



# Growing up our way

Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander child rearing

## Practices matrix



**SNAICC**  
Secretariat of  
National Aboriginal  
and Islander  
Child Care

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# Introduction

This matrix aims to document some traditional and contemporary child rearing practices among a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. It is part of a larger Child Rearing Stories project, which primarily aims to promote and preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices.

As the national peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, SNAICC is interested in promoting culturally appropriate practices among those who support and care for our children.

The *Growing Up Our Way: Practices Matrix* is a collation of material collected from literature and a synthesis of the child rearing themes found in that literature. It aims to recognise the uniqueness and value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing customs in the hope that these

customs and practices will be preserved for future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families raising children.

This matrix is informed by a strength-based approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices, we aim to help workers gain a greater understanding of the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 'grow up' their children and hence to promote culturally appropriate work practices.

It must be acknowledged that there is no one way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people raise their children, that families may draw upon child rearing practices from a range of cultures and that the child rearing practices of any one culture are no more 'valuable' than those of another.

# Methodology

- Before research was conducted, any possible related ethical problems were identified. For example, interviewees were provided with transcripts of their interviews and shown the quotations selected, giving them the opportunity to consent to their material being used for the project.
- We sourced and identified relevant material – including books, articles and databases.
- An internet search was conducted using the search terms ‘Aboriginal child rearing’, ‘Aboriginal child-rearing’, ‘Aboriginal growing up’ and ‘Aboriginal children practices’. Databases that were searched included:
  - AIATSIS site under the category ‘Social behavior – socialisation – child rearing’, from which 535 titles were identified, and 260 of these were filtered for content, with a sub group of 68 (going back to 1984) selected for follow-up for future content analysis
  - FaHCSIA website – Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children
  - National Child Protection Clearinghouse
  - Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet
  - Cooperative Research Centre – Aboriginal Health
  - SNAICC’s own resources.
- Key texts were then selected, of which 15 were thoroughly analysed for content denoting a child rearing practice and that content was extracted as a quotation.
- The project identified key Aboriginal informants with lived experience to share. Potential interviewees were shortlisted and a series of these were interviewed and key themes from their interviews pulled out.
- Also included were quotations that emerged from other activities in the wider Child Rearing Stories project including interviews, children’s self-publishing workshops and an interactive conference workshop.
- ‘Grounded theory’ methods informed the next stage of the research; that is, practices were coded and thematically classified as themes emerged, with the quotes then being grouped accordingly.
- Wherever it is known, the key informant’s cultural heritage – that is, whether they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or non-indigenous – is noted, as is the geographic area from which the quotes were sourced.

## How to use this matrix

This matrix is intended to be a living document, to be added to as more practices are collated from the literature, more interviews are conducted, and more information on child rearing is shared with SNAICC or comes to SNAICC's attention.

The quotations are drawn from a small sample of the available literature on child rearing. Under-represented in the matrix, for example, are quotations relating to contemporary, urban child rearing practices. Users of this matrix are urged to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not a homogenous group, and that some practices may

contradict others; any such practices should be thought of as taking place within a wider context.

Users of the matrix are also warned against drawing conclusions from one quotation in isolation. Rather, the complete body of examples gives a diverse picture of child rearing practices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

SNAICC recommends that this document can be used to facilitate discussion within, and with, local communities, to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait people to reflect on, support, value and validate their own child rearing practices.

# How children are viewed

## This section details perspectives on the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities view children and babies

### REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS *Project Team 2002, Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – ‘Working Together Everyone and Listening’*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

### AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

“When Yapa and Anangu look at babies and young children they see young adults. These ‘little people’ have a set place in the family and community, along with all the responsibilities of Law and culture. They may be addressed as ‘my young auntie’, ‘my mother again’ or ‘my young grandfather’”.

(Waltja 2001, cited on p. 16)

To be indulged is the right of the child and to indulge is the obligation of the parent.

(p.16)

### REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

### AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

Children do not start to live at birth, or even at conception, for they pre-exist in the form of spirit children.

(p.16)

The Aboriginal model trusts the child’s knowledge of its own states, both physical and emotional. When the 3 year old is tired someone will carry it. No one says ‘Three year olds are old enough to walk.’ In fact, no one makes generalisations about children at all.

(p. 128)

Each child is treated solely on the merits of its actual concrete situation at that moment... each child is... a valuable member of its community, as an individual.

(p. 128)

... parents are pleased to see the child's daring [risk taking] and neither encourage nor discourage. Just as the mother assumes that the baby knows best what it wants, so the adult assumes that the child knows best his or her own abilities and skills, and will exercise sensible judgement in using them... underlying this is an attitude of basic trust in the child and basic trust in the physical world in which the child develops.

(p. 139)

Children are not expected to obey or respect adults by virtue of their different status.

(p. 150)

... [The Anbarra perspective of children]... supposes that the child is born with a set of needs, which can only be supplied through social interaction; that the child indicates these needs to others, and the duty of others is to respond; that there is no difference for a small child between want and need, and that these things remain hard to differentiate throughout life; that the older and stronger must be responsible for the younger and weaker; that dependency behaviour is perfectly right and proper; that the child is naturally sociable and wishes, from its innermost being, to do the same things that others do provided the others treat it with fairness and equality; that reward is not necessary to produce acceptable behaviour providing everyone behaves well.

(p. 161)

The Aboriginal model is one in which the role of the caretaker is to pay attention to the overt demands of the infant. Here, the infant is active and the caretaker passive ... the assumption is that whatever the child wants is what it needs.

(p. 128)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2004, *Indigenous Parenting Project: Executive summary*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

The Indigenous perception of the parenting role is tied closely to the cultural norm of extended family, kin and community child rearing responsibility. The terms *parent education* and *parent programs* may be too narrow for the Indigenous context of family and community.

(p. 12)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

The aim of parenting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is to let the child know who they are in relationship to their family, their kin, their people, their environment and the living spirits of their ancestors and land. These relationships define a child's identity by defining how they are connected to everything in life.

(p. 21)

Children have a special place within the family and community.

(p. 23)

Today, Aboriginal communities see children as central to the life and culture of the community. In many aspects, the role of children in these communities remains unchanged.

(p. 23)

Aboriginal parents play a central role in the cultural, social and spiritual development of their children. It is understood that to 'parent' a child means to help the spirit of the child emerge as the child grows and experiences life.

(p. 23)

# Pregnancy and birth

Some of the practices that take place during childbirth and pregnancy, as well as information on some of the values that surround such practices, are included in this section

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

The place of conception is ... important in terms of establishing a connection with that area. When a family knows about a pregnancy, they will try and determine the place of conception. Later the child will be made aware of the special relationship between themselves and the site or landform determined by the family to be linked with their conception (Nungarrayi Brown, personal commentary 2001).

(p. 70)

“When an infant is born to us, we all gather around and make the baby feel our presence. The child will be nursed-rocked-pinched-squeezed-teased and generally felt all over. The squeezing, teasing or biting is very consciously regulated. This requires a response from the child... The mother can see and feel the process that is happening and react to it. This indicates how far she is willing to protect her child... The infant is being conditioned to – love, punishment, reassurance and protection at this tender age”.

(Mills 1987, cited on p. 84)

The topic of birth explores common factors that characterise birth in the desert communities: the smoking ceremony, the exclusion of men and the importance of both physical and spiritual well-being for mother and child.

(p. 35)

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**REFERENCE**

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

Giving birth is not considered a particularly trying or dangerous process.

(p. 26)

After the child is born... the baby is taken by the woman's mother or sister, and the mother lies down to sleep. After she wakes the baby is put to the breast, and the mother is given drink and vegetable food.

(p. 27)

The father may be given the infant to hold within a few hours of birth and other relatives come and sit with the mother and hold the baby. Girls and childless young women are anxious to nurse it, and a baby less than a day old may be passed around from hand to hand until it protests. When this happens it is returned to the mother, who immediately offers it her breast.

(p. 27)

The father is usually pleased about the child and may carry the tiny infant around for a short time, although never far from the mother.

(p. 28)

Beliefs about conception and birth stress continuity rather than change. The new baby was already an old spirit child... just waiting for the right mother to come along... New babies are simply accepted as a segment in the immutable cycle of life, the human link between the present and the Dreaming.

(p. 28)

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**REFERENCE**

Anson, E 1988, 'Child rearing on Darnley Island: An Islander's account', *Queensland Researcher QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Erub (Darnley Island)

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

Naming the child commences as soon as it is known that the mother is pregnant. During that time, the mother and father start thinking up names to be given to the baby.

(p. 70)

The mother's sister might say, 'If a girl, call her after me', and the mother's brother might say, 'If a boy, call him after me'... All the people who ask for their names to be added to the list will understand and show appreciation for the chosen name although they make remarks, when talking to the baby, such as, 'You

should have been called (their name added in a very soft voice)'.  
This can go on until the child is grown up.

