raised around connectivity, having working phones, internet connection and sufficient data to participate.

“Some people struggle with data issues and having their phones charged” (P17, E. Cape).

The impact of Covid and the challenges of connecting with others is displayed in P14’s comment,

“Didn't think online would work, but with Covid, it did”.

There are clearly both advantages and disadvantages to running the programme on WhatsApp. While some parents expressed appreciation for accessing the programme via WhatsApp on mobile devices, others said they would have preferred being able to meet in person. It is evident that for parents for whom in-person participation is impossible, this format is beneficial and provides ease of access to the programme. Considering the restrictions and rulings enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic about group gatherings, this was a convenient format to utilise when in-person sessions were not feasible. There were also several requests for a “hybrid format”, i.e., some in-person groups even while some content is delivered digitally.

#### **Theme 6: Group/shared learning from other parents**

Repeatedly highlighted as a significant benefit of the programme was an appreciation for this being a group programme, where learning took place from the shared wisdom and experiences of other parents. Feedback was that it highlighted the commonality of experience and that there was power and wisdom gained from the shared experiences. Man and Man (2014) emphasise the importance of the group as a shared learning community where parents themselves are the sources of learning, bringing and sharing their own knowledge and experiences as they learn from one another.

“When you are alone, you do not learn from your mistakes. You learn when you are around others”. (P2, KZN)

This was echoed by P4 (KZN) who commented,

“Overall, there was a lot we did not know that we learned from others and there are other parents who learned a lot from our own experiences”.

This suggests that the group, even online, functioned as a form of group therapy. Parents remarked on how they identified with and learned a great deal from the experiences of others. In his classic work, Irvin Yalom (1985) identified eleven core therapeutic factors that contribute to successful group therapy. Many of these factors identified by Yalom, appeared to be present to varying degrees in the ParentChat groups. These are: universality:

group members realize that they are not alone in their suffering; imparting information: specific to the situation faced by group members; altruism: group members begin to develop confidence as they realise they have something of value to offer others in the group; imitative behaviour where group members learn effective approaches to confronting challenges from each other; and group cohesiveness, which gives participants a sense of acceptance, belonging and value which is an empowering experience and can be a catalyst for self-disclosure and change.

Man and Man (2014) describe how “parent education programmes enable participants to examine and reflect collaboratively on their parenting experiences within a group-based conversation, developing self-awareness and self-confidence as a parent” (p54). When asked about what was most useful about the ParentChat programme, the majority of participants said they found learning from other parents, discussing other parents’ strategies and sharing ideas very helpful. For parents, having the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences and circumstances and the diversity of their environment, as well as the areas of commonality with other parents, clearly provides a valuable learning experience. Exposure to other parents’ approaches provided access to alternative and creative parenting methods; and knowledge about how other parents dealt with difficult behaviour.

“What I found useful is, you know, sometimes as parents we do things a specific way, but as you hear from other parents, we learn new methods and you start trying those methods, the ParentChat programme sort of gave us ideas on how to start, the do’s and don’ts of raising children”. (P26, W. Cape).

This is echoed by research from Yuen (2017) which found that parent education programs should not only be a method to teach parenting skills and knowledge but should also serve as a supportive environment of mutual learning and networking for parents.

Feedback from one participant, P2 (KZN), reflects that some of the benefits of group work transfer well to the digital approach:

“Very good on WhatsApp because we could listen to different people's views, and someone would come up with an idea that you did not even think of. And you would find that you were experiencing the same thing and never even noticed it. So, you can’t share alone, you need to share with other people”.

And while parents could discuss parenting issues in their informal social settings, parenting programmes differ from this approach. Some parents may feel uncomfortable talking about difficulties with their child and admitting to their challenges, for fear of being judged by their friends. Rodrigo, Martin, Maiquez & Rodriguez (2007) found in their

research that at-risk mothers relied heavily on available friends and neighbours as well as social services, for differing sources of help. As a result of the challenging circumstances they faced, and the lack of personal resources, many of the at-risk mothers had to turn to external sources of support for personal and family issues. In a study by Powell and Eisenstadt (1988), they found that it was not clear how emotional sharing and emotional support addressed the needs of gaining new insights and ideas and educational input. Their research showed that the informal exchange of ideas had the potential to reinforce the status quo. From their work and that of Rodrigo et al. (2007), it is apparent that there is merit in both the formal and informal conversations between parents together with providing helpful educational material. It was evident that for the parents in this study, being part of a group where everyone had come to learn about parenting, they had the freedom to say, ‘I have this issue with my child, what do others have to say or how have you handled this?’ This group parenting process also normalises the idea that parenting is tricky/ challenging/ hard and that parents don’t always have all the answers – and that it is acceptable to ask for help. There is also evidence that simply joining a parenting programme may reduce stress. Research by Post-Kammer (1988) on Parenting Anonymous, which provides support-group services for families and generates community awareness of child abuse and neglect, in the USA, revealed that the longer a parent attended Parenting Anonymous, the better they understood their children and these parents tended to have less stress and fewer abuse issues and more positive feelings about themselves and their children. The author suggested that the act of committing to attend the self-help group and tapping into the informal social network was possibly a significant factor in reducing parenting stress. Similar factors appeared to have been at play in the ParentChat groups.

### **Other benefits of the programme**

One of the other major benefits of the programme expressed by respondents was that of enhanced self-awareness, for example about anger issues, how the environment the parent creates dictates the child’s behaviour and the importance of modelling the behaviour you expect from your child. P17 (E. Cape) explains a shift in her attitude as a parent,

“I used to be rude or aggressive, I could not be calmed – I used to sprint and be quick to give a hiding and this programme made me change and slow down with the kids and if they don’t follow my instructions I communicate and ask the reasons and listen to them and also give them autonomy to make decisions. I used to dictate to my children but now I find common ground, and this has helped me grow”.

P9 (Gauteng), explained how there had been a positive shift in her relationship with her son, “Let your child lead - you don't always have to lead as parent – they can teach you”.

Despite the apparent difference in social norms, the respondents described the significant benefits gained from learning new skills on the ParentChat programme and expressed appreciation and enjoyment of the learning opportunities afforded them by attending ParentChat. It was evident that most parents valued the input, learning from other parents and having a space to practice and enhance their parenting skills.

P20 (W. Cape), said “It’s amazing, I learned so much about being a better parent. I only knew I didn’t want to be like my parents, but I didn’t know exactly how to go about it. The programme gave me a better perspective and I’ll forever practice all the tips and skills gained. Take a deep breath, calm down; praise your child for good behaviour, give clear and practical instructions, listen to their crisis and offer support, create play time”.

This feedback from this participant reflects the significant impact of the programme, the new learnings, skills developed and willingness to adopt new approaches.

Parents also expressed appreciation for the resources of the programme, which reminded them of what to do in difficult circumstances.

“I was left with a paper to remind me of what to do and how to approach sensitive matters concerning a child”, said P12 (Gauteng).

The majority of respondents enjoyed the cartoons in the programme material which provided good stimulus material for learning about handling specific situations and trying out new techniques.

The power of awareness-raising and new insights produced by the programme, is reflected in the following feedback from P27 (W. Cape),

“It raised awareness about things that we never thought about, things we overlooked as parents, things that sometimes become challenges as time goes on. The questions they were asking makes you question your own parenting style, to include your children’s feelings and thoughts when raising them. In other words, it taught us to create a conducive environment for the child to tell you about his feelings and to be open to talking to you as a parent”.

The majority of parents who attended the ParentChat programme hadn’t previously had time, opportunity or resources to attend courses or gain parenting input, so the educational and learning experience and opportunity of embarking on this course was seen as valuable.

“I learned a lot from the programme because they would also teach us about the different stages that are involved in a child’s growth, such as how to deal with them when they throw tantrums and what you should and should not do. They also teach you the skill to communicate effectively with your child when they are distant or withdrawn and to find out what they are thinking at that moment and stuff. And also to teach them how to share so that they do not keep things on the inside” commented P24 (W. Cape).

In reflecting on what had changed in their family life, respondents emphasized that they were using less corporal punishment, they were enjoying one-on-one time; there was a shift from being angry and wanting to be physical, to keeping quiet and observing, rather than being reactive. For some parents there was an urge at times to resort to the old ways of disciplining their child, but they countered this by keeping quiet and speaking or responding later when they felt calmer. Some parents spoke about not allowing their anger to control their parenting and about clarifying expectations and communicating clearly to ensure that requirements were met. Others explained how they were learning to give their children more responsibility, while also creating a sense of accountability. In the pressure of busy lives, parents spoke of the need to slow down and not rush their child (P22, W. Cape), speaking to them as equals (P14, Gauteng). One parent (P9, Gauteng) who had previously resorted to swearing and shouting at their child, revealed how they had seen a significant change in their child who had been angry and fearful and was now an inquisitive child who was using more reasoning capacity. For this parent, the parent-child relationship had shifted to a more relaxed and easy relationship where they could joke with each other and reprimand and remind each other about the programme. This highlights how both the parent and child benefited from the programme and how it had become a central stimulus for growth and change.

A participant (P3, KZN) commented, “I see changes, I can totally see it. The key is that he must know and understand his chores fully and be capable of carrying them out without supervision. When he knows what is expected of him and what is frowned upon in the household, he usually finds it easy to carry out his duties. He must know what is expected from him when he wakes up, like brushing his teeth, washing his face before eating and doing his bed, including dishes. You must have rules in the house so that even the child can easily assess himself when he is in the wrong and bear in mind a child will not do any chore, except when he knows for a fact that it is expected from him or he was instructed to do so”.

This comment above highlights the importance of clear, concise instructions and clarification of expectations to create the boundaries necessary for children to thrive.

The challenges and rewards of adopting new parenting approaches is reflected in a response from P21 (W. Cape),

“The problem is that I struggle to be consistent with my implementation. Sometimes I just revert to my old ways, and I can’t help it. However, I always realise after a while that I have departed from what I learned from the ParentChat programme”.

It was encouraging to see that real learning had taken place, the seeds of knowledge and insight had been sown and that the principles of the programme had been internalised. Of particular significance is the fact that the time elapsed between the implementation of the programme and the qualitative interviews was two years, thus sustained learning appears to have taken place. These learnings would be strengthened by follow-up programmes to cement the learnings from the initial programme. The trickle-down impact of the programme in the community was reflected in several respondents commenting that others in the community had noticed the changes in the way they were parenting and went to them for advice and input. This is highlighted in the response of P19 (W. Cape) who said,

“The programme helped a lot, because in some instances people ask, how do you do it? How have you made changes? I tell them about the programme, especially in church. Sometimes other parents bring children to me to speak to them”.

The broader impact of the programme at schools was another area highlighted by parents who commented that since the programme, their children were performing better at school, not displaying behavioural issue at school and shifting to better friendships and not hanging out with ‘bad elements’.

P3 (KZN) described how his oldest son was not doing well at school, but since the programme,

“He is doing very well. He was recently nominated as a school monitor. The time I would spend with him previously on his schoolwork was very little, so after the programme, the time we spent on schoolwork increased and I could see where he was struggling. We helped him with that and he is doing well now”.

This reveals how spending time and energy engaging with and assisting his son with schoolwork had boosted the child’s self-esteem and resulted in improved academic performance.

The ParentChat programme appears to have played a significant role in raising awareness of parenting issues, activating new skills, advocating different discipline strategies and exposing parents to new approaches.

### **Activating new skills**

In terms of activating new skills, parents described new ways of being for themselves and their children - shifting their parenting style from an authoritarian to a more child-centred approach. Respondents described how there were parenting skills and approaches that they knew of but hadn't necessarily adopted.

“The programme made me aware of things that I knew but I never really tried. The programme activated some of those things and then it also exposed me to others”, said P9 (Gauteng).

“The programme “raised awareness about things we never thought about, things we overlooked as parents... we learned to include our children’s feelings and thoughts ... and create a conducive environment for the child to tell you about his feelings and to be open to talking to you as a parent”. (p8 Gauteng).

This indicates that many of the skills taught in the ParentChat programme were not unfamiliar to all of the participants. Some of the skills taught were described by participants as being ‘too white’ (P15 Gauteng), ‘too limiting’ (P7 Gauteng) or too culturally different. While some parents tried out the skills and found them helpful, others were more reluctant to adopt them initially. A large proportion of parents had been adopting some positive parenting approaches; however, it appears that the programme provided structure and knowledge for considering and choosing how to react to their children and developing more strategic positive parenting skills. Below are some of the skills parents appreciated learning about, in the order that the programme introduced them.

### **Quality one-on-one time spent with children**

As highlighted by the quantitative and qualitative findings, one of the most valued new skills learned highlighted by participants, was that of giving their children quality time one-on-one. Recognising that spending quality time with children enhances the relationship is reflected in the following feedback from parents:

“No matter how busy you are and how short the time is to give your child, sit with your child and ask them about their day”. (P13, Gauteng).

“I have learnt that as a parent you need to give your child quality time, even if it is only five or ten minutes... it doesn’t have to be more than that... when you return

from work, then you have to sit down and talk to your child and ask them about their day”. (P21, W. Cape).

“Money doesn’t raise a child, love raises them. The irony is that I work long hours away from home and while money is needed, I learned on the programme that while money is needed, being present is what truly matters”. (P5, Gauteng).

A skill highlighted by P20 (W. Cape) as being a valuable one learned, is that of not always feeling that the parent has to lead the conversation but letting the child lead and also allowing the child to choose what it is they want to do with the parent, instead of making the choices for them.

“It makes a huge difference letting the child lead and choose – they enjoy that ‘Okay, my mom is letting me do this, she is letting me choose a game or where we want to go’. They enjoy those experiences and the feeling of being in charge”. (P5 Gauteng)

The realisation that spending quality time with a child and giving them your attention can have a real impact is reflected in the following reflection from P24 (W. Cape),

“The programme taught me to notice things that I had not noticed before. Even the things that I found annoying and nagging from the children, after the programme, I knew that, no man, they just want my attention and I need to give it to them when they need it”.

“We play together, talk about their dreams and aspirations and sometimes even give them time to tell me things they don’t like about me. I am enjoying being a parent” (P8 Gauteng).

A father, P3 (KZN) commented,

“Since the programme, the time I spent with them has increased now. They even challenge me when I leave and ask, ‘Where are you going Daddy and when will you come back?’ So I can see that they enjoy having my presence around, so I give them that time”.

Across the feedback in the interviews, it was apparent that most parents were adopting a more engaged, playful approach to parenting and that the children were interacting more with the parents and the parents enjoying the process of parenting more.

### **Talking about emotions and enhanced communication skills**

The feedback cited above highlights how enhanced communication skills were repeatedly emphasized as important new skills learned.

“If you want your child to listen to you, you need to listen to them”. (P17, E. Cape)

“If you make time for your child and actually hear them, don’t just tell them you don’t like their behaviour, when they have a problem they will talk to you”. (P5 Gauteng)

“Before the programme I didn’t have time to listen to my child and I was prescriptive, I used to tell my child what to do - it was simpler to tell him what to do and he didn’t listen”. P2 (KZN)

This parent (P2) then elaborated how the programme and developing enhanced communication skills assisted her in understanding adolescents and their actions by learning to listen and attempt to understand the child before judging and punishing them.

Other parents commented on new learning in terms of the importance of the tone of voice:

“Listening and guiding versus criticism and shouting; showing respect to my child, trusting him; greeting each other, showing appreciation and manners towards each other and advising each other”. (P14, Gauteng).

This reflects a recognition that children have a voice, that their perspectives are valid and valuable, that there is merit in sitting down and talking things through and that this approach can work without using physical and or emotional violence.

Creating reciprocal communication channels is highlighted in the following response,

“He responded well because he started talking to me about his schoolwork and showing interest in his schoolwork and talking about it, which is very different from what he used to do. What I like is that it opened a communication channel for him to tell me when I do something he doesn’t like and for me to do the same without him feeling like I am attacking him”. (P8, Gauteng).

### **Using praise and complimenting children**

Learning to compliment and praise children and developing open communication was another skill frequently cited by parents as a useful one learned during the programme.

Praising children was seen as a skill that many parents initially thought wouldn’t work. They thought that by praising their children, ‘they would get too big for their boots’ (P22, W. Cape), and would be difficult to discipline, however after several months of implementation, it was seen as a useful skill that positively impacted parent-child relationships.

“My child was surprised and encouraged by praise”. (P16, E. Cape);

“I observed a huge improvement in my child’s behaviour by using praise” (P19, W. Cape).

Parents interviewed describe how they had learned to compliment their children when they behaved well and did good things, such as helping around the house, achieving well at

school and helping younger children. The powerful impact of using praise is reflected in the following feedback from a parent,

“You know I would observe an improvement within him and sometimes, when I would ask him something...I would be listening intently, and I would tell him that you did well today. And he would be surprised and tell me that he is happy because he knows that it is not easy for you to say, ‘good job’. But I now know that he could that I couldn’t praise him before. Now I would practice praising him and encouraging him”. (P20, W. Cape).

### **Shift from an authoritarian approach to household rules and routines**

For many parents, to gain the respect of their child, and because of learned patterns from previous generations of parents, an authoritarian approach to being a parent was viewed as important. Parents expressed the belief that not being in control and making all the rules was a sign of weakness. By developing skills of involving children in decision-making, generating family rules and deciding jointly on discipline, parents noticed the positive impact of adopting a more collaborative approach. In terms of the shift from an authoritarian parenting approach to a more collaborative approach, P12 (Gauteng) describes,

“Previously, my approach was based on strength: I am your parent, and you are my child. I didn’t have to listen to him and what he thought and felt was irrelevant”.

This theme was repeated by several parents and P5 (Gauteng) echoes how the programme changed her,

“As a parent you always think you are right, so it (the programme) changed me in a way that if I do something wrong, I would take ownership and say I’m sorry to the point where if I don’t say sorry for screaming at him he would say ‘mommy you didn’t say sorry’, so it taught me to take ownership”.

Another parent, P26 (W. Cape) says, “I listen to my children a lot now and guide them accordingly, rather than screaming or criticising or shouting at them when they do something. I have learned to listen to them and to compliment them when they do well. When you look at this, these are the values of life. Respecting someone and trusting them to do things. In the morning, we now greet each other and ask when you want things done and say thank you when they are done. Just because you are an adult, does not give you the right to be harsh to children”.

This comment reflects a dramatic shift in approach to parenting from the way the parents interviewed were themselves parented. P4 (KZN) explained how her mother was extremely strict and so she became a very strict parent:

“I was strict for no reason and when you raise your child with only yelling, she ends up keeping to herself and not wanting to spend time with me or even have a conversation with me”.

