The Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme

Developing a Theory of Change for an Evidence-Supported Design

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for Evidence and Implementation

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Contents

This work was commissioned by Family Links

Family Links Mission and Vision

Our Mission: Family Links is a national charity dedicated to empowering children, parents, families, schools and workplaces to be emotionally healthy.

Our Vision: Our vision is a world where adults and children live flourishing lives, fulfil their potential and make a positive contribution to their community. Family Links believes that emotional health is a human right and that it is the foundation for achievement and happiness.

What we do: We deliver innovative, high quality training in the Nurturing Programme to health and social care services, third sector organisations, schools and universities. The Nurturing Programme is the approach that underpins all our work and is designed to provide adults and children with the understanding, skills and ability to lead emotionally healthy lives, build resilience, empathy, self-esteem and support positive relationships.

For information, please visit: www.familylinks.org.uk

Family Links 10-week Nurturing Programme: Theory of Change

overarching parameters

Type of programme: Parent support	Philosophy of intervention: Cognitive-relational	Level of prevention: Selective preventive	Target population: Parents of pre-school & primary school-aged children	Modality: Group-based in community settings	Infrastructure: Purveyor supported

Causes, Needs, Resources

Root causes

Prior parenting experiences cause absence of internal models of positive parenting	Parents feel isolated from sources of guidance & support

Needs

Parents – cognitive & emotional
- Low sense of self-efficacy & confidence in parenting
- Low self-awareness and self-knowledge / mindfulness
- High levels of parenting stress and poor strategies for self-nurturance & self-care
- Low empathy for child
- Low insight, knowledge or understanding of child's needs
- Inappropriate expectations of child
- Parents feel isolated in their own problems

Parents – behaviours
- Children's behaviour is not positively or consistently managed
- Poor ability to manage/resolve conflict with child

Children – emotional and behavioural
- Children stressed, unhappy or uncooperative

Parent-child relationship
- Parent-child relationship is conflicted & stressful
- Home life not enjoyable and home climate is 'hot' (angry, emotionally volatile) or 'cold' (distant, detached)

Resources/inputs

Provided by FL (Purveyor) Training
Mandatory:
- 4 day training course led by experienced trainers
Expected but not mandatory:
- Annual refresher course
- Network Meetings

Provided by FL (Purveyor) Materials
Manuals:
- PGLs and Trainers Handbooks,
- Parenting Puzzle Handbook
- Games, toys, aids & 'kit'
Implementation support
- Telephone support; Monitoring support

Provided by purchasing agency:
Skilled PGLs/facilitators (two per group) with:
- Facilitation skills
- Knowledge of parenting work: theory & practice
- Life experience & credibility
- Personal aptitude and 'people skills'
- Modelling and role-play skills
- Preparation & debrief time; Supervision

Dosage
10 week course; 2-hour sessions (20 hrs/ person)

Activities

(right side vertical label:) **cognitive-relational** (knowledge, attitudes, feelings, understandings)

The Four constructs (principles of optimal parenting)

Empathy	Appropriate expectations (ages & stages)	Positive discipline	Emotional health (self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-worth, self-regulation)

Mechanisms of Change (cognitive & value changes for parents)

Parents feel increased empathy with child	*Parents have more developmentally appropriate expectations*	*Parents understand value of positive discipline*	*Parents have increased self-awareness, self-knowledge, & self-worth*

The Four Strategies (putting the constructs into practice)

Managing and communicating feelings
- Managing feelings
- Communicating clearly

Solving problems
- Problem-solving and negotiating
- Choices & Consequences
- Rewards and penalties

Managing & reducing conflict
- Boundaries & limits
- Behaviour to ignore
- Praise

- Choices and consequences
- Rewards and penalties
- Time Out to Calm Down

Managing & reducing stress
- Time to Calm Down
- Personal power & self-agency
- Self-nurturance for stress management

Delivery style and mode (how the activities are delivered)

Facilitative not didactic; non-judgemental Group-based & interactive Experiential	Cater to different ways of learning Mix of serious and fun/humour Use of role-play & acting out	Use of 'take home & try out' Use of group feedback Pacing and variety (movement, games)	Nurturing style & environment Ongoing review & reflection Planned & communicated

outcomes

(right side vertical label:) **behavioural = changes of state** (practices, strategies, circumstances, states)

Immediate Term (post course)

Parent outcomes

Listening, understanding and expressing feelings clearly	Using problem-solving and negotiation strategies	Using conflict management and reduction strategies	Using self-regulation and self-nurturance strategies

Child outcomes

Experiencing better and more communication with parent	Experiencing less conflict and fewer escalated conflicts with parent

Medium Term 3–6 months + (all of the above plus)

Parent outcomes

Better communication and understanding of child	Increased repertoire of positive discipline	Reduced use of coercive & punitive control	Reduced frequency of escalated conflict	Increased parenting self-efficacy	Increased well-being (calmer, less stressed)

Child outcomes

Experiencing parent as more consistent, clearer, calmer	Experiencing improved relationship with parent	Experiencing more frequent positive and enjoyable interactions with parent

Long term 9 months + (all of the above plus)

Parent outcomes

Improved coping with parenting	More enjoyment of parenting and family time	Child more co-operative with parent

Child outcomes

Feel happier at home	Calmer, less stressed and anxious	Improved mood and behaviour at home

Family Links

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The Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme:

Developing a *Theory of Change* for an Evidence-Supported Design

Foreword

*This paper describes the process and results of work with Family Links to elucidate and validate a Theory of Change for their ten week group-based parenting support programme, the **Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme (FLNP-10)**. It is intended to be read alongside a summary graphic, the **Family Links 10-week Nurturing Programme Theory of Change, Version 1 2016**, which summarises the results of the work in graphical form and shows how the various elements of the theory are expected to relate to one another. The paper and associated graphic have been prepared to help commissioners and parent group leaders and their managers understand the connections between the design of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme and the expected outcomes for parents who attend.*

The paper describes the present design of the programme, as it is currently intended to be delivered. It is based in the programme's historical design but includes some clarifications, revisions and updates that arose out of the process we undertook together. The paper describes a number of changes that have been made to the specification of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme to improve the connections between the design of the programme and the evidence base about 'what works' in parenting support. It also highlights some aspects of the design that are, at the time of writing, under continuing consideration and re-development. These include areas where the programme's implementation model places 'real world' considerations and practicalities above a 'scientifically ideal' design.

The author and Family Links are most grateful to Professor John Coleman for reviewing an earlier draft of this paper and for his insightful comments, especially with respect to areas of the design that continue to be developed as the programme further evolves.

1. Introduction

The Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme (FLNP-10) is a 10-week community-based, 'purveyor-supported'[1,2] parenting support programme[i], designed to be delivered by trained parent group leaders who are employed by or contracted to provider agencies. It has at its

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[i] Purveyors are individuals or organisations that operate in the role of external experts to a provider implementing a particular programme. They support organisations, systems and practitioners in striving to adopt and implement that programme with fidelity and effectiveness [1,2]

core 'four constructs' or principles of optimal parenting - *empathy*, *age* or *stage-appropriate expectations*, *positive discipline* and *emotional health* - that are used to frame the practical content of the programme. The programme is widely used across local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Provider agencies are predominantly local authorities, with some voluntary organisations and independent consultancies also trained to deliver the programme.   10-Week Nurturing Programme courses are usually delivered within community-based venues such as children's centres and schools.

Originally based on a US-developed intervention known as the *Nurturing Parenting Programs* (Bavolek, 2000[4] and http://www.nurturingparenting.com/) the 10-Week Nurturing Programme has been adapted and developed over many years by practitioners at Family Links for delivery in the UK. Although it retains some features of the US programme, the UK programme is now quite different from the US programme, which is predominantly used in high-risk child welfare (i.e. safeguarding/child protection) interventions and for addressing greater levels of parenting need than the UK programme. The UK programme has been the subject of a number of research studies of varying size, scope and methodologies including a large-scale randomised control trial (RCT) published in 2010.[5] Results have been mixed, following a pattern familiar in much parenting support research of very positive results from qualitative research but inconclusive results in larger scale quantitative research.[6]

Part of the explanation for this phenomenon may be related to how well the quantitative research designs used in prior research captured the actual implementation model of the programme, and how well-fitted the relevant outcome measures were to the content and to the implementation model of the programme as delivered in 'real world' settings. For example, the theory base of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme and a formal *theory of change* had not, prior to 2014, been articulated for an external audience. This meant that all prior research, including the randomised control trial, was based on the researchers' best assumptions about how the programme worked and what it was likely to achieve, rather than testing a clearly articulated model that had been agreed between the developers and researchers. Recognising the difficulties this created for rigorous and accurately focused evaluation, during 2014 and 2015, and as part of a number of related strategic review and development activities, Family Links worked with the Colebrooke Centre for Evidence and Implementation to capture and articulate a preliminary theory of change as a basis for further development of its implementation model and of its research evidence base. This work was continued in 2016, when the theory was subject to validation checks against the international evidence base, and was further developed and considerably refined; see Appendix 1 for further detail on the methods used in both stages of this work. At the time of writing (late 2016), Family Links was updating and revising its manuals for 10-Week Nurturing Programme Parent Group Leaders (PGLs) and for parents, and some of the detail that follows refers to the 10-Week Nurturing Programme 'in development' as well as to the

programme as it is currently delivered ('in development' areas are shown in the cloud-shaped Figures throughout the paper).

The aim of this piece of work was to refine the programme to be more evidence-supported and more logically coherent, reflecting the very latest learning about effectiveness in parenting support and contemporary thinking about the implementation of effective programmes. This work should also help to ensure that in future, any evaluations are better tailored to the programme's real world delivery. It is important to stress however that the theory of change as presented in this paper represents the author's best efforts to describe and unpack the existing programme logic rather than to develop a design from first principles. It aims to elucidate the programme 'as it is', in the real world of UK parenting support services. It does not claim to present a perfect design for a parenting programme, and contains some elements that are pragmatic compromises between real world contingencies and the more stringent parameters suggested by developmental science. Some of these elements of design are noted in this paper as being under review, or as already earmarked for further refinement by Family Links as the opportunity arises or as further emerging evidence suggests.

2. What is a *theory of change* and why is it important for programme quality and results?

A theory of change describes the logic, principles and assumptions that connect **what** an intervention, service or programme does, and **why** and **how** it does it, with its **intended results** or outcomes. It is a formal articulation of the assumptions that underpin the rationale and design of the programme, and explains why the programme providers expect the programme to achieve change for service users. It is based on the idea of a 'pathway to change' along which service users should travel, moving from their initial presenting needs or problems to the final positive outcomes that the programme hopes to achieve.

Most theories of change look something like the schematic model below:

Figure 1: Theory of change basic model
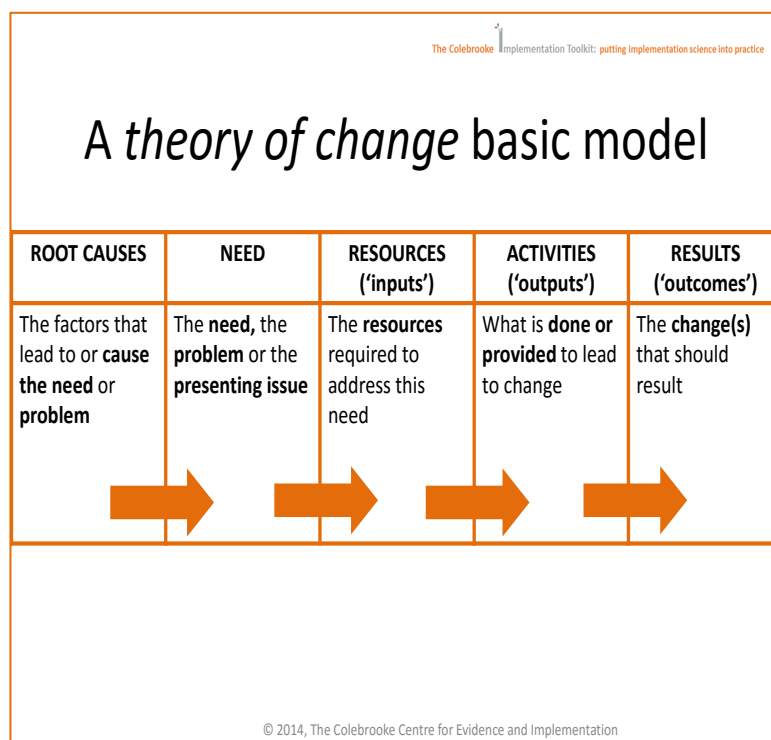
There are different ways of constructing a theory of change, but most models, at a minimum, set out the assumed links between the **resources** provided ('inputs'); the **activities** undertaken ('outputs'); and the **expected results** ('outcomes').