(p. 70)

During pregnancy, the mother starts talking to the baby...  
The baby is considered very important from the very early stage.

(p. 70)

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**REFERENCE**

Bourke, E 1993, 'The First  
Australians: kinship, family  
and identity', *Family Matters*,  
no. 35, August

Aboriginal women due to give birth were moved away from the  
main camp accompanied by other women to assist... as soon as  
the child was born the father was called to see his daughter or  
son, bringing with him wood, water and food.

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

(p. 4)

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and  
Walking Together: supporting  
family relationship services to  
work with Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander families and  
organisations*

Where they are born signifies connection to the land and/or sea.  
It identifies a child's relationship and responsibilities to law and  
culture and establishes certain obligations and responsibilities  
according to traditional Aboriginal law.

(p. 23)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

# Babies

The information provided here details some of the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies are cared for and some of the practices used when looking after babies

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## REFERENCE

Anon, SNAICC Conference 2010: Ampe Anwernekenhake – For Our Children, Alice Springs Conference Centre, 27–29 July 2010

Babies are special; babies are entrusted to us from those beyond. Where I work, places me as a custodian to these little people – to help develop a great sense of self and cultural identity, and to act as a guide-post in our baby’s journey through life.

## REGION/ GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Noongar

## AUTHOR

Aboriginal

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## REFERENCE

Yeo, S 2003, ‘Bonding and Attachment of Australian Aboriginal Children’, *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 12, pp. 292–304

The infants are kept close to their caregivers and they may be weaned off at around 3 years or as old as 5 years.

(p. 297)

## REGION/ GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General/non specific

Infants are often attended and responded to by multiple caregivers and are seldom left alone.

(p. 298)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

... Caregivers would anticipate their infants’ comfort and take steps to ensure it... caregivers would observe the smile on the face of sleeping infants after having a feed to anticipate the discomfort of having wind in the stomach. The caregivers would ‘burp’ the baby, as it was believed that there must be ‘wind tickling the tummy’ which resulted in a smile on the infants face. The caregivers are concerned that the wind in the infants could result in vomiting the milk. The infants are often checked regularly to see whether they are awake and ready for the next meal.

(p. 298)

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS  
Project Team 2002, *Warrki  
Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu  
Purananjaku – 'Working  
Together Everyone and  
Listening'*, Aboriginal Child  
Rearing & Associated  
Research: A Review of the  
Literature, Department  
of Family & Community  
Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature  
review instigated by  
Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi  
Aboriginal Corporation  
working with communities  
in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

If babies cry they are immediately picked up and held;  
it is considered cruel to do otherwise.

(p. 16)

For most infants living in desert communities, the people who surround them are constantly vigilant and responsive to them. It is expected that a baby's hunger, need for sleep, attention and physical comfort will be determined and clearly communicated by the infant. The carer's role is to be sensitive to, observant of and responsive to those needs (Waltja 2001).

(p. 53)

Rather than a routine, an environment that facilitates immediate response between carers and babies is established. For example, a crying baby is very rarely left, babies and toddlers always sleep next to their mother or primary carer, breast feeding occurs frequently – up to 20 times a day for short periods – and babies are very rarely left in a room or area on their own.

(p. 53)

Jacobs (1988), in her description of Western Desert child rearing, comments that in the birth-to-6-month period, the baby was always in close physical contact with the mother or other close relatives who were able to take the mother's role; for example, the mother's sisters. Between 6 and 9 months the mother's attention to the baby became less intensive. This occurs when the baby is able to sit.

(p. 59)

"Once babies could sit unsupported, they literally became public property, being passed from person to person and losing the direct and constant attention of their mothers."

(Jacobs, 1988, cited on p. 59)

The intensity of the mother-and-baby attachment continues up to about 18 months. Jacobs (1988) remarks that an important learning period occurred for children between 12 and 18 months.

(p. 59)

"[12–18 months] was a time when the close bond with mother was used to teach the child about her environment and how to survive in it... the main teacher was still the mother (or her mother and sisters, who were also in the 'mother' category of relationships)."

(Jacobs 1988, cited on p. 59)

Hamilton (1981) comments that although the close physical contact between mother and baby continues, other relatives start to talk to the baby more and more, attempting to attract attention to themselves. Grandparents seem particularly keen to gain the child's attention. However, if the child cries, they are given back to the mother straight away to be put on the breast, given food or distracted from their cause of distress (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001).

(p. 59)

By around 18 months to 2 years, the infant starts to move out of the sight of the mother, gradually increasing the distance from her and mixing with other children of various ages. While the mother's presence may not be overt, she watches from a distance (Kearins 1983).

(p. 59)

"From the time children are born they are being told who their kin are: 'There is your uncle', 'Here comes your cousin', or 'Say "Mama"' and so on. The person pointed out will, if within hearing, always stop and talk to the child and use the reciprocal kin term."

(Coombs et al. 1984, cited on p. 72)

"The skin name for that person is spoken, as is the baby's skin name... the behaviour indicates the importance of knowing who their people are. The baby is socialised right away to one important aspect of Warlpiri society."

(Bavin 1993, cited on p. 72)

"Babies are often pinched on the cheek as a greeting or picked up by the top of the arm. Sometimes they are asleep when this happens" (Waltja 2001, cited on p. 85) ... "This was particularly so with non-responsive babies. These behaviours are designed to encourage the development of an independent and responsive baby" (Jacobs, 1988, cited on p. 85) ... Although this practice may sound a bit harsh, in context it is always mixed with affection, warmth and laughter. Usually the mother is holding the baby or is close-by, ready to provide comfort or defend the baby if need be.

(p. 85)

... [there is] extensive human interaction and attention, love and stimulation from a range of people, a lack of feeding or sleeping routines and a discouragement of physical exploration away from the family.

(p. 110)

... babies are constantly with their parents or other adults, never sleeping, feeding or spending time alone.

(p. 111)

“Aboriginal infants provided a source of entertainment for the whole extended family and were shared around to be kissed, cuddled, pinched and tickled.”

(Jacobs, 1988, cited on p. 111)

“Interactions with babies were characterised by non-verbal games of showing or giving objects, showing and hiding objects, calling the baby’s name and rewarding eye contact, pointing out significant people or things in the environment, and a great deal of face-to-face stimulation, such as imitation of facial postures [sic] and vocal play.”

(Jacobs 1988, cited on p. 111)

“During the first six months of their life, Yolngu babies experience intense social and physical contact with adults and older Yolngu children but receive very little stimulation from the non-human environment such as would be gained through playing with objects or toys. However, contact with winds, changing temperatures, sounds and smells would be greater than for Balanda (non-Aboriginal) babies.”

(Harris 1984, cited on p. 111)

“Babies are taken everywhere with the family and they are carried upright so they can see where they are going and their surroundings.”

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001, cited on p. 112)

## REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land  
(Anbarra)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

[Traditionally] babies were fed lying in [a] cradle across the mother's knee... holding the cradle in this way, the woman cannot use her arms for other purposes, and this imposes some restrictions on her daily activities. Others often help with firewood and food.

(p. 29)

It [the baby] is passed around the group and people constantly look at it, placing their faces close and making sounds to it, or saying 'you are my sister' (or the relevant kinship relation). If it is fretful it is fed, and if still fretful, rocked and joggled up and down. Fathers play a very small part in the care of babies although they may hold them for a while. But in the main the baby lies on its back in the cradle, over its mother's knee, surrounded by the movement and sounds of the camp.

(p. 29)

As the early weeks pass, the infant is more and more often taken from the cradle to be carried and held in the arms, as it will be for the next 5 months or so... Each time one woman hands it to another it is greeted by a particular gesture. The tip of the tongue is curled behind the lower teeth and the tongue protrudes, while the woman looks at the child and moves her head towards it, making a sound like 'Nhhhh, Nhhhh'. Any woman or girl passing is likely to bend down to the child with this gesture, and the baby seems to respond with a smile very early in life.

(p. 30)

The more time the baby spends out of the cradle, the more physical stimulus it receives – it is patted, joggled, lightly pinched and sometimes not so lightly slapped.

(p. 30)

Women do not lose their temper with babies... Needless to say, no one ever physically abuses an infant by hitting, smacking or otherwise violently hurting it.

(p. 41)

[While] the mother moves freely about the camp, relatives greet the baby, handling and petting it. Other children are now able to maul it with their overenthusiastic, sometimes hostile, kisses, and the more often a classificatory mother cares for a child, the more likely is such an 'assault' from one of her children.