This mother described how since the programme she and her daughter spend time together and bake together. In terms of their communication she comments,

“She is no longer that child that used to be scared of talking to her mom, things are not the way they used to be”. (P4 KZN)

Another parent, P10 (Gauteng), highlighted how they had learned in the programme that you can’t expect children to know something that you have never taught them. The impact of how the parents themselves were parented was reflected in participants’ reflections on significant generational shifts:

“When we were young, we listened to our elders regardless of how they addressed us and how it made us feel as kids. We listen even when adults said something hurtful; we were not given an opportunity to voice out our feelings”, (P8, Gauteng).

When asked what changes the parent had observed in their child, P8 (Gauteng) said,

“Now we are able to talk to each other and hold a conversation and sometimes we even pray together. We clean together and he understands that he does not need to wait for me to tell him to clean the house – when it’s dirty, he just cleans because he understands that he lives here so he must clean when there is a need”.

This is echoed by P9 (Gauteng),

“We share ideas... I stopped that thing where I say my house my rules... we all contribute to coming up with amicable solutions”.

This shows a power shift, giving children agency and allowing the child to have a voice and input into decisions made in the household.

### **Involving the child in discipline**

In terms of a shift away from authoritarian parenting and utilizing good communication skills to teach children about rules, consequences and discipline, P11 (Gauteng) described how learning to do things differently in terms of discipline and listening skills and involving the child in decision-making, caused a major change:

“My child was wild and all over the place and used to scare me when she got out of hand, now she is calmer, listens to me and her behaviour has changed”.

This collaborative approach to parenting and open communication represents a significant shift in parenting style described by quite a few respondents.

“My child can challenge me if I am shouting; my child has taught me a lot by me listening to him and not just shouting”. P24 (W. Cape).

“I have changed my language and no longer swear and use harsh language, threatening to beat my son”. (P16, E. Cape)

Another approach raised by a parent regarding his personal learning was about the timing of giving feedback and discipline.

“You should not try to ask the child when he is angry or sad, because he thinks you are trying to attack him or pick a fight with him. It is easier to just wait for him until he is happy or in a good mood and just slowly approach him with all these questions you want to ask. He’s usually more cooperative when he’s happy”. P4 (KZN).

“What I learned is that you must not always be strict, you need to be calm most of the time when you are talking to your child. This was something that I did not have, especially for myself, that I do not need to be strict about everything. I need to be calm so that I can be comfortable with the child, and this will help me to address their problem better”. P7 (Gauteng).

### **A generational shift in parenting style**

What emerged from the interviews was that the parenting approach taught in the ParentChat programme significantly differed from how many participants had been raised. Many of the respondent’s parents were extremely strict, there was minimal discussion and communication with children, fathers often beat their children, and they were raised in homes and schools where parents and teachers beat and shouted at children regularly. This highlights how corporal punishment is learned and often carried down intergenerationally. One of the goals of ParentChat, was to disrupt this pattern, where corporal punishment was viewed as the only way of disciplining children, to provide alternative methods and to encourage a collaborative, caring and non-violent approach.

“Usually when you do things, you lead the way that you were led. Our parents shouted at us for every little thing. I said you know what, I’m not gonna do that, I’m gonna change that routine”. (P5 Gauteng).

For some parents, the programme was a revelation in seeing that there were different ways of disciplining children and as P7 (Gauteng) said,

“I can choose how to raise my child in my own way, using my own unique parenting style”.

Reflecting on her own upbringing, P17 (E. Cape) commented,

“When we were young, we listened to our elders regardless of how they addressed us and how it made us feel as kids. We listened even when adults said something hurtful; we were not given an opportunity to voice out our feelings. But now I’ve learned to use open communication with my child, he can say ‘Mama, why are you shouting at me a lot? What did I do?’ So my child is teaching me now that I let him talk to me”.

Similarly, P13 (Gauteng) shared: “I have lost the mentality that I cannot be told anything by a child. Now we sit down and talk things through and it works without using violence. Talking calmly helps. Hitting a child doesn’t help because sometimes it makes them worse. Sometimes it turns them into violent people”.

This reduction in the use of corporal punishment is encouraging and the recognition that violence begets further violence is reflected in P12’s (Gauteng) comment,

“I used to beat my son, but I have realised it isn’t the best way to deal with things”. This insight into how using violence propagates a cycle of violence, is pertinent in meeting one of the fundamental goals of the programme, namely the reduction of violence against children.

“I was fearful that if I gave over control, children would disrespect me and be disobedient; and that they would want to control me”. (P23 W. Cape)

This comment by P23 shows insight into prior beliefs that it was considered a weakness to relax a totalitarian approach that did not allow the child to be involved in making decisions and a belief that doing so would impact the parent-child relationship negatively.

### **Changing language and adopting positive parenting to discipline children**

While some parents saw using corporal punishment as being necessary to teach respect, and to ensure that children learn their lessons and were kept safe in dangerous environments, they acknowledged that alternate ways of disciplining children and involving them in choosing consequences was beneficial and improved the relationship between parent and child. Reflecting this shift, participant, P14 (Gauteng) said,

“I used to tell him, ‘I’ll beat you’ and look at him in a menacing manner; then I would hit him if he does not listen, despite the threats. I would take a flip-flop and spank him with it. Now I just observe so that I can speak to him later”.

Another parent, P1 (KZN) adds, “I shout if they do something wrong – I know what’s right for them”.

This could arise from fear and alludes to a need to protect the child and keep them out of danger. This parent expressed a desire to shift from this approach but said she sometimes

slipped back into her old ways of shouting. The benefits of adopting new parenting skills and strategies was reflected in the following parent's comment (P27, W. Cape),

“Bad habits can ruin a person's personality. When you are used to swearing at people, you end up feeling like that is normal. It becomes a habit. So we learned to not let those things become a habit and to make a change.”

Many parents interviewed indicated that they used both positive and negative approaches to discipline and parenting. Research by Lansford et al. (2014) found that if parents used both harsh and positive forms of parenting, it had a more negative impact on the children than if they utilised only one or the other. This creates uncertainty on the part of the children, not knowing where they stand with their parents and whether they will be accepted and have a positive interaction with their parents, or whether they will be punished. The study also found that in the context of high parental warmth towards children, corporal punishment may be especially damaging (Lansford et al., 2014).

### **Challenges of co-parenting**

As highlighted by Lin et al (2024), positive co-parenting is critical for parenting and child outcomes, particularly for new parents, who can be prone to increased conflicts and stress in their marital relationships. Supportive co-parenting, and a collaborative approach to raising children, as highlighted in a study by Pan et al. (2024), is shown to be a protective factor that can result in child and family well-being. On the other hand, their study showed that non-supportive parenting, characterised by parental conflict and disagreement regarding child-rearing practices was a potential risk factor for child development and strained family relationships.

Respondent P3 (KZN) described in her interview how in dealing with her difficult 13-year-old teenage son, she got frustrated with him and used aggressive, harsh language with him and beat him regularly. Through the experience of the programme, this parent realised that this was making the situation worse and was not the best way to deal with her teenage son, so she changed her language and no longer beat him, and she noticed a shift in his behaviour. The mother then spoke to her husband and said she wanted to use a different approach that she had learned on the programme, however, he wanted to use corporal punishment to forcefully instil discipline in the child, not communicating with the child and allow him to share feelings. He said he would then determine which approach would work best for the child. Another parent, when asked what was stressful about parenting, said,

“Disagreeing about the child and how to raise them...I see this a lot in my neighbourhood”. (P4, KZN).

“I am stressed because my husband and I are not working together in co-parenting. This makes things hard for me as I feel I put in most of the effort and then only one parent feels the burden”. (P17, E. Cape).

These three responses about the stresses of disagreeing about how to raise children highlight the challenges of co-parenting. They emphasise the importance of addressing co-parenting issues and conflict resolution skills in future iterations of the programme. These need to equip parents with approaches to co-parenting and address conflict resolution in different approaches to discipline, house rules, expectations, gender roles and responsibilities.

The frustration expressed by the mothers (P3, P4 and P17) and the differing gender norms of whose responsibility parenting is, underscores the importance of extending the ParentChat programme to both parents (and other caregivers) and involving them in discussions around parenting issues and equipping the wider caregiver community with parenting skills. Early on in the programme, the husband of a woman taking part in the programme, became jealous because his wife was spending a great deal of time on WhatsApp on her phone with the ParentChat programme. He became increasingly upset and jealous about the time she was spending on her phone, convinced she was having an affair. After two weeks, he took her phone and destroyed it in a fit of jealous rage and she was forced out of the programme. This highlights the need to concurrently involve the partners who are not involved in the programme and to provide information and input for them about the programme, how it works, and what its aims and goals are. A comprehensive pre-programme information and educational drive involving partners and family members about what the programme entails and its aims, needs to be implemented, inviting the other family members to be part of the change process.

### **Personal growth, reflection and self-discovery**

The ParentChat programme not only taught parents skills to utilise in their parenting approaches but also afforded opportunities for personal growth. Parents interviewed expressed appreciation for personal learning, developing new insights into themselves as well as their children and the opportunity to try new approaches and get feedback from facilitators and other parents attending the programme. Of note, was the parents’ recognition of the need for change in their own behaviour and attitudes to effect changes in their children’s behaviour.

“There is a change, I can’t lie. I changed first and eventually he changed too, I just didn’t rush him, he eventually he came around and changed his ways”. (P8, Gauteng)

It was interesting that the children themselves noticed the shift in attitude in parents, as expressed by P19 (W. Cape),

“But the kids saw the changes, even though they will not say anything. Usually, I would swear and shout at them when they do something wrong, but now I just talk to them as if we are equals”.

This was also highlighted by P21 (W. Cape) who commented,

“I kept on saying things that were inappropriate towards the child that hurt his feelings and became a bad habit and the child gets used to the bad habit. Then after the programme he asked me once, ‘You don’t call me inappropriate names anymore’.”

The changes within the family system were reflected in feedback from P9 (Gauteng):

“His older brother and sister are happy because they saw changes in me that I never applied to them. They could see that I am doing things differently with him”.

P23, W. Cape, expressed it as,

“The discovery of myself as well, because some things I would say that I wouldn’t know how to react, especially when my son was being naughty. But then he would teach me that okay, in some circumstances you don’t have to scream. You need to speak calmly so that he can understand. Because I discovered that when you scream it doesn’t make any difference, but when you start to have a conversation then it makes a whole lot of difference”.

The fact that parents and children learned from each other is an important aspect of the programme. The reciprocal learning and development between parent and child gave the children agency and a voice, empowering them in the family system. The following comment from P10 (Gauteng) highlights the importance of the programme for reflection and self-discovery,

“I was a dictator. I didn’t have time to listen to my child, but now everything has changed. Every time I would tell my child precisely what I wanted them to do. I would not listen to what he had to say. I found it simpler for me to tell him what to do – do it this way”.

On reflecting on her learning from the programme, P23 (W. Cape) comments,

“Sometimes the environment that you create as a parent also dictates how your children behave. For example, you will blame your child for failing his schoolwork, while you don’t even assist him with his homework or schoolwork. If you don’t teach your child, where do you think he is going to learn all the things you expect him to know?”

P17 (E. Cape) reflected on her personal learning,

“The thing I found helpful is that I discovered that I have anger issues, so this helped me to identify this issue and be able to see my anger when it takes over, especially in matters relating to my child. The programme taught me how to deal with my child using creative methods, rather than shouting and beating the child”.

These comments suggest that while there are significant differences in families who come from different cultures/ backgrounds/ economic strata, there are universal principles of child rearing and parenting that have relevance and merit across these differences.

### **Challenges of programme:**

As this was a digital programme, parents were required to have a smartphone to access the sessions and content. While most parents have cell phones, some did not have smartphones which could access video and picture content. Throughout the programme, some participants had their phones stolen and those who could not get other phones had to drop out. Some participant's phones stopped working and they were not always able to join the online discussions. At the time of the programme South Africa was experiencing power outages and it was challenging having phones fully charged, which also created some challenges for being online and having internet. Participants were given data bundles to participate online, however some of them used these for other purposes and ran out of data and could not attend the online sessions.

When asked about the challenges of the programme, one of the strongest messages conveyed was the ongoing need for advice and support from other parents after the programme had finished. Many requested an ongoing support network where they could meet once a month and with a facilitator where possible. The need for repetition and practice of skills learned was highlighted by P21 (W. Cape) who said she struggled to be consistent with her implementation and sometimes found herself reverting to her old ways and needed reminders of her learning from the ParentChat programme. The agreement about the need for ongoing support is reflected in the following responses:

“Maybe it's when we needed advice from the other parents, especially after the program was finished. The program ended while we still needed it. We could have continued with it on our own, but we didn't”, commented P13 (Gauteng).

“I wish it could continue. I learned so much, but I want to learn a lot more and move forward” (P18, W. Cape).

“I wanted more, I was sad when the programme ended”. (P7, Gauteng).

Some parents found corporal punishment not being encouraged limiting and felt that there was a time and place for this, especially where there was a lack of communication. This suggests a need for ongoing engagement about the limitations of corporal punishment and continued input of other different and creative approaches to dealing with challenging behaviours from children.

### ***Summary of challenges of the ParentChat programme***

This pilot digital parenting programme was launched to meet the needs arising from the inability to conduct in-person sessions due to Covid-19 restrictions. The main problems arising related to: (a) phone issues; (b) data challenges; (c) a need for ongoing support and allowing for some in-person sessions; (d) resistance to discarding corporal punishment as a discipline strategy and (e) involving men and fathers in the programme.

Concerning phone issues, having a smartphone was a requirement for participating in the programme, however many of the phones were relatively old and didn't have all of the functionalities required. Some people had their phones stolen or they broke and they were not able to continue with the programme. A few participants were unable to view videos or cartoons, however they developed a system of sharing or getting input from other parents.

While we issued data to participants, some experienced data issues, running out of data or not having access to the internet, which hampered their ability to participate at the set times, but because the chats and voice notes were easily accessible, they were able to catch up on sessions missed.

The majority of participants expressed a strong desire for the programme to continue, to have further opportunities to engage with the other parents and to practice the skills learned and get further input.

“Now that the programme is over, let's continue sharing ideas, even once a week and speak about how people with issues solved them and let's talk about solutions and solve issues for each other”(P17, E. Cape).

Requests for ongoing support to entrench the learning of the programme were suggested by several respondents.

Some parents were resistant to relinquishing their use of corporal punishment because they felt it kept their children safe and created an instant solution to challenging issues, at the same time as establishing respect for parents and grandparents

While there were some fathers and uncles who took part in the programme, recruiting more fathers for future programmes is a critical next step to ensuring their buy-in to adopting less violent and more caring parenting approaches.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations**

In this section, I will summarise the findings of the study and provide recommendations for implementation as well as those for future science, indicate the limitations of the study and provide a final conclusion.

The findings from this study indicate that a digital approach to running the programme is feasible and that it is possible to run a programme virtually. Grafft et al. (2022) adapted a ten-session empowerment-focused parenting programme Parents Connect for Healthy Living (PConnect), to a virtual format, for low-income families in USA. Seventy-eight parents participated in the in-person program and 58 in the virtual program via smartphones. Their study showed higher participation in the virtual programme than the in-person one and participants found the programme highly acceptable, satisfying and relevant. They found that many of the elements of change associated with the digital format such as time of sessions, frequency of meeting and composition of the group, increased access to the programme. Similarly, work in a low-income setting in Brazil by Altafim et al. (2024) confirmed that digital parenting programmes can enhance parenting experience and reduce child behavioural problems. Their findings showed that the majority of participants were satisfied with and engaged consistently with the programme material, enjoying the flexibility of being able to receive and engage with the material at their convenience.

WhatsApp is an inexpensive way to run a programme and makes logistics and accessibility to the programme easy. Parents indicated, however, that a hybrid approach, which includes in-person contact, in addition to digital, would be more powerful and meaningful for them. This was highlighted by Shenderovich et al. (2022) who found that programmes combining digital and in-person components could combine connection with others with ease of access to input. Leijten et al. (2023) examined whether online parenting could replace in-person programmes or whether online should be used to support traditional support. They found that online parenting support was not inferior to in-person support in reducing child and parent mental challenges and was successful in providing positive parenting support. They also found that parents preferred online support and ascribed this to professional guidance offered to the parents. Their second study showed that a combined in-person and online programme had stronger effects than the in-person offering.

The analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data reveals that there was strong acceptability of the programme, how it was implemented, the materials and content of the programme, the skills taught and the engagement with other parents and facilitators. The responses from the surveyed parents indicate that they are likely to continue using the new

skills they have acquired. The fact that parents were still applying these approaches long after the programme was implemented and that results in children's behaviour were observable, suggests that this method was effective and sustainable. This could be because the groups were facilitated by actively engaged facilitators who encouraged and motivated participants by regularly interacting with them individually and as a group, which could have contributed to participants staying involved and continuing to learn new skills. A critical success factor for digital programmes shown in Leijten et al.'s study (2023) was the interaction between parents and professionals. Where chatbots have been widely utilised and shown positive outcomes for a variety of mental health interventions, they have been criticised for high dropout rates and low usage engagement (Limpanopparat, S., Gibson, E., & Harris, A., 2024). A study by Kaur et al. (2021) showed how chatbots could be used to reduce tutor input for medical students and to promote self-learning, suggesting that chatbots could supplement input from programme facilitators. ChattyCuz, the gamified and narrative chatbot delivered by WhatsApp, revealed how digital solutions, together with live individual counselling, also delivered on WhatsApp, provided a useful approach to improving gender equity attitudes and reducing IPV among young women (De Fillippo et al., 2023).

It was apparent that the parents who experimented with the new skills taught were developing positive and effective parenting strategies, as evidenced by the change in their family dynamics, improvement in children's behaviour, less physical and verbal violence in the home and more cooperative approaches to managing discipline and household engagement. The reduction in harsh parenting and shift in parenting approaches was reflected in family members spending more time together, enjoying each other's company, communicating more openly and bonding more closely. Parents expressed greater enjoyment of parenting and the ripple effect was that others in the family and community noticed the changes, commented on them and were curious to learn about new positive parenting practices. This suggests that the digital approach is not significantly different from in-person programmes and that participants experience the same benefits, while for some the benefits of online outweigh those of in-person. Shenderovich et al. (2018) studied what affected attendance and engagement in a Teen parenting programme in South Africa and caregivers attended 50% of sessions and teenagers 64% of the sessions. These figures are lower than those reported in high-income countries and they highlighted how time, logistics and being employed were barriers to attendance. These factors were reduced by the online programme. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the implementation of digital delivery and the work of Shenderovich et al. (2022) highlighted how despite issues with internet access, limited mobile

data and not all participants having smartphones, digital interventions could reach a wider range of families. This was done through extensive facilitator training and providing engaging resource materials.