Many programmes, especially those developed by practitioners in the UK, do not have formally articulated theories of change, but some of the benefits of having one include:

- The original intentions of the programme developers are clearly set out, and are explicit and open to critique
- The underlying logic of the assumptions made in the theory, for example that undertaking a certain activity will lead to a particular outcome, can be scrutinised
- The assumptions made by the programme developers can be checked against wider evidence of 'what works', to assess the likelihood of the programme being successful
- The assumptions made by the programme developers are clearly articulated, so that commissioners can check the programme meets their needs; and providers and practitioners delivering the programme can check their own assumptions and the

alignment of their expectations against the original intentions of the programme developers

- The key parameters or boundaries (e.g. who is the programme for, and under what specific circumstances) can be set out, reducing the likelihood that the programme is used inappropriately or ineffectively

- Core components (of content, or of implementation, or both) that are believed to be *essential* to the programme's effectiveness can be identified, ensuring that if local adaptations are made, they do not undermine the programme and make it less successful

- The most important features of the implementation model of the programme can be captured, enabling higher quality delivery that adheres to the original model and helping to prevent slippage or unnecessary modification by providers and practitioners (known as 'programme drift')

- The logic on which the programme is based can be tested: each element can (in principle) be measured to check that it is present; in particular, it allows a clear statement of expected outcomes that can be measured, for example, before and after the service has been taken up

- Most important of all, because it is explicit, the programme theory can be tested, and then refined or amended to take account of the results of testing. These kinds of iterative processes should result, over time, in more effective and more cost-efficient programmes for families.

For all of these reasons, the development of a testable theory of change was considered an important next step for the 10-Week Nurturing Programme as it pursues a process of continuous quality improvement in the context of modern parenting support needs in the UK.

3. The Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme *Theory of Change*: overview

The accompanying graphic (page 1), the *Family Links 10-week Nurturing Programme Theory of Change, Version 1 2016,* shows a summarised version of the FLNP-10 Theory of Change 2016. This model emerged from the process described in the Appendix, and represents an iteration of an earlier draft published in 2014, and after further refinement following exploration of the components against the international literature on effective parenting programmes. The 2016 model sets out detail on assumptions about **logical relationships between root causes, needs, resources, and activities** and **between activities and outcomes for parents and children**, by way of anticipated *mechanisms of change* (see below for further explanation).

3.1 Goals and outcomes

At the highest level, the **overall goal** of the programme, simply framed in plain English, **is to support parents to cope better with being a parent.** Although in theory it is possible for parents to feel they are coping well but in fact be poor quality carers, in practice, large-scale research amongst parents living in difficult situations indicates that self-appraisal of how well or badly a person is coping as a parent is associated with a host of other important variables that predict outcomes for children and parents.[12] These include parents' mental and emotional health; parent stress levels; and children's social and emotional wellbeing and their behaviour.

Moving down a level from high-level goals to **specific outcomes**, the 10-Week Nurturing Programme is a parenting support programme for parents, and so **the primary outcomes expected are for parents and their parenting**. These are defined as specific, measurable changes for parents that are intended to occur as a result of participating in the 10-Week Nurturing Programme; in particular, positive changes in certain parenting practices and behaviours, relationships, and states of wellbeing. These are set out in detail below and in Figure B. However, because we know that parents are "*the final common pathway*" to children's development, stature, adjustment and success[7] and that the quality of parenting and parenting style is a powerful - although not the only - influence on young children's social and emotional development and wellbeing,[8] the logic of the programme assumes that if it is effective at helping parents, certain **secondary outcomes** can also be expected **for children**. Specifically, certain improvements in the wellbeing of children can be expected: in their relationship and quality of interaction with their parent, in greater enjoyment of time spent with that parent, and in a reduction in children's own feelings of stress, anxiety or unhappiness at home and an improvement in mood.

Outcomes for parents and for children are conceptualised along a continuous time-line from *immediate* (that is, measurable immediately after the course is completed in full); through *medium term* (measurable at around 3-6 months after participation in the course); to *long term* (measurable from 9 to 12 months after participation).

- **Immediate outcomes**, which are expected to be demonstrated by the end of the ten week course, are expected to be demonstrated as (relatively) simple changes in parents' daily parenting practices: specifically, an increased use of the specific strategies taught by the 10-Week Nurturing Programme (see below for details). Parents should also feel they are coping better, and it is hypothesised that children should also experience some immediate positive changes, in improved communication and reduced conflict with parents.
- **Medium term** outcomes, which are assumed to be achievable if the parent continues to implement the strategies, are demonstrated as more complex changes in parenting practices and in a parent's state of wellbeing and sense of coping and self-efficacy, as a parent and as a person. Again, details are given below. These are expected to be measurable at about 3-6 months after the end of the course. Secondarily, children are expected to be experiencing improved quality of interactions and relationships with parents.
- **Longer-term outcomes**, which are anticipated to be measurable 9-12 months after the course and assume continued use of the strategies and maintenance of the medium term changes, are predominantly expected to manifest as changes in the quality of relationships between attending parents and children, and in mutual enjoyment of time spent together, and as changes in children's emotional wellbeing and co-operation with parents. Parents should continue to report coping better than prior to attending the programme. It is also hypothesised that if a child's stress drops and their mood improves, their at-home behaviour may also improve.

Outcomes are also discussed as part of the programme logic in Section 6, see page 42.
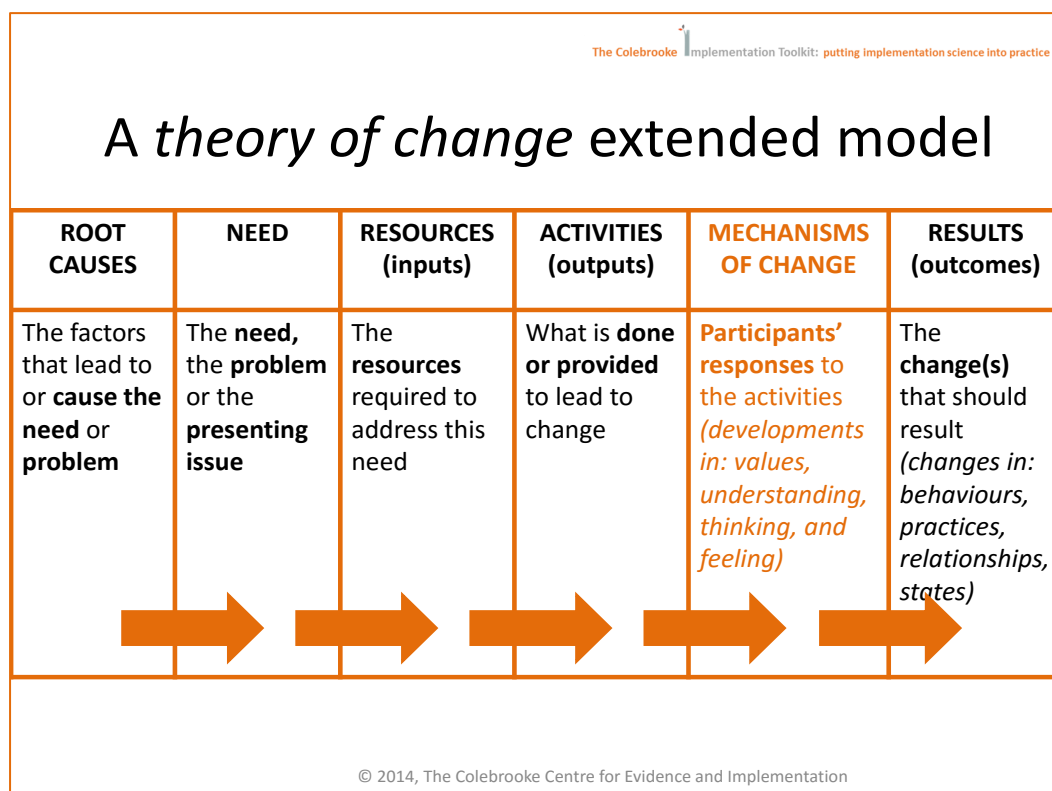
3.2 Mechanisms of change

Mechanisms of change are frequently left unspecified in theories of change. However it has been argued that it is essential to consider "*the mechanisms that intervene between the delivery of the programme service and the occurrence of the outcomes of interest*"[9] in order to fully model and understand how a programme is intended to work. In the case of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, **mechanisms of change are framed as changes in values, beliefs, understandings or attitudes** that should arise in parents participating in the course, as result of the reflection and learning arising from the repeated emphasis on the 'four constructs' [*empathy*, *age or stage-appropriate expectations*, *positive discipline* and *emotional health*] that are used to frame the practical content of the programme. They are

changes of a cognitive, attitudinal or mental variety: as such they are not viewed as 'outcomes' in themselves, (since the definition of an outcome for the purposes of the programme is a measurable change in a behaviour, relationship or state), but they are considered to facilitate or enable the outcomes. They are the essential, intermediate step along the logical pathway to change.

Mechanisms of change are also discussed as part of the programme logic below in Section 6, see page 40.

This results in an extended model, as shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Theory of change extended model

The Colebrooke Implementation Toolkit: *putting implementation science into practice*

A *theory of change* extended model

ROOT CAUSES	NEED	RESOURCES (inputs)	ACTIVITIES (outputs)	MECHANISMS OF CHANGE	RESULTS (outcomes)
The factors that lead to or **cause the need** or **problem**	The **need,** the **problem** or the **presenting issue**	The **resources** required to address this need	What is **done or provided** to lead to change	**Participants' responses** to the activities *(developments in: values, understanding, thinking, and feeling)*	The **change(s)** that should result *(changes in: behaviours, practices, relationships, states)*

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Based in this extended model the rest of this paper, and the *Family Links 10-week Nurturing Programme Theory of Change, Version 1 2016,* set out the detail behind the model.

4. The Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme
Theory of Change in detail: overarching parameters

The six key parameters are the fixed boundaries within which the 10-Week Nurturing Programme is designed to work. These are the:

1.   **type of programme**
2.   **philosophy of intervention**
3.   **level of prevention**
4.   **target population**
5.   **modality of delivery**
6.   **support infrastructure**

Each were reviewed as part of the process of development of a formal theory of change, and examined in the light of the most up-to-date international evidence on the effectiveness of parenting support programmes. This process led to a number of refinements to the specification of the programme design and implementation. For example, the programme previously operated somewhat more flexibly in relation to *level of prevention* and *target population*. The recently refined, evidence-supported parameters are set out below.

4.1 Type of programme

The 10-Week Nurturing Programme is a parent support programme[10] rather than a parent training programme;[11] see Box 1 for an explanation of this distinction. It is aimed at supporting parents to cope better with parenting 'in the round' and to manage a wide range of daily parenting issues whilst promoting better relationships between parents and children. Parenting support programmes that recognise the social and family contexts in which parents care for children are widely recognised across the world, especially although not exclusively as a means for assisting parents living in socially challenging circumstances or where there is a multiplicity of background family problems. They may include many different forms of community-based assistance, depending on the context, and are offered at all levels of prevention from universal through to therapeutic or 'tertiary' prevention for families with high levels of risk (see Box 3 below), although at tertiary levels they would

> **Box 1 Parent support and Parent training**
>
> **Parent training** programmes… are programmes that include **"the active acquisition of parenting skills"** [11]
>
> **Parent support**… is a broader construct than training that includes **"any intervention for parents aimed at reducing risk and promoting protective factors for their children, in relation to their social, physical and emotional wellbeing… and that is appropriate to parents' own self-identified needs"** [10]

usually be combined with clinician or practitioner-led interventions focused to address specific problems. They may address any of a large range of needs that parents or professionals identify, and typically pay close attention to the surrounding wider contexts of home, personal and social life that impinge of the quality of care and nurturance that parents provide for their children. They start from a recognition that raising children is normally experienced as challenging at some point for most parents, and that a majority of parents (not just those who are considered vulnerable or disadvantaged) admit they could benefit from support from time to time.[12]

4.2 The philosophy of intervention

In terms of their broad philosophy of intervention, most parenting programmes typically draw on one of two approaches,[13] or combine elements of both, but usually with an emphasis more on one rather than the other. Both approaches are based on theory about how parents shape and can influence children's development. One is known as a 'behavioural' approach, which as its name suggests, focuses relatively narrowly on what shapes children's behaviour and how carers can encourage or modify this in socially and developmentally desirable ways.[14,15] The other approach, which is known as 'cognitive-relational', takes a broader and more holistic view, combining theory about the emotional and cognitive underpinnings of behaviour with an emphasis on the importance of relationships[16] (see Box 2).

The 10-Week Nurturing Programme focuses on supporting parents across a wide range of parenting challenges rather than on modifying specific features of child behaviour, and thus **is based in a primarily cognitive-relational approach that incorporates some behavioural elements**. It is, in other words, a hybrid programme, and the two elements mesh together across an interface between *principles* (or 'constructs' in the language of the programme) and *strategies* (see below). To a large extent, the constructs represent the cognitive-relational aspects of the programme (as we might say, *thinking about parenting*), and the strategies connect to the behavioural elements (or as we might say, '*doing parenting'*) and to parenting style.

