



The Raising Children DVD in a Nutshell:

- **What is it?** The Raising Children DVD, launched 20 August 2007, is a comprehensive parenting resource, covering all the basics from birth to five, that is now being distributed to all new parents in Australia by the federal Government.
- **Distribution.** On November 1st the Australian Government commenced distribution of the Raising Children DVD through a new Parent Pack, which also contains the 'Baby Bonus' application form, delivered via hospitals and midwives to each family when their baby is born. In the two months between the launch and the start of formal distribution, over 40,000 families ordered the DVD from the www.raisingchildren.tv website, free during that period courtesy of the Australian Government.
- **Importance.** The impact of early childhood environments and family functioning on outcomes for children is undisputed. Five years of research initiated by the Government provided the framework for how the Raising Children DVD has been structured and developed.
- **Raising Children Website Companion.** The DVD is the official companion to the Government supported, national parenting website, raisingchildren.net.au, launched in May 2006, now widely considered the definitive resource for quality-assured parenting information by professionals and parents across Australia.
- **Genesis.** The Raising Children DVD was produced so that the high quality information from the Raising Children website could reach more families and so that it could be presented in an even more engaging format.
- **Need.** Statistics on circumstances within families suggest vast improvements in confidence about raising children could be made. In December 2006, the Australian Institute of Families Studies (AIFS) published a report on the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) which recognises that providing educational support to parents, on a universal basis, can have significant impact on the long-term outcomes for all children¹. Many parents admit that insecurity and stress can negatively impact their children, as well as themselves, and at worst can lead to abuse, neglect, ill health and family break down.
- **Demand.** Extensive research has shown that almost all parents crave reliable information, especially the first time around. Many parents express hesitation at asking for help from professionals and support services because they feel intimidated or embarrassed — they feel they ought to know, or they feel too shy and awkward. In many cases parents don't read books or other materials. The Raising Children DVD can overcome many of those barriers by enabling parents to pick up the basics at their own pace and in the privacy of their own homes.
- **Can it work?** Every aspect of the DVD has been designed to increase the chances that a parent will watch it and encourage others to watch it. Early feedback suggests that it has been enthusiastically embraced. In addition, it is important that viewers retain educational value from the experience – both in terms of understanding and remembering. Based on recent findings (on mirror neurons in the brain), the most effective way of learning is by watching other people demonstrate particular strategies as they talk about important information, either in person or on film.
- **Content Quality Assurance.** The Raising Children DVD content is of extremely high quality, and is developed in a highly collaborative process, adapted from the comprehensive Raising Children Network

¹ "The current findings suggest that even somewhat subtle variations occurring within the 'normal' range of parenting behaviours are potent predictors of children's outcomes. This gives general support to universal initiatives that assist all parents in their parenting skills." (LSAC 2005-06 Annual Report p25 from "Parenting and families in Australia" by Steve Zubrick, Grant Smith, Jan Nicholson, Anne Sanson and Tanyana Jackiewicz.)

(RCN) website content. Each web article is reviewed by two independent experts from a panel of over 100 experts from around the country, and the DVD content was further reviewed at key stages by an additional panel of experts and focus groups.

- **Innovation.** The Raising Children DVD has high production values and innovative, interactive design, improving the effectiveness of valuable harm prevention and family management information. Three short movies — (1) Newborn, (2) Baby and (3) Child — explaining top priority and preventative concepts, let viewers expand the experience on the fly simply by using the ‘Enter’ button on their DVD remote when ‘pop-up clip’ icons appear throughout the main movies. This enables self-paced and self-directed learning. There are over 40 extra in-depth clips, including 16 demos, for a total of 5 hours of content on one disk.
- **Inclusive, Relevant Style.** The DVD features real families, celebrity parents and experts filmed in a directed documentary style. The goal of juxtaposing families of different backgrounds is to convey the universal nature of raising children and to create a virtual community of common experience. Fifty families from all over Australia were filmed over 6 months, including a 19-year old single father from Ipswich and his 18 month old son; a young, remarried widowed father from Melbourne with a recombined family; and a young Indigenous family of five living in Redfern — among many others, all raising their children admirably and making the best of circumstances.
- **Content Philosophy.** The content embodies the RCN philosophy of making information available for parents to make their own decisions. RCN does the work to bring together the most reliable, practical information about child development, health and behaviour and available resources, in collaboration with parents and experts, but leaves all the decisions to the individual. The DVD and website also help families find and access existing high quality services, encouraging interaction with professionals and peer groups.
- **Collaboration.** The Raising Children DVD is an example of highly effective collaboration between the Government, the NGO Health Education sector, the corporate community, the entertainment industry and individuals from all over Australia.
- **Impact.** The basic information will enable families to make informed decisions improving long-term outcomes for children, no matter what their circumstance. Effective prevention can also reduce the burden on health and emergency services. Informed, confident parents can help prevent obesity and bullying, can improve school readiness and are better able to manage family responsibilities.
- **Improved Long-term Outcomes.** The Raising Children DVD is embarking on a comprehensive evaluation of the uptake and effectiveness of the program, comparing results with extensive data from the LSAC findings. Reasonable early childhood environments enable children to learn faster and adapt successfully to changing circumstances. They need less remedial assistance, are healthier and are more likely to participate productively in the workforce. As young adults they are more proactive, self-disciplined, can work cooperatively and are more resilient in the face of challenge. An engaged population makes better informed decisions about the future.

Who is involved?

Talent. The DVD includes a good cross-section of families from all over Australia. However, as there is such a focus on health, obesity and **sport** in Australia, we are fortunate to have current and former top athletes with young children involved in the project including: Lote Tuqiri, Johanna Griggs, Phil Kearns, Hazem El Masri, Lisa Forrest, Peter FitzSimons, Jana Rawlinson and James Hird. Other notable Australians on screen include Colin Lane, Russell Crowe, Danielle Spencer, Neil Perry, Dr. Cindy Pan, Bill Granger, Angela Clark and Paul Clitheroe. Comedian Dave Hughes helps navigate the content and Deborra-lee Furness narrates the program. All provided their time and expertise at no charge.

Raising Children Network (RCN) Consortium members — converting research into practical outcomes: (1) The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute’s *Centre for Community Child Health* at the Royal Children’s Hospital, University of Melbourne, (2) the Parenting Research Centre, and (3) Smart Population Foundation (SPF) the producer of the Raising Children DVD.