(p. 31)

Although many women apart from the mother may care for the baby, there is no doubt that the real mother is the most important person in its life. She holds and carries it more often than anyone else, sleeps next to it and is the only one who feeds it. Although other women will playfully hold out a breast, they withdraw the offer if the baby tries to suckle. In an emergency a 'mother' would no doubt feed a child. If a hungry baby has been left with a caretaker she will not offer the breast but instead joggles and distracts the baby until the mother returns. *Kungal* (both 'breast' and 'milk') signifies the mother-child bond and feeding is a ritual of attachment, not just a way of filling a hungry stomach.

(p. 31)

No young child is weaned unless another sibling is born.

(p. 126)

Babies are always in physical contact with others. Occasionally a baby falls asleep in its mother's arms and is put onto a blanket, but a caretaker is always close by and the mother rarely goes out of earshot. Consequently, if she needs to leave the camp she picks the baby up and takes it with her. Babies must snatch sleep whenever they can and most babies... slept no more than an hour at a time, and were woken up rather than waling themselves... Anbarra children are constantly exposed to all the sights and sounds of the camp.

(p. 31)

Other than the injunction that babies must never cry, no stated rules govern their treatment... No one complains at the inconvenience they cause, and no one ever makes any special fuss of them.

(p. 37)

... no one says very much to babies. People act as if babies were more responsive to non-semantic sounds than to words, and this of course is supplemented by a lot of purely physical interaction.

(p. 41)

The apparently lavish attention surrounding babies seems to be primarily a readiness to satisfy their physical needs. As long as a baby shows no signs of distress by crying, no one pays

particular attention to it, unless they feel like playing with it. It is rocked, cuddled and fed, but its presence is immaterial to the activities around it.

(p. 41)

Instigating behaviours are: pinching the child, tickling the child, lifting the child up. Terminating behaviours are: rocking the child, joggling the child so that it becomes passive and sleeps, and giving the child to another. Two other behaviours may be either instigating or terminating, or both... these are kissing the child on the mouth or body and giving the child the breast.

(p. 43)

Pinching, tickling, rocking, joggling and kissing are used to distract and entertain.

(p. 44)

I have never observed a young baby crying continuously because people were so concerned to stop it. No matter what a mother was doing, she interrupted her activity at a whimper from her baby. Women never expressed any overt resentment at having their activities constantly interrupted and never seemed concerned with persuading a baby to go to sleep so that they could have time to themselves.

(p. 45)

The infants are subjected to no routines and exist as appendages to their caretakers' activities. They receive a high level of stimulation from other people and relatively little from the non-human environment. They are held and carried in positions that foster rapid physical development and [they] are encouraged to perform activities beyond their physical capabilities... their contacts with fathers are invariably warm and supportive [though distant]... The communication directed at [babies/ young children] is most often of a non-verbal nature.

(p. 46)

While the physical interaction with others has prepared [babies] for [sitting unsupported, crawling and taking a few steps], when they finally attain them they are given little opportunity to use them. This applies especially to sitting and crawling since babies

are very rarely left on the ground. The importance of sitting unsupported is that the child can now be transported on the mother's shoulders.

(p. 48)

Once a child is able to walk alone it is constantly prevented from doing so by being snatched from the ground and handed back to its mother... The major concern of adults is to prevent children of this age from leaving the camp area.

(p. 48)

The lack of concern shown about ordinary 'dirt' in connection with children and babies is [due to the fact that dirt] is merely accepted as a normal aspect of life and arouses neither positive nor negative emotions in adults. Indeed this, like most other Aboriginal child rearing practices, is governed by the principle of never interfering in a child's activities until it, or another, indicates distress. This principle is crucial in understanding the attitudes towards children and food at this period.

(p. 50)

Babies are all breast-fed at 6 months and... should still be breast-fed at 18 months, preferably much longer. Women consider breast milk is the most important source of food throughout this period.

(p. 50)

Once the baby attains a degree of control and mobility it starts to instigate the feeding process directly... the more active, demanding children receive a larger amount of breast-feeding at this age than more passive ones.

(p. 51)

By 12 months, when the baby is beginning to walk, it protests at being left with anyone [other than the mother], even a completely familiar grandmother. From 12 to 18 months the child demands to go everywhere with the mother and is inconsolable if she leaves it at all... public opinion [around the camp] is solidly against a mother who attempts to leave her crying child.

(p. 56)

Children aged 6–18 months continue to be exposed to the hurly-burly of camp life around them.

(p. 65)

Babies continue to be breast-fed but must progressively instigate the feeding process themselves. They receive bits and pieces of solid food at the whim of adults until they can effectively solicit food for themselves.

(p. 65)

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**REFERENCE**

Anson, E 1988, 'Child rearing on Darnley Island: An Islander's account', *Queensland Researcher QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Erub (Darnley Island)

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

After the baby is brought home, it is admired by all and great care is taken during the stage from birth to six months. The people allowed to hold the baby during this stage are mother, mother's sister, and father's sister and older daughter. Men are afraid to hold a young baby. Six months to one year is the stage when the baby is handled by all except the very small children.

(p. 70)

... A certain whistle from a certain relation is passed on to the child. As soon as the baby hears a familiar whistle, he/she gets so excited to see the familiar face the baby starts to push the person who is holding him/her.

(p. 70)

From one to two years, they are attached to the mother and everyone is considered strangers except the immediate family. The baby keeps a close watch focused on mother. Her every move is watched and, as soon as she moves away, the baby cries.

(p. 70)

Another issue relating to child rearing is Island adoption. This is still common today [1988].

(p. 70)

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**REFERENCE**

Winch, J 1999, 'Aboriginal Youth', *New Doctor*, Summer Edition

Aboriginal culture sees babies as individuals – feeding on demand.

(p. 23)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

Babies are held upright and are usually astride an older person's hips – they rarely have clicky hips.

(p. 23)

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

Customary 'adoption' is a widespread practice that involves all Torres Strait Islander extended families in some way, either as direct participants or as kin to 'adopted' children. One of the most significant differences in terms of child rearing practices between Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal peoples is customary 'adoption', which is a feature of Torres Strait Islander communities.

(p. 26)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

'Adoption' takes place between relatives and close friends where bonds of trust have already been established. Some of the reasons for the widespread nature of 'adoption' include:

- To maintain the family bloodline by adopting (usually) a male child from a relative. This is linked to the inheritance of traditional land in the islands.
- To keep the family name by adopting a male child from a relative or close friend into the family.
- To give a family who cannot have a child due to infertility the joy of raising a child. A married couple may give a child to either a single person or another couple. 'Relinquishment' is not restricted to single parents.
- To strengthen alliances and bonds between the two families concerned.
- To distribute boys and girls more evenly between families who may only have children of one sex.
- To replace a child who had been adopted out to another family – this may occur within extended families.
- To replace a child into the family once a woman has left home so that the grandparents would still have someone to care for.

The most common way for an 'adoption' to be arranged is for a promise to be made while a woman who is pregnant for the child she is carrying to be adopted by another family on the child's

birth. There are other circumstances and customs under which children are adopted into other families.

(p. 26)

The underlying principle of Torres Strait Islander 'adoption' is that giving birth to a child is not necessarily a reason to be raising the child. The issue of who rears a child depends on a number of social factors, such as those listed above, and is a matter of individual consideration by the families involved. Children are never lost to the family of origin, as they are usually placed with relatives somewhere in the family network.

(pp. 26–7)

The main characteristics of Torres Strait Islander 'adoption' are:

- It provides a sense of stability to the social order and is seen as having a useful social function.
- It is characterised by the notions of reciprocity and obligation between the families involved.
- It generally occurs within the wider network of the extended family and carries with it the intention of permanency
- It occurs frequently but can have an element of instability and fragility sometimes leading to its dissolution.
- The arrangements for the care of the child are usually made between the birth parent(s) and the receiving parent(s) during the course of the pregnancy.

(p. 27)

Today, Torres Strait Islanders are seeking greater recognition of customary practices in child protection policy.

(p. 27)

# Mothers

This section lists some of the information available on mothers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and includes some particular aspects of Aboriginal child rearing practices

## REFERENCE

Yeo, S 2003, 'Bonding and Attachment of Australian Aboriginal Children', *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 12, pp. 292-304

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General/non-specific

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

Generally, Aboriginal children grow up in a close relationship with their community and various mothers will frequently breastfeed the infants... These 'knee babies' will also seek several other women for nurturance... In Aboriginal communities there is no concept of 'aunts', but rather mothers. Children are cared for by different women interchangeably and often will be brought up by women who are not their natural mothers (Ralph 1998).

(p. 297)

In the Northern Territory, children called other women in the community 'mum', or 'iliyatjari', and had strong relationships with them. These womenfolk could be related or unrelated to the biological parents of the child.