While the context of the parents remained the same – namely parenting in challenging economic environments, where overcrowding, crime and violence were an everyday reality, and where parents lived with uncertainty, there appeared to be an openness to change. The attitudes of the parents interviewed reflected a willingness and desire to do things differently, even when it differed significantly from the way parents themselves were raised. The acceptability of the programme and the willingness to try the new skills of ParentChat to develop more healthy parenting relationships suggest a successful transfer of the programme across cultures and language groups in the four provinces across South Africa.

### **Recommendations for programme delivery**

#### ***Suggested programme adaptations***

The following programme adaptations listed below are recommended and discussed in further detail below the list:

- Running a hybrid programme where there is digital engagement as well as some in-person contact,
- Gender-transformative approaches and challenging gender stereotypes in families,
- Co-parenting and dealing with conflict in the family,
- Trauma-informed parenting to address exposure to violence and trauma (of parents and children),
- Booster sessions where parents can get specific input regarding problematic child behaviours,
- Ongoing contact and support from facilitators,
- Free WiFi access at libraries, schools and healthcare facilities for those parents who struggle with data and internet issues,
- Cash transfer initiatives to support financially struggling families,
- Programme embedded in local social services

While the digital programme provided significant benefits for ease of access, cost-effectiveness, parents not needing to travel to a venue and enabling fathers and working parents to join the discussions and engage with other parents when they could go online, participants expressed a strong desire for some in-person sessions at least once a month. In addition to running the programme digitally, it is recommended that an in-person session be

held once a month where parents can engage with each other, discuss what is and is not working, practice their skills and get ongoing input from facilitators.

Concerning challenges some parents had with their cell phones, a recommendation that could address this issue, is having devices in community centres or libraries, where parents whose phones are broken or stolen, or who are unable to charge their devices, can use communal devices and free WiFi to log onto the sessions. Another option for participants who ran out of data and did not have connectivity is for cities and municipalities to provide access to the internet in specified communal spaces. A paper by Mathane and Gumbo (2023) proposes a conceptual framework for municipalities in South Africa to provide free WiFi as a basic municipal service. They argue that free data services would have a multiplier effect and emphasise that Internet access is a critical means through which communities can access health-related services and education. Research by Geerdts and Gillwald (2017), addressing the question of whether public WiFi can redress digital inequality suggests that government buildings are ideal starting points and that education institutions, libraries, museums and health facilities should be prioritised to provide access and broadband for learning.

Utilising a digital approach appeared to have facilitated men's involvement in the programme, which had traditionally been a difficult challenge. In future iterations of the programme, targeted marketing of the programme to men would be an important initiative. Targeting both parents or all adults in the household could potentially reduce conflict about parenting in the household and reinforce awareness and development of the skills. Future programmes need to pay particular attention to co-parenting, the involvement of men and possible gender-transformative outcomes. The UNICEF Brief 2 report (2023) highlights the importance of engaging men as equitable parents because of the benefits to children of having engaged fathers and because working together with men is crucial for preventing violence. The report describes how "Men must be encouraged to reflect on and challenge their own gender attitudes and practices and to change the world around them to support these shifts" (p 6). A recommendation for future versions of this programme would be to put together a comprehensive recruitment strategy to attract fathers, generating messages which emphasise the importance of their participation in building strong families, enhancing parent-child relationships and strengthening couple relationships. An initiative by McGirr et al. (2020) to investigate recruiting and retaining fathers in a parenting and pregnancy prevention programme outlined the importance of raising awareness of the programme, communicating the benefits of attending; addressing barriers that limit men's participation, providing opportunities to connect with and learn from other fathers as well as space to connect with the

programme staff. Monitoring which families enrolled, stayed in and exited the programme and then modifying the programme to address those needs, was also a critical component of success in keeping the men engaged. Yaremych and Persky (2023) did an evaluation of recruitment methods to encourage fathers' participation in parenting programmes. They concluded that the approaches need to emphasise how both fathers and children benefit from their participation in programmes.

A large proportion of participants in the study had been exposed to extreme violence and trauma, and while they were referred to support services, (Appendix 4), it may be useful to add a component to the programme which deals with skills for coping with trauma and processing loss and grief. Lindstrom Johnson et al. (2018) examined the negative developmental outcomes for youth exposed to violence and trauma and considered the potential impact of trauma-informed parenting interventions on parenting and child outcomes. Their findings support "parenting interventions for violence-related trauma and support models of trauma-informed care that situate treatment in the broader social context, particularly the family" (p. 927). The trauma-focused interventions included cognitive behavioural therapy, attuned to traumatic experiences and symptoms, providing parent skills training related to trauma, trauma education and coping skills. They found that the nature and severity of the trauma impacted the outcomes of the intervention, however, their meta-analysis showed that trauma-informed parenting interventions could improve positive parenting practices. Where possible, facilitators could encourage those parents who have experienced substantial trauma to utilise community resources for counselling. Sullivan et al. (2016) found that participants in their workshops on trauma-informed parenting felt more empowered to deal with traumatised children and recommended individual support and coaching to develop the skills further. A meta-analytic study conducted by Liu et al. (2024) revealed the effectiveness of trauma-informed parenting programmes in reducing mental stress for traumatised parents and improving their parenting skills. ParentChat could be reviewed with plans to incorporate trauma-informed parenting skills into the programme to upskill and resource parents with skills for caring for traumatised children and dealing with their own trauma. Part of the process could include upskilling facilitators to run sessions and workshops for the parents and the children.

Another important component that needs to be added to the programme is input on co-parenting and dealing with conflict. Having more fathers signing up to participate in the programme is the ultimate goal, but while moving towards that, it is recommended that there be introductory sessions for all parents, caregivers and grandparents and that there be

supplementary sessions on co-parenting and managing conflict. A model for this is Bandebereho, a couple's parent training model in Rwanda that aims to prevent IPV by focusing on discussions on gender and power dynamics, household decision-making, division of labour in the home, enhancing communication skills, conflict resolution and building relationship skills. (Levtov et al., 2022). They ascribe the effectiveness of their study to the holistic approach of the intervention which resulted in more positive couple interaction, increased communication and emotional connection and a shift in men's attitudes to gender issues and violence. Doyle et al. (2023) followed up six years after the Bandebereho programme and found that it had a lasting impact on the reduction of IPV and harsh punishment of children. The shift towards less conflicted and more cooperative couple relations as well as less family violence, makes this approach a powerful one to consider including in parenting programmes such as ParentChat. UNICEF (2023) highlights the importance of ensuring that parenting programmes “foster couple communication, create shared aspirations for parenting and strengthen relationship skills” (p9). What emerged from the interviews was that there could be a contribution to changing gender norms. This could be promoted through discussion on approaches to parenting that are more egalitarian. This is a topic that hasn't been thought about and covered in most parenting programmes. Researchers for UNICEF (2023) report that “Effective programmes often take on a gender-transformative approach, working with women and men to challenge unequal gender norms and power dynamics and to build relationships and parenting skills that support more equitable caring and nonviolent family dynamics” (UNICEF, 2023, p3).

The work of Arriagada et al (2018) showed promising results in improving child development outcomes and parenting practices where parenting programmes were added to cash transfer programmes. Considering the pervasive economic and financial stress that the majority of parents from the study live under, and which impacts their lives significantly, it becomes imperative to align with government initiatives and combine the ParentChat programme with cash transfer initiatives to address the economic well-being of parents while providing parenting support concurrently. Altafim et al. (2024) recommends that in the face of food insecurity which parents faced in their study (similar to the context of the parents in this study) that linking parenting programmes to cash transfer schemes and other supportive initiatives for populations at risk, is an important strategy to strengthen the wellbeing of children and parents. These findings are confirmed by the MaPa study in the Philippines which support situating programmes within existing social services for optimal engagement

and sustainability as well as combining the parenting programme with an economic strengthening approach of conditional cash transfers (Lachman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the research of Doubt et al. (2018) with the Sinovuyo Teen Parenting Programme for at-risk families of ten to eighteen-year-olds, which suggested a reduction in harsh and abusive parenting and an increase in engaged parenting, indicated that there are multiple benefits to embedding parenting programmes into existing local services to ensure sustainability. These include: “access to local knowledge, reinforced support to vulnerable families, a bolstered supportive network for child and youth care workers, and professional synergies” (p. 28). In many of the economically insecure contexts that parents live in, assisting them with how to access socio-economic grants, education and health services has the potential to lower the financial stress of the parents, as it did in this study. In the work with Sinovuyo Teen, the facilitators had developed trust with the families for programme buy-in through other Isibindi work they had done and their ongoing contact with the families provided sustained programme learning. It would therefore be an important goal to look at embedding ParentChat in local services.

Following the enjoyment of the programme by the parents, many had queries relating to what would happen next and how they could sustain their learning. As outlined by Doubt (2018), ongoing contact of facilitators led to sustained change, suggesting that where possible, finding opportunities for the facilitators to engage with the families who were on the programme, would cement the learning.

On another note, a single parenting programme cannot meet all the needs of all parents and children. A randomised controlled trial by Van Doornik et al. (2024) highlighted how parent training programmes are not always tailored to the specific behavioural challenges of all children and that programme content needs to be adapted to be effective. They recommended running brief, individually tailored training programmes to reduce these issues and offering optional booster sessions. While offering individually tailored sessions would not be an option at scale and with large populations such as the communities where we ran ParentChat, offering optional booster sessions, tailored to meet the specific needs of parents, could be a valuable addition to the programme.

### **Recommended future directions for scientific study of parenting programmes**

This ParentChat study provides evidence that by enhancing and improving parenting skills, family bonds were enhanced, children’s behaviours improved, children were less easily influenced by bad elements in the community, schoolwork improved, thereby allowing for a brighter future potential. The knock-on effect of doing one thing (running the programme)

achieved a whole range of outcomes. This echoes studies that find that some activities are “accelerators”, i.e., interventions that help with achieving multiple of the sustainable development goals (Sherr et al., 2023). Sherr and colleagues (2023) showed that if children received warm, positive, not only were children better protected from violence, but other outcomes were achieved as well. For instance, parental praise was associated with lower rates of depression (Haag et al., 2022; Sherr et al., 2023).

In future, measures of other outcomes should be incorporated into studies, with a view to prospective designs investigating parenting as an accelerator. There is a need to lobby government and social development agencies and service providers to promote and financially back parenting programmes, specifically gender-transformative parenting programmes, which have shown effectiveness in reducing violence against women and children and creating less violent and more equitable family environments (Mamauag et al. 2021). A strong recommendation is also to design messaging and content that appeals to men and women, to engage fathers in the process of building caring and resilient families.

A further recommendation is to engage the communities where the programme will be run, in the design or adaptation of the programme as well as in suggesting content. This ensures their ownership and buy-in of the programme, ensuring that their needs and challenges are considered and that they do not feel the programme is externally imposed on them. Participants in this study requested more input on finances and budgeting and considering the material disadvantage and economic stresses of most of their lives, this needs sufficient coverage in programme sessions. The underlying structural inequalities which impact parents’ relationships and parenting through issues such as food insecurity cannot be ignored and cash transfer or food parcel schemes need to be considered.

What became evident in the feedback in the interviews was that there were some serious issues within families that were not directly dealt with in this programme, and which affected both parenting and child outcomes. These included gender-based violence, being victims of violent crime and the trauma of watching a partner or parent murdered or injured and these issues necessitate being addressed by further input. A range of possible interventions should be investigated for their potential to enhance the effectiveness of parenting programmes by addressing the impact of traumatic experiences. This might include running support groups and programmes to support women, children and families who have been exposed to violence, teaching vulnerable women and children skills in self-protection could be valuable, upskilling community workers and teachers to identify victims of violence and trauma and empowering them to provide support.

Parents requested additional content be added to the programme incorporating elements of current risks faced by children (risk-taking behaviour such as substance abuse) and challenges such as attention and hyperactivity disorders. Ogundele and Ayyash (2023) indicate how parenting children and young people with ADHD can be very stressful and recommend providing mental health support and training input to parents, combined with appropriate behaviour interventions for the children with ADHD, can be helpful. A study by Mishra, Neha and Ram (2023) utilised Kazdin's model and divided participants with ADHD into one group that received Parent Management Training (PMT) with medication, while the control group received only medication. Children who received the combination of PMT and medicines had better outcomes, and the parents showed enhanced parental management skills. This suggests that psychoeducation would be a useful addition to programmes such as ParentChat.

It is clear that parenting programmes, and specifically the ParentChat programme, makes a valuable contribution. ParentChat was appreciated by the parents who participated in it. Most notably, when asked for suggestions and recommendations, many participants expressed the need for continuance to roll out the programme to other parents who would benefit from input about parenting in their communities.

“I hope you can reach other people who need your assistance as much as I did when I started the program”, commented P19 (W. Cape).

The request for the programme to be implemented to reach other families suggests the need for rolling out to scale. This pilot study worked with skilled trainers, coaches and facilitators from CWBSA and the Department of Social Development, and it needs to be determined whether wider rollout can be done with fidelity to achieve the same effects as this study. This would require a strong cohort of skilful, certified facilitators, coaches and trainers who can ensure fidelity of implementation of the programme (Hutchings et al., 2024).

### **Limitations of this research**

Many factors influence the acceptability of parenting programmes. This limited sample of acceptability of parenting skills will not necessarily translate to all parents within the range of people in South Africa across all culture and language groups. Social desirability bias could have impacted participants' responses when answering questions on the bi-weekly survey and in the qualitative interviews: they may have wanted to impress the interviewers, or they may have felt ashamed or embarrassed to admit to parenting approaches seen as abusive towards their children (slapping, shouting at children, harsh parenting). They may therefore not have answered questions honestly, thereby skewing the data. Furthermore, the

fact that there was a power differential with myself being a white researcher and not a first-language indigenous speaker, could have impacted the responses. This suggests the importance of choosing first-language indigenous speakers as interviewers needs to be addressed in future projects. In addition, many parents struggled with answering the bi-weekly surveys (due to phone and mobile data issues) and did not answer all the questions and for some questions, the sample size was relatively low, (ranging from 44 to 60 responses out of a total of 248 participants) and the findings may have differed if all participants had answered every question. Other than a limited number, we were not able to interview all participants who dropped out of the programme and discover the reasons for their dropping out, which means we mainly interviewed participants who completed the programme and therefore were particularly likely to be positive about the programme.

The quantitative questionnaire measured parents' ratings of how acceptable they felt the skills learned were, as well as likelihood of use of specific skills. It would have been useful to explore in further detail the skills that parents felt were acceptable, but were not used by them. It would have been interesting to understand why these skills were not used by the parents.

The initial qualitative interviews in the Western Cape and the follow-up qualitative interviews which were conducted across the provinces in South Africa were conducted with interpreters/ translators, and this could have had some impact on participants' responses because the questions and answers were filtered through the translator's framework.

However, this research has important implications for the success of parenting programmes because it is important for parents to feel that the skills learned in parenting programmes resonate with them, their context and culture. Furthermore, although there have been randomised control trials of PLH, the acceptability of the programme had not been explored in South Africa: this study could therefore make a valuable contribution to understanding perceptions and buy-in from parents. A strong motivation for the cultural adaption of parenting interventions is to improve participant engagement and satisfaction with the programme, and to increase attendance and in-session participation and use of programme skills (Barrera et al., 2017). Castro and colleagues (2010) suggest that if an intervention is not culturally appropriate to a group, the impact of the programme will be reduced as will the sense of investment in the programme and ownership of the skills learned (Castro et al., 2010). This is echoed by Barrera and colleagues (2011) who indicate that people are more likely to engage in programmes that fit with their values, lived reality and cultural norms (Barrera et al., 2011).

Another significant limitation is that the qualitative interviews were done with parents who were willing to participate in the programme and to be interviewed, which could have skewed the results. The parents and caregivers who signed up for the ParentChat programme did so voluntarily and were eager to engage, learn and have input about parenting, which could impact the fact that they were enthusiastic and complimentary about the programme. Further, the smaller group that agreed to these follow-up interviews are likely to have been even more enthusiastic. A more mixed methods research approach would be helpful, utilising a randomized controlled trial. Future research should purposely explore the views of men, the views of single parents, two-parent households, those caregivers who did not complete the programme and those who did, thereby addressing some of these limitations.

A further limitation of the study is considering who was excluded from participating in programme because of no access to mobile phones. There were parents who dropped out of the study because their phones were stolen, lost or broken. This could be addressed by making iPads or other devices available in community centres and investigating building something that is appropriate for rural or low-resource areas where current smartphones are not available.

While not included in the scope of the research question of this study, it would be interesting to garner the perceptions and experiences of the children whose parents participated in the ParentChat programme.

## **Conclusion**

Most of the parents who participated in the ParentChat programme during the COVID-19 pandemic, residing across the four provinces in South Africa, faced significant challenges in the low-income settings where they lived. These included safety and security issues, financial constraints, and living in overcrowded housing with extended families of multiple generations. These were parents at risk, who were eager to learn new ways of parenting and to be part of a group process where they could share experiences, wisdom, advice and insight with other parents living under similar circumstances.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the responses of the parents who participated in the bi-weekly surveys and post-test interviews indicates that the ParentChat programme and the content covered were acceptable to South African parents. Despite some initial concerns that the programme was too Western and “white”, the parents embraced the new skills, showed appreciation for them and adopted them. The impact of utilising the skills learned was reflected in significant changes in the relationships between parents and their children, a more playful parenting approach, enhanced communication skills, closer bonds

between family members, noticeable changes in attitudes and academic outcomes for children, reduced verbal and physical violence in the family and feedback from other family members and members of the community who had noticed the changes in parenting approaches adopted by parents who had attended the programme.

The findings of this study indicate that there is potential for digital parenting programmes to have a sustained effect on parenting practices. The qualitative interviews which were done eighteen months after completion of the programme revealed that parents were still using the skills learned from the programme almost two years later, which is a powerful indicator of the sustaining effects of the programme. The engagement on the WhatsApp platform appeared to have created a conducive environment for parents to engage and learn new and alternative parenting approaches. It successfully offered a low-cost, accessible option for presenting the programme, which caters to the needs of busy working parents who aren't always able to attend in-person sessions at specific times. It provides a solution to offering the programme in more remote and rural areas, where access to in-person programme is limited. Participants indicated that they would value a hybrid approach where there is some monthly support and engagement with other parents and facilitators on an ongoing basis.