Box 2 Philosophies of intervention

Behavioural approaches….teach parents how to change events leading up to the problem behaviour using social learning techniques such as positive reinforcement, negotiation and finding alternatives to punishment. During sessions, parents see how these techniques are implemented and practice skills. Many are based in operant conditioning theory: (i.e. behaviour is viewed as produced by stimuli, and modified by the consequences of responses to stimuli)[14] and usually rest on principles of non-coercive discipline.[15]

Cognitive-Relational approaches….provide parents with new skills in listening and communicating with their children and teach an understanding of behaviour in the context of relationships. They are based in Rogerian therapy: the stress is on empathy, authenticity, unconditional positive regard; emphasis is placed on democratic negotiation and effective non-blaming communication.[10,13]

The fact that the 10-Week Nurturing Programme is primarily cognitive-relational with some behavioural aspects is important. The 10-Week Nurturing Programme focuses mostly on helping parents *understand* thoughts, feelings, and emotions (of both parents and children) and on the *quality of relationships* between parents and children. There are some important behavioural components in the programme, focusing on broadening the repertoire or range of strategies parents have for responding to various normal but challenging situations at home, but these are secondary to the programme's main emphasis on listening, communicating, understanding and strengthening relationships. The cognitive-relational focus therefore underpins and interfaces with the behavioural components in all respects, and the sessions of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme that deal with children's behaviour, parenting practices and parenting skills (for example, using positive discipline) focus more on reflection and cognition about what is happening and why, and how parents can build better relationships that increase the likelihood of positive behaviours, rather than teaching behaviour management techniques. The 10-Week Nurturing Programme is, therefore, somewhat distinctive compared to other parenting programmes well-known in the UK. For example, *Triple P*, *The Incredible Years* and most of the best known and most extensively tested programmes (known collectively in the literature as 'evidence-based programmes' or EBPs) are not primarily cognitive-relational, but much more behavioural in emphasis.

Cognitive-relational programmes have been under-researched and, as one might expect given the focus on parents rather than on children, have often been found to be less likely to deliver results observable at the level of children's behaviour.[17,18,19] However, recent evidence increasingly suggests that cognitive-relational elements may in fact be the foundations on which the effectiveness of behavioural approaches relies. Cavell and colleagues (2013) for example note the overarching importance of the relationship between parents and their children, and point out that in the long run, this trumps skills or competencies in simply managing children's behaviour.[20] The implication is that teaching parents skills in child management is likely to make only a minor (and possibly temporary) contribution to overall good outcomes for children in the absence of attention to the quality of the relationship within which the management skills are practised. In other words:

> "*The quality of the parent-child relationship is also shown by research to be more important for the long-term success of parenting than are the parental management skills used to curb immediate non-compliance*"[21]

Given that even behavioural programmes usually incorporate some elements of a cognitive-relational approach, recent reviews have begun to try and unpick the interdependency between cognitive relational and behavioural approaches in more detail. These suggest that even amongst behavioural approaches, the components that focus on enhancing the overall quality of parent-child relationships appear to be the 'active ingredients'. For example, a major meta-analysis of 77 parent training programmes found:

> "*Interestingly, of the four most robust predictors of outcomes …two (teaching positive interactions and teaching emotional communication skills) were focused on providing parents with the skills to enhance the overall quality of the parent-child relationship - such as increasing parental activity and positivity with child, decreasing parental negativity, and teaching the parent to communicate in ways that promote the child's emotional health and well-being. **These findings are consistent with decades of basic developmental theory and research suggesting that the quality of the parent-child relationship has a great deal of influence on a child's behaviour or misbehaviour*"[22]**

In the combined literature, then, there is a clear endorsement of cognitive-relational approaches that work with parents for the 'deep' changes on which behaviour modification programmes likely rest.

4.3 Level of prevention

The 10-Week Nurturing Programme is designed for selective prevention, (see Box 3) but is **provided within universal, community-based settings to parents with low-to-moderate levels of identified need for support in improving their relationship with their child or children**. This emphasis on the programme as a selective preventive intervention rather than as a universal offer (that is, open to anyone who wants to attend, regardless of need)[23] represents an evolution for the 10-Week Nurturing Programme. It is based on recent research for Family Links that gives insights into the referral routes and presenting needs of parents most often using the programme,[24] and on re-thinking the relationship between universal and more targeted provision

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Box 3 Levels of prevention: definitions taken from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE)

Universal strategies of prevention are aimed at the general population…The population to which the intervention is applied is not preselected. Most universal prevention strategies **do** identify high-risk populations, but unlike selected intervention programmes they **do not target** a specific group that has characteristics that define its members as being at high risk within the population for developing the disorder. Thus, the program is delivered universally. **It is the population, and not the individual within the population, that may carry the risk, which is generally relatively low in these interventions.**

Selective prevention interventions are generally considered to be secondary preventions. (…) Selective prevention interventions are **aimed at individuals who are at high risk** of developing the disorder **or are showing very early signs or symptoms**. Interventions tend to focus on reducing risk and strengthening resilience. Risk is obviously higher in these selected groups and is often the result of a combination of risk factors rather than the intensity of any single factor. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate transportation, substandard housing, parental mental health problems, and marital conflict, which may affect a particular child, could be addressed by selected prevention programmes.

Abstracted from NICE Guidelines[23]

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within the contemporary parenting support environment. The 10-Week Nurturing Programme capitalizes on the 'normalising' effect of advertising and delivering parenting programmes in familiar, open access and non-stigmatising locations such as schools and local children's centres that can be accessed by any parent in the community, but recognises that its curriculum is likely to be of most benefit to parents who are in various ways experiencing difficulty coping with parenting and/or difficulties in their relationship with their child or children.

Referrals to the 10-Week Nurturing Programme may be made by a worker who knows the parent and child (usually a family support, early years worker or health visitor), and three quarters of referrals were recently estimated to come through these routes.[24,25] Because the programme is advertised and delivered within universal settings, about one quarter of referrals are currently estimated to be self-referrals by parents themselves rather than through child-care professionals.

Eligibility, irrespective of the origin of referral, was previously flexibly defined. It was based on whether parents themselves (in the case of self-referrals), or parents and referring staff where applicable, perceived a need for and likely benefit from the programme. In future, eligibility criteria will be refined and tightened. These will be determined on the basis of reporting one or more of the **presenting needs** that have been identified in the Theory of Change, 2016 (see Figure A). The precise criteria for eligibility will be the subject of future work, planned for 2017, having reference to the design, content and implementation parameters of the programme, the updated target outcomes, 'market' considerations (for example, the kinds of parents/parenting difficulties upon which commissioners currently place priority), and capacity and competency issues (what kinds of parents/parenting difficulties can a 'typical' 10-Week Nurturing Programme Group Leader reasonably be expected to help). The more challenging the level or type of need included, the more likely it is that the basic group delivery model will benefit from being supplemented by additional one-to-one support or by groups focusing on specific issues in order to achieve the target outcomes (see below, Modality). There will also be a number of **exclusion criteria**, (factors that would be considered to preclude a parent from attending the programme), which are also under development (see Cloud 1).

Cloud 1 In development…… Eligibility and exclusion criteria

As part of the move to position the programme more firmly for effective selective prevention, Family Links will in 2017 be developing eligibility (or 'inclusion') criteria that have external validity and that reflect the factors that the programme is particularly designed to address. They will be based on the needs identified in the Family Links 10-week Nurturing Programme: Theory of Change, 2016. Parents being recommended or wishing to attend will complete one or more validated measures to enable assessment of their type and level of need. This will involve calculating a score above a pre-determined threshold on a suite of referral criteria measures, or will reflect a simple Yes/No scoring system, with one or more 'Yes' determining eligibility. Parents will still be able to self-refer, but they will need to meet the eligibility threshold. The programme may not altogether exclude parents who do not meet the threshold, but places for such parents will be restricted, and they will be identified separately in any measurement of outcomes. Except in cases where additional support is agreed, exclusion criteria will apply to parents with higher levels of need than the programme is designed to address: e.g. in cases of known or suspected significant harm; children on the edge of care; a diagnosed mental health disorder that makes group work inappropriate; and known domestic violence.

4.4 Target population

The programme content is aimed at parents of children at the stages of development broadly corresponding in the UK system to **preschool** (3-4 years old); and **primary school**, the latter divided into *early childhood* (aged 5-7 years), and *middle childhood* (aged 8-11 years).

The course is for adults only; parents do not attend with children. Usually, only one parent in a couple will attend, usually the main carer (generally, the mother).

The **inclusion of a relatively wide age-range of children** reflects the fact that the 10-Week Nurturing Programme is a primarily cognitive relational programme targeted at many dimensions of optimal parenting, rather than just at behaviour modification. This is justified because, as up to date reviews confirm:
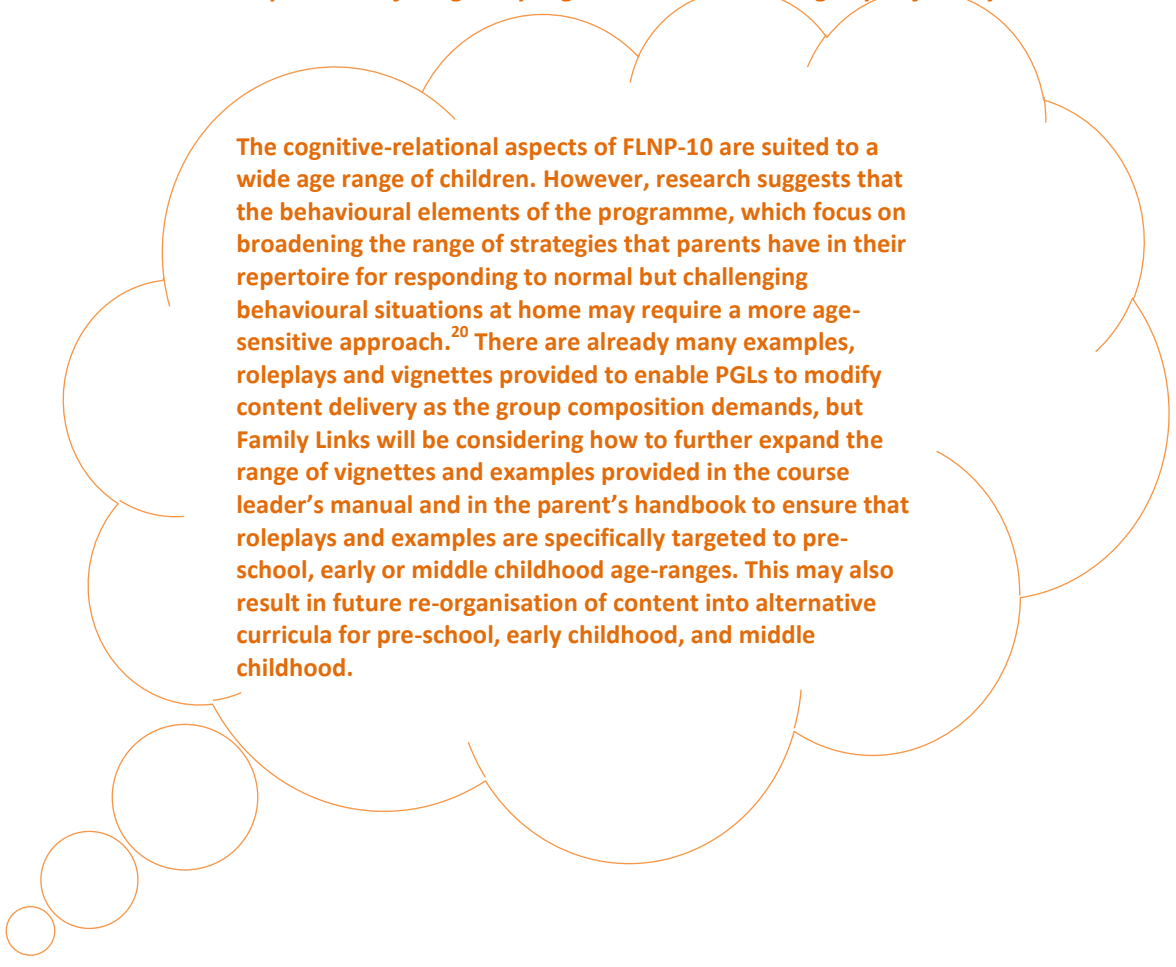
"*The basic dimensions of parenting (nurturance, adequate and reasonable regulation of behaviour, absence of intrusive or demeaning behaviours) have been found to be salient across age, gender and culture*".[26]

Furthermore, recent research with a sample of 136 parents using 30 10-Week Nurturing Programme courses in 22 local areas across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which tested out a number of broad 'overarching impact measures' designed to capture the high level impact of the programme, also confirmed that the age of the child on whom parents responded was unrelated to differences in results.[25] This suggested that the programme was equally impactful for children across a wide age range.

10-Week Nurturing Programme groups are generally delivered to groups of parents who have children of a similar age, but the same broad content is delivered to all. Alternative vignettes and different examples to be used for pre-schoolers and for primary school aged children are currently provided within the course leaders' manual, and parent group leaders vary these as appropriate during delivery. However, a future development under consideration is a clearer division of the programme content into different curricula, with age-appropriate examples more firmly signposted; see Cloud 2. There is a view that an 'ideal design' informed by child development science suggests that parents of pre-schoolers and parents of school-aged children should be formally separated within programme delivery. Family Links remain open to future research on whether this approach would improve the programme's results; but at present, practical and local considerations argue against this approach.

