SESSION

7 Understanding your child's behaviour Positive influences on emotional development and behavioural patterns

- Building a positive relationship with your child is the best way to help your child develop positive emotional wellbeing. As a parent, you have a central part in helping your child or teenager to learn how to tolerate frustration, how to calm down, how to behave acceptably in society and how to relate to others in a healthy way.

- Showing your child or teenager you are listening to them and that you understand that they are trying to communicate with you is an important part of developing a two-way relationship. You may not always know immediately what they want to tell you but they will feel more secure knowing that you are open to hearing about their feelings.

- There may be times when both you and your child or teenager find feelings overwhelming. It is at these times that logical clear thought seems to be most difficult. Finding support for yourself is an extremely important part of your emotional wellbeing. In taking care of your emotions you may feel better able to help your child or teenager with theirs. Regaining a sense of calm may make what you thought was an unmanageable situation seem less difficult.

- Parents have often commented that at difficult times it is hard to look past your child or teenager's behaviour and think about how your child is feeling. Finding ways to stay calm can not only support you but also help you to look past the behaviour and see the message your child or teenager may be giving and why they behaved in that particular way.

- Helping your child to calm down so that they will eventually learn to calm themselves is an important skill for life. As children move into the teenage years, being able to tolerate frustration and cope with strong emotions may positively affect the way they behave towards other people.

- Children respond far more positively towards loving, predictable, behaviour strategies that have clear boundaries. Avoiding threats and

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7.28 harsh punishment, smacking and excessive shouting will help both you and your child or teenager to develop a more respectful and positive relationship. Giving children a way of saving face and an opportunity to change their behaviour is important in helping them to learn that relationships are about how both people feel.

- Choosing behaviour techniques such as positive praise and encouragement, distraction, time out, or rewarding good behaviour instead of focusing on difficult behaviour, will help lay the foundations for later negotiations on acceptable limits to behaviour.

- Each parent's experiences of being parented may be different. Therefore, it is important that two parents spend time alone talking together about the way they plan to parent their child, so that the child does not feel confused by different approaches.

- Boundaries and rules are sometimes an important part of family life. They can offer a sense of security and predictability for your child or teenager. Boundaries that are most effective are those that are appropriate to your child or teenager's age.

- While it is good to be consistent in putting agreed rules and boundaries into place, it is also helpful to have a degree of flexibility. There may be occasions when it is appropriate not to stick rigidly to the rule, such as when your child or teenager is ill.

- If boundaries are changed for other reasons it is best to avoid making decisions at the height of an argument or in anger. The message about new rules may be lost as one or both of you struggle to keep control of your emotions.

- As your child or teenager grows and develops there will be decisions to be made about changes in boundaries. Talking to your child or teenager about why new boundaries are planned will help them to co-operate more readily.

- Sharing time with your child or teenager to help develop a positive relationship is important. Within a family children may have different individual needs. This may include giving different age appropriate bedtimes.