While it has historically been difficult to engage fathers in parenting programmes, (Yaremych & Persky, 2023; Stahlschmidt et al. 2013) it was encouraging that some men attended this programme. Going forward, actively marketing the programme to men, providing more comprehensive information about what the programme aims and content are, to encourage fathers and other family members to attend and be part of the change process, is a critical step to consider. It could also be worth investigating whether a different message for fathers is needed. It appears that the digital format of the programme makes attending more accessible and less threatening for fathers.

Literature and systematic reviews indicate that successful parenting programmes such as ParentChat can create a ripple effect with a range of outcomes and implications for individuals, families and communities. The drive to reduce violence against children necessitates adopting the accelerator concept of the United Nations Development Programme, by implementing interventions that impact multiple sustainable goals. It is evident that offering parenting interventions, embedding them with existing local services, and adopting a collaborative approach with other approaches such as cash transfers, food security and other psycho-social support, provides a valuable way to do this and has been shown to reduce violence against children.



## References

- Adeyefa, S. A. (2016). Determinants of food insecurity among the urban poor in the city of Tshwane, South Africa. *Journal of Economics*, 4(2), 101-114.  
<https://doi.org/10.15640/jeds.v4n2a9>
- Afifi, T. O., Salmon, S., Stewart-Tufescu, A., & Taillieu, T. (2022). An examination of parents' adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) history and reported spanking of their child: Informing child maltreatment prevention efforts. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(17), 10580. <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/17/10580>
- Al-Hassan, S. M., & Lansford, J. E. (2011). Evaluation of the Better Parenting Programme in Jordan. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(5), 587-598.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03004431003654942>
- Alloush, Mo, and Jeffrey R Bloem. "Neighborhood Violence, Poverty, and Psychological Well-Being." *Journal of Development Economics*, 154 (2022): 102756.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2021.102756>
- Arriagada, A. M., Perry, J., Rawlings, L. B., Trias, J., & Zumaeta, M. (2018). Promoting early childhood development through combining cash transfers and parenting programs. *Global Social Policy*, 20 (1) 15-20. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-8670>
- Awah, I., Green, O., Baerecke, L., Janowski, R., Klapwijk, J., Chetty, A. N., Wamoyi, J., Cluver, L. D. (2022). 'It provides practical tips, practical solutions!': acceptability, usability, and satisfaction of a digital parenting intervention across African countries. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 27, 1, 107-123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2022.2113106>
- Badroodien, A. (2004). Rac(e)ing poverty and punishment in South Africa, 1920–1970. *Safundi*, 5(1–2), 1–26. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1080/17533170400605126>
- Bakker, D., & Rickard, N. (2018). Engagement in mobile phone app for self-monitoring of emotional wellbeing predicts changes in mental health: MoodPrism. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 227, 432-442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.11.016>
- Barlow, J., & Coren, E. (2018). The effectiveness of parenting programs: A review of Campbell reviews. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 28(1), 99–102.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731517725184>
- Barrera, M., Castro, F. G., & Steiker, L. K. H. (2011). A critical analysis of approaches to the development of preventive interventions for subcultural groups. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 48(3-4), 439-454. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9422-x>

- Barrera, M., Berkel, C., & Castro, F. G. (2017). Directions for the advancement of culturally adapted preventive interventions: Local adaptations, engagement, and sustainability. *Prevention Science, 18*(6), 640-648. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0705-9>
- Baumann, A. A., Powell, B. J., Kohl, P. L., Tabak, R. G., Penalba, V., Proctor, E. K., Domenech-Rodriguez, M. M., & Cabassa, L. J. (2015). Cultural adaptation and implementation of evidence-based parent-training: A systematic review and critique of guiding evidence. *Children and Youth Services Review, 53*, 113-120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.015.03.025>
- Baumann, A. A., Mejia, A., Lachman, J. M., Parra-Cardona, R., López-Zerón, G., Amador Buenabad, N. G., ... & Domenech Rodríguez, M. M. (2019). Parenting programs for underserved populations in low-and middle-income countries: issues of scientific integrity and social justice. *Global Social Welfare, 6*(3), 199-207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40609-018-0121-0>
- Beatty, P. C., & Willis, G. B. (2007). Research synthesis: The practice of cognitive interviewing. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 71*(2), 287-311. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfm006>
- Berger, J., & Packard, G. (2021). Using natural language processing to understand people and culture. *American Psychologist*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfm006>
- Bokonda, P.L., Ouazzani-Touhami, K., & Souissi, N. (2019). Open data kit: mobile data collection framework for developing countries. *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering, 8*(12), 4749-4754. <https://doi.org/10.35940/ijitee.L3805.1081219>
- Bornstein, M. H. (2012). Cultural approaches to parenting. *Parenting, 12*(2-3), 212-221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2012.683359>
- Bornstein, M. H. (2013). Parenting and child mental health: a cross-cultural perspective. *World Psychiatry, 12*(3), 258-265. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20071>
- Bornstein, M. H., Putnick, D. L., & Lansford, J. E. (2011). Parenting attributions and attitudes in cross-cultural perspective. *Parenting, 11*(2-3), 214-237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2011.585568>
- Bradford, K., Barber, B. K., Olsen, J. A., Maughan, S. L., Erickson, L. D., Ward, D., & Stolz, H. E. (2004). A multi-national study of interparental conflict, parenting, and adolescent functioning: South Africa, Bangladesh, China, India, Bosnia, Germany, Palestine, Colombia, and the United States. *Marriage & Family Review, 35*(3-4), 107-137. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J002v35n03\\_07](https://doi.org/10.1300/J002v35n03_07)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 12*, (297-298). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>

- Britto, P. R., Ponguta, L. A., Reyes, C., & Karnati, R. (2015). *A systematic review of parenting programmes for young children in low-and middle-income countries*. United Nations Children's Fund, 363-394. [www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/press-releases/media-P\\_Shanker\\_final\\_Systematic\\_Review\\_of\\_Parenting\\_ECD\\_Dec\\_15\\_copy.pdf?utm](http://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/press-releases/media-P_Shanker_final_Systematic_Review_of_Parenting_ECD_Dec_15_copy.pdf?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=parenting)
- Brush, L. D., & Miller, E. (2019). Trouble in paradigm: "Gender transformative" programming in violence prevention. *Violence Against Women*, 25(14), 1635-1656.
- Brooks, J., Mccluskey, S., Turley, E., & King, N. (2015). The utility of template analysis in qualitative psychology research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12(2), 202–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.955224>
- Brooks, J., & King, N. (2012). *Qualitative psychology in the real world: The utility of template analysis*. Paper presented at the 2012 British Psychological Society Annual Conference, London, UK. <https://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/13656>
- Buckle, A. M. (2019). *Corporal Punishment: A Crime or Act of Love?* (Master's thesis). [https://studenttheses.uu.nl/handle/20.500.12932/34568?utm](https://studenttheses.uu.nl/handle/20.500.12932/34568?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=parenting)
- Burkholder, E. O., & Peláez, M. (2000). A behavioral interpretation of Vygotsky's theory of thought, language, and culture. *Behavioral Development Bulletin*, 9(1), 7. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0100530>
- Burger, R., vander Berg, S., vander Walt, S. et al. The Long Walk: considering the enduring spatial and racial dimensions of deprivation two decades after the fall of apartheid. *Social Indicators Research*, 130, 1101-1123. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1237-1>
- Bunting, L. (2004). Parenting programmes: The best available evidence. *Child Care in Practice*, 10(4), 327-343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357527042000285510>
- Butler, J., Gregg, L., Calam, R., & Wittkowski, A. (2020). Parents' perceptions and experiences of parenting programmes: A systematic review and metasynthesis of the qualitative literature. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 23(2), 176-204. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-019-00307-y>
- Cabassa, L. J., & Baumann, A. A. (2013). A two-way street: bridging implementation science and cultural adaptations of mental health treatments. *Implementation Science*, 8(1), 90. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-8-90>
- Castro, F. G., Barrera, M., & Martinez, C. R. (2004). The cultural adaptation of prevention interventions: Resolving tensions between fidelity and fit. *Prevention Science*, 5(1), 41-45. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:PREV.0000013980.12412.cd>

- Castro, F. G., Barrera Jr, M., & Holleran Steiker, L. K. (2010). Issues and challenges in the design of culturally adapted evidence-based interventions. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 6, 213-239. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-033109-132032>
- Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg, and Sonke Gender Justice. (2013, July 17). So we are ATM fathers: A study of absent fathers in Johannesburg, South Africa. <https://www.uj.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/absent-fathers-full-report-2013.pdf>
- Chang, L., Schwartz, D., Dodge, K. A., & McBride-Chang, C. (2003). Harsh parenting in relation to child emotion regulation and aggression. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17(4), 598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.17.4.598>
- Cheteni, P., Mah, G., Yohane, Y. K., & Nsiah, C. (2018). Drug-related crime and poverty in South Africa. *Cogent Economics & Finance*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2018.1534528>
- Chavda, K., & Nisarga, V. (2023). Single parenting: Impact on child's development. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 19(1), 14-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09731342231179017>
- Chiumento, A., Rahman, A., Machin, L., & Frith, L. (2018). Mediated research encounters: methodological considerations in cross-language qualitative interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 18(6), 604–622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117730121>
- Chiumento, A., Machin, L., Rahman, A., & Frith, L. (2018). Online interviewing with interpreters in humanitarian contexts. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 13(1), 1444887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2018.1444887>
- Chung, E. K., Mathew, L., Rothkopf, A. C., Elo, I. T., Coyne, J. C., & Culhane, J. F. (2009). Parenting attitudes and infant spanking: The influence of childhood experiences. *Pediatrics*, 124(2), e278-e286. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2008-3247>
- Cluver, L., Doubt, J., Gardner, F., Hutchings, J., Lachman, J., Tsoanyane, S. & Ward, C. (2021).. *COVID-19 e-Parenting for Lifelong Health (ePLH) pilot study protocol: Promoting positive parenting and preventing violence through online parent support groups - ParentChat. Parenting for Lifelong Health.*
- Cluver, L., Doubt, J., Gardner, F., Hutchings, J., Lachman, J., Tsoanyane, S & Ward, C. (2020). *Parenting for Lifelong Health – ParentChat Facilitator Manual*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition.
- Cluver, L. D., Meinck, F., Steinert, J. I., Shenderovich, Y., Doubt, J., Herrero Romero, R., Lombard, C. J., Redfern, A., Ward, C. L., Tsoanyane, S., Nzima, D., Sibanda, N., Wittesaele, C., De Stone, S., Boyes, M. E., Catanho, R., Lachman, J. M., Salah, N., Nocuza, M., & Gardner, F. (2018). Parenting for Lifelong Health: a pragmatic cluster randomised controlled trial of a non-commercialised parenting programme for adolescents and their families in

- South Africa. *BMJ Global Health*, 3(1), e000539. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2017-000539>
- Cluver, L. D., Rudgard, W. E., Toska, E., Zhou, S., Campeau, L., Shenderovich, Y., Orkin, M., Desmond, C., Butchart, A., Taylor, H., Meinck, F. & Sherr, L. (2020). Violence prevention accelerators for children and adolescents in South Africa: A path analysis using two pooled cohorts. *PLoS Medicine*, 17(11), e1003383. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003383>
- Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., & Martin, M. J. (2010). Socioeconomic status, family processes and individual development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 685-704. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00725.x>
- Cook, C.J., Howard, S.J., Cuartas, J., Makaula, H., Merkley, R., Mshudulu, M., Nosibusiso, T., ... & Draper, C.E. (2022). Child exposure to violence and self-regulation in South African preschool-age children from low-income settings. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 134, 105944–105944. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105944>
- Coulton, C. J., Crampton, D. S., Irwin, M., Spilsbury, J. C., & Korbin, J. E. (2007). How neighborhoods influence child maltreatment: A review of the literature and alternative pathways. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(11-12), 1117-1142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.03.023>
- Cuartas, J., Gershoff, E. T., Bailey, D., & McCoy, D. C. (2022). Physical punishment and child, adolescent, and adult outcomes in low-and middle-income countries: protocol for systematic review and meta-analysis. *Systematic Reviews*, 11(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-022-02154-5>
- Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(2), 236-264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>
- Dawes, A., Long, W., Alexander, L., & Ward, C. L. (2004). *Partner violence, attitudes to child discipline and the use of corporal punishment*. Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11910/7862>
- Dawes, A., De Sas Kropiwnicki, Z., Kafaar, Z., & Richter, L. (2005). Corporal punishment of children: A South African national survey. Paper at United Nations study on violence against children. <https://repository.hsrb.ac.za/handle/20.500.11910/7142>
- De Oliveira, A., Strugnell, J. L., Mamputa, G., & Snel, S. (2022). Mapping gender norms in public social media: A South African study. *Gender Based Violence*, 157. [www.innovationedge.org.za](http://www.innovationedge.org.za)

- De Filippo, A., Bellatin, P., Tietz, N., Grant, E., Whitefield, A., Nkopane, P., & Hatcher, A. M. (2023). Effects of digital chatbot on gender attitudes and exposure to intimate partner violence among young women in South Africa. *PLOS Digital Health*, 2(10), e0000358. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pdig.0000358>
- Doubt, J., Bray, R., Loening-Voysey, H., Cluver, L., Byrne, J., Nzima, D., ... & Medley, S. (2017). “It has changed”: understanding change in a parenting program in South Africa. *Annals of Global Health*, 83(5-6), 767-776. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aogh.2017.10.021>
- Doubt, J., Loening-Voysey, H., Blanc, D., Cluver, L., Byrne, J., & Petersen, T. (2018). Delivering a parenting programme in rural South Africa: The local child and youth care worker experience. *UNICEF*. [https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/UNICEF-Innocenti\\_2018\\_Parenting-Programme-in-Rural-South-Africa.pdf](https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/UNICEF-Innocenti_2018_Parenting-Programme-in-Rural-South-Africa.pdf)
- Doyle, K., Levitov, R. G., Karamage, E., Rakshit, D., Kazimbaya, S., Sayinzoga, F., ... & Barker, G. (2023). Long-term impacts of the Bandedereho programme on violence against women and children, maternal health-seeking, and couple relations in Rwanda: a six-year follow-up of a randomised controlled trial. *EClinicalMedicine*, 64. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(23\)00410-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(23)00410-8/fulltext)
- Durrant, J. E. (2018). Corporal punishment and the law in global perspective. In J.G. Slemming (Ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Children and the Law* (pp293-320). Oxford Handbooks (2020 online edition), Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190694395.013.15>
- Eagle, G., Hayes, G., & Sibanda, T. (1999). Standpoint methodologies: Marxist, feminist and black scholarship perspectives. *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Sciences*, University of Cape Town Press, 438-461.
- Endendijk, J. J., Groeneveld, M. G., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & Mesman, J. (2016). Gender-differentiated parenting revisited: Meta-analysis reveals very few differences in parental control of boys and girls. *PLoS One*, 11(7), e0159193. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0159193>
- Farrington, D. P. (1995). The development of offending and antisocial behaviour from childhood: Key findings from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 6(36), 929-964. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1995.tb01342.x>
- Ferguson, K. M., & Heidemann, G. (2009). Organizational strengths and challenges of Kenyan NGOs serving orphans and vulnerable children: A template analysis. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18(4), 354-364. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2009.00637.x>

- Fleckman, J. M., Taylor, C. A., Theall, K. P., & Andrinopoulos, K. (2019). Perceived social norms in the neighborhood context: The role of perceived collective efficacy in moderating the relation between perceived injunctive norms and use of corporal punishment. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 36(1), 29-41. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0581-1>
- Forehand, R., & Kotchick, B. A. (2002). Behavioral parent training: Current challenges and potential solutions. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 11(4), 377. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1020913422609/>
- Gallo, M. A. (2020). Bantu education, and its living educational and socioeconomic legacy in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Thesis. Fordham University.
- Ganz, G., Neville, F. G., Kassanje, R., & Ward, C. L. (2020). Parental misperceptions of in-group norms for child discipline. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 30(6), 628-644. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2466>
- Ganz, G., Neville, F. G., & Ward, C. L. (2017). Applying behavioural science to issues of public health in South Africa: the case for social norms intervention. *South African Journal of Science*, 113(5-6), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2017/20160217>
- Gardner, F., Ward, S., Burton, J., & Wilson, C. (2003). The role of mother-child joint play in the early development of children's conduct problems: A longitudinal observational study. *Social Development*, 12(3), 361-378. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9507.00238>
- Gardner, F., Burton, J., & Klimes, I. (2006). Randomised controlled trial of a parenting intervention in the voluntary sector for reducing child conduct problems: outcomes and mechanisms of change. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 47(11), 1123-1132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2006.01668.x>
- Gardner, F., Montgomery, P., & Knerr, W. (2016). Transporting evidence-based parenting programs for child problem behavior (Age 3–10) between countries: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 45(6), 749-762. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2015.1015134>
- Gershoff, E. T. (2002). Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: a meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(4), 539. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-2909.128.4.539>
- Geerdts, C and Gillwald, A. (2017). *Developing smart free public Wi-Fi in South Africa: Can public Wi-Fi help redress digital inequality, and if so, how? Emerging lessons from South Africa's diverse implementations*. Social Science Research Network. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3043690>

- Gottfredson, D., Kumpfer, K., Polizzi-Fox, D., Wilson, D., Puryear, V., Beatty, P., & Vilmenay, M. (2006). The Strengthening Washington D.C. Families Project: A randomized effectiveness trial of family-based prevention. *Prevention Science*, 7(1), 57-74.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-005-0017-y>
- Haag, K., Du Toit, S., Rudgard, W. E., Skeen, S., Meinck, F., Gordon, S. L., Mebrahtu, H., Roberts, K.J., Tomlinson, M. & Sherr, L. (2022). Accelerators for achieving the sustainable development goals in Sub-Saharan-African children and young adolescents—A longitudinal study. *World Development*, 151, 105739. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105739>
- Hall, K. (2024). Demography of South Africa's children. In W. Slemming, L. Biersteker, & L. Lake (Eds.), *South African Child Gauge 2024: Enhancing early childhood development* (pp. 198-202). Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. <https://ci.uct.ac.za/cg-2024-early-childhood-development>
- Haslam, D., Mejia, A., Sanders, M., & de Vries, P. (2016) Parenting programs. In Rey, J M (Ed.) *IACAPAP e-Textbook of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions, (pp. 1-29).  
<https://eprints.qut.edu.au/131289/>
- Heilmann, A., Mehay, A., Watt, R. G., Kelly, Y., Durrant, J. E., van Turnhout, J., & Gershoff, E. T. (2021). Physical punishment and child outcomes: A narrative review of prospective studies. *The Lancet*, 398(10297), 355-364. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)00582-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00582-1)
- Hiles, D. & Cermák, I. (2007). Narrative psychology. In W. Stainton-Rogers, & C. Willig (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* (pp. 147-164). Sage Publications
- Holborn, L., & Eddy, G. (2011). First steps to healing the South African family. South African Institute of Race Relations. <https://irr.org.za/reports/occasional-reports/first-steps-to-healing-the-south-african-family>
- Hunter, S. C., Riggs, D. W., & Augoustinos, M. (2017). Hegemonic masculinity versus a caring masculinity: Implications for understanding primary caregiving fathers. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 11(3), e12307. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12307>
- Hutchings, J., Ferdinandi, I., Janowski, R., Ward, C. L., McCoy, A., Lachman, J., ... & Williams, M. E. (2024). Parenting for Lifelong Health for young children in Montenegro: Preliminary outcomes, dissemination, and broader embedding of the program. *Prevention Science*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-024-01682-x>