Finally, because the cognitive-relational content of the programme emphasises general aspects of optimal parenting and parent-child relationships, which are known to cross-cut age, gender, and cultural boundaries, parents who require support with older (adolescent) children may occasionally be accepted onto a course if referral staff strongly believe the programme would benefit them. However, these families are usually directed, where possible, to other Family Links programmes (see Appendix 2).

The cognitive-relational aspects of FLNP-10 are suited to a wide age range of children. However, research suggests that the behavioural elements of the programme, which focus on broadening the range of strategies that parents have in their repertoire for responding to normal but challenging behavioural situations at home may require a more age-sensitive approach.[20] There are already many examples, roleplays and vignettes provided to enable PGLs to modify content delivery as the group composition demands, but Family Links will be considering how to further expand the range of vignettes and examples provided in the course leader's manual and in the parent's handbook to ensure that roleplays and examples are specifically targeted to pre-school, early or middle childhood age-ranges. This may also result in future re-organisation of content into alternative curricula for pre-school, early childhood, and middle childhood.

4.5 Modality

The course is **group-based**, offered in groups recommended to contain 8-10 parents although the numbers vary according to local circumstances. Groups over 12 participants are not advised by Family Links.

Group-based programmes are an accepted and proven method of delivering parenting support and parent training. There is strong support in the evidence-base for the efficacy and cost effectiveness of group-based interventions, provided they are well facilitated.[27] Numerous reviews and reviews of reviews have confirmed this. [13,19,11,28] Parent functioning and wellbeing is frequently found to be improved as a result of group-based parenting interventions; child behaviour somewhat less reliably, although in behavioural-type programmes for children with diagnosed conduct disorders, group work is now recommended by NICE. [24]

One issue with the group modality is that the parenting literature indicates that to work most effectively with higher-need groups, some degree of tailored one-to-one support may be required.[29] Anecdotally, PGLs and other workers in the various settings from which 10-Week Nurturing Programme recruits are drawn (e.g. children's centres) indicate that some parents attending the groups, especially those who are most vulnerable, are also receiving

other forms of support. This can be between, after and before 10-Week Nurturing Programme group sessions. For example, some workers report making home visits that are used to reinforce 10-Week Nurturing Programme messages and keep parents engaged and motivated to attend the groups. It was noted in the recent strategic review of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme[25] that if this were common, it would mark an important point of departure from (and likely augmentation of) the group-based delivery model. Data on the frequency and conditions under which this may be happening are important to have. Family Links plans to carry out further research on this question.

4.6 Purveyor-supported

Box 4 Implementation support for providing agencies and practitioners

- Initial consultancy for providing agencies
- One-to-one telephone and email advice available for all trained practitioners
- Access to a dedicated log in section on the Family Links website with all resources needed to deliver the programme, plus leaflets for recruitment of parents
- Regular newsletters with up-to-date research and best practice examples
- Professional development opportunities via refresher courses for those delivering the Nurturing Programme
- Access to a wide range of resources via an online shop
- Regular regional meetings
- Follow-on training and professional development opportunities, including access to accredited Level 3 or 4 Awards in Work with Parents (based on the *National Occupations Standards for Work with Parents*)
- Free processing of pre and post group data from parent groups, and personalised reports for facilitators

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The 10-Week Nurturing Programme is a purveyor-supported programme. *Purveyors* is a term increasingly used to describe individuals or organisations that operate in the role of external experts to a local provider who is implementing a particular programme. They support systems, organisations, and individual practitioners to use and deliver that programme effectively.[1,2] Implementation science research increasingly suggests that purveyor-supported programmes, especially where purveyors provide focused and tailored technical assistance to providers who may be encountering problems, is the key to more effective results.[30]

Family Links, as originating designers of the programme, are content-experts who provide implementation support to assist new providers to identify whether the 10-Week Nurturing Programme will meet their needs and determine the feasibility of delivery. They also assist existing providers to maintain quality standards, including by encouraging providers to use data feedback to monitor progress and outcomes, thus supporting what implementation scientists refer to as 'data-driven decision-making.'[30] This support has in the past included provision of standardised questionnaires and guidance on their administration, and analysis and reporting back of data results on outcomes. Family

Links do not compel providers to utilise the support; however, there is a clear expectation set out in an initial Agreement that providers will take up the offered support in the interests of programme quality. The full range of implementation and data-driven support provided by Family Links is shown in Box 4.

5. The Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme *Theory of Change* in detail: the theory base underpinning content

The underpinning theoretical basis of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme's content is well-validated in the wider parenting support literature. Below, we highlight international evidence that supports the five key underpinning theoretical bases of the programme, which are:

1. **Social learning theory**
2. **Relationships between parents and children are key**
3. **The past affects the present**
4. **Thoughts and feelings influence behaviours**
5. **Family systems and home environments are determinant in stress and wellbeing**

5.1 The underpinning 'theory of causation' for the programme is based on social learning principles.

Social Learning Theory[31] (or social interaction learning theory, SIL, as it is also called) states that children learn from significant people around them, especially carers. It is one of the most well-established foundational theories for parenting interventions:

"children are socialized during their day to day interactions with other significant figures, including parents. As such, parent training interventions focus on balancing parents' supportive interaction with their children, with setting clear limits and using effective discipline"[32]

Most well-regarded and effective parenting programmes are based to some extent in social learning theory or its variants.

5.2 Relationships between parent and child are key

Again, this is a key tenet of the cognitive-relational approach and the 10-Week Nurturing Programme places particular emphasis on this. The emphasis of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme in maintaining a focus on relationships above skills and strategies as noted and discussed above is supported in the literature. It is noted that:

 *"the child's relationship with the caregiver is the **essential vehicle** for allowing the child's individuality to develop… relationship strengthening at this level must therefore be a core consideration for early interventions"*[33]

5.3 The past affects the present

This principle has been generally accepted as one of the most important influences on parenting for many decades.[34] The 10-Week Nurturing Programme includes "*methods for considering how parents' previous negative experiences affect the quality of their current relationship with their children*" noted as being one of most common assumptions of effective parenting programmes.[35]

There are numerous invitations throughout the 10-Week Nurturing Programme for participants to review and reflect upon their own childhood experiences. The harmful and undermining effects of being poorly parented oneself is well documented in the literature, as well as being consistent with the social learning perspective. There is a large literature going back to the 1970s documenting the association of poor parenting experiences with subsequent child-rearing difficulties, including, in extreme cases, child maltreatment.[36]

5.4 Thoughts and feelings influence behaviours

This is a key tenet of the cognitive-relational approach. There is a huge psychological literature on how what human beings think and how they feel impacts on what they do. Early studies of parenting especially noted how 'ghosts in the nursery'[37] (that is, the tendency of parents to bring to their child rearing the unresolved issues of their childhoods), shape the way adults subsequently parent their own children. Literature on child care also shows that parents and carers may frequently misattribute negative emotions or intentions to many normal child behaviours. This can lead to misunderstandings at best and ineffective or even harmful responses by parents at worst.[32] The 10-Week Nurturing Programme aims are fully consistent with another of Asmussen's (2011) 'common assumptions of effective programmes', one of which is to "*improve the way parents interpret their children's behaviour, manage their own thought processes, and perceive their sense of efficacy*".[35]

5.5 The family system and the home environment are determining factors for family stress and wellbeing

The family system and the home environment or 'family emotional climate' (the way people communicate and express emotions) is known to impact on parent stress and child wellbeing and behaviour. Again consistent with Asmussen's common assumptions of effective programmes, the 10-Week Nurturing Programme assumes, (as Asmussen frames it) "*that parent and child behaviours are reciprocally determined … and reflect the overall functionality of the family system*".[35] Family emotional climate, a strong focus of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, is noted in various studies as related to negative child outcomes when it is negative in affect or expression.[38,39]

6. The Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme *Theory of Change* in detail: the 'causal pathway' and programme logic assumptions

Having described the underpinning theory base for the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, below we outline the key features of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme theory of change model, 2016, as shown in the graphic. This section sets out the assumed logical links between the different elements of the theory of change in a 'causal pathway' from root or antecedent needs to ultimate outcomes. **This section should be read alongside the graphic.**

6.1 Root or antecedent causes [what underlies the needs that parents have]

Preliminary work to elucidate the key elements of the theory of change for the 10-Week Nurturing Programme (Ghate, 2015) identified that there are two common antecedent factors most often found amongst parents attending the 10-Week Nurturing Programme. These may be seen as distal (relatively distant) causes of parenting difficulties, and are confirmed to give rise to some of the needs listed below by a wide body of international research over many decades.[40]

> **(6. 1a) Absence of an 'internal model' for positive parenting and positive parent-child relationships:** poor prior parenting experiences, with low levels of positive parenting (warmth, positive discipline, nurturant and empathic care, consistency) in parents' own childhoods result in parents who are unsure how to parent their own child positively.

> **(6. 1b) Parenting isolation**: parents often feel (erroneously) that they are unique in their difficulties, and feel isolated from sources of guidance and support. This may be due to isolation from other wider forms of social support. In addition, it is also sometimes found that parents attending the courses also disclose outright trauma and abuse in childhood. PGLs are trained to support such parents in the course of the group sessions and to refer on to appropriate sources of specialist support. The programme itself does <u>not</u> address this in depth, because it is not intended to be used as a therapeutic support for historic maltreatment nor a preventive intervention in cases of current maltreatment.

In the Theory of Change, these antecedent factors are considered to form the backdrop to:

6.2 Needs [the reasons parents are referred to the programme]

Specific presenting needs at three levels (in parents, in children, and in the parent-child relationships) are addressed by the programme, and can be viewed as the proximal (relatively closer) causes of parenting difficulties for 10-Week Nurturing Programme participants. It is often noted by 10-Week Nurturing Programme content experts that parents themselves may not always identify these proximal factors; instead, they may believe that the 'problem' lies more or less exclusively with the child, who needs to 'be fixed' by the programme. Developing a better understanding of these background proximal causes and an appreciation of how they may be contributing to the 'identified' problem is part of the journey of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme for parent participants, consistent with theoretical principle 5.4. This developing understanding on the part of parents who participate (that is, developments in what they *think* and *feel*) constitutes a 'mechanism of change' within the terms of the programme theory which, together with adoption of the recommended strategies and changes in what parents *do*, is expected to produce the target positive outcomes for parents and ultimately for children.

(6. 2a) For parents, cognitive and emotional problems: parents may present with multiple needs, but the most commonly observed presenting needs that the 10-Week Nurturing Programme is specifically designed to address are related to parents' own poor experiences and examples of childhood care. These include:

- Low parenting self-efficacy[II],[41,42] and confidence, and low levels of reported coping[III] with the daily demands of parenting;[43]

[II] *Parenting self-efficacy* is concerned with how parents asses their own capabilities. It is defined as "*beliefs or judgements that a parent holds of their capabilities to organise and execute a set of tasks relating to parenting a child*"[41] or, from a behavioural point of view: "*a parent's beliefs in their ability to influence their children in ways that foster their development and success*"[42]. It concerns not only the possession of skills but also a person's belief that he or she can integrate them into an appropriate course of action.

[III] *Coping*, a more plain-English term, is closely related to self-efficacy. It is defined as "*the belief that one has the ability to successfully manage the tasks and other aspects of being a parent*"[43]

- Low self-awareness, low self-knowledge[IV], [44] and mindfulness[V], [45] in the sense of understanding how parenting behaviours and responses can affect and shape parents' relationships with their child, and also affect the child's behaviour;
- High levels of parenting stress and feeling overwhelmed, often combined with poor 'self-nurturance' strategies for maintaining emotional health and wellbeing;
- Low levels of empathy for their child (not being able to take the perspective of the child and put themselves in a child's place; not hearing or correctly identifying children's expressed emotions)
- Low levels of insight, knowledge and understanding of children's developmental and emotional needs
- Developmentally inappropriate expectations of children's emotional or behavioural maturity
- Parents feeling isolated in their own problems

(6.2b) For parents, absence of parenting skills: parents (and referring workers) also often report specific skill or competency gaps in two common areas:

- Low levels of positive or consistent management of children's behaviour, with inconsistent responses to infractions
- Poor abilities in managing and resolving conflict with children in positive, non-coercive ways (over-reliance on punitive and controlling discipline; low levels of praise and positive re-enforcement)

(6.2c) For children, one **emotional** and one **behavioural need:** parents (and referring workers) also often report two common needs observed in children:

- Child often appears stressed or unhappy
- Child is uncooperative with adults and with other children

(6. 2d) For both parents and children, poor parent-child relationships, poor relationship and poor 'home climate': parents also often report difficulties in:

- Parent-child relationships are conflicted and stressful
- Home and family life is not enjoyable and the home climate or atmosphere is 'hot' (angry, emotionally volatile) or 'cold' (distant, detached), or fluctuates between the two

Parents with one or more of these problems (see Cloud 1, In development) are accepted onto the programme.