(p. 299)

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Amongst the central Australian Aboriginal language groups the biological mother's sisters are also referred to as the child's mothers. The mother's sisters have an obligation to support her to carry out her daily roles and responsibilities. This may extend to breastfeeding for her if required and possible. If the biological mother is absent for a period, it is the duty of her sisters or mother to take over the responsibility for the children. For example, the activist and song writer Bob Randall, a child taken from the Pitjantjatjara community next to Uluru at about 7 years of age, remembers that he had several mothers, and knowing who was his biological mother was never made clear to him or considered important (ABC Message Stick 2000).

(p. 58)

"If the mother is not well or has to go to hospital with another child, other women will look after the remaining children. This will usually be her own mother or her sister,"

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001, cited on p. 58)

...mothers carry their babies wherever they go and that they don't stay home alone with their baby.

(p. 58)

"While the mother is the main carer, grandmothers, aunts and older siblings share this responsibility and children are carried around with all of them."

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi, 2001, cited on p. 58)

"Mothers may report that they keep an eye on the activities of young children but not obtrusively, since they apparently do not wish to detract from the child's sense of independence or assume a directing role."

(Kearins 1983, cited on p. 59)

There is a particular pressure on mothers to be totally unselfish and giving to their children.

(p. 83)

"A mother is required to accede to the demands of her children, to show generosity, and to avoid being seen to cross them."

(Brady 1993, cited on p. 83)

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**REFERENCE**

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

Arnhem Land ideology stresses throughout the unity of the sibling group, and although the child's tie to its 'real' mother is very strong there seems to be a feeling that this should be extended to include her sisters as well... Attachment extends to the grandmother also – the mother of all 'mothers' in the ideal system... she takes the baby willingly. Her voice is always gentle and she never teases the baby... infants without grandmothers are at a real disadvantage.

(p. 34)

The infancy period then is characterised by care and attention from a number of women, the development of a close attachment to those women in the 'real' mother's matri-line, and a strong dependence on the mother herself.

(p. 35)

Children under 2 and a half years are invariably on their mother's shoulders, from this position they have a good view of the landscape... their mothers point out things and places to them, saying 'see where uncle speared a kangaroo', 'watch that bee, good honey somewhere', 'there is sweet water here'.

(p. 59)

Noticeable in the 6–18 month period is the increase in intensity of the mother–child interactions and a corresponding decrease in the participation of 'others' in the child's care.

(p. 60)

As the Aboriginal child grows older it demands more and more to stay with the mother, and these demands are always met.

(p. 61)

The mother's mother, a very important figure for the small child, is known by her kin term – [*mununa*].

(p. 94)

The fact that the mother's mother is called by a status term long before she is called by a name would seem to suggest that the naming of mother's sister (and father's brother) is more than an accident. This is not merely a matter of familiarity in everyday life as the mother's sister is as much concerned with the care of children as is the mother.

(pp. 94–5)

The Anbarra... have a rigid set of expectations about maternal conduct, the chief of which is that a mother feeding a child never leaves it alone to cry.

(p. 132)

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**REFERENCE**

Anson, E 1988, 'Child rearing on Darnley Island: An Islander's account', *Queensland Researcher QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

The mother's role is the most important one in child-raising... She sometimes works with the child held against her. If the child is upset, the baby will only settle down when being held by the mother.

(p. 69)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Erub (Darnley Island)

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

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**REFERENCE**

Davis, R and Dikstein, J 1997, 'It Just Doesn't Fit: The Tiwi family and the Family Law Act – can the two be reconciled?', *Alternative Law Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, April

"Mother is the word commonly used when a Tiwi Island child is referring to either his biological mother or to any of his biological mother's sisters. The child rearing manifests itself in many ways. It is not uncommon for a woman to give her child to one of her sisters to grow the child up."

(Fourmile, 1995, cited on p. 64)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Tiwi Islands

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Bourke, E 1993, 'The First Australians: kinship, family and identity', *Family Matters*, August, no. 35

Often Aboriginal women rear children alone. They do so for many reasons, including broken relationships, the high mortality rate of Aboriginal men, and the high proportion of men in prison.

(p. 5)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

In some communities, the mother's sisters (aunties) are also considered as the child's mothers. This practice is very strong in some communities. The mother's cousins are also considered sisters in some families and have a role in raising the children. The relationships, roles and responsibilities of extended family members will be different in each family.

(p. 23)

The aunties have an obligation to support the mother in the raising of her child. The mother is the main carer for the child, but grandmothers, aunties and older siblings also share the responsibility for caring for and raising the child.

(pp. 23-4)

# Fathers

## Some types of roles fathers play in the upbringing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are detailed here

### REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

### AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Apart from brief and occasional references, the specific role of fathers in child rearing is very poorly documented. It is an area that needs to be researched and documented, ideally by Indigenous men in communities. It is particularly noticeable for its absence as anyone who has spent time in central Australian Aboriginal communities usually notes the close and attentive involvement that many men have with their young children and the child rearing process. On the other hand, there also appears to be a trend towards the absence of fathers through preoccupation with alcohol, petrol sniffing, marijuana, gambling, illness and, occasionally, enforced removal through jail sentences ... The role and also the breakdown of the role of fathers need to be explored more thoroughly.

(p. 60)

"The role of the father in child care is very noticeable among these [Pitjantjatjara] people; fathers carry their small children about with them, feed them, talk and sing to them, entertain them with sand stories and even cook special foods for them, when they are available. This is in marked contrast to the lack of involvement in the care of small children in Arnhem Land."

(Hamilton 1981, cited on p. 61)

[Warlpiri fathers] take children for walks, carrying them around visiting others ... grandfathers can have a very particular role as 'boss' or protector for a child and that they may be asked to perform certain ceremonies over a baby or child, particularly if the child is seen to be weak or sick.

(p. 61)

“Until they are initiated, boys are indulged by their fathers... During their first 3 or 4 years, boys delight in accompanying their father around the camp, walking hand in hand with them or rising on their shoulders.”

(Meggitt 1962, cited on p. 61)

While men spend less time with their daughters the relationship is still characterised by a strong affection which continues throughout their lives (Meggitt 1962).

(p. 61)

[There is a] gentle and distinct type of teasing that fathers often engage in with their children, distinct from women’s teasing and often marked by the telling of ideas or stories. The child listens, trying hard to determine whether the father is joking or being serious. This may particularly occur between fathers and sons. As with a mother’s sisters being referred to as mother, a father’s brothers will also be referred to as ‘father’ by the child, so a child may have many fathers, although in some communities, the term ‘uncle’ has begun to be used.

(p. 61)

“It is the father who sees that the mother attends to the infant’s needs, and it is common to hear a father berating his wife for failing to feed a crying child.”

(Hamilton 1981, cited on p. 62)

[Hamilton 1981] also remarks on the father’s lack of verbal commands to children. She suggests that fathers’ interaction with infants aged 6 months to 18 months consisted of information giving rather than commands as opposed to mothers who were more likely to give commands in the form of single word instructions.

(p. 62)

... the father’s role in early child rearing is to see that the mother is responsible in her role. Others have also observed that a father tended to take a supervisory role over the mother’s child rearing, sometimes expressing anger with a mother for castigating a child, particularly a son (Berndt & Berndt 1988; Meggitt 1962).

(p. 62)

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**REFERENCE**

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

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The father is the only man who has much contact with the small infant, and in day to day action he is warm though somewhat distant. But when the father is present the teasing or rough-and-tumble to which a child in all-women groups is subjected ceases immediately. It is the father who sees that the mother attends to the infant's needs.

(p. 35)

**REFERENCE**

Anson, E 1988, 'Child rearing on Darnley Island: An Islander's account', *Queensland Researcher QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Erub (Darnley Island)

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

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Within the family the husband's role is making decisions... these are usually told to the family at the tea table.

(p. 68)

The father plays a very small part in a young child's life. He can hold the baby for a certain length of time, once the baby wets or dirties his/her pants, he hands the baby back to the mother or a sister to be changed. The father is said to be the busiest person and seems to be on the move all the time.

(p. 68)

**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2004, *Indigenous Parenting Project: Executive summary*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

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There is not enough recognition or support for men and their role as a parent... Single-parent men stated it was particularly difficult for them to be a mother and a father at the same time.

(p. 22)

**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

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The father's main role is as the protector and provider for the family. The father also has responsibility for maintaining discipline as required. Fathers may also indulge their children; they will carry their small children about visiting others, feed them, talk and sing to them and entertain them with stories and teasing. The father's brothers (uncles) play an active and recognised role and are also considered the child's fathers in some communities. While men spend less time with their daughters, the relationship is still strong and affectionate.

(p. 24)

Today, the interchangeable roles of fathers and uncles remain strong in many Aboriginal families, and many fathers and uncles take time to impart aspects of Aboriginal culture to their boys. However, it is clear that for many Aboriginal communities, the traditional roles of men have changed through the effects of colonisation.