- Jabareen, Y. (2009). Building a conceptual framework: philosophy, definitions, and procedure. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(4), 49-62.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800406>
- Jain, M., & Mahmoodi, V. (2022). Being one in a world of twos: experiences and consequences of single parenting. *Graduate Student Journal of Psychology*, 18.  
<https://doi.org/10.5070/G618156764>
- Jiang, W. (2000). The relationship between culture and language. *ELT Journal*, 54 (4), 328-334.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/54.4.328>
- Jocson, R. M., Alampay, L. P., Lachman, J. M., Reyes, J. C., Mamauag, B. L., Maramba, D. H. A., ... & Calderon, F. (2024). Feasibility and acceptability of a digital parent group chat intervention to prevent child and adolescent maltreatment in the Philippines. *International Journal of Psychology*, 59, (6), 832-840. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.13148>
- John, W., & Shimfe, H. G. (2020). Single parenting and its effects on the development of children in Nigeria. *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, 7(03), 5891-5902. <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijsshi/v7i04.02>
- José Rodrigo, M., Byrne, S., & Álvarez, M. (2012). Preventing child maltreatment through parenting programmes implemented at the local social services level. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(1), 89-103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2011.607340>
- Jose, P. E., Hunstinger, C. S., Hunstinger, P. R., & Liaw, F. R. (2000). Parental values and practices relevant to young children's social development in Taiwan and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 31, 677-702. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022100031006002>
- Kaminer, D., Du Plessis, B., Hardy, A., & Benjamin, A. (2013). Exposure to violence across multiple sites among young South African adolescents. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 19(2), 112. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032487>
- Kaur A, Singh S, Chandan JS, Robbins T, Patel V. (2021) Qualitative exploration of digital chatbot use in medical education: A pilot study. *Digital Health*, 7.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/20552076211038151>
- Khine, A. A., & Mokwena, K. E. (2016). Drug interactions in the constituents of street drug mixture "Nyaope" in South Africa: A mini-review. *African Journal of Drug and Alcohol Studies*, 15(2), 91-101.
- Klevens, J., Mercer Kollar, L., Rizzo, G., O'Shea, G., Nguyen, J., & Roby, S. (2019). Commonalities and differences in social norms related to corporal punishment among Black, Latino and White parents. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 36(1), 19-28.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0591-z>

- Korbin, J. E. (2021). Invited Commentary: How does culture matter in child maltreatment? *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice*, 5(1), 129-132. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-021-00100-x>
- Korbin, J. E., & Spilsbury, J. (1999). Cultural competence and child neglect. In H. Dubowitz, J. Korbin & J. Spilsbury (Eds.), *Neglected Children: Research, Practice and Policy*, (pp69-88). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452225586.n4>
- Kotchick, B. A., & Forehand, R. (2002). Putting parenting in perspective: A discussion of the contextual factors that shape parenting practices. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 11(3), 255-269. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:101686392166>
- Kumpfer, K., Magalhães, C., & Xie, J.. (2016). Cultural adaptation and implementation of family evidence-based interventions with diverse populations. *Prevention Science*, 18(6), 649–659. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0719-3>
- Kumpfer, K. L., Alvarado, R., Smith, P., & Bellamy, N. (2002). Cultural sensitivity and adaptation in family-based prevention interventions. *Prevention Science*, 3(3), 241-246. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0719-3>
- Lachman, J. M., Juhari, R., Stuer, F., Zinser, P., Han, Q., Gardner, F., ... & Landers, C. (2023). “Before I was like a Tarzan. But now, I take a pause”: mixed methods feasibility study of the Naungan Kasih parenting program to prevent violence against children in Malaysia. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1), 241. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15065-4>
- Lachman, J. M., Alampay, L. P., Jocson, R. M., Alinea, C., Madrid, B., Ward, C., ... & Gardner, F. (2021). Effectiveness of a parenting programme to reduce violence in a cash transfer system in the Philippines: RCT with follow-up. *The Lancet Regional Health–Western Pacific*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2021.100279>
- Lachman, J. M., Sherr, L. T., Cluver, L., Ward, C. L., Hutchings, J., & Gardner, F. (2016). Integrating evidence and context to develop a parenting program for low-income families in South Africa. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25, 2337-2352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-016-0389-6>
- Lansford, J. E., & Dodge, K. A. (2008). Cultural norms for adult corporal punishment of children and societal rates of endorsement and use of violence. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 8(3), 257-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295190802204843>
- Lansford, J. E., Sharma, C., Malone, P. S., Woodlief, D., Dodge, K. A., Oburu, P., ... & Di Giunta, L. (2014). Corporal punishment, maternal warmth, and child adjustment: A longitudinal study in eight countries. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 43(4), 670-685. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2014.893518>

- Lansford, J. E. (2022). Annual Research Review: Cross-cultural similarities and differences in parenting. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 63(4), 466-479.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13539>
- Lansford, J. E., Deater-Deckard, K., Dodge, K. A., Bates, J. E., & Pettit, G. S. (2004). Ethnic differences in the link between physical discipline and later adolescent externalizing behaviors. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45(4), 801-812.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2004.00273.x>
- Lansford, J. E., Godwin, J., Bornstein, M. H., Chang, L., Deater-Deckard, K., Di Giunta, L., ... & Bacchini, D. (2018). Parenting, culture, and the development of externalizing behaviors from age 7 to 14 in nine countries. *Development and Psychopathology*, 30(5), 1937-1958.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579418000925/>
- Leijten, P., Rienks, K., Groenman, A. P., Anand, M., Akik, B. K., David, O., ... & Canário, A. C. (2024). Online parenting support: Meta-analyses of non-inferiority and additional value to in-person support. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 159, 107497.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107497>
- Leung, C., Tsang, S., Ng, G.S.H., & Choi, A.S.Y. (2015). Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) Service in Hong Kong: effectiveness and efficacy on Children with ADHD. Hong Kong: Sung Wah Hospitals.  
<https://pcit.tungwahcsd.org/file/PCIT%20research%20book%202015.pdf>
- Levtov, R.G., Doyle, K., Bingenheimer, J.B. (2022). Improved relationship quality, equitable gender attitudes, and reduced alcohol abuse as key mechanisms to reduce intimate partner violence in the Bandedereho couples' randomized trial in Rwanda. *Prevention Science* 23, 1495–1506. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-022-01445-6>
- Lin, Y. F., Li, N., Huang, W. H., Ecsedy, K., Feinberg, M. E., Teti, D., & Carroll, J. M. (2024). "Ultimately we're together": Understanding new parents' experiences of co-parenting. *Proceedings of the Association for Computing Machinery on Human-Computer Interaction*, 8, (CSCW2), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3687018>
- Limpanopparat, S., Gibson, E., & Harris, A. (2024). User engagement, attitudes, and the effectiveness of chatbots as a mental health intervention: A systematic review. *Computers in Human Behavior: Artificial Humans*, 2, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbah.2024.100081>
- Lindstrom Johnson, S., Elam, K., Rogers, A.A. & Hilley, C. (2018). A meta-analysis of parenting practices and child psychosocial outcomes in trauma-informed parenting interventions after violence exposure. *Prevention Science*, 19, 927–938. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-018-0943-0>

- Little, M., Berry, V., Morpeth, L., Blower, S., Axford, N., Taylor, R., Bywater, T., Lehtonen, M., & Tobin, K. (2012). The impact of three evidence-based programmes delivered in public systems in Birmingham, UK. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6(2), 260-272. <https://doi.org/10.4119/ijcv-2917>
- Liu, A.Y., Gubbels, J. & Orobio de Castro, B. (2024). The effectiveness of trauma-informed parenting programs for traumatized parents and their components: A meta-analytic study. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review* 27, 1113–1143. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-024-00503-5>
- Liu, S., Xia, X., Lachman, J. M., & Zhang, H. (2024). A Feasibility Study of Parenting for Lifelong Health for Adolescents in China. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 34, (6), 687-700. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315241238964>
- Lorenc, T., Lester, S., Sutcliffe, K., Stansfield, C., & Thomas, J. (2020). Interventions to support people exposed to adverse childhood experiences: systematic review of systematic reviews. *BMC Public Health*, 20, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08789-0>
- Lynch, M., & Cicchetti, D. (2002). Links between community violence and the family system: Evidence from children's feelings of relatedness and perceptions of parent behavior. *Family Process*, 41(3), 519-532. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2002.41314.x>
- Mahlangu, P., Gibbs, A., Shai, N. et al. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 lockdown and link to women and children's experiences of violence in the home in South Africa. *BMC Public Health*, 22, 1029 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13422-3>
- Mamauag, B. L., Alampay, L. P., Lachman, J. M., Madrid, B. J., Hutchings, J., Ward, C. L., & Gardner, F. (2021). A south-to-south cultural adaptation of an evidence-based parenting program for families in the Philippines. *Family Process*, 60(4), 1202-1216. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12625>
- Man, K. W., & Man, L. C. (2014). Collaborative learning in group parent education: a case study of process and outcome. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Learning*, 20(1), 53. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7939/CGP/v20i01/4841>
- Marshall, J. M., Dunstan, D. A., & Bartik, W. (2020). Clinical or gimmickal: The use and effectiveness of mobile mental health apps for treating anxiety and depression. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(1), 20-28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004867419876700>
- Masarik, A. S., & Conger, R. D. (2017). Stress and child development: A review of the Family Stress Model. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 13, 85-90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.05.008>

- Masiran, R., Ibrahim, N., Awang, H., & Lim, P. Y. (2020). Improving multicultural parenting program for children with emotional and behavioral problems: an integrated review. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 51, 101851. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2019.101851>
- Mathane, T. P., & Gumbo, T. (2023). *Towards a conceptual framework for sustainable municipal free Wi-Fi interventions in South Africa: a city of Tshwane case study*. In: Let it Grow, Let us Plan, Let it Grow. Nature-based Solutions for Sustainable Resilient Smart Green and Blue Cities. Proceedings of REAL Competence Center of Urban and Regional Planning 2023, 28th International Conference on Urban Development, Regional Planning and Information Society (pp. 849-855). [https://archive.corp.at/cdrom2023/papers2023/CORP2023\\_11.pdf](https://archive.corp.at/cdrom2023/papers2023/CORP2023_11.pdf)
- McCoy, A., Lachman, J. M., Ward, C. L., Tapanya, S., Poomchaichote, T., Kelly, J., ... & Gardner, F. (2021). Feasibility pilot of an adapted parenting program embedded within the Thai public health system. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 1009. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11081-4>
- McCoy, A., Melendez-Torres, G. J., & Gardner, F. (2020). Parenting interventions to prevent violence against children in low-and middle-income countries in East and Southeast Asia: A systematic review and multi-level meta-analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104444>
- McGill, M. G., Purkey, E., Davison, C. M., Watson, A., & Bayoumi, I. (2022). Financial stress during COVID-19: implications for parenting behaviour and child well-being. *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2022-001569>
- McGirr, S., Torres, J., Heany, J. (2020). Lessons learned on recruiting and retaining young fathers in a parenting and repeat pregnancy prevention program. *Maternal & Child Health Journal*, 24, 183–190. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-020-02956-w>
- Meinhart, M., Seff, I., Falb, K., Deitch, J., Roth, D., Poulton, C., & Stark, L. (2024). Humanitarian-specific recommendations for gender-transformative parenting programming: lessons from the field to address gender-based violence. *EClinical Medicine*, 78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2024.102954>
- Mejia, A., Leijten, P., Lachman, J. M., & Parra-Cardona, J. R. (2017). Different strokes for different folks? Contrasting approaches to cultural adaptation of parenting interventions. *Prevention Science*, 18(6), 630-639. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0671-2>
- Michaelson, V. (2023). Decolonizing discipline: The normalization of violence against children, church parties to the settlement agreement, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 6. *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights/Revue Canadienne des Droits des Enfants*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.22215/cjcr.v10i1.4231>

- Mishra, A., Sayeed, N., & Ram, D. (2023). Efficacy of parent management training in ADHD children using Kazdin's model. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 49, 4, 133-137. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374898035\\_Efficacy\\_of\\_Parent\\_Management\\_Training\\_in\\_ADHD\\_Children\\_Using\\_Kazdin%27s\\_Model](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374898035_Efficacy_of_Parent_Management_Training_in_ADHD_Children_Using_Kazdin%27s_Model)
- Morawska, A. (2020). The effects of gendered parenting on child development outcomes: A systematic review. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 23(4), 553-576. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-020-00321-5>
- Mthembi, P. M., Mwenesongole, E. M., & Cole, M. D. (2018). Chemical profiling of the street cocktail drug 'nyaope' in South Africa using GC–MS I: Stability studies of components of 'nyaope' in organic solvents. *Forensic Science International*, 292, 115-124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2018.08.001>
- Nkosi, B., & Daniels, P. (2007). Family strengths: South Africa. *Marriage & Family Review*, 41:1-2, 11-26. <https://www.w3.org/1999/xlink>
- Ogundele, M. O., & Ayyash, H. F. (2023). ADHD in children and adolescents: Review of current practice of non-pharmacological and behavioural management. *AIMS Public Health*, 10(1), 35. <https://doi.org/10.3934/publichealth.2023004>
- Oliveira, K. D. S., Nakano, T. D. C., & SILVA, G. M. D. (2019). Children's resilience markers: Criterion-based validity evidences. *Estudos de Psicologia (Campinas)*, 36, e180142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-0275201936e180142>
- Optimus Study South Africa: Technical Report. Sexual victimisation of children in South Africa. Final report of the Optimus Foundation study: South Africa. May 2016
- Pan, B., Wang, Y., Zhao, C., Miao, J., Gong, Y., Xiao, B., & Li, Y. (2024). Co-parenting, parental competence and problem behaviours in children: examining differential parental roles. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03774-z>
- Para-Cardona, J. R., Bybee, D., Sullivan, C. M., Domenech Rodríguez, M. M., Dates, B., Tams, L., & Bernal, G. (2017). Examining the impact of differential cultural adaptation with Latina/o immigrants exposed to adapted parent training interventions. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 85(1), 58-71. <https://doi:10.1037/ccp0000160>
- Parkinson, S., Eatough, V., Holmes, J., Stapley, E., & Midgley, N. (2016). Framework analysis: a worked example of a study exploring young people's experiences of depression. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 13(2), 109-129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2015.1119228>
- Parra Cardona, J. R., Domenech-Rodriguez, M., Forgatch, M., Sullivan, C., Bybee, D., Holtrop, K., Escobar-Chew, A. R., Tams, L., Dates, B., & Bernal, G. (2012). Culturally adapting an

- evidence-based parenting intervention for Latino immigrants: The need to integrate fidelity and cultural relevance. *Family Process*, 51(1), 56-72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2012.01386.x>
- Peters, N. (2019). Shebeens (South Africa). *Wiki Index. Global Informality Project*. [https://www.informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Shebeens\\_%28South\\_Africa%29](https://www.informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Shebeens_%28South_Africa%29)
- Pinker, Steven. 2007. *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*. Viking.
- Piquero, A. R., Farrington, D. P., Welsh, B. C., Tremblay, R., & Jennings, W. G. (2008). Effects of early family/parent training programs on antisocial behavior & delinquency. *Campbell Systematic Review*, 4(1), 1-122. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2008.11>
- Pitchforth, E., & Van Teijlingen, E. (2005). International public health research involving interpreters: a case study from Bangladesh. *BMC Public Health*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-5-71>
- Posel, D. (2001). What's in a name? Racial categorisations under apartheid and their afterlife. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 47, 50-74. <https://transformationjournal.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/tran047005.pdf>
- Post-Kammer, P. (1988). Effectiveness of Parents' Anonymous in reducing child abuse. *The School Counselor*, 35(5), 337-342. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23901682>
- Powell, D. R., & Eisenstadt, J. W. (1988). Informal and formal conversations in parent education groups: An observational study. *Family Relations*, 166-170. <https://doi.org/10.2307/584315>
- Puff, J., & Renk, K. (2014). Relationships among parents' economic stress, parenting, and young children's behavior problems. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 45, 712-727. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-014-0440-z>
- Reyes, D. R. G., Jocson, R. M., Alampay, L. P., Mamauag, B. L., Reyes, J. C., & Lachman, J. M. (2024). Evaluation of a brief online parenting training for community service providers in the Philippines. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 161, 107664. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107664>
- Richter, L. M., & Dawes, A. R. (2008). Child abuse in South Africa: rights and wrongs. *Child Abuse Review: Journal of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*, 17(2), 79-93. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.1004>
- Richter, I.M., Bac, M., & Hay, I. (1990). Psychological aspects of the health care of young children. *South African Family Practice*, 11, 490-497.
- Richter, L. M. (1999). Parenting in poverty: Young children and their families in South Africa. In L. Eldering & P. Leseman (Eds.), *Effective early childhood education: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, (pp202-222). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203800010>