[IV] *'Substantial' self-knowledge*: knowledge of the type of person one is. [44]
[V] *Mindfulness*: an awareness that emerges though paying attention, on purpose, in the present, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience, moment by moment.[45]

Programme logic:

Programme logic:

In the Theory of Change, these needs and problems are addressed within the programme by:

6.3 Activities/outputs [what is delivered as part of the programme]

The content delivered by the 10-Week Nurturing Programme is anchored by **four constructs** or themes that represent principles of optimal parenting. Session content reflects these four constructs across the programme curriculum, briefly named and discussed in detail below:

1. **empathy**
2. **appropriate expectations**
3. **positive discipline**
4. **emotional health: self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-worth**

The constructs are delivered within a cognitive-relational frame, and underpin the behaviourally focused elements of the programme, where a set of **four strategies** are taught, backed up with roleplays and vignette examples. Briefly these are:

1. **managing and communicating feelings**
2. **problem solving**
3. **managing and reducing conflict**
4. **managing and reducing stress**

6.3.1 The Four Constructs

The 'four constructs' that are identified as fundamental to optimal parenting and are used to anchor much of the content of the programme originate from Bavolek's 'Nurturing Parenting Programs' (Bavolek, 2000;[4] and http://www.nurturingparenting.com/). Below these are discussed in turn, together with a brief review of the evidence base (and because they are coterminous with the practical strategies covered by the programme, some are further discussed below in respect of 'strategies'). **The four constructs operate at the cognitive and mental level** (they are about the way parents think and feel) and are intended

to scaffold the learning about strategies that parents have as the course progresses, and to deepen reflection and understanding about how parents can best support children.

(a) Empathy [the ability to identify with the feelings of the child].

Empathy with children and attempting to connect with how children might be feeling in given situations is a core element of all sessions of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, and is considered to be key in helping parents understand how to help and support children in constructive ways. There is plenty of research evidence to substantiate a focus on empathy, which has for a long time been one of the cornerstones for assessing parenting capacity.[46] For example, low empathy is strongly associated with child maltreatment,[47] and research has demonstrated that highly empathic mothers are more easily able to develop positive relationships with young children than those who are less empathic.[48] It links to the construct of *attunement* which is fundamental construct in attachment theory, defined as: *an awareness of the child's current psychological space (emotions, thoughts, needs).*[49]

(b) Appropriate expectations [knowledge and understanding of what is reasonable to expect at different ages/stages of development].

Again, there is substantial and long-standing evidence that parental expectations that are inappropriate for the age or developmental stage of the child are associated with parenting difficulties, and foster conflict and poor child outcomes. Other well-known programmes with high effectiveness also teach parents to have regard to child development capacity, and 'authoritative parenting' is consistently demonstrated to be associated with the best child and youth outcomes, and "*authoritative parents encourage autonomy but also hold appropriate maturity demands in both learning and play situations…*".[50] *Ages and stages in child development* is a specific session for Week 7 of the programme (see below Section 6.3.3) that "*provides useful information about child development*" (PGL Handbook p7.4) but in a relatively non-specific way.

(c) Positive discipline [setting of reasonable boundaries; consistency; allowing limited choices; avoiding control by punishment or coercion].

Again, an accepted tenet of optimal parenting, there is a wealth of theory and sound empirical evidence on the importance of discipline that is firm, consistent and non-coercive. Contemporary and updated writing on disciplining children incudes discussion of "confrontive" (as distinct from 'coercive') control which combines positive boundary and limit-setting, whilst allowing choices, respecting the child's view, being consistent, and avoiding punitive or demeaning responses.[51] All of these reflect the content of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme well, where the emphasis is on teaching and guiding rather than punishing children.
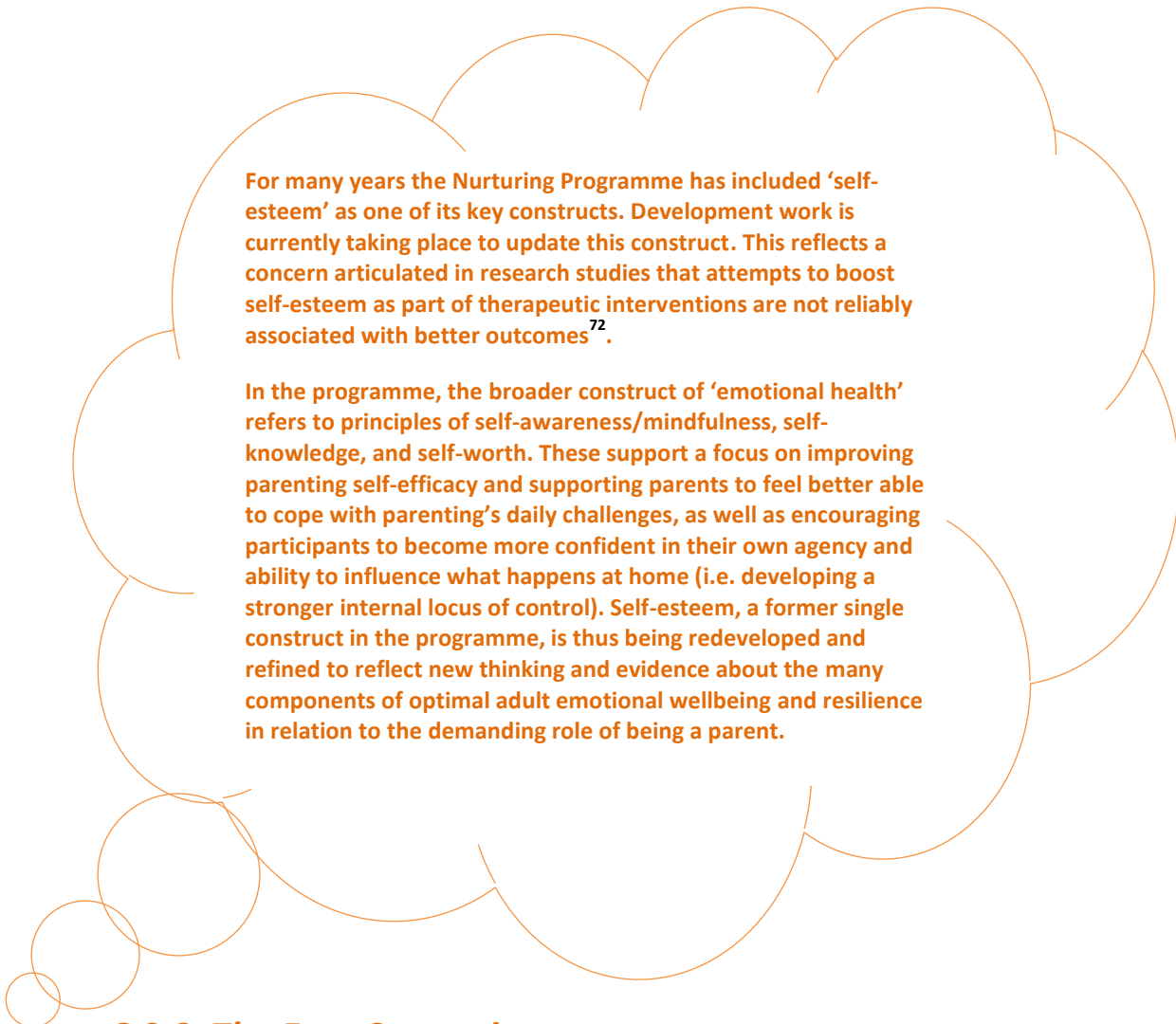
In this respect, the 10-Week Nurturing Programme shares a focus with many other parenting programmes, including those of a behavioural tradition, in which the emphasis is

on managing undesirable and stressful (or dangerous) behaviours by children and redirecting undesirable behaviours in more desirable and pro-social directions. However, consistent with the frame of the programme as cognitive-relational, in the 10-Week Nurturing Programme the principles and the relational context of praise and discipline are emphasised above specific strategies and techniques for child management. There are however some specific strategies taught by the 10-Week Nurturing Programme (such as *Time to Calm Down*) and problem solving (see below, the Four Strategies).

(d) Emotional health [self-awareness of ones' own thoughts, feelings and behaviours; the impact of one's own responses and behaviours on others; self-knowledge of the kind of person one is; self-worth; personal agency; and taking ownership for one's self and one's choices]

The construct of *emotional health* represents an evolution for the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, and is a development and updating of the ideas previously contained in the single construct of '*self-esteem*' (see Cloud 3 for more details). This construct is currently under development, and will be discussed in a forthcoming paper by Family Links, to appear on the Family Links website. It combines a package of ideas collectively linked by the construct of personal impact and agency within relationships, and is related to the construct of mindfulness and acceptance of one's own thoughts and feelings, as well as to emotion regulation.[45]

Within this theme, parents are encouraged to develop greater *self-awareness* of themselves as parents and of the mutuality implied in the parent-child relationship, meaning awareness of their own thoughts and feelings and behaviours as well as the reciprocal impact of their own responses and behaviours on children.[52] Here, interfacing with the behavioural elements of programme content, they are also taught to recognise the importance of actively modelling desirable responses and behaviours for their children. Parents are also encouraged to think about the kind of person and the kind of parent they are (development of a kind of 'substantial *self-knowledge*'[44]) and to reflect on how their particular parenting style may be affecting their child and influencing his or her behaviour. Finally, discussion of this construct also explores ideas about self-value or *self-worth*, linking to parenting self-efficacy - (see footnote ii: parents' beliefs in their ability to effectively manage the varied tasks and situations and responsibilities of parenthood). There is plenty of high quality research that confirms low parenting self-efficacy is associated with parenting difficulties while higher parenting self-efficacy is associated with more adaptive (responsive, flexible, healthy) parenting styles and practices[53]; (see for example Moran and Ghate, 2013,[43] p32-33 for a review on parenting self-efficacy and related concepts). Parents are introduced to the confidence-giving importance of thinking positively and avoiding denigrating themselves. Finally, ideas about self-agency, the significance of internal locus of control, self-regulation of emotion and owning responsibility for one's own choices are introduced using the popular term '*personal power*'. These are all further discussed below, see **the Four Strategies**.

Cloud 3   In development: Moving from a narrower focus on 'self-esteem' to the wider construct of 'emotional health'

For many years the Nurturing Programme has included 'self-esteem' as one of its key constructs. Development work is currently taking place to update this construct. This reflects a concern articulated in research studies that attempts to boost self-esteem as part of therapeutic interventions are not reliably associated with better outcomes[72].

In the programme, the broader construct of 'emotional health' refers to principles of self-awareness/mindfulness, self-knowledge, and self-worth. These support a focus on improving parenting self-efficacy and supporting parents to feel better able to cope with parenting's daily challenges, as well as encouraging participants to become more confident in their own agency and ability to influence what happens at home (i.e. developing a stronger internal locus of control). Self-esteem, a former single construct in the programme, is thus being redeveloped and refined to reflect new thinking and evidence about the many components of optimal adult emotional wellbeing and resilience in relation to the demanding role of being a parent.

6.3.2 The Four Strategies

Four strategies, linked to the four constructs, provide the practical frame for the 10-Week Nurturing Programme content, providing examples of ways to put the core principles and values of the programme into practice in everyday life. They link to fundamental components of everyday parenting, and are described as 'strategies' to indicate that although specific and particular examples are given as illustration of the principles being conveyed, they are not intended as prescriptions. Parents are expected to develop their own interpretations of how the strategies can work for them in the context of their own family lives. The strategies provide a frame for covering a range of different topics that are included in the ten sessions of the programme (see Box 5 below), and are intentionally overlapping and mutually re-enforcing (so that specific topics may recur under the heading of different strategies). **Figure A** shows (broadly, though there is some overlap) how the topics covered across the programme as a whole map onto the four strategies.

The four strategies operate at the level of parent practices and behaviour: they are about what parents do with children. They are intended to help parents broaden the range and

repertoire of positive, constructive and pro-developmental responses that they can make when they are with their children. They cover a range of situations that parents of young children commonly find challenging, and that are particularly prone to negative escalation in families where relationships are stressed or where parents lack positive internal models from their own childhood experience of being parented.

In terms of the evidence supporting these strategies, it is sometimes difficult to disaggregate content components of programmes one from another within the wider literature, due to overlap between constructs and lack of consistency in the labels applied by programme developers and evaluators across the field. However, there appears to be strong and robust support for the broad content of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme in a reasonably recent and thorough meta-analysis by Kaminski and colleagues.[11] Here, 77 published evaluations (of a slightly smaller number of differing programmes) are re-analysed to determine which specific components of parent *training* programmes (their content, and delivery methods) are '*reliably associated with more successful outcomes*" in respect of parenting and child behaviour. This review carefully and quantitatively synthesises the result of many other studies, and provides a particularly reliable and robust source of 'corroborating evidence' for the likely efficacy of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme approach, especially in relation to its behavioural dimension.