(p. 25)

# Relationships

Some of the patterns of family and kinship systems are documented below, with particular reference to the roles these play in growing up children

## REFERENCE

Yeo, S 2003, 'Bonding and Attachment of Australian Aboriginal Children', *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 12, pp. 292–304

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General/non-specific

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

The commonalities that cut across all the various clans who live in different parts of the Australian continent include having a complex system of relationships of appropriation. There is a web of reciprocity of obligations and avoidance provisions. Relationships are based... along the lines of parents of children.

(p. 298)

... Great emphasis on the values of interdependence, group cohesion, spiritual connectedness, traditional links to the land, community loyalty and inter-assistance...

(p. 298)

Aboriginal culture inculcates social and emotional closeness to multiple caregivers and the community at large

(p. 298)

... A child may have multiple caregivers with occasional lengthy absences from their parents and develop multiple attachments.

(p. 299)

The security of an Aboriginal child would be derived from a network of regular caregivers and acceptance in their community. Attachment in a network of multiple caregivers... takes on special significance... The opportunity of forming an enduring affective relationship with more than one specific person in the community allows the support and maintenance of the child's emotional health throughout their life span.

(p. 299)

Child-rearing... is literally a family and community concern and is not confined solely to the parents of the child.

(p. 299)

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS  
Project Team 2002, *Warrki  
Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu  
Purananjaku – 'Working  
Together Everyone and  
Listening'*, Aboriginal Child  
Rearing & Associated  
Research: A Review of the  
Literature, Department  
of Family & Community  
Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature  
review instigated by  
Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi  
Aboriginal Corporation  
working with communities  
in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

The details of kinship are complex ... kin relationships and the associated obligations extend well beyond the immediate family group. Children are always surrounded by a range of people who can respond to their needs. For example, a child has several fathers and mothers. A father's brother is classified as, and is called, a father. The mother's sister is considered to be, and is known as, a mother (Edwards 1988).

(p. 58)

"... the small child is able to move out with confidence into the larger world, a world where all whom she meets are her kin, substitute mothers and fathers, who treat her with care and affection..."

(Thompson 1983, cited on p. 58)

... the role of the grandmother ranges from that of being a strong form of support and guidance to parents to having equal responsibility in the care of children to being the primary caregivers in place of a child's parents.

(p. 62)

"... for almost the first seven years of our lives my sister... and I lived with my grandmother. Mum and Nanna shared our upbringing and Nanna was considered to be 'Boss' for us."

(Ngaaritjan-Kessarlis 1994, cited on p. 62)

"Grandmothers usually care for the children when the mother is away. The grandmother is a key person in teaching the child a great deal about traditional Aboriginal ways and cultural business... Young children spend a great deal of time with their grandparents. Grandmothers share responsibility for the care of the child with the parent."

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi, comments by Napurrula 2001, cited on p. 63)

While it is evident that there is much individual variation in family life in central Australian communities, requiring differing levels of responsibility by grandmothers, in general grandmothers are taking on far more responsibility in the area of child rearing than was traditionally the case.

(p. 63)

“Many of the [grandmothers] interviewed were caring for little children, less than 3 years old... and expressed strong dissatisfaction with this as a permanent situation, which they saw as wrong but preferable to other options for the children.”

(NPY Women’s Council 1991, cited on p. 63)

“... it is hard for parents to look after their children properly. Lots of fathers go to town and drink and the mother is left to look after the children. Some mothers play cards and then the children walk around feeling lost. They go to their grandparents for help.”

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001, cited on p. 64)

That grandmothers are taking in a major part of the responsibility in terms of child rearing has implications for the ways in which children are being reared nowadays. Positive effects could include that knowledge and practice associated with *Tjukurpa*, *Ngura*, *Waltja* and *Kanyini* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] are being passed on strongly to the next generation. Negative effects for grandparents may include less physical energy, and illness associated with age, limiting their ability to respond effectively to the needs of young children.

(p. 64)

“Yolngu people, in spite of a high degree of personal independence, most often do things in the company of other people... From about the age of six until death, the ‘other people’... are very often members of one’s peer group. These peer group members are frequently same sex siblings and other actual or classificatory kin.”

(Harris 1984, cited on p. 65)

... relationships and kinship ties are constantly referred to in interaction with babies and young children. Children are told the relationship of people around them [so as] to identify who is in their family and how they are related. This knowledge helps children to understand the relationship and also to strengthen it.

(p. 71)

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**REFERENCE**

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

[Children] are masters of their own social world, tolerated and indulged in their demands, with assured place beside a number of different adults and children to whom they are tied by bonds of kinship, aid and daily interaction.

(p. 84)

The peer group is the most important source of daily companionship for the child, and its dynamics are crucial to understanding the social development of the child from about 2 years on... The child's contact with, and knowledge of, the world are controlled by its access to local areas through the peer group and its parents' visiting patterns.

(p. 73)

The composition of the peer group is not determined by physical proximity but by membership of kin-linked families in a general local area... Most women and many men pay a visit at least once a day, and their children then leave their own group and become visitors in another.

(p. 73)

Small children of the same age [often] call each other 'uncle' and 'nephew', 'mother' and 'son', 'aunty' and 'niece'.

(p. 75)

The system of classificatory kinship, whereby all sisters of one's mother are also called 'mother', and all brothers of one's father, 'father', tends... to reduce the exclusivity of the categories.

(p. 92)

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**REFERENCE**

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G 2001, 'Family for the Future Project – Buai sei boey wagel: parenting in the Torres Strait Islands', *Family Matters*, no. 59, Winter

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu, Mabuig, Warraber, Mer (Murray Island) and Thursday Island)

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal in collaboration with community

Islanders defined family to not only include their parents and children but also 'cousins, uncles, brothers, sisters, wife's family' (Mabuig young mother).

(p. 49)

Many households consist of three generations: grandparents, parents and children (Boigu key informant).

(p. 49)

... the whole community [is perceived] as family: 'The whole island's related' (Warraber young mother).

(p. 49)

The notion of the extended family was basic to an understanding of Islander culture and, in particular, to parenting values and practices: 'The strength of Islander families that I see is togetherness, you're not on your own when you need support' (Mer key informant).

(p. 49)

While the biological parents had particular responsibility for providing children with a secure and nurturing environment, responsibilities for discipline matters, for transmitting traditional values and skills and other cultural practices and for ensuring continuity of moral precepts and behaviour were seen as responsibilities that were shared with grandparents, aunts and uncles from both sides of the family.

(p. 49)

The extended family plays an important role in all aspects of child rearing (Anson 1988).

(p. 49)

These extensive relationships were highly valued: 'We have uncles and aunties and grandfathers all over the place and not only in Mer – in all Torres Strait' (Mer male key informant).

(p. 49)

When asked about the particular support they receive from family... mothers talked about babysitting and care for children while fathers referred to help with gardening.

(p. 49)

... The upbringing of children was shared: 'My youngest daughter she calls them [sister-in-law and brother-in-law] mum and dad as well – she keeps saying she's got two mothers and fathers' (Warraber female).

(p. 49)

... Children in the islands grow up within a support system that is quite dense, with each member in the extended family playing an active, and in some ways unique, role in child development. Family interaction provides children with the opportunity for rich and stimulating life experiences.

(p. 50)

An important characteristic of life on the islands was a strong sense of community and its contribution to the raising of children.

(p. 50)

The small size of Islander communities where 'everyone knows everyone' also provided assistance in the growing up of children... 'You're not worried about your child like people are down south... I'm not worried about [my child]. She could be running about in the middle of the village but I know she's still safe. Even families that aren't really direct, like blood, related to me, they would look after her' (Boigu young mother).

(p. 50)

Traditionally, members of the extended family had clearly defined duties and responsibilities in all family matters, including the "growing up" of children. (Cutts, 1996)...

(p. 52)

... Parents were unanimous in conceiving of 'family' as an extended family including not only parents and children but also grandparents, cousins, brothers, sisters, and wife's or husband's family.

(p. 53)

[There is] mutual assistance and support in the rearing of children; sharing of activities between generations; and provision of advice and role modelling for the younger generation [among others].

(p. 53)

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**REFERENCE**

Longbottom, S 2009,  
Interview with Jane Harrison  
on 1 July 2009, La Perouse,  
Home Interaction Program  
for Parents and Youngsters

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Koori

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

I have brought my kids up to have respect for Elders. They know to call them Aunty and Uncle, that's with anyone, whether they are his Uncle and Aunty...

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**REFERENCE**

Anson, E 1988, 'Child rearing on Darnley Island: an Islander's account', *Queensland Researcher QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Erub (Darnley Island)

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

The extended family plays an important role in raising children. Mother's sister looks after the child if the whole family needs to plant and clear the garden but the father's sister always cares for the baby and other siblings when mother goes away to Thursday Island to give birth to another child.