- Richter, L., & Morrell, R. (2006). *Baba: men and fatherhood in South Africa*. HSRC Press.
- Ritchie, J., & Spencer, L. (2002). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Bryman & R.G. Burgess (Eds.), *Analyzing Qualitative Data* (pp. 187-208). Routledge.
- Roach, A., McLean, R., Diaz, A. M., Hawes, D., & Dadds, M. (2024). Time-out under scrutiny: examining the relationships among the discipline strategy time-out, child well-being and attachment and exposure to adversity. *The British Journal of Psychiatry, Preprint*, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2024.228>
- Rodrigo, M. J., Martín, J. C., Máiquez, M. L., & Rodríguez, G. (2007). Informal and formal supports and maternal child-rearing practices in at-risk and non at-risk psychosocial contexts. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29(3), 329-347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2006.03.010>
- Rodriguez, Alison and King, Nigel (2009) The lived experience of parenting a child with a lifelimiting condition: A focus on the mental health realm. *Palliative and Supportive Care*, 7 (01). pp. 7- 12. ISSN 1478-9515 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478951509000030>
- Roman, N. V. (2014). Parenting in a rainbow nation: A South African perspective on parenting. In H.Selin (Eds.), *Parenting Across Cultures* (pp. 213-229). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7503-9\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7503-9_16)
- Roy, K. (2008). A Life Course Perspective on Fatherhood and Family Policies in the United States and South Africa. *Fathering*, 6.2, 92–112. <https://doi.org/10.3149/fth.0602.92>
- Rubin, K & Chung, O.B. (2006). *Parenting Beliefs, Behaviors, and Parent-Child Relations : a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Psychology Press.
- Sahithya, B. R., Manohari, S. M., & Vijaya, R. (2019). Parenting styles and its impact on children - a cross cultural review with a focus on India. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 22(4), 357-383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2019.1594178>
- Sanders, M. R., & Turner, K. M. T. (2018). The importance of parenting in influencing the lives of children. In M. Sanders & A. Morawska (Eds.), *Handbook of Parenting and Child Development Across the Lifespan*, (pp3–26). Springer. In [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94598-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94598-9_1)
- Schilling, S., Mebane, A., & Perreira, K. M. (2021). Cultural adaptation of group parenting programs: review of the literature and recommendations for best practices. *Family Process*, 60(4), 1134-1151. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12658>
- Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Shafer, K., Olofson, E. L., & Kamp Dush, C. M. (2021). Fathers' parenting and coparenting behavior in dual-earner families: Contributions of traditional masculinity,

- father nurturing role beliefs, and maternal gate closing. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 22(3), 538. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/men0000336>
- Shenderovich, Y., Sacolo-Gwebu, H., Fang, Z., Lachman, J., Cluver, L., & Ward, C. (2022). Adaptations and staff experiences in delivering parenting programmes and other family support services in three community-based organisations in Cape Town, South Africa during the COVID pandemic. *Global Public Health*, 18, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2022.2129725>
- Shenderovich, Y., Eisner, M., Cluver, L., Doubt, J., Berezin, M., Majokweni, S., & Murray, A. L. (2018). What affects attendance and engagement in a parenting program in South Africa? *Prevention Science*, 19, 977–986. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-018-0941-2>
- Sherr, L., Haag, K., Tomlinson, M., Rudgard, W. E., Skeen, S., Meinck, F., ... & Cluver, L. (2023). Understanding accelerators to improve SDG-related outcomes for adolescents—An investigation into the nature and quantum of additive effects of protective factors to guide policy making. *PLoS One*, 18(1), e0278020. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0278020>
- Sherr, L., Macedo, A., Cluver, L. D., Meinck, F., Skeen, S., Hensels, I. S., Sherr, L. T. S., Roberts, K. J., & Tomlinson, M. (2017). Parenting, the other oldest profession in the world - a cross-sectional study of parenting and child outcomes in South Africa and Malawi. *Health Psychology & Behavioral Medicine*, 5(1), 145–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2016.1276459>
- Shimpuku, Y., & Norr, K. F.. (2012). Working with interpreters in cross-cultural qualitative research in the context of a developing country: systematic literature review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 68(8), 1692–1706. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2012.05951.x>
- Silva, Í. D. C. P. D., Cunha, K. D. C., Ramos, E. M. L. S., Pontes, F. A. R., & Silva, S. S. D. C. (2021). Family resilience and parenting stress in poor families. *Estudos de Psicologia (Campinas)*, 38. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0275202138e190116>
- Simkiss, D. E., Snooks, H. A., Stallard, N., Kimani, P. K., Sewell, B., Fitzsimmons, D., Anthony, R., Winstanley, S., Wilson, L., Phillips, C. J., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2013). Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a universal parenting skills programme in deprived communities: multicentre randomised controlled trial. *BMJ Open*, 3(8), e002851. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2013-002851>
- Sosu, E. M., & Schmidt, P. (2017). Economic deprivation and its effects on childhood conduct problems: the mediating role of family stress and investment factors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1580. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01580>

- Srivastava, S. B., Goldberg, A., Manian, V. G., & Potts, C. (2018). Enculturation trajectories: Language, cultural adaptation, and individual outcomes in organizations. *Management Science*, 64(3), 1348-1364. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2016.2671>
- Srivastava, A. & Thomson, S. (2009). Framework analysis: A qualitative methodology for applied policy research. *Journal of Administration and Governance*, 72. [https://www.joaag.com/uploads/06\\_Research\\_Note\\_Srivastava\\_and\\_Thomson\\_4\\_2\\_.pdf](https://www.joaag.com/uploads/06_Research_Note_Srivastava_and_Thomson_4_2_.pdf)
- Stahlschmidt, M. J., Threlfall, J., Seay, K. D., Lewis, E. M., & Kohl, P. L. (2013). Recruiting fathers to parenting programs: Advice from dads and fatherhood program providers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(10), 1734-1741. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.07.004>
- Statistics South Africa. (2011). Statistics South Africa. Formal census. URL: [http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page\\_id=383](http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=383)
- Statistics South Africa. (2007). General household survey 2006. (Online) [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)
- Su, C., & Hynie, M. (2011). Effects of life stress, social support, and cultural norms on parenting styles among mainland Chinese, European Canadian, and Chinese Canadian immigrant mothers. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42(6), 944-962. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022110381124>
- Sullivan, K. M., Murray, K. J., & Ake III, G. S. (2016). Trauma-informed care for children in the child welfare system: An initial evaluation of a trauma-informed parenting workshop. *Child Maltreatment*, 21(2), 147-155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559515615961>
- Swartz, L. (1998). *Culture and mental health: A Southern African view*. Oxford University Press.
- Thiagarajan, P., Chakrabarty, S., Lueg, J. E., & Taylor, R. D. (2007). Work-family role strain of single parents: The effects of role conflict and role ambiguity. *Marketing Management Journal*, 17(1). URL: <https://www.mmaglobal.org/publications/MMJ/MMJ-Issues/2007-Spring/MMJ-2007-Spring-Vol17-Issue1-Complete.pdf>
- Tomlinson, M, Kleintjes, S & Lake, L (eds). (2022) South African Child Gauge 2021/2022. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. URL: <https://www.ci.uct.ac.za/ci/child-gauge/2021-2022>
- Tremblay, R. E., Nagin, D. S., SéGuin, J. R., Zoccolillo, M., Zelazo, P. D., Boivin, M., PéRusse, D., & Japel, C. (2004). Physical Aggression During Early Childhood: Trajectories and Predictors. *Pediatrics*, 114(1), e43–e50. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.114.1.e43>
- UNICEF. (2020). Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3461/file/Brief-2-Parenting-programmes-to-reduce-violence.pdf>

- UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research & Foresight, Prevention Collaborative and Equimundo. (2023) Parenting programmes to reduce violence against children and women: What gender-transformative programmes look like (Brief 2). UNICEF Innocenti. <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3461/file/Brief-2-Parenting-programmes-to-reduce-violence.pdf>
- Van den Berg, W., Hendricks, L., Hatcher, A., Peacock, D., Godana, P., & Dworkin, S. (2013). ‘One Man Can’: shifts in fatherhood beliefs and parenting practices following a gender-transformative programme in Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Gender & Development*, 21(1), 111-125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2013.769775>
- van Doornik, R. S., van der Oord, S., Luijckx, J., Groenman, A. P., Leijten, P., Luman, M., ... & Dekkers, T. J. (2024). The short-and longer-term effects of brief behavioral parent training versus care as usual in children with behavioral difficulties: study protocol for a randomized controlled trial. *BMC Psychiatry*, 24(1), 203. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-024-05649-8>
- Van Esch, R., & De Haan, M. (2017). Implementing parenting programmes across cultural contexts: A perspective on the deficit narrative. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 29(5), 983-998. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-017-0103-y>
- Vaughan-Eden, V., Holden, G. W., & LeBlanc, S. S. (2019). Commentary: Changing the social norm about corporal punishment. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 36, 43-48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0592-y>
- Walker, H.E., Diemer, M.C. & Wamser-Nanney, R. (2022). Childhood maltreatment and parental attitudes regarding the use of corporal punishment. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 31, 2376–2386. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02279-0>
- Wallin, A. M., & Ahlström, G. (2006). Cross-cultural interview studies using interpreters: systematic literature review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 55(6), 723-735. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2006.03963.x>
- Wang, F., Wang, M., & Xing, X. (2018). Attitudes mediate the intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment in China. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 76, 34-43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.10.00>
- Ward, C. L., Wessels, I. M., Lachman, J. M., Hutchings, J., Cluver, L. D., Kassanjee, R., Nhapi, R., Little, F., & Gardner, F.. (2020). Parenting for Lifelong Health for Young Children: a randomized controlled trial of a parenting program in South Africa to prevent harsh parenting and child conduct problems. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 61(4), 503–512. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13129>
- Wardhaugh, R. (2002). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. (4th ed.). Blackwell Publishers.

- Whiting, B. B., Whiting, J. W. M., & Longabaugh, R. (1975). *Children of six cultures: a psycho-cultural analysis*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674593770>
- World Health Organization. (2020). *Global status report on preventing violence against children*.  
World Health Organisation. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240004191>
- World Health Organization. (2019). INSPIRE handbook: Action for implementing the seven strategies for ending violence against children. World Health Organization.  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241514095>
- Yalom, ID. (1985). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*. (5th ed.) Basic Books.
- Yamaoka, Y., & Bard, D. E. (2019). Positive parenting matters in the face of early adversity. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 56(4), 530-539.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.11.018>
- Yaremych, H. E., & Persky, S. (2023). Recruiting fathers for parenting research: An evaluation of eight recruitment methods and an exploration of fathers' motivations for participation. *Parenting*, 23(1), 1-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2022.2036940>
- Young, L., & Ansell, N. (2003). Fluid households, complex families: The impacts of children's migration as a response to HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa. *The Professional Geographer*, 55, 464-476. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.5504005>
- Yuen, L. H. (2017). Personal growth and development of parent leaders through a group parent education program. *Teacher Development*, 21(4), 547-560.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2017.1298537>
- Zilanawala, A., & Pilkauskas, N. V. (2012). Material hardship and child socioemotional behaviors: Differences by types of hardship, timing, and duration. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(4), 814-825. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.008>

### Appendix 1 ParentChat Topics, session outlines and techniques used

| Topic                                       | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Techniques                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Spending One-on-One Time with your child | <b>spend one-on-one time</b> with their children away from work and household duties and other people, they create space to <b>be available</b> to their child, to get <b>more involved</b> in their lives, and to <b>build trust and communication skills</b> .                                 | <p>Use words to describe what your child is doing.</p> <p>Allow your child to take the lead during one-on-one time.</p> <p>Allow your child to invite you into his/her world by showing interest in what they are doing.</p> <p>Accept and observe instead of asking questions and criticising your child when playing.</p> <p>Play at your child's developmental level and pace.</p> <p>Find ways of playing together instead of competitive games during one-on-one time.</p> <p><b>for parents with adolescents:</b></p> <p>One-on-one time means giving your full attention to your teen.</p> <p>Allow your teen to talk to lead in a conversation or activity.</p> <p>Look at your teen while they are speaking.</p> <p>Show interest in their story and acceptance of their feelings.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 2. Talking about Emotions                   | The importance of accepting, naming and exploring a range of emotions with their children. They learn techniques that will help them to do this effectively. The primary objectives for this week are parents learning and practicing how to talk about their own and their children's feelings. | <p>BREATHE. Slowly. Pause.</p> <p>Before you say anything, slowly breathe in and out. It will calm you and give you a chance to think.</p> <p>SHARE how you feel</p> <p>Many of us were told not to cry or show our feelings to our children. But take a deep breath and calmly tell them how you feel. They will understand better, and also learn from you how to deal with stress.</p> <p>LISTEN to your child or teen</p> <p>Allow your child to share their emotions. You can also reflect back what you them say to you. Accept that the feeling is okay, even if it is negative.</p> <p>SHOW them you care</p> <p>Stress makes us focus on ourselves. But our children and teens need our support. Ask them how they feel. Listen to them and comfort them. Try a hug or say, 'I understand.'</p> <p>It can change everything.</p> <p>SEEK the positive</p> <p>Can you and your child or teen think about ideas that might help? Can you do something positive together to take your mind off the stress?</p> |

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. Keeping it Positive with Praise                    | Praise is an expression of approval or appreciation. It's a very useful tool for parents because everything we do is more likely to happen again if it is rewarded in some way. When caregivers reward good behaviour with praise or other simple rewards, children are encouraged to behave that way more often in the future. By the same token, as we will see in later weeks, behaviour that is ignored or not rewarded is less likely to happen again. | <p>The key building blocks for Praise are:</p> <p><b>SEE IT.</b> Notice anything your child or teen does that is helpful or good and praise them. They may not show it, but you'll see them doing that good thing again. It will also reassure them that you notice and care.</p> <p><b>SAY IT.</b> Be enthusiastic - really mean it when you say it!</p> <p><b>REPEAT IT.</b> Try to find something every day to thank them for. Even something really small.</p>                                                                                                                                |
| 4. Giving Specific, Positive & Realistic Instructions | This looks at how parents can be more effective at getting their children to follow their instructions. When parents give specific, positive instructions, children know exactly what behaviour is expected from them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>The key building blocks for Giving Instructions are <b>Be Real, Be Positive, and Be Specific:</b></p> <p>Know the positive behaviour you want to see from your child.</p> <p>Make sure to have your child's attention when giving an instruction.</p> <p>Give one instruction at a time.</p> <p>Give your child time to follow each instruction.</p> <p>Make sure your child is able to follow your instructions.</p> <p>Praise your child immediately after following an instruction.</p> <p>For younger children, break one big task into small ones and give step by step instructions.</p> |
| 5. Household Rules & Daily Routines                   | Parents sometimes get frustrated at their children for being noisy or not tidying up after they have played, throwing their food on the ground or staying out way too late. Often children don't understand why these things are important. Establishing and                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>In this session, parents focus on the importance of involving their children when establishing household rules and routines to help keep their children safe and healthy and remember to praise their children in order to help children to follow household rules and routines.</p> <p>The key building blocks for Rules and Routines are:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                        | <p>explaining household rules helps to give children guidance around the behaviours that are expected of them and why. Rules also establish clear boundaries that help children to feel safe and secure.</p> <p>Routines also help children to feel safe and secure. Routines such as mealtimes and bedtimes can help create a stable environment for children. This is especially important for those who are living in hectic or unsafe environments because of stress or factors such as those relating to Covid-19, which has made school and workplace routines unstable.</p> | <p><b>Be a Team.</b> Create rules with your child or teenager. One rule at a time is easiest. Discuss the reasons for the rule and listen to their views.</p> <p><b>Keep It Real.</b> Make them realistic for what your child or teenager can do and be clear and specific so there's no misunderstanding. Not 'on time' but 'by 7pm'.</p> <p><b>Be Consistent.</b> Daily routines, such as time for schoolwork, play, meals, and sleep, can help our children feel safe and secure. They also give our children a sense of security that they need to grow and develop.</p> <p><b>Praise, Praise, Praise.</b> Praise your child or teen for making a rule with you and praise them for keeping it!</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 6. Positive Discipline | <p>Using Redirecting and consequences for managing behaviour. Redirecting is effective with younger children: you distract a child when they are misbehaving by turning their attention to something positive. Redirecting as another way to ignore negative behaviour. It works especially well if you can then praise your child for positive behaviour.</p> <p>Consequences are the results of actions or behaviours, for example: Not</p>                                                                                                                                      | <p>In this session, parents focus on how to discuss consequences with their children by giving them choice. They also learn how to select a consequence that is realistic, and how to apply consequences by combining them consistently with household rules.</p> <p>The key building blocks for Positive Discipline are:</p> <p><b>Be Calm.</b> The most important thing you can remember is to be calm when disciplining your child. Take a couple deep breaths or walk away if you need to. And then respond in a calm and clear way.</p> <p><b>Be Fair.</b> Give your child a choice to comply before giving a consequence. For household rules, you can discuss consequences with your child or teen in advance. Make sure the consequence is reasonable and one you can follow through on.</p> <p><b>Be Positive.</b> Remember the Sunshine of Positive Attention! Try to avoid giving consequences in the first place by redirecting your child and giving lots of positive</p> |

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                       | cleaning the dishes will result in not having a clean plate to eat from. When we use them to manage behaviour, then they are the unwanted results of certain behaviours that parents want to discourage, for example: Staying out past curfew means you cannot go out the following night. Children therefore learn that their behaviour is unacceptable and results in a consequence. | attention to the behaviours you want to see more of with plenty of praise. Make sure you involve your child in a positive activity after giving the consequence.                                                                       |
| 7. Responding to Difficult Situations and Crises      | Responding to tantrums/ bad behaviour and to crisis situation such as illness/ abuse, sexual abuse, rape or violence in community                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Remain calm, reassure child, discuss immediate action; ask “What does my child need right now?”; involve child in responding to crisis; look at services available in community.                                                       |
| 8. Problem Solving with Children and Final Reflection | <p>Involving children in solving problems.<br/>The key building blocks for Problem Solving are:</p> <p><b>Know it:</b> Identify the problem<br/><b>Solve it.</b> Think of possible solutions and what their results would be.<br/><b>Try it:</b> Choose one solution and try it out<br/><b>Test it:</b> Did it work? Great! If it did not work, then try another solution.</p>         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify the problem</li> <li>2. Jointly come up with solutions</li> <li>3. Choose a solution</li> <li>4. Try the solution out</li> <li>5. Reflect on whether the solution worked</li> </ol> |

**Appendix 2:****ORAL CONSENT STAGE**

- ☐ Do you agree to take part in this study?
- ☐ Do you give permission for us to audio record your interview?
- ☐ Do you give permission for us to quote you directly without using your name?