This analysis found that:

> "*program components consistently associated with larger effects included increasing positive parent-child interactions and emotional communication skills, teaching parents to use time out and the importance of parenting consistency….*"[11]

Note that the focus of the analysis in the review is stated as on *parent training* and thus 'behavioural' programmes - that is, ones that involve 'a skills acquisition component' as their main if not their only goal - so the sample of studies is not completely analogous to programmes of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme's type. However, to the extent that the 10-Week Nurturing Programme does contain some behavioural components and some skill acquisition, this provides a reassuring set of findings.

Box 5 shows the four strategy groupings and the specific topics covered in 10-Week Nurturing Programme sessions that relate to them. Many topics overlap more than one strategy, and in practice, topics will be revisited in different contexts and with different examples provided, as appropriate to the developing discussion within the group. Box 5 shows a broad schema, therefore, not a precise curriculum. Below, the four strategies and associated topics are discussed in the context of up to date evidence on factors associated with positive outcomes from parenting interventions.

> **Box 5   Strategy groupings and specific topics covered in Nurturing Programme sessions** :
>
> **(a) Managing and communicating feelings**
> - Managing feelings (Feelings and Wishes)
> - Communicating clearly (Two-way communication; I-Messages)
>
> **(b) Solving problems**
> - Problem Solving and Negotiating
> - Enabling Choices and Consequences for children
> - Rewards and Penalties
>
> **(c)   Managing and Reducing Conflict** and **Discipline**
> - Setting Boundaries and Limits (establishing and applying Family Rules)
> - Behaviours to Ignore
> - Praise for Being and Doing
> - *Choices and Consequences also recapped*
> - *Rewards and Penalties also recapped*
> - *Overlaps with Kinds of Touch*
> - *Overlaps with Time to Calm Down*
>
> **(d) Managing and reducing stress**
> - Time to Calm Down
> - Personal Power and personal agency
> - Self-Nurturance and stress management
>
> *Other topics*
>
> - Ages and Stages in child development: *overlaps (a) to (d)*
> - Kinds of Touch (appropriate and inappropriate)
> - Sex and Helping Children to Stay Safe

(a) Managing and communicating feelings

The session in week five is described in the PGL's manual as "*a powerful self-awareness exercise*" and deals with the effects of difficult feelings, parents and children's ways of managing those feelings, and what happens when those feelings are not acknowledged or suppressed. It also covers ways to express and release difficult feelings safely.

This session also focuses on communicating using "*I" statements* (defined as assertive and clear but non-blaming communication of feelings and wishes, without raising the emotional temperature of the interaction).

The focus on emotion management (also called 'emotion coaching' in the literature[32]) and sharing feelings constructively is supported in the research. *"Skills relating to emotional communication"* (which included: training in active listening skills, such as reflecting back

what the child says; teaching parents to help children identify with and deal with emotions; and teaching parents to reduce negative commination such as criticism and sarcasm) was predictive of large effects on both parenting and child outcomes and was one of four key components/strategies that when combined with other effective practices were significant predictors of large effect sizes in the meta-analysis by Kaminski and colleagues[11] (p582). "I messages" were a staple element of *Parent Effectiveness Training* (PET; Gordon 1975), a now relatively uncommon intervention in the UK but one that was at one time credited with moderate impacts on parenting.[54]

Relevant topics covered in the 10-Week Nurturing Programme sessions are:

- Managing Feelings (Feelings and Wishes)
- Communicating clearly; Listening and naming feelings; I statements; two way communication)

(b) Solving problems

Problem-solving is the basis of many successful parenting programmes. Triple P for example includes a session on problem-solving, and Incredible Years also uses a problem-solving curriculum which has been shown to produce effective results.[55] 'Disciplinary reasoning' and negotiation are also emphasised in much of the child development research.[11] Thus 'problem-solving' is both a way of resolving conflict at home and assisting stressed parents to manage parenting daily hassles more constructively. Problem solving and negotiation, and related strategies for reducing the occurrence of conflicts are discussed across a number of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme sessions, and are intended to mutually re-inforce one another. Specific strategies and techniques are suggested for achieving mutually acceptable compromises between parent and child, using flow diagrams and step by step role plays.

Topics of particular relevance are:

- ➢ Problem Solving and Negotiating
- ➢ Enabling Choices and Consequences for children
- ➢ Rewards and Penalties

(c) Managing and reducing conflict

Closely related to Problem-solving (see above) and Managing Stress (see below), strategies for reducing the occurrence of conflict are discussed across a number of sessions. Topics of relevance are:

- Setting Boundaries and Limits (establishing and applying Family Rules)
- Behaviours to Ignore
- Praise for Being and Doing
- Choices and Consequences

- Rewards and Penalties
- Time to Calm Down

Setting family rules and consistently applying them is introduced in Week 2. Four types of disciplinary style (parents who are: controlling, inconsistent, have no boundaries, or who have clear boundaries) are identified and discussed. These map closely but not fully onto the four well-researched parenting types identified originally by Baumrind.[56,57] that are ranged along two dimensions (*responsiveness* and *demandingness*). Baumrind called the styles: authoritarian, disengaged, permissive, and authoritative (the latter being the optimal style). Teaching disciplinary consistency (ie, that by responding to a particular misbehaviour every time it occurs and with the same consequence, the misbehaviour will disappear more quickly) has been shown to be predictive of large effects on child behaviour[11] across many parenting programmes.

Active ignoring of minor unwanted child behaviours (ignoring the behaviour, but not the child; *Behaviour to ignore*) is covered in Week 9 of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme as part of the overall coverage of discipline. It is presented as a strategy for reducing the frequency of negative interactions (*Do's work better than Don'ts*) between parents and children and for discouraging ('extinguishing' in clinical child development parlance) unwanted behaviour by depriving it of attention. 'Planned ignoring' is described in the literature as amongst some of the earliest elements of parent training efforts from the 1960s onwards, but is identified as a specific component in too few programs to have been amenable to separate analysis in the meta-analysis by Kaminski and colleagues.[11]

In terms of achieving a balance within disciplinary strategies, new updated writing from North America on authoritative parenting emphasises the importance of 'confrontive' control as distinct from control that is coercive, and supports the 10-Week Nurturing Programme approach (although confrontive is not a term used in the programme). 'Confrontive' control is defined as *demanding, firm*, and *goal-directed*[51] and centres on recognising

> "*a fundamental duality of human development, namely that optimal functioning is undergirded by a basic tension between individual freedom (autonomy) and control (regulation, conformity).*"[26 [p63]]

This balanced approach maps well to the 10-Week Nurturing Programme approach, which includes content to balance appropriate parental control with helping children to develop their own self-regulation alongside developmentally appropriate levels of autonomy.

Praise, for Being, as well as Doing: "*the magic ingredient in relationships*" (PGL Handbook p1.15), is covered with parents in the very first week of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, alongside discussion about how positive re-enforcement works to encourage repetition of positive behaviours. The saying: "*what we pay attention to is what we get more of*" is stressed here and at regular points through the following weeks of the course. Nine specific

steps are suggested as ways to give praise effectively and authentically, and praise both for 'doing' (behaviour reinforcement) and 'being' (relationship building and valuing the child) is covered.

Parent training in this kind of 'positive interaction' is well-supported by the wider evidence-base: for example, teaching parents about 'attending' (active listening and other ways of interacting positively with children in non-disciplinary situations, including in play) was predictive of both parent and child positive outcomes in the meta-analysis by Kaminski and colleagues.[11]

(d) Managing and reducing stress

Managing stress, especially but not only during conflict episodes, is covered by the idea of *Time to Calm Down* for children over 3 years old only (PGL Handbook 2.11), as well as in topics around personal agency (*Personal Power*), and *Self-Nurturance*.

Time to Calm Down is an area of 10-Week Nurturing Programme content that has evolved over recent years. The current emphasis is primarily on 'calming down' as a means of supporting children (and parents) to self-regulate their own emotions, and is used for conflict de-escalation. It is not used as a behaviour control strategy, nor as a punishment for infraction (as in the sense of 'time OUT' or 'sitting on the naughty step' as in some popularised parenting advice). It is combined with strategies for giving positive choices to children (*Choices and Consequences*, Week 4) which is viewed within the 10-Week Nurturing Programme as "*the most useful behaviour encouragement technique of all*" (PGL handbook p 4.12). This provides strategies for offering children limited choices within parameters the parent decides. It emphasises children's own agency and power to influence how things turn out, supporting the development of self-regulation as children mature. Teaching parents to use 'time out' effectively was found to be one of the most powerful predictors of parent <u>and</u> child outcomes in Kaminski et al's 2008 meta analysis, but it is not clear if this is 'time out' (in the sense of a behaviour control strategy) or 'time to calm down' (in the sense of a conflict de-escalation strategy). It seems likely however that time out used for both adult and child emotional regulation, as in the 10-Week Nurturing Programme's interpretation of this concept, is the most 'active ingredient' associated with better outcomes in parenting interventions.

Personal agency, coping and self-efficacy are important elements of the stress management and stress reduction approach advocated in the 10-Week Nurturing Programme. In Week 4, '*personal power*' is covered under the construct of emotional health to encourage discussion about emotional strength and resilience, and the role of a sense of self-worth in feeling strong and able to cope with life's hassles and with parenting. The construct of personal power appears in popular psychology, and Family Links group leaders report that it appears meaningful and resonant to parents who attend the course. It is not well covered in the scientific literature. It is probably close to the construct of resilience (the ability of

individuals to remain emotionally and behaviourally healthy in the face of threats to coping). In the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, it links back clearly to the concepts of parenting self-efficacy and coping with parenting, the promotion of which is a key goal of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme. It also links to discussion during sessions about taking responsibility for one's own well-being and self-agency, and to the idea of promoting an internal rather than an external 'locus of control' to help parents to feel more agency and influence in their own lives and in what happens at home. This is highly relevant since research has shown that individuals who tend to believe that caregiving outcomes are outside of their own control are particularly reactive to difficult child behaviour.[58]

Self-nurturance (strategies for supporting one's own emotional and physical wellbeing) for stress management and general wellbeing is also a focus of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme. In respect of *self-nurturing*, as with 'personal power', there is popular psychological and self-help literature on this, but relatively little academic literature that uses this particular term. Described as a '*newly recognised component of adult wellness*',[59] 'self-nurturance' has however been implicated in increased wellbeing and life and career satisfaction amongst registered nurses in the US;[59,60, 61.] Neff (2003)[62] has written on '*self-compassion*' as an '*emotionally positive self-attitude*' (p85) and as a useful alternative construct to self-esteem. She defines it as consisting of three components: (a) emotional self-kindness, in understanding one's own pain and failures as opposed to judging oneself harshly; (b) common humanity - viewing one's own experiences as part of larger human experience rather than peculiar, separating and isolating; and (c) mindfulness – holding painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them. The 10-Week Nurturing Programme programme introduces the *SPICES* mnemonic to remind parents of the different dimensions of life in which enjoyment and relaxation may be achieved (s̲ocial, p̲ersonal, i̲ntellectual, c̲reative, e̲motional and s̲piritual; PGL Handbook, p6.10) and to underpin the learning that looking after oneself as well as others is important for parent well-being and stress management. This principle - that parents as primary care-givers legitimately should pay attention to their own health and well-being - is a major plank of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme. It is supported by decades of research on parenting support. It has long been recognised, in the specific context of designing effective support for parents, that external source of stress must be tackled alongside specific parenting issues as "*stressed parents cannot benefit from parenting support*".[63,64] Although we know a lot about the intersection between external sources of parenting stress (especially as expressed by poor mental and emotional heath) and poor outcomes of parenting, the benefits of self-care and self-nurturance for parents is a surprisingly neglected area of research. There is, therefore, relatively little evidence that demonstrates a direct link between parenting self-nurturance and parenting outcomes, and most of the literature on 'self-care' (as it tends to be called) does not in fact come from parenting studies. One exception is Cavell and colleagues (2013), writing about supporting parents of aggressive children. They note that parental self-care is a 'non-dyadic' (i.e. one-way) but still critical area of functioning within parenting which can have a "*direct bearing on parents' efforts to*

establish and maintain a socializing relationship (with such children)." They note (in the context of parenting an aggressive child) that

> *"finding reliable ways to refuel and re-engage with the difficult task of parenting are not luxuries for parents"*[20 [p181]]

6.3.3   Other topics

(e) Ages and stages of child development

Ages and stages in child development is a specific session for Week 7 of the programme; and clearly links to the construct of Appropriate Expectations (see above Section 6.3.1). The session "*provides useful information about child development*" (PGL Handbook p7.4) but in a relatively non-specific way. Based around the *Ages and Stages Quiz* for parents it discusses expectations that parents may have of their children and the consequences when the child fails to meet them. It encourages parents to notice the effects of labelling. It also focuses on positive aspects of empowering children to make appropriate decisions. There is some support in the literature that teaching parents about child development improves the outcomes of parenting programmes[11] although perhaps surprisingly, the evidence is not extensive.