(p. 69)

... both the mother's sister and the father's sister visit regularly and have a say in the upbringing of the children.

(p. 69)

The grandparents [on both sides]... also care for the siblings and the baby during the day but only for short times when the mother goes shopping... The grandparents visit the house regularly and have a say in the upbringing of the children.

(p. 69)

Once the child turns three years, he/she joins the peer group but still seeks mother's attention. If a child wants something he/she saw the others with, the child will demand it from the mother, mother's sister, or father's sister.

(p. 70)

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**REFERENCE**

Hammond, C 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 29 May 2009, Newcastle

**REGION/ GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Moree

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

It is important to keep track of your Aboriginal family name if you have a non-Aboriginal parent. Because more and more people have a non-Aboriginal partner, and that Aboriginal name will give you a sense of belonging and identity. That is where our kids get lost and confused about who they are and where they are from ... the first things we say to someone when we meet them is where you from, and who's your mob. By doing this it will build a strong relationship with your kids and their extended family. That's not to say that kids forget about their non-Aboriginal name, but if they live or work in the Aboriginal community, that Aboriginal name can make them feel a bit more comfortable.

We have a big extended family, so we need to look outside of family and I think some people will look outside of the Aboriginal community so they do not connect up with relations, whether it's distant or not.

I wanted my boys to have a sense of belonging about where I am from ... who they are connected to, and to have a sense of belonging in the community. The same applies with their mother,

and who they are connected to, so when their grandkids are growing up, they will know who they belong to.

The most important thing was to support family ... older one's looking after younger ones, that's just how it is with Aboriginal families. You look after your mob.

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**REFERENCE**

Howard, S 2001, 'Fathering and Indigenous Families – a North Queensland community partnership', Paper presented at the Helping Families Change Conference, Melbourne, 22–24 February

There is no one 'traditional Indigenous family structure', and while there are commonalities across clans, there are also a range of relationships and behavioural norms specific to different clan groups...

(p. 2)

**REGION/ GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North Queensland/general

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

[Traditionally] the role of men was clearly defined, as were the roles of all members in traditional society. Men were seen as protectors, providers, leaders and skilled hunters. This afforded them respect, which was accompanied by the reciprocal obligation of meeting specific responsibilities.

(p. 2)

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**REFERENCE**

Davis, R and Dikstein, J 1997, 'It Just Doesn't Fit: the Tiwi family and the Family Law Act – can the two be reconciled?', *Alternative Law Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, April

Children on the Tiwi Islands are raised in large extended families. Raising children is often referred to 'growing children up'. The parents of a Tiwi child do not have exclusive rights in respect of the child.

(p. 64)

**REGION/ GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Tiwi Islands

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal

The Tiwi Island family comprises a 'one granny sibling group'. The family includes all children who share a maternal grandmother. Child rearing or the 'growing up' of a child is not exclusively the responsibility of the child's biological parents. Primarily,... raising children is the responsibility of the Tiwi women. When a child is born he or she will have multiple mothers. Great importance is placed on the relationship between sisters in the Tiwi family who share between them the responsibility for raising children.

(p. 64)

If a woman has more children than she can cope with, it is not uncommon for the woman to give one of the children to a sister for an indeterminate period of time... The Tiwi child may also be given to a woman who is not a biological member of the 'one granny sibling group'. If a... woman is befriended by a Tiwi family, and if she has no children, the Tiwi family may give her a child to grow up. If this occurs the expectation is that the woman will become part of the Tiwi family. They do not exclude the child by giving the child to someone to grow up but rather they give the child as a means by which the person is included into the family group.

(p. 65)

Children are never given to others to grow up for an indeterminate period of time. The Tiwi family expects that it can request that the child be returned to a biological family member at any time.

(p. 65)

"The Tiwi emphasis is never on formal separation or relinquishing of custody, nor... on exclusive custodial or proprietary rights over a child... it is premised on the existence of ongoing relationships in extended familial groups".

(Christie, 1995, cited on p. 65)

Children can make demands on either their biological mother or any of his or her other mothers... Children develop a level of independence... Children are able to locate themselves in any of the biological mothers' sisters' households from a very early age. It is not uncommon for the children to locate themselves in several of the extended family households throughout their respective childhood years.

(p. 65)

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**REFERENCE**

Winch, J 1999, 'Aboriginal Youth', *New Doctor*, Summer edition

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

The Aboriginal child in the urban setting has a lot to learn from the family relationships and responsibilities of caring within the extended group. Among this is the importance of attending funerals. It is here they learn about the whole extended family and who will not be eligible for partnership when they get older. It is probably the one time when all the extended family gets

together... Children are included in the family ritual and it is said that we always meet in sorrow... A series of funerals [may] keep [a] child away from school.

(p. 23)

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**REFERENCE**

Bourke, E 1993, 'The First Australians: kinship, family and identity', *Family Matters*, August, no. 35

Children in Aboriginal families are, in the main, well cared for and spoiled by all in the immediate group.

(p. 4)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

Children are the responsibility of the entire family in many cases... Many Aboriginal people have been brought up by members of the family other than their immediate parents.

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

(p. 5)

Many grandparents carry out the responsibility of growing up children today. Grandparents are ... very important members of the Aboriginal family unit and are often relied upon to play a major part in child rearing. This results in children being encouraged to think family. Some have responsibility at a very early age for the care of siblings, and as a result they have a large degree of personal autonomy.

(p. 5)

The family structures of urban and rural Aboriginal people are... different from those of some more traditionally oriented groups... Aboriginal families in urban and rural areas have developed a culture of their own through family, community and organisation structures.

(p. 6)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2004, *Indigenous Parenting Project: Executive summary*

Information about children comes mainly from other family and community members within the Indigenous community... Community role models such as elders and other strong and resilient parents can be used to model and discuss parenting issues.

(p. 13)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

Women and men alike [reported] that traditionally men and women had specific roles in regards to rearing children and that

these roles had either been eroded or become blurred.

(p. 22)

Family and friends are the main sources for parenting information; maternal child health nurses, health workers and support workers are other 'trusted' sources for information.

(p. 22)

There needs to be more recognition of the number of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

(p. 31)

Family stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities relating to child rearing were seen as an important source of parenting information... Family stories need to be gathered and developed as a culturally relevant resource to strengthen and restore child rearing practices and provide positive role models for Indigenous parents and carers.

(p. 31)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

Family is the cornerstone of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, spirituality and identity. As an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child grows up, maintaining their connections to family and community forms the basis of the development of the child's identity as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, their cultural connectedness and their emerging spirituality.

(p. 19)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are strong and powerful. Family provides important social capital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

(p. 19)

Those involved in children's lives, and helping to raise them, commonly include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, and members of the community who are considered to be family.

(p. 19)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have overlapping and extensive kinship networks, with both adults and children commonly moving between different households.

(p. 20)

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families... have strong functional kinship networks in place, built on key people who play different roles but hold overall authority and responsibility for the upbringing and overall wellbeing of children and young people.

(pp. 20–1)

The kinship system is a feature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social organisation and family relationships. It is a complex system that determines how people relate to each other and their roles, responsibilities and obligations in relation to one another...

(p. 21)

Kinship systems define where a person fits into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, binding people together in relationships of sharing and mutual obligation. Kinship defines roles and responsibilities for raising and educating children ...

(p. 21)

Relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are understood as a way of including people in 'parenting' a child rather than distinct roles. Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family practices have strict rules and laws for people to live by.

(p. 21)

Children without able parents are often accepted and cared for by others of the original family group and/or by other members of their clan group.

(p. 23)

Although traditional aspects of child-rearing practices have changed with the impact of colonisation, most Aboriginal parents impart their understanding of culture to their children and maintain their kinship networks.

(p. 23)

Children are taught about the importance of a kinship structure. It is usually close relatives who will guide and support them from the early years, through the transition from teenager to life as an adult with their own family.

(p. 23)

Grandmothers and aunts have responsibility for passing on traditional knowledge to girls. In some families, members of the extended family have more authority to make decisions concerning the child – this depends on the dynamics of the family.

(pp. 23–4)

Women's major responsibilities in child rearing have been to teach young girls important cultural information about being a woman, such as their spiritual and social well-being, ancestral laws, information on how to care for land and information on fertility and child rearing. Traditionally, a young girl learns from older women how to track and hunt small animals, traditional methods of cooking and fishing and how to collect and treat edible plants for food and medicinal use. For example, in some communities girls are taught skills in basket weaving and how to make clothing such as possum skin cloaks.