**RESEARCHER RECORD OF ORAL CONSENT**

Participant Name:

Date:

Province:

Interview Explained (Yes/No):

Participant agreed to take part in the study: (Yes/No)

Participant agreed to be audio recorded: (Yes/No)

Participant agreed to quotes which would not identify them: (Yes/No)

Signature of Researcher [*insert name*]:

## **Appendix 2. ParentChat Oral Consent Script for Parents/Caregivers participating in Qualitative Interviews and permission to record the interviews.**

Hello, my name is *Katherine*. I am from *the University of Cape Town* and I would like to invite you to participate in an interview about the ParentChat programme you participated in. We are doing this study so that we can understand how to help improve the lives of children and families and provide helpful parenting skills.

These questions I will be asking you are for my study which is looking at the ParentChat programme that we delivered during Covid-19, and how acceptable it is to parents in South Africa.

The interview should take about 30 to 45 minutes.

The risks to you in participating, are that some people find it upsetting to talk about parenting. If you find talking about parenting issues upsetting, I will refer you to sources of assistance. In terms of the benefits for you, we hope that the process will highlight and support what you have learned and show you where you might need or want more input or support.

The only cost to you for participating in the interviews, is your airtime and your time. We will provide you with data bundles to compensate you for your airtime.

Any information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential, unless you tell us that you or your child is at risk of harm.

If there is risk of significant harm to you or your child/ren, we will discuss possible sources of support following this discussion. If necessary, we may also make a referral to the appropriate services for further assistance.

To be part of this interview, you need to have participated in the ParentChat programme.

Your participation is voluntary (it is your choice).

Nothing will happen if you decide not to participate. You may also stop participating at any point of the interview.

If there are any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering, you do not have to answer them.

Your personal information will be deleted immediately after completing the study. Any other research data will be anonymized, meaning that your name will be removed. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the information you provide. All research data will be stored for at least 5 years after the study.

Results from the study may also be shared in reports, at conferences, and in policy briefs for

government and other agencies. Your name and your child's name and details will not appear in any of these materials.

This study has received ethical approval from the University of Cape Town, approval number: PSY2023-11.

I am the researcher responsible for ensuring the safe and proper use of any personal information you provide, solely for research purposes. You are most welcome to ask questions about the study now, or at any time in the future.

We would like your permission to record this interview, so that we don't have to handwrite our notes. Once we have made our notes, the recording will be deleted.

### **Appendix 3A: Instrument: Fortnightly ParentChat Survey Questions:**

#### **A: 1st Fortnight questions: Week 1**

##### **One-on-one time**

1. How acceptable was the strategy of **one-on-one time** with your child when you first heard about it? (1= not at all acceptable and 10= extremely acceptable)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

2. How likely are you to use the strategy of **one-on-one time** with your child?  
(1= not at all likely and 10=extremely likely)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

#### **B. 2<sup>nd</sup> Fortnight questions Week 3**

##### **Talking about Emotions**

1. How acceptable was the strategy of **talking about emotions** with your child when you first heard about it?

(1 = not at all acceptable and 10 = extremely acceptable)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

2. How likely are you to use the strategy of **talking about emotions** with your child?  
(1 = not at all likely & 10 = extremely likely)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

##### **Praising your child**

3. How acceptable was the strategy of **praising your child** when you first heard about it?  
(1 = Not at all acceptable & 10 = Extremely acceptable)

1   2   3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

4. How likely are you to use the strategy of **praising your child**?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

(1 = Not at all likely and 10 = Extremely likely)

### C: 3<sup>rd</sup> Fortnight Questions: Week 5

#### Keeping it Positive

1. How acceptable was the strategy of **keeping it positive and giving clear and realistic instructions** to your child when you first heard about it?

(1 = Not at all acceptable and 10 = Extremely acceptable)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

2. How likely are you to use the strategy of **keeping it positive and giving clear and realistic instructions** to your child?

(1 = Not at all likely and 10 = Extremely likely)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

#### Keeping your child safe: Rules and Routines

3. How acceptable was the strategy of **keeping your child safe: rules and routines** for your child when you first heard about it?

(1 = Not at all acceptable & 10 = Extremely acceptable)

1   2   3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

4. How likely are you to use the strategy of **keeping your child safe: rules and routines** with your child?

(1 = Not at all likely & 10 = Extremely likely)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### D: Last Fortnight Questions Week 7

#### Positive Discipline

1. How acceptable was the strategy of **positive discipline: using redirection and consequences** with your child when you first heard about it?

(1 = Not at all acceptable & 10 = Extremely acceptable)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

2. How likely are you to use the strategy of **positive discipline: using redirection and consequences** with your child?

(1 = Not at all likely & 10 = Extremely likely)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### Handling Crises:

3. How acceptable was the strategy of **handling crises** with your child when you first heard about it?

(1 = Not at all acceptable & 10 = Extremely acceptable)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

4. How likely are you to use the strategies of **handling crises** with your child?

(1 = Not at all likely & 10 = Extremely likely)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### Reflection

5. How acceptable was the strategy of **reflection** with your child when you first heard about it?

(1 = Not at all acceptable & 10 = Extremely acceptable)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

6. How likely are you to use the strategies of **reflection** with your child?

(1 = Not at all likely & 10 = Extremely likely)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

### **Appendix 3B: Interview schedule for Initial Qualitative Interviews**

#### **Follow up One-on-one Interview questions after completion of the ParentChat Programme**

##### **Introduction:**

We are going to go through the skills that you learned on the ParentChat programme one by one and discuss how you found them, whether you liked them, whether you used them and found them helpful or not.

1. Tell me about yourself and being a parent.
  - Do you find parenting stressful? What are the things that make parenting hard for you?
  - What is good about being a parent?
  - Probes: work, time, shift work, long distances to get to and from work, money, no other adult in the house, exposure to violence (direct, indirect, living in violent neighbourhood)
2. Thank you. Now we are going to look at each of the skills you learned in ParentChat in turn. First, how did you feel about the skill of spending one-on-one time with your child,
  - when you first heard about it in the ParentChat programme?
  - How do you feel about this skill now?
  - Are there things that stop you from using this skill with your child?
  - What makes it easier for you to use this skill?
  - Different cultures have different ways of raising children. Do you think that this skill of one-on-one time fits in with your culture? Why or why not?
3. How did you feel about the skill of talking about emotions,
  - when you first heard about it in the ParentChat programme?
  - How do you feel about this skill now?
  - Are there things that stop you from using this skill with your child?
  - What makes it easier for you to use this skill?
  - Different cultures have different ways of raising children. Do you think that this skill of talking about emotions, fits in with your culture? Why or why not?
4. How did you feel about the skill of praising your child,
  - when you first heard about it in the ParentChat programme?
  - How do you feel about this skill now?

- Are there things that stop you from using this skill with your child?
  - What makes it easier for you to use this skill?
  - Different cultures have different ways of raising children. Do you think that this skill of praising your child fits in with your culture? Why or why not?
5. How did you feel about the skill of keeping it positive and giving clear and realistic instructions,
- when you first heard about it in the ParentChat programme?
  - How do you feel about this skill now?
  - Are there things that stop you from using this skill with your child?
  - What makes it easier for you to use this skill?
  - Different cultures have different ways of raising children. Do you think that this skill of keeping it positive and giving clear and realistic instructions fits in with your culture? Why or why not?
6. How did you feel about the skill of keeping your child safe: rules and routines,
- when you first heard about it in the ParentChat programme?
  - How do you feel about this skill now?
  - Are there things that stop you from using this skill with your child?
  - What makes it easier for you to use this skill?
  - Different cultures have different ways of raising children. Do you think that this skill of keeping your child safe: rules and routines fits in with your culture? Why or why not?
7. Has the programme changed anything in how you get on with (relate to) your child?
8. Have you noticed any difference in your child's behaviour since you completed the ParentChat programme?

### **Appendix 3C Questions for follow-up final post ParentChat qualitative interviews:**

Prior to the interview I did a cognitive interview asking, “What does ‘How acceptable were these skills’ mean to you?” This was to understand what the participant understood by this term and to assess their perception and interpretation and in so doing, identify any misunderstandings/ problems that could occur. This entailed asking the participant to think out loud and express their thoughts to the interviewer (Drennan, 2002).

#### Information about the parent: Tell me about yourself and being a parent:

- What are the things that made parenting hard for you? (Probes: work, money, time to spend with your children, no other adults to assist with parenting, long distances to travel to and from work, exposure to violence in community, lack of safety in community)
- Ask about stress and exposure to violence in home and community.
- What do you struggle with as a parent?
- Do you find parenting stressful? If so, why?
- What is good for you about being a parent?

#### Overall Experience of Programme

1. Tell me about your overall experience of the programme.
  - a. What did you find helpful/ useful from the programme?
    - i. Have you used the things you learned from the programme? How did it go?
    - ii. (Probes: Spending one-on-one time with your child; Talking about emotions with your child; Praising your child; Keeping it positive: Giving clear and realistic instructions; Keeping your child safe: Rules and routines for your child; Positive discipline: Using redirection and consequences; Handling crises; Reflection).
  - b. Were there any skills that you thought wouldn’t work when you first heard about them? Tell us what your concerns were?
    - i. (Probes: Spending one-on-one time with your child; Talking about emotions with your child; Praising your child; Keeping it positive: Giving clear and realistic instructions; Keeping your child safe: Rules and

routines for your child; Positive discipline: Using redirection and consequences; Handling crises; Reflection).

- c. Has anything changed for you and your child?
  - i. Probes: Have you noticed anything different in the way you parent your children?
  - ii. Have you noticed any difference in your child's behaviour since you completed the ParentChat programme?
  - iii. Has the programme changed anything in how you get on with (relate to) your child?
2. What were your own parenting practices that you used before attending the programme? Where did you get these approaches/ skills from? Was there anything that made it difficult for you to benefit from the programme?
3. How did you find doing the programme and getting advice on WhatsApp and doing the programme online instead of in-person?
4. How have other members of your family responded to anything new/ different you are doing since attending the programme?

## Appendix 4

### ePLH Online Parenting Group Programme

#### Self-Referral Form

### EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

|                                        |                                        |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Police Emergency Response              | 10111                                  |
| Medical Emergency Response (Ambulance) | 10177                                  |
| Covid-19 National Hotline              | 0800 029 999                           |
| Western Cape                           | 021 928 4102/ 080 928 4102 (toll free) |
| KwaZulu-Natal                          |                                        |
| Gauteng                                | 0800 428 8364                          |
| Violence Against Women                 |                                        |
| GBV Command Centre                     | 0800 428 428 OR *120*7867# (free)      |
| Urgent Victim Response Line            | 0800 150 150                           |
| Rape Crisis                            | 021 447 9762                           |
| Depression, Suicide or Mental Health   |                                        |
| Lifeline                               | 0861 322 322                           |
| Suicide Crisis Line                    | 0800 567 567                           |
| SADAG Mental Health line (GP)          | 011 234 4837                           |
| For Child Protection                   |                                        |
| Childline                              | 0800 05 55 55                          |

## Appendix 5A

## UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



## Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa  
Telephone (021) 650 3417  
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

26 May 2023

Katherine Wilson  
Department of  
Psychology  
University of Cape  
Town Rondebosch  
7701

Dear Katherine

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your study, *Acceptability of a Social Learning Theory based Parenting Programme to Black South African Parents*. The reference number is PSY2023-011.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely

|                     |
|---------------------|
| Signed by candidate |
|---------------------|

Lauren Wild (PhD)  
Associate Professor  
Chair: Ethics Review Committee

Appendix 5B : *Ethical Approval*

# UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



---

## Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa  
Telephone (021) 650 3417  
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

03 May 2021

Katherine Wilson  
Department of  
Psychology  
University of Cape  
Town Rondebosch  
7701

Dear Katherine

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for the amendment your study, *COVID-19 Parenting: Promoting Positive Parenting and Preventing Violence Through e-Parenting for Lifelong Health (ePLH) Parent Support Groups*. The reference number remains PSY2020-056.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely

Signed by candidate

Lauren Wild (PhD)  
Associate Professor  
Chair: Ethics Review Committee

**Appendix 6: Checklist: *Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR)***

| SRQR element        |                                                             | Checklist criterion                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | How criterion is met                                                                                                                                                                | P. no. |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| S1                  | Title                                                       | Concise description of the nature and topic of the study identifying the study as qualitative or indicating the approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory) or data collection methods (e.g., interview, focus group) is recommended.                                                                                                           | Title: Is the ParentChat programme acceptable to the South African parents who participated in the study?<br>A qualitative study using interviews with parents for data collection. | P1     |
| S2                  | Abstract                                                    | Summary of key elements of the study using the abstract format of the intended publication; typically includes background, purpose, methods, results, and conclusions                                                                                                                                                                             | See abstract on p.4.                                                                                                                                                                | P4     |
| <b>Introduction</b> |                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                     |        |
| S3                  | Problem formulation                                         | Description and significance of the problem/phenomenon studied; review of relevant theory and empirical work; problem statement                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | See Introduction.                                                                                                                                                                   | P9-15  |
| S4                  | Purpose of research question                                | Purpose of the study and specific objectives or questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | The purpose of this study was to assess the acceptability, feasibility and appropriateness of the digital group based ParentChat programme for South African parents.               | P19    |
| <b>Methods</b>      |                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                     |        |
| S5                  | Quantitative and Qualitative approach and research paradigm | Qualitative approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, narrative research) and guiding theory if appropriate; identifying the research paradigm (e.g., postpositivist, constructivist/ interpretivist) is also recommended.                                                                                         | The study followed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design.                                                                                                                   | P18    |
| S6                  | Researcher characteristics and reflexivity                  | Researchers' characteristics that may influence the research, including personal attributes, qualifications/experience, relationship with participants, assumptions, and/or presuppositions; potential or actual interaction between researchers' characteristics and the research questions, approach, methods, results, and/or transferability. |                                                                                                                                                                                     | P28    |

|     |                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                  |
|-----|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| S7  | Context                                      | Setting/site and salient contextual factors; rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | ParentChat Programme rationale<br><br>Context<br><br>Overview of the programme on page18, 19                                                                                                                                                                 | P16<br><br>16-P21<br><br>P18- 19 |
| S8  | Sampling strategy                            | How and why research participants, documents, or events were selected; criteria for deciding when no further sampling was necessary (e.g., sampling saturation); rationale                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | P21-27                           |
| S9  | Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects  | Documentation of approval by an appropriate ethics review board and participant consent, or explanation for lack thereof; other confidentiality and data security issues                                                                                                              | Two approval numbers issued by the University of Cape Town Research Ethics Committee for this study: PSY2020-056 and PSY2023-011                                                                                                                             | P28-29                           |
| S10 | Data collection methods                      | Types of data collected; details of data collection procedures including (as appropriate) start and stop dates of data collection and analysis, iterative process, triangulation of sources/methods, and modification of procedures in response to evolving study findings; rationale |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | P22-26                           |
| S11 | Data collection instruments and technologies | Description of instruments (e.g., interview guides, questionnaires) and devices (e.g., audio recorders) used for data collection; if/how the instrument(s) changed over the course of the study                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | P26-28                           |
| S12 | Units of study                               | Number and relevant characteristics of participants, documents, or events included in the study; level of participation (could be reported in results)                                                                                                                                | There were 286 caregivers, 94.3%female, mean age of 40.2%<br>See the Table of participant demographics                                                                                                                                                       | P21<br><br>P33                   |
| S13 | Data processing                              | Methods for processing data prior to and during analysis, including transcription, data entry, data management and security, verification of data integrity, data coding, and anonymization/deidentification of excerpts                                                              | Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Template analysis of the themes drawn from the transcripts of the interviews provided codes and themes to be analysed. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, with visualisations reported in the Results. | P29-30                           |

|                          |                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                            |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| S14                      | Data analysis                                                                             | Process by which inferences, themes, etc., were identified and developed, including the researchers involved in data analysis; usually references a specific paradigm or approach; rationale.                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                         | P29-30                     |
| S15                      | Techniques to enhance trustworthiness                                                     | Techniques to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of data analysis (e.g., member checking, audit trail, triangulation); rationale                                                                                                                                                                  | I worked with a research assistant who coded with me to ensure objectivity in analysis and selection of codes and themes.                                                                               | P30                        |
| <b>Results/ Findings</b> |                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                            |
| S16                      | Synthesis and interpretation                                                              | Main findings (e.g., interpretations, inferences, and themes); might include development of a theory or model, or integration with prior research or theory                                                                                                                                            | Bar charts of acceptability and likelihood of use of skills<br>Summary of main themes that emerged<br>Table of main themes, sub themes with examples                                                    | P34-35<br>P36-37<br>P38-39 |
| S17                      | Links to empirical data                                                                   | Evidence (e.g., quotes, field notes, text excerpts, photographs) to substantiate analytic findings                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Quotes from parents in table of main themes<br>Multiple quotes from participant interviews illustrating themes and sub-themes and learning from the programme are integrated into the results findings. | P38-39<br>P41-79           |
| <b>Discussion</b>        |                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                            |
| S18                      | Integration with prior work, implications, transferability and contributions to the field | Short summary of main findings; explanation of how findings and conclusions connect to, support, elaborate on, or challenge conclusions of earlier scholarship; discussion of scope of application/ generalizability; identification of unique contribution(s) to scholarship in a discipline or field |                                                                                                                                                                                                         | P80-92                     |
| S19                      | Limitations                                                                               | Trustworthiness and limitations of findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                         | P89-90                     |
| <b>Other</b>             |                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                            |
| S20                      | Conflict of interest                                                                      | Potential sources of influence or perceived influence on study conduct and conclusions; how these were managed.                                                                                                                                                                                        | See conflict of interest statements on p.3.                                                                                                                                                             | P3                         |

|     |         |                                                                                                         |                             |    |
|-----|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----|
| S21 | Funding | Sources of funding and other support; role of funders in data collection, interpretation, and reporting | See funder statement on p.3 | P3 |
|-----|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----|