(f) Kinds of touch: corporal punishment, and keeping children safe

A session in week 6 covers the ineffectiveness and other negative aspects of physical punishment of children. *Kinds of Touch* and the ineffectiveness and other potentially negative consequences of corporal punishment is an obvious and important area for any parenting programme to cover and there is a voluminous literature on this. Most of it supports the view that hitting children for any reason is undesirable and counter-productive, although there is continuing debate about whether 'mild' physical punishment in the context of a warm and authoritative relationship is as harmful as has often been claimed.[65] On the basis of the evidence at this point, the general thrust of the approach of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme - that smacking and other coercive discipline and punishment should be avoided, but that PGLs should not make an issue of this or make parents feel shamed and vilified for smacking children - is sensible and proportionate, and clearly works in the interests of retaining parental engagement in the programme. Research shows that most parents in Britain are ambivalent about hitting children (40% of parents think it is never acceptable to smack a child on the bottom and a further 50% think it only sometimes acceptable, depending on the circumstances, leaving just 10% who have no qualms), and do it only for lack of time, lack of more constructive approaches, or when under stress.[66] Techniques for stress management (time out, relaxation, reflection; self-nurturance – see above) are justifiably given prominence within the 10-Week Nurturing Programme.

How to talk to children about sex (*Issues around Sex*) and about children's personal and bodily space and privacy and *Helping Children to Stay Safe* are also covered in the programme. The Handbook notes many parents find this an uncomfortable topic, and again, especially if offered in a universal setting where parents may not already be connected in to other services, signposts parents to places where they can get further support. Recent updates to the programme also deal with dangers posed by the internet, and children's use of social media.

6.3.4 Style of delivery

The style within which the content delivered is assumed to be an important active ingredient in the delivery of the programme. The following features of 10-Week Nurturing Programme delivery are considered indivisible from the topics covered, and acquisition of competence in this style is the focus of the PGL training:

- Facilitative not didactic
- Interactive
- Experiential
- Catering to different ways of learning
- Mix of serious and fun/humour
- Use of role-play and acting out to model constructs and skills
- Use of 'take home and try out' to re-inforce learning and prompt discussion about real world application and specific personal examples
- Use of group feedback to prompt discussion
- Pacing and variety to keep energy levels high [movement; games]
- Nurturing [warmth & acceptance from PGL & other parents; pleasant physical environment; treats] to model caring and being cared for
- Planned and communicated to manage expectations and model organised structure
- Ongoing review and reflection, modelling reflective practice and reinforcing learning

Programme logic:

In the Theory of Change, these activities of the programme follow from and are enabled by:

Programme logic:

6.4 Resources and Inputs

6.4.1 Training and competency support

As a purveyor-provided programme, the 10-Week Nurturing Programme is supported within local provider organisations by a **national implementation structure** provided by Family Links. Local agencies themselves are responsible for delivering the programme to parents, through Parent Group Leaders (PGLs) who are employed or sub-contracted to lead the 10 week courses. Family Links provides delivery agencies with the following:

- Mandatory: 4 days training to each PGL in the programme 'as designed' with assessment and post-training accreditation on reaching an acceptable level of competence. Training is provided by highly experienced trainers, all of whom have also delivered the programme themselves as PGLs.
- Recommended and Expected: An annual refresher course for PGLs delivered locally by a Family Links trainer.

In addition, Family Links provides the offer of telephone support to PGLs, and recommends at least two supervisions of PGLs (observed) should take place per course, provided by experienced staff at the local provider, and suggests other forms of coaching and feedback at the local level.

6.4.2 The skills of Parent Group Leaders

The facilitators and leaders of each 10-Week Nurturing Programme course are the Parent Group Leaders, or PGLs, employed by (or contracted by) the providing agencies: usually local authorities, or voluntary organisations serving families and children. In group-based programmes such as the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, the technical skills and relational styles of facilitators are known to influence parenting programme outcomes and there is supporting evidence confirming facilitation skills are vital to effective parenting programmes.[11,28,67,68] **In the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, the skill of the group leader is considered an active ingredient**, and the following specific attributes are thought to be significant in more, or less, effective delivery of the programme at the front line:

- Facilitation skills
- Knowledge of parenting work – both theory and best practice
- Life experience and credibility
- Personal aptitude and interpersonal or 'people skills' (the ability to listen, communicate and relate to others, thus forming constructive relationships with participants)
- Use of modelling (demonstrating through their actions key principles conveyed as part of the programme)
- Preparation & debrief time

Family Links specifies that courses should always be delivered by **two PGLs**, in order that one can deliver the core content whilst the other is available to observe group dynamics, contribute support when necessary, and provide one-to-one support if required at any point during the sessions (for example, when discussion touches on topics that are particularly sensitive for some participants).

Family Links does not specify a minimum level of qualification to train to become an accredited PGL, which is appropriate given the nature of the Early Years workforce in the UK (which is typically not highly qualified in terms of formal credentials). However, **it is recommended that practitioners should be at NVQ-equivalent Level 3 or above**. Family Links also provides the opportunity for unqualified PGLs to obtain a *Level 3 Award* in *Work with Parents* alongside the delivery of the parents groups.   The international implementation literature does to some extent suggest better credentialed leaders get stronger results; however, it may be that life experience and credibility to lead groups, as well as receptivity to training and 'coachability' are as important, or even more important than formal qualifications.[69] Family Links consider that the ability of PGLs to win the trust of local parents (shown in research to be essential both for 'getting' (reaching) and 'keeping' parents engaged in parenting support interventions[10]) is at least as important.

6.4.3 Materials and equipment, and delivery environment

Materials and equipment are carefully and fully specified by Family Links, and examples of visual aids that are used in the sessions are available to purchase direct from Family Links or to make (with instructions).

Materials developed by Family Links include, very importantly, the programme manuals, which have been written separately for parents and PGLs. These are important aspects of ensuring fidelity to the core components of the programme 'as designed'. There is also a manual for PGL trainers employed by Family Links. Equipment that is an important part of the delivery model for a 10-Week Nurturing Programme group session include a specific recommended 'kit' (full details are provided within the manual for PGLs) that includes many fully explained games, projective techniques, ice breakers and activities to raise energy and maintain attention levels. Manuals and equipment are purchased from Family Links by providers at local level.

In terms of **delivery environment**, although the programme is typically delivered in community-based venues that may be (for example) in schools or in children's centres, a quiet, private and preferably not too institutional room is advised. Group leaders are advised to bring decorative items to create a pleasant and more domestic-feeling space. Child care facilities are provided or arranged when required, subject to local constraints.

6.4.4 Dosage (number and length of sessions)

Compared to other popular community based programmes the programme is a **medium-length course and moderate dosage**, at 20 hrs per parent in ten two-hour sessions, plus an induction session known in some areas as 'week 0'.
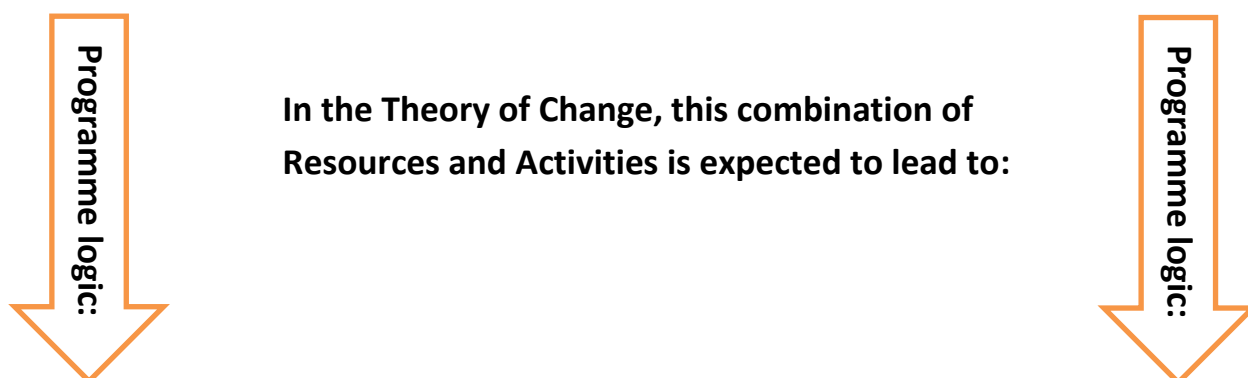
The main curriculum is designed to be delivered over a ten week period, with the induction week utilised (in some areas) for introductions, an opportunity for parents to ask questions and check the programme is a good match for what they hope to gain, and paperwork including evaluation and monitoring. Ten 2-hour sessions over the ensuing weeks are then used to deliver the content in the manual.

The 10-Week Nurturing Programme is twice as long as Triple P Level 4 'Broad Focus parent training' (ten hours over 8-10 sessions) and roughly equivalent to IY BASIC program (12-14 two-hour weekly sessions).[70] Both are shown to be effective. Dosage of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme is therefore assumed to be adequate, although this remains to be tested. It is also known that some parents do drop out early (as in all parenting programmes[10]) but it is not yet known where the threshold between adequate and inadequate dosage over the maximum ten-session period lies. These are questions to be researched in due course.

6.4.5 The 'Nurturing' environment

That interventions should aim to make parents feel safe and accepted and offer a warm, respectful and non-judgemental helping ("therapeutic") environment is listed as one of the four 'common assumptions' of evidence-based parenting programmes in a recent review by Asmussen.[35] This is a key feature of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme groups, where local PGLs are encouraged to create such environments both by their own behaviour (modelling) and by agreeing rules for how the group will be conducted. They also improve the physical appearance of rooms used with decoration and 'homely' accessories. The importance of provision of refreshments and adequate breaks is stressed in addition.

Programme logic:

In the Theory of Change, this combination of Resources and Activities is expected to lead to:

Programme logic:

6.5 Mechanisms of change

For parents to benefit from the resources and activities provided by a parenting programme, they must respond to them in some way. This connects with the principle of active 'engagement' by participants, not just attendance at the sessions, which is noted as essential to effective parenting support.[10]

Four *mechanisms of change* (the mechanisms that intervene between the delivery of the programme service and the occurrence of the outcomes of interest, or in the case of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, what happens mentally to parents that leads to changes in their behaviour or state) are theorised to be the key mediators between what the service that the 10-Week Nurturing Programme provides (inputs and outputs) and the eventual outcomes (positive changes) it hopes to achieve. In the case of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme Theory of Change 2016, these are framed as **cognitive or mental changes - changes in values, beliefs, understandings or attitudes** - that should arise in parents as a result of participating in the course. These changes are required to *precede* the behavioural or practice changes hypothesised as outcomes of the programme, since implementing the behavioural or practice changes on their own (those specified as immediate term outcomes), without 'adoption' of the principles and an appreciation of why they are important at a personal level (or what we might call 'feeling persuaded by' or 'taking to heart' the values and learning of the programme) is probably unlikely to produce the medium and longer term outcomes that ideally the 10-Week Nurturing Programme hopes to achieve.

The mechanisms of change that are assumed to function to cause change for participating parents flow from the four constructs listed in Section 6.3.1 and conveyed to parents throughout the sessions of the course (i.e. empathy, appropriate expectations, the importance of positive discipline, and the importance of positive 'emotional health'). They are that:

1. Participating parents **feel increased empathy** with their child (have more insight into how the child may be feeling; identify with and can put themselves in the child's place)
2. Participating parents **develop expectations that are more age or stage-appropriate** relative to their child's actual development stage and needs
3. Participating parents **understand what is meant by 'positive discipline'** and why it is important for child development
4. Participating parents **develop increased self-awareness**, **self-knowledge and self-worth** ('emotional health': parents gain a better sense of what kind of person and parent they are, more understanding of their parenting style).

These mechanisms are expected to arise in response to reflection and learning, including experiential learning through the opportunity to role play and practice at home, about the 'four constructs' that are used to frame the practical content of the programme. They can all in principle be measured quantitatively as well as assessed qualitatively.

In the Theory of Change, If these *Mechanisms of Change* occur, this is expected to lead to:

6.6 Immediate, medium and long-term outcomes

Outcomes are the 'end product' of the programme. The expected outcomes have been specified in the 10-Week Nurturing Programme Theory of Change, 2016 as a set of behaviour changes in parents (primary outcomes), and of changes in children's home experiences, relationships with parents and emotional wellbeing (secondary outcomes). These outcomes are logically preceded by the cognitive mechanisms of change specified earlier, and have been specified over short, medium and longer term time horizons.

Outcomes for parents are formally conceptualised as **positive changes in parenting practices and behaviours, based in strategies learned as part of the programme, or as changes in circumstances or states, following from the development in understanding, knowledge and a widening repertoire of positive parenting responses and strategies that the programme content encourages.** They are seen as **additive and cumulative**: changes made early on need to be sustained in order for later outcomes to crystallise. Time frames for observing the changes have been specified, although it may of course be possible to observe some changes earlier (or later) than specified in the theory of change. This remains a question for future research on the programme, and is part of testing the theory of change. Outcomes for children also remain to be tested, but are conceptualised as changes in home experiences, in aspects of their relationship with parents, and in mood and feelings of stress, anxiety and happiness. As a result of these, and in the longer term, any behavioural problems at home could also be expected to diminish.

