

## THE HAVEN EXPERIENTIAL PARENTING COURSE

This is an experiential course where parents are invited to learn parenting skills through play. It gives parents the tools they need to better understand their children – to better understand what children are saying through their toys. When children feel understood they feel better. There is a direct connection between how children feel and how they behave. Children who feel better behave better. The focus of this course is on the relationship, not the problem. The focus on what the parent is doing right is vital to this course.

### Objectives

The goal is for parents to begin with small changes. Changing what they are doing for only 30 minutes each week to begin with. These special playtimes will significantly improve childrens' behaviour , significantly impact the parent-child relationship and significantly reduce parenting stress.

Play is the child's language. Childrens' play provides parents with a window to their child's inner worlds.

The goal is to prevent problems by teaching parents to understand what their children need.

The skills learned in this course strengthens parent-child relationships

The focus is on the positive the "can do."

In these eight sessions parents will learn basic play therapy skills. In this method the parent is seen as the therapeutic agent for the child, rather than the professional, thereby empowering the parent.

The majority of parents will come to this course feeling out of control and feel that the children are in charge. The role of the course is to help parents to understand that regaining control as a parent means developing control over themselves and how they respond to their child. The skills they will be learning will give them the tools they need to respond purposefully and effectively to their children in difficult situations. During this course the parents will be focussing on their strengths and their childrens ' strengths.

## **Session 1 Course Objectives and Informal Sharing**

The main objective of this session is to create a safe environment for parents, one that encourages them to share their parenting struggles openly with each other. Ample time will be spent with parents introducing themselves, describing their families with particular emphasis on the children that they wish to work with.

The facilitators will give an overview of the training objectives.

## **Session 2 Basic Principles of Play Session**

Parents are introduced to the basic principles, guidelines and goals for the play sessions using role play in the skills training.

## **Session 3 Parent – Child Play Session and Procedures**

Parents are shown how to put their toy kit together and helped to decide the time and location for their home play sessions. They are given a handout of basic “do’s and don’ts” for conducting play sessions. The essential piece of allowing the child to lead, and being with are demonstrated by the facilitator and these are followed by role play.

## **Session 4 Feedback from the last session and the introduction of Boundary Setting**

The main focus in this session is for the parents to feedback their first home play session with their children. The sharing of the feedback provides a space for learning and empathy. The facilitator uses examples from the experiences that are positive and support the parents. The skill of boundary setting is introduced, demonstrated and role-played by the parents.

## **Session 5 Play Session Skills Review**

This session concentrates on supporting parents as they learn and practice their new play session skills. In order to avoid overwhelming the parents no new skills are introduced, however, boundary setting is a continued focus. There is an increased emphasis on parents’ self awareness, particularly in relation to their children. Skills are reviewed, role played and demonstrated as the need arises.

## **Session 6**

Each session begins with the parents' reporting on their home play session followed by feedback from the facilitators. Self-esteem-building responses are introduced and the related topic of encouragement versus praise.

### **Session 7 Application of Skills**

Parents are helped to apply their skills to everyday life at this stage of the course.

### **Session 8 Evaluation and Conclusion**

This session is used to bring closure to this part of the course and to emphasise the progress that the parents and children have made. Parents are asked to contract to continue with their play sessions and encouraged to come to a follow-up session in 6 weeks. An evaluation document will be filled in by the parents.