Figure 3: Mind Map of what parents learned on ParentChat

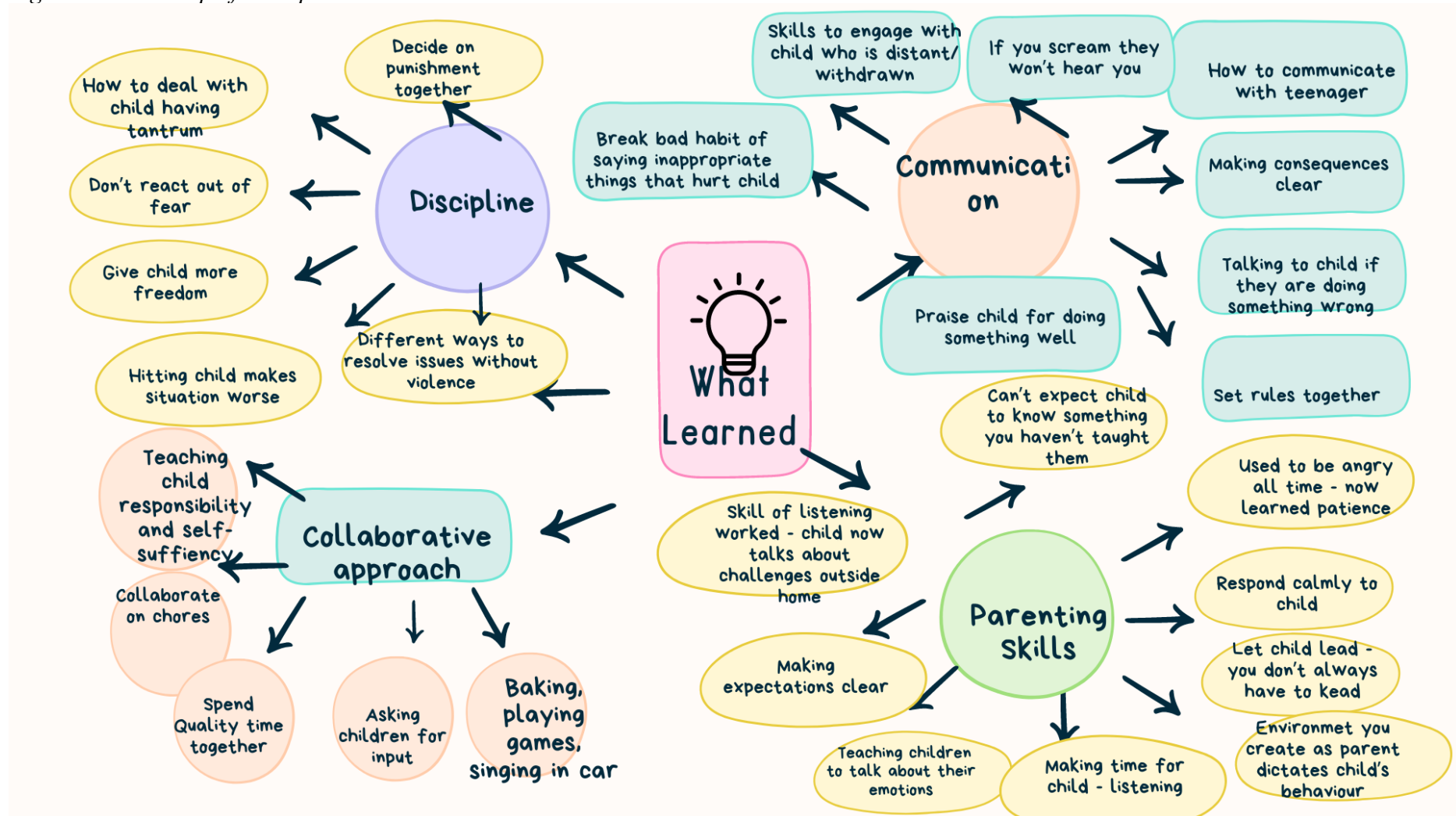


Figure 4: Mind map of what parents liked about the programme

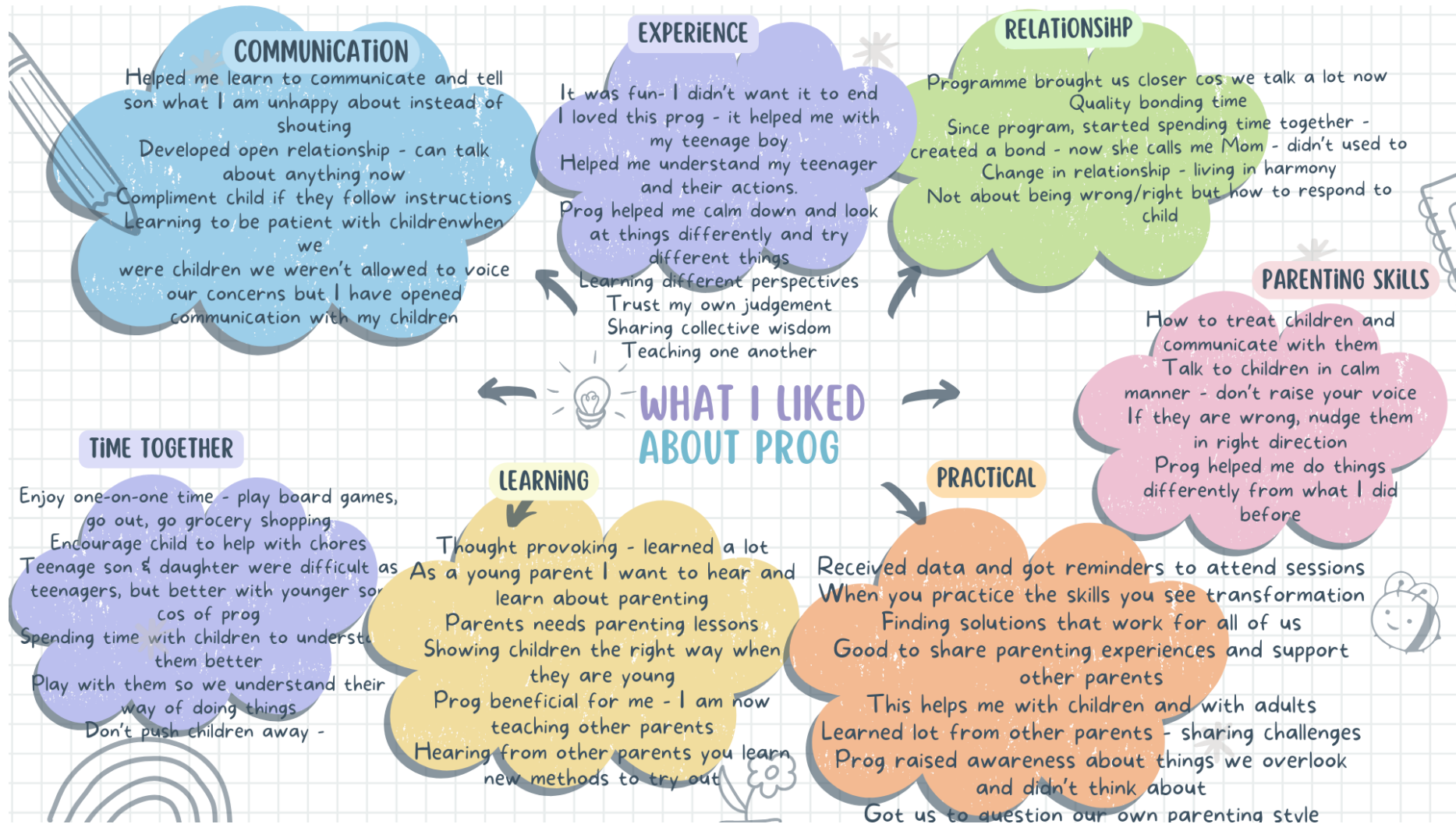


Figure 5: Mind map of different cultural practices relating to corporal punishment

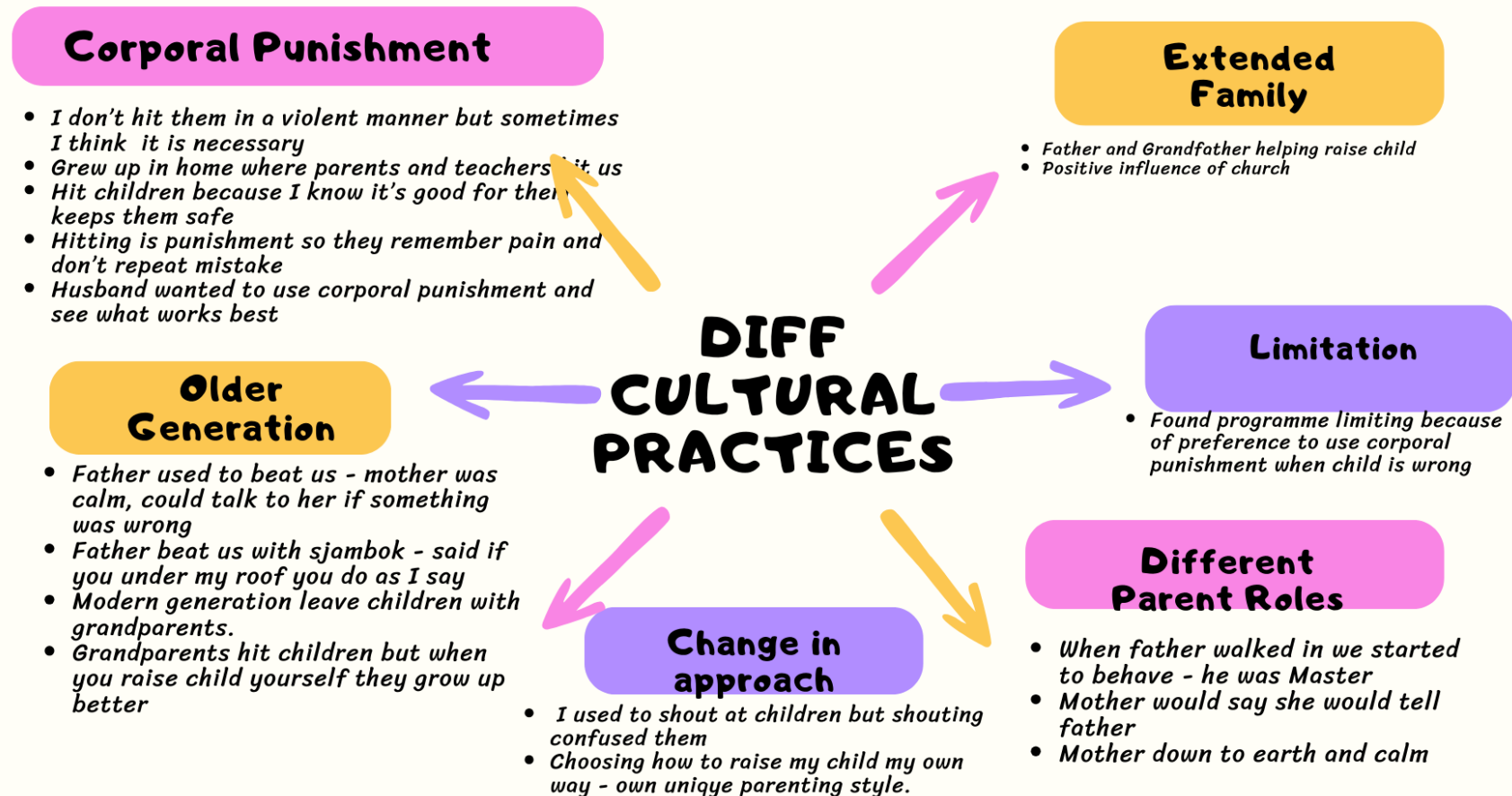


Figure 6: Mind map of gaps in the ParentChat programme

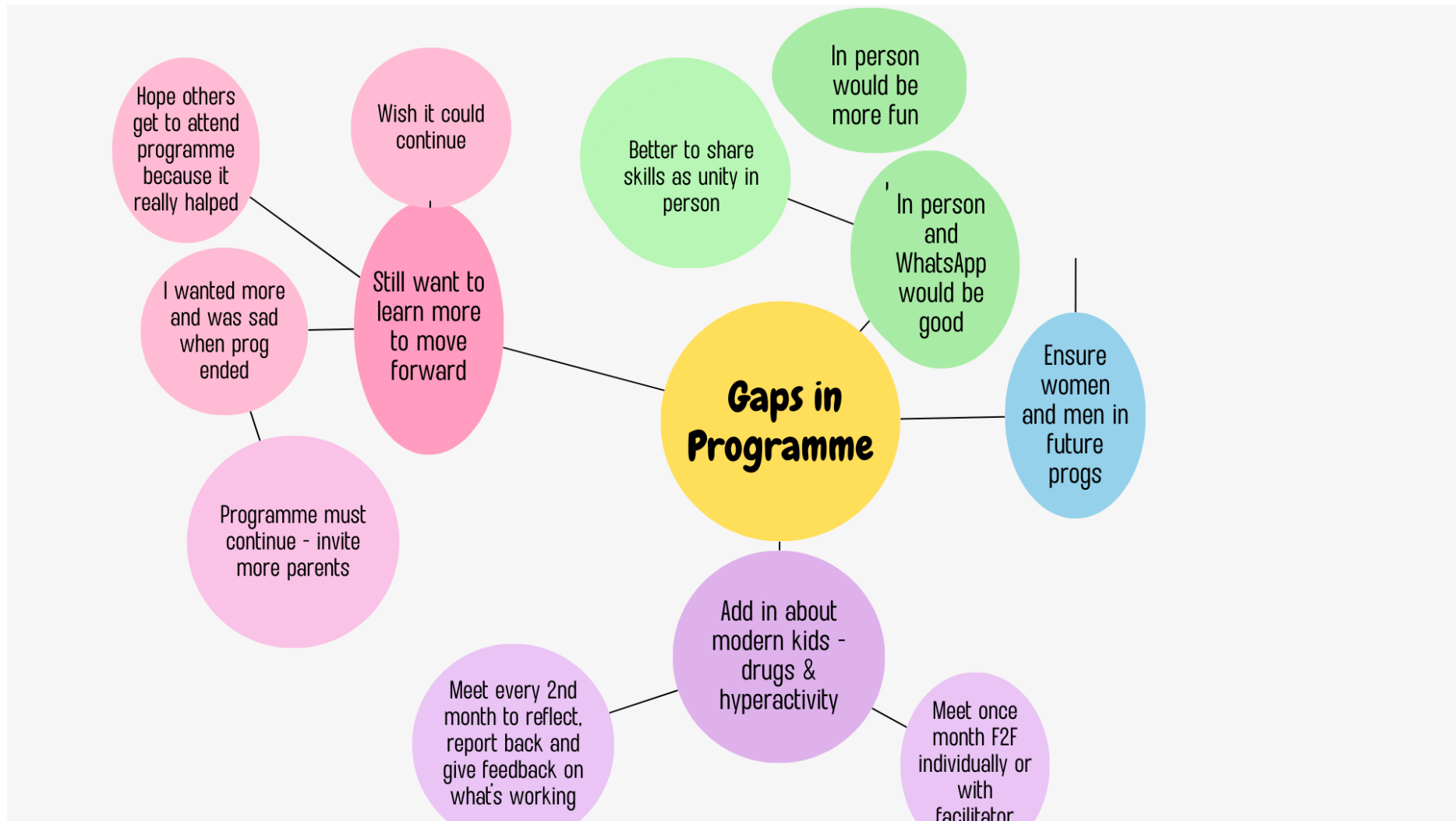


Figure 7: Mind map of changes parents saw in their children

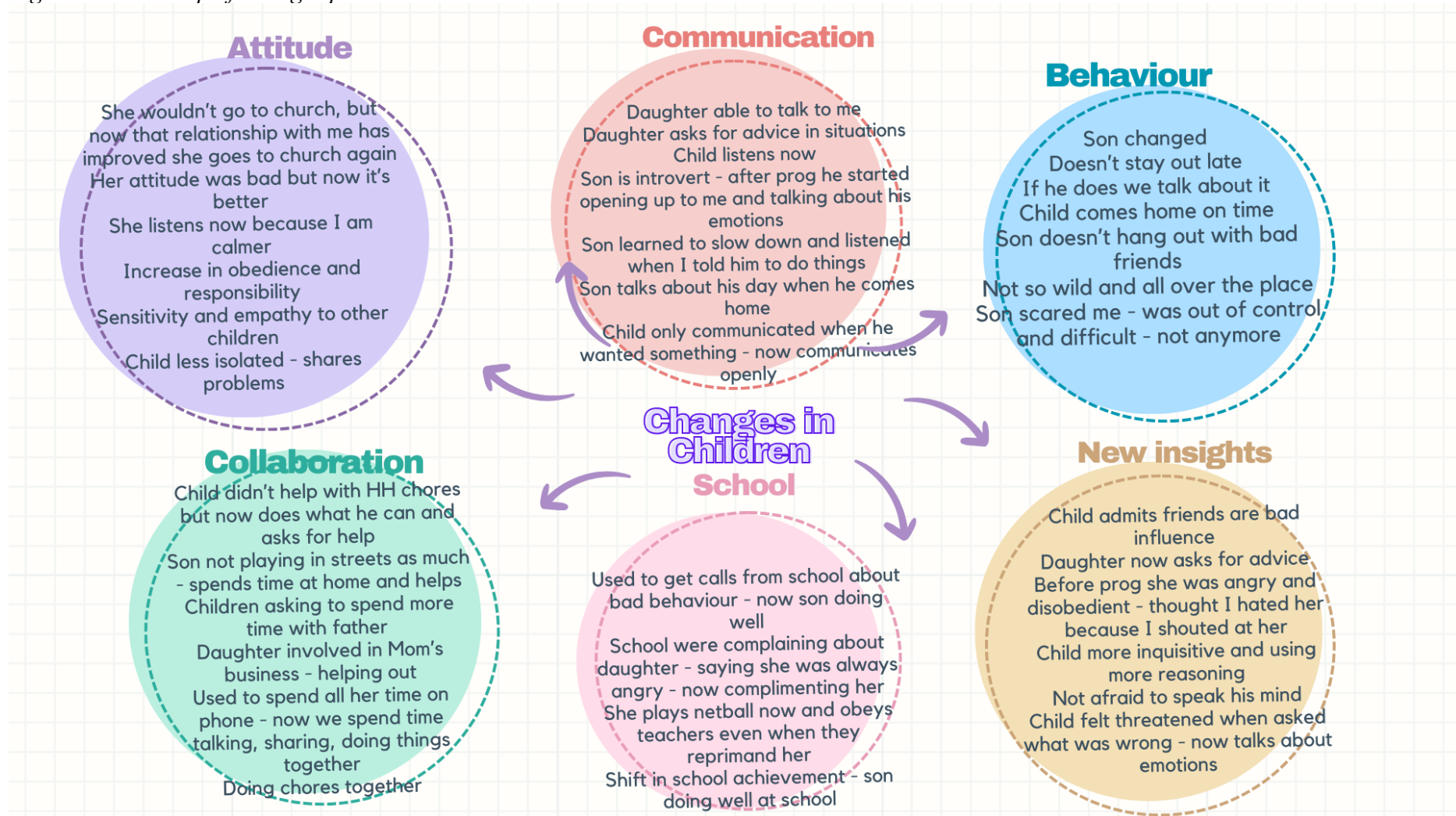


Figure 8: Mind map of running ParentChat on WhatsApp