(p. 24)

Today, traditional family child rearing structures and practices continue to varying extents despite the disconnection from land that has occurred since colonisation. The traditional interchangeable roles of mothers and aunts remain strong in many Aboriginal families, irrespective of where they live.

(p. 24)

The uncles are required to help with raising the child, especially in the case of a young boy. There is also the passing of traditional knowledge to boys by their fathers and uncles.

(p. 24)

Men in traditional days, and in some communities today, would hunt for many days, and Aboriginal peoples' existence would rely heavily on the combined role of men and women in providing food. These practices are still maintained and passed on to boys in some, particularly remote, communities.

(p. 24)

Grandparents are very important people in the life of an Aboriginal family. They are the teachers of culture and traditional law, and are accorded a place of respect by all family and clan members. Children spend a great deal of time with their grandparents, learning cultural knowledge and being cared for. Grandfathers and grandmothers often fill the role of 'boss' or protector for a child. Grandparents are sometimes required to perform certain ceremonies over a baby, particularly if the child is weak or sick. Grandparents also care for children when the mother or father are away, including when the mother is having a baby. Older children assist their grandparents with physical work and in looking after younger siblings.

(p. 25)

Grandparents continue to be seen as respected and important members of the family. Today's Aboriginal grandparents have critical roles in imparting culture, particularly through storytelling, and in assisting parents in the raising of their children. However, one of the key issues faced by Aboriginal communities since colonisation is the shorter life span of Aboriginal elders, which impacts on child-rearing practices.

(p. 25)

In some Aboriginal languages there is no word for cousins. Cousins are often referred to as brothers or sisters. Children will refer to their older cousins as brothers or sisters. This mixed group of siblings and cousins forms the peer group for the child and is the most significant influence in their daily life.

(p. 25)

Today, cousins continue to be important members of an Aboriginal child's peer group. While they may have a wider group of friends, Aboriginal children are still very closely connected with their cousins.

(p. 25)

It is not only the elders to whom a child is related who are respected, but also elders within the larger clan, language group or community. The whole community holds these elders in high regard. Elders also play an important part in a child's life through teaching, guidance and passing down traditional knowledge. Close family friends also known to the children and their parents, such as a father's or mother's best friend, play a significant role in the life of an Aboriginal child.

(p. 25)

Families are still guided by elders – either community elders (people who have lived in the area for a long time and are respected community participants) or traditional elders (people who are descendants of the area and are active in community issues).

(p. 25)

“Children are the responsibility of the entire family rather than the biological parents alone. Many Aboriginal people have been ‘grown up’ by members of the family other than their biological mother and father and this practice of growing up children is still very widespread today...”

(Daylight and Johnstone 1986, cited on p. 26)

Some families follow their kinship obligations quite strictly while others live according to a combination of western and traditional kinship values. Individuals who are not blood or language related may be considered family and have a role to play through their kinship relationships.

(p. 26)

The dynamics and relationships within Aboriginal families will differ. It is good practice to ask the family how they manage rather than making assumptions based on the colour of their skin, their environment or lifestyle.

(p. 26)

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#### REFERENCE

Yorganop Child Care  
Aboriginal Corporation,  
unpublished ‘Noongar  
Knowledge of Child  
Rearing Project’

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Noongar nation, Western  
Australia (Medina,  
Rockingham, Mandurah;  
Armadale, Kelmscott and  
Gosnells; Midland; Fremantle  
Hilton area; and Koondoola,  
Balga, and Girrawheen)

#### AUTHOR

Aboriginal organisation

...for the Torres Strait Islanders [there are] “expectations of each particular community” in “the primary protection, socialisation, and nurturance of the children they bear or adopt”

(Kolar and Soriano 1998, cited p. 11)

The impact of colonisation saw the “traditional forms of social organisation along totemic and band lines also started to be replaced by kinship systems based along European-style family lines, although place of origin and kinship ties remained an important determinant of Noongar social and cultural life”

(Barcham, 2008 cited on p. 12).

# Responsibilities

This section provides brief information on the concept of responsibility and the growing up of children

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Young Yapa children are gradually introduced to their specific obligations and responsibilities associated with *Jukurpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law]. As part of these teachings young children have almost complete freedom to choose and demand what they desire.

(p. 16)

In learning about *Tjukurpa, Waltja, Ngura* and *Kanyini* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] children learn the importance of relationships and the responsibilities they have to everything in their environment. They are taught to help and encourage one another; to keep each other sage and to work together.

(p. 17)

Children ... from a young age ... are told of their particular association with and responsibilities towards a certain animal or plant.

(p. 71)

Children are born with all the responsibilities of Law and culture...

(p. 109)

One of the most significant features of Aboriginal child rearing in the desert regions is the great importance placed on a child's ability to learn and understand her/his responsibility and relationship to everything in the environment – people, animals, land, family.

(p. 121)

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**REFERENCE**

Yorganop Child Care  
Aboriginal Corporation,  
unpublished 'Noongar  
Knowledge of Child  
Rearing Project'

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Noongar nation, Western  
Australia (Medina,  
Rockingham, Mandurah;  
Armadale, Kelmscott and  
Gosnells; Midland; Fremantle  
Hilton area; and Koondoola,  
Balga, and Girrawheen)

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

"The Aboriginal people... believe that culture, respect and family harmony are the fundamental elements of family life, child rearing and kinship maintenance. Culture consists of complex systems of obligations and responsibilities that bind all members of the kinship system through a strong oral tradition. Respect reflects the absolute belief that all people are worthy of respect and it is right that others will pay them due regard. Family harmony is premised on the principle of reciprocity – a mutuality of expectations."

(Collard et al., 1994, cited p. 12)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and  
Walking Together: supporting  
family relationship services to  
work with Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander families and  
organisations*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

"... As a result of the children being encouraged to think and have responsibility at a very early age, they have a large degree of autonomy."

(Daylight and Johnstone 1986, cited on p. 26)

# Gender

This section documents the impact of gender on the child rearing process and childhood

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – ‘Working Together Everyone and Listening’*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

“The [Warlpiri] regard a woman’s love for her son as the most intense and enduring affectionate attitude there is. It often excuses behaviour that in other people would be considered outrageous.”

(Meggitt 1962, cited on p. 60)

## REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

Boys are more likely to be by themselves, away from either adults or other children... Girls are more often to be found with a small group of 2–4 other children while boys are to be found in large parties. This trend is in fact more noticeable over the age of 5 years.

(pp. 87–8)

Boys are as likely to be with their fathers as with their mothers, while girls become strangers to their fathers by comparison.

(p. 88)

Males stay together, often in large groups, usually with specified other males (fathers, mother's brothers); females stay in small groups founded on the matrilineal tie between grandmothers, mothers and their female siblings, and daughters.

(p. 88)

[Over 5] boys now receive much more interaction from their fathers and less from their mothers than they did when they were younger.

(p. 88-9)

All of the boys among whom a particular child has spent his younger years will be included in the over 5 group; its structure is based upon an amalgam of several smaller ones rather than on any... new recruiting ... The group [is] based on common language and kinship ties.

(p. 102)

... [the boys] did not range themselves against other groups ... and they had no regular leaders ... if a boy wished to leave his regular friends and join another group he was free to do so.

(p. 102)

The ethic of generosity and mutual help which started to appear before the age of 5 was strengthened [in these groups of boys]... there was no system of superior or inferior status based on relative age ... [a] younger [boy was] helped and supported by older brothers and cousins ... until he was comfortable with the others.

(p. 102)

The activities of the boys remained physical ... they became completely familiar with the environment around them.

(p. 102)

Each boy usually has a co-member as a special friend; this is often a close classificatory 'brother', and many adults look back on a lifetime of close friendship with such a person.

(p. 104)

The boys' relations with each other, and with others in the group, are characterised by affection and mutual aid ... [they do not attempt] to order themselves as individuals in dominance hierarchies.

(p. 104)

Girls remain in a close relationship with their similar age 'sisters' and 'cousins' and continue to spend time with their mothers and grandmothers.

(p. 104)

Girls ... are resourceful, independent, and tireless in carrying out useful tasks.

(p. 105)

... Both boys and girls up to the age of 9 [traditional age of the end of childhood] receive a considerable amount of physical contact from adults.

(p. 111)

Girls become proficient in understanding and exploring the environment and caring for others, while boys devote their energies to exploring and perfecting their physical skills.

(p. 112)

[Boys] participate less in adult social activities at this age than they did earlier.

(p. 112)

... Boys and girls both show signs of shyness in contrast to the exuberance of little ones.