6.6.1 Immediate/short term outcomes

In the **immediate term**, for example at **the end of the ten week course** or immediately following it, positive outcomes from the programme are expected to be demonstrated by evidence that **parents are using the strategies they have learned** consistently in everyday parenting**.**

If that is the case, for **children,** it is expected that **communication with parents will have improved and instances of conflict will be reducing in frequency**. Thus, at this stage it is anticipated that:
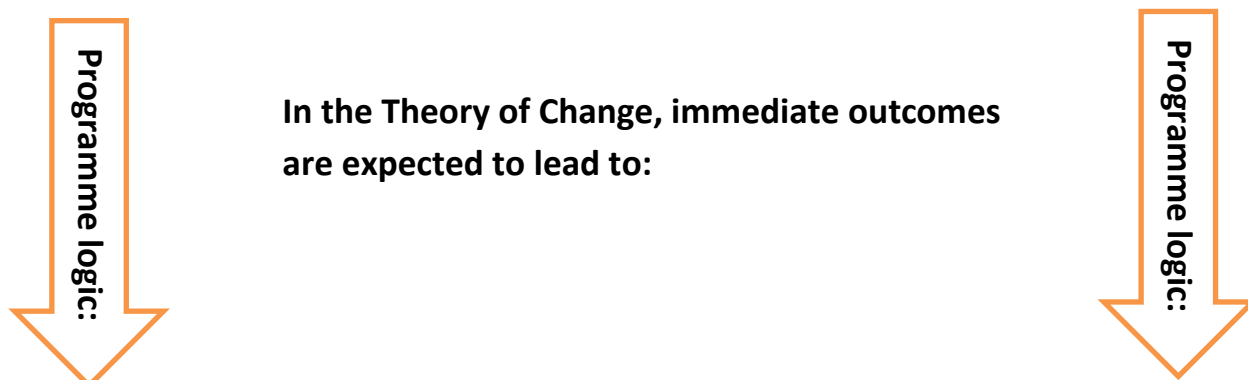
At the parent level:

1. Parents are **managing and communicating feelings** (communicating clearly themselves using I Statements; listening to and correctly naming their child's wishes and feelings; successfully managing difficult feelings; and helping their child to do the same)
2. Parents are **using problem-solving and negotiation strategies** (using problem-solving and negotiating strategies including Rewards and Penalties, and Choices and Consequences)
3. Parents are using **conflict management and reduction strategies** (setting consistently enforced Boundaries and Limits; implementing Behaviours to Ignore; using Praise for Being and Doing)
4. Parents are **using stress-management and reduction strategies** (regulating their own feelings; developing more 'personal power' or agency at home; implementing stress-reducing self-nurturance)
5. Parents are **feeling more confident** and that they are generally coping better with parenting their child.

At the child level:

6. Children are **experiencing improved communication** with parents (e.g. more talking together; feel more listened to)
7. Children are **experiencing less conflict** with parents

Programme logic:

In the Theory of Change, immediate outcomes are expected to lead to:

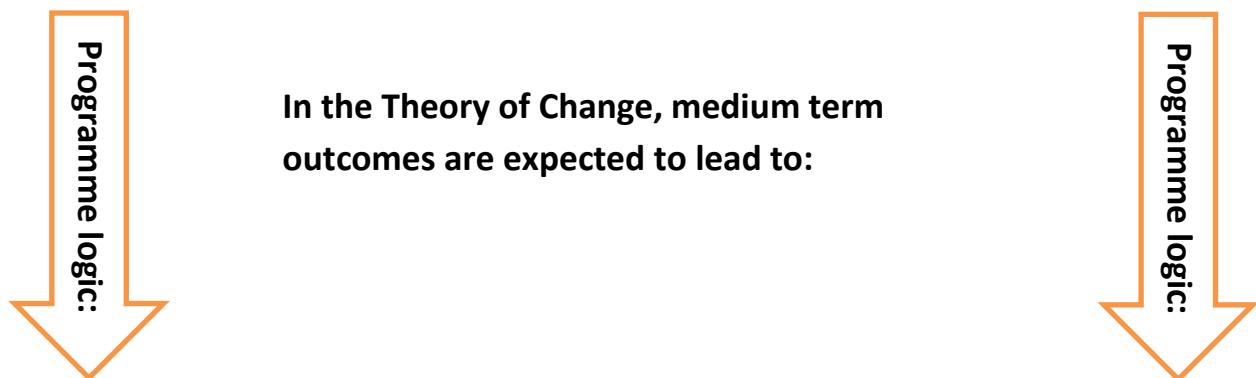**Programme logic:**

6.6.2 Medium term outcomes

In the **medium term**, up to six months after the course, and *assuming the strategies continue to be implemented*, for parents the anticipated outcomes should reflect deeper and more far-reaching changes in their own states and in their daily experience of parenting. Children should be experiencing calmer and more consistent parenting, and experiencing improved relationships and interactions.

At the parent level:

1. Parents are reporting **better communication** with their child, with increased perception of mutual understanding
2. Parents are reporting an **increased repertoire of positive discipline** with increased examples of successful problem-solving
3. Parents are reporting **reduced frequency of punitive or 'coercive' styles of control**
4. Parents are reporting **reduced frequency of escalated conflict situations**
5. Parents are reporting **increased well-being**: specifically, feeling calmer and less stressed
6. Parents are reporting **increased levels of self-efficacy** with parenting

At the child level:

6. Children are **experiencing parent as more consistent and clearer**
7. Children report **improved relationship** with parent (feel better understood by, closer to parent)
8. Children are **experiencing more frequent positive interactions** with parent (e.g doing more together, having more fun together)

Programme logic:

In the Theory of Change, medium term outcomes are expected to lead to:
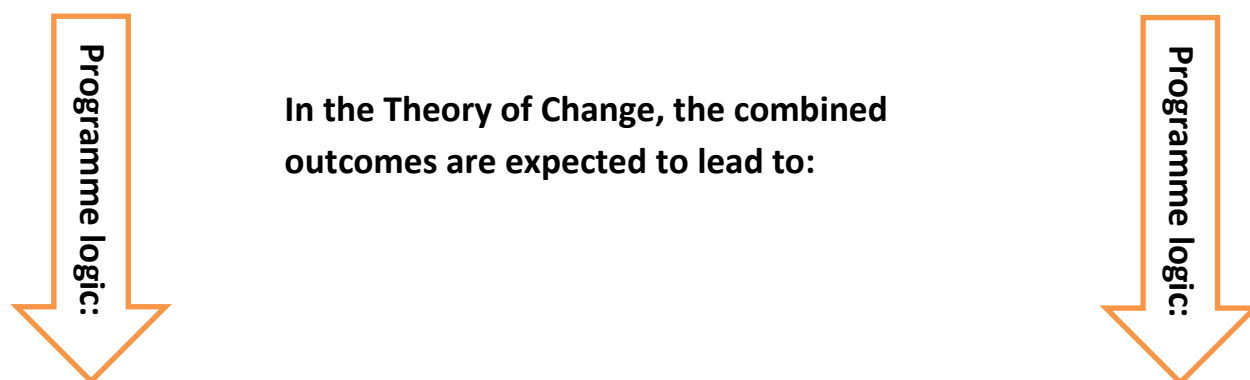
Programme logic:

6.6.3 Longer term outcomes

The programme anticipates that in the **longer term** time frame, from nine months after the programme and *assuming the prior outcomes are maintained*, six further key outcomes should be observed:

At the parent level:

1. Parents report **better coping** with parenting in general
2. Parents feel **enhanced enjoyment** of parenting and family time
3. Children are perceived as **more co-operative** with the parent

At the child level:

4. Children **feel happier at home**
5. Children are **less stressed, calmer, and less anxious**
6. Children **have improved mood** and **improved behaviour at home**

Programme logic:

In the Theory of Change, the combined outcomes are expected to lead to:

Programme logic:

6.7 Overarching impact

Another way to think about outcomes is to consider the cumulative and overarching 'impact' of the programme. 'Impact' by this definition represents the higher order or higher level change or changes that could be expected to occur for anyone who has completed the programme, that represent the 'one key change' that providers and commissioners would hope to see, even if nothing else could feasibly be measured. The concept of impact relates to the overall, high-level goals of the programme, rather than the more fine-grained changes we would look for as outcomes: in the case of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme, this means **better coping** with parenting.

In 2014-2015 Family Links commissioned an extensive research and development project that included work to identify, test and psychometrically validate a simple, overarching impact measure ('OIM'[6]) for the programme. Four measures were tested in a pilot sample of 30 groups and 136 parents who provided responses to the test measures at two waves of data collection (and a smaller sub-sample at a 6 month follow-up). A full account of this work[24] is available from Family Links and a summary of this work is available to download.[25] The measure that performed best in testing, which has been validated for use as a low-cost measure of overarching impact in its own right, was a simple measure of coping with being a parent known as the Parent Coping Scale.[71] This has also been incorporated into the Theory of Change 2016, and doubles an outcome measure as part of a suite of other measures, or as a stand-alone single overarching measure of impact.

7. Concluding remarks

The work described in this paper represents the culmination of a long period of research and development, much of it co-constructed between an implementation specialist with knowledge of parenting support and Family Links staff and associates with deep experience of the programme itself, as well as other 10-Week Nurturing Programme stakeholders. The work has taken account of up to date literature (as well as long-established evidence) of what makes parenting programmes and other services for people effective, and on the way, has critically reflected upon, and at some stages led to a re-specification of, some of the key elements of the 10-Week Nurturing Programme design. There has been some clarification and some sharpening of the design, and new avenues for future development have emerged. The newly refined FLNP-10 Theory of Change, 2016 should provide a sound basis both for describing and quality-controlling the programme 'as intended'; and it is hoped it will help providers, commissioners and individual practitioners and workers to understand the underlying logic that is assumed to make the programme work.

Most importantly, the Theory of Change 2016 will require robust testing. In this respect it also provides a sound basis for future evaluators wishing to develop an appropriate research design for creating the fairest possible test of the programme's effectiveness under a range of conditions. Implementation variations from the model 'as designed' will now be easier to identify. The neatness and linearity of the model as presented in the paper is of course not how the programme will always unfold in the real world! We know the real world of implementation is messy and challenging[72]: but the FLNP-10 Theory of Change 2016 at least provides a benchmark of assumed core components against which necessary context-sensitive local adaptations can be catalogued.

Family Links have now embarked on a period of continuing development, testing and improvement of the programme, reflecting the ever-changing practice and policy context of services to people in the UK, and incorporating the best new learning the field has to offer. The paper indicates some areas that are already earmarked for further development, but there will be others. The FLNP-10 Theory of Change may therefore evolve in the coming years. Feedback from programme providers and users will help this process.

Deborah Ghate and Family Links
2016

APPENDIX 1   METHODS

Preliminary work to develop the theory of change occurred as part of a wider Strategic Review and Development project with a number of components, commissioned from the Colebrooke Centre by Family Links in 2013-2015. A draft theory of change was published in August 2014, based on co-constructed work involving:

- desk research on the evidence base for the programme;
- a review of programme materials;
- a day-long workshop with a group of expert stakeholders in parenting support research, policy and practice who were familiar with the programme;
- attendance by researchers at training days for Family Links Parent Group Leaders;
- a series of facilitated iterative workshop sessions with stakeholders ('content experts') in the programme.

More detail on the work to develop the theory of change in particular and the Colebrooke Centre's method for developing theories of change for services can be found at https://familylinks.org.uk/why-it-works#10-week-nurturing-programme/reviewing-the-theory-of-change-for-the-nurturing-programme-1.pdf

(find the paper as the fourth item under 10-Week Nurturing Programme-Research papers).

Work to validate, further develop and refine a testable final version of the theory of change was undertaken during 2016. Methods for this work included:

- a review of the wider international literature relevant to the theory base of the Programme, its content and implementation model
- development of a narrative account of the programme theory (ultimately the foundations of this paper), documenting the assumptions underpinning the programme and the programme logic, and a summary graphic (which ultimately became figures A and B)
- discussions with senior programme executives and content experts to refine and develop the final narrative and summary

APPENDIX 2 OTHER PROGRAMMES PROVIDED BY FAMILY LINKS

	Welcome to the World	**Parenting Puzzle workshops**	**Talking Teens**
Target population	Parents from 24th week of pregnancy	Parents of children under 4 years	Parents of young people aged 11-18
Level of Need	Selective prevention	Universal	Universal
Number of sessions and mode of delivery	8 sessions (plus introductory session) for up to 10 parents in a group with 2 facilitators	4 sessions for up to 20 parents in a group with 2 facilitators	4 sessions for up to 20 parents in a group with 2 facilitators
Intended outcomes	Improvements in attunement and attachment Improved social and emotional well-being of parents Improved understanding of practical aspects of baby care, including breastfeeding	Increased understanding of the importance of play, empathy , communication, positive approaches to discipline and emotional well-being in children's development	Increased understanding of teenagers' developmental needs and the influence of brain development on behaviour. Increased use of authoritative approaches to parenting

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