(p. 113)

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**REFERENCE**

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G  
2001, 'Family for the Future  
Project – Buai sei boey wagem:  
parenting in the Torres Strait  
Islands', *Family Matters*,  
no. 59, Winter

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu,  
Mabuiag, Warraber, Mer  
(Murray Island) and  
Thursday Island)

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal in  
collaboration with  
community

Traditionally, authority was centred on the older males who held power over sacred and economic domains and over women and children: 'Eldest sons have special status in the family... if the father couldn't attend any function inside the community, they always send the eldest son' (Mer experienced mother). This does not mean, however, that [Torres Strait] islander women did not have their own important domains of power.

(p. 51)

In more traditional families, patriarchy was alive and well whereas in others, especially where women were working, there was a movement towards a more egalitarian family life.

(p. 53)

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**REFERENCE**

Anson, E 1988, 'Child  
rearing on Darnley Island:  
An Islander's account',  
*Queensland Researcher*  
*QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Erub (Darnley Island)

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

Once a boy is eight years old he accompanies his father and uncle everywhere. Some things they teach him are:

- 1 How to dig holes to plant crops;
- 2 What leaves are needed to plant crops;
- 3 How to cut wood;
- 4 When is the right time to go and hunt for turtles;
- 5 How to travel in the boat when there's no moon at night;
- 6 What to do when stranded in the boat;
- 7 Which place to go fishing or diving for clam and trochus shells, etc.

(p. 68)

[The boys] are allowed the freedom to visit either the mother's sister or the father's sister, whichever they feel comfortable with. The girls help the mother with the cooking, washing, collecting wood, raking the yard and minding the baby. They also go wherever the mother goes and are not allowed to go wondering off on their own to another village unless accompanied by the mother or brothers.

(pp. 68–9)

Some of the teachings that are taught to girls are:

- 1 How to cook food;
- 2 How to harvest all crops;
- 3 How to plant some crops;
- 4 How to keep the yard clean;
- 5 How to collect shells from the reef;
- 6 How to make island crafts
- 7 To be sure she has clothes on all the time (less care is given to a boy concerning this matter of clothes).

(p. 69)

Young boys ... play with older boys, learning to make spears and go out to the reef to look for fish. The young girl needs to play with other girls near where the mother can see her... The boy, at this stage, is sent on errands to the village ... but the girl is not allowed to go unless accompanied by her mother or brother. Both are still called 'baby', although they are given responsibilities during the day.

(p. 71)

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**REFERENCE**

De Ishtar and the Women Elders of the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre, Balgo, WA 2009, 'Strong for Law, Strong for Culture: growing up resilient kids in a remote Kimberley community', *Redress*, December

[The elders] are anxious to protect the girls, to warn them against becoming pregnant 'too soon', urging them to be wary and 'hide' themselves from the boys: 'walk the other way'.

(p. 9)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Kimberley region

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

When boys reach a certain age and maturity, older men are responsible for training them to become men as providers and protectors of the family and clan. In remote communities, initiation ceremonies formalise this process. Traditionally, a young boy also learns from older men how to hunt large animals such as kangaroo and emu. He will also be taught how to prepare the animals for cooking, fishing techniques, how to build a shelter and where to find water supplies.

(p. 24)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

# Developmental milestones

Aspects of child development, along with some Aboriginal perspectives on child development, are detailed below

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS  
Project Team 2002, *Warrki  
Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu  
Purananjaku – 'Working  
Together Everyone and  
Listening'*, Aboriginal Child  
Rearing & Associated  
Research: A Review of the  
Literature, Department  
of Family & Community  
Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature  
review instigated by  
Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi  
Aboriginal Corporation  
working with communities  
in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

... a vital role of Pintupi socialisation of children focuses on being able to communicate appropriate emotional states. This development is seen as the growth of 'understanding'. In understanding, "one acknowledges one's relatedness to another, and is able to subdue one's will in order to sustain relatedness" (Myers 1986).

(p. 109)

As children grow and demonstrate that they are developing their 'understanding', they are gradually introduced to more knowledge.

(p. 109)

"From six to eighteen months as the child develops, its attempts at crawling and walking are hampered by its caretakers, who constantly reposition the child when it tries to explore the physical environment... Towards the end of this time, one of the governing principles of adult attitudes towards children begins to be exercised; that is, a policy of non-interference with a child's activities unless s/he is in distress or is causing distress to another child."

(Harris 1984, cited on p. 112)

"Children have already learnt a lot about their family group and their surroundings before they are 3 years old. They know a lot of the rules about interacting with family and other community... After 3 years old they begin to play more and learn from their play group."

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001, cited on p. 112)

... there is a distinct move away from the mother towards participation in a peer group at about 3 years of age. This often coincides with weaning ... during early childhood, children start to accept the peer group as the most significant force in their daily life.

(p. 64)

[There is an] emphasis placed on developing generosity and compassion for others, and the methods used for stimulating a child's responsiveness and survival skills through awareness of danger and comfort zones.

(p. 35)

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#### REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land  
(Anbarra)

#### AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

The term *child* (*andalipa*, male, & *djundalipa*, female) is not used until the baby begins to smile, at 3–6 weeks, and remains the generic term throughout childhood.

(p. 16)

In the first 6 months of life babies are characterised as 'fat and happy' while in the 6–18 month period they are called 'clinging', 'hanging on' – *awudjarkidja* 'he who sits on the shoulder'.

(p. 17)

From about 15 months on, little ones play constantly with children older than themselves, with better developed coordination, and so the younger ones are constantly encouraged to keep up.

(p. 139)

18 months – 2 years... he is *adjorkidjera*, 'the frightened one' ... he should start to move into the peer group, although he remains close by his mother and frequently seems to be distressed and unhappy.

(p. 17)

Around 3 she stops being frightened and moves with confidence into the play group of the local camp area. She is less concerned with her mother and more interested in the activities of other children and adults. She wants to see everything, touch everything, be where the action is, and she learns to tease and demand things from her parents and relatives. At the age of 3–5 years she is called *djinbaitjuda* – 'the cheeky one'.

(p. 17)

By 5 ... boys and girls are differentiated in behaviour. Boys join in the play group of the older lads, which is not restricted to the local camp area but ranges far and wide into the bush. Boys of this age come home only to eat and sleep. Girls after 5 learn to 'hear'; that is, they become obedient and helpful to their mothers. Children of this age are referred to collectively as *dalip'djaringa* – literally 'all the children', but in English the 'kid mob'.

(p. 17)

[Traditionally] at 9–12 years childhood comes to an end for both girls and boys. Boys then become *wana*, 'the big ones', and girls [become] *ngamanguma*, 'the breasts'.

(p. 17)

The 6–18 months phase is one in which the child is most intensively in contact with its biological mother, and her role in the learning process must be of key significance, particularly in laying the foundations of language ... [and] the participation of the father increases.

(p. 62)

The Anbarra ... are neither amazed nor anxious about their children's development, accepting each transition as a matter of course. They have no timetable for development to which they expect conformity... they do not seem to be interested in comparing their own children with previous ones, or the neighbours'.

(p. 131)

The fact that Anbarra children can do this [sit unsupported on a mothers shoulder – holding only her hair to assist] at 6–7 months ... indicates an acceleration of motor development.

(p. 133)

The consistently advanced motor development of these children in the first 15 months of life is apparent...

(p. 134)

From the time when the Anbarra child's independent mobility is well established until about the age of 5 years, physical and emotional separation from the mother occur... Gradually [moving] into a supportive group of peers, the core of which includes other

children of the same age and local area as well as some older children.

(p. 67)

The weaning period is one of stress for mother and child, and the Anbarra say that children are 'frightened' (*-djorkidjera*) at this time.

(p. 70)

Once the child starts to accept being weaned, it more and more often leaves the area of its mother and joins other children in games, swimming and exploration.

(p. 72)

At 3 years most children remain close to their mothers but by 5 they are ranging farther and farther afield more often in the company of children... more and more in single sex groups... Girls remain nearer their mothers when in camp; boys start to sit and walk beside their fathers.

(p. 80)

By the time children are 5 they have become independent, self-possessed creatures fully capable of asserting their power over adults in tantrums, but also closely involved in adults' everyday affairs... They are generally considerate of others, willing to help younger children, and find much of their emotional support in the peer group, where they spend much of their time.

(p. 84)

Anbarra infancy and early childhood can be seen to divide itself into two fairly clear segments. The first is a long period of greatly indulged, but sometimes difficult, dependency up to 18 months to 2 years ... then ... there is an increasingly rapid absorption of the child into the peer group of related children.

(p. 100)

They [children] remain an integral part of the camp life, welcome at several hearths and able to depend on adults other than their actual parents for physical comforts and emotional support. By the time they reach 5 they are physically graceful and skilful from constant running, throwing and swimming, and through the absence of cautions and warnings about physical danger they have learnt to feel entirely at home in the environment.

(p. 101)

The events of adolescence... are seen by the Anbarra as the beginnings of adulthood, and intensive learning of the period is the privilege of adults, not children.

(p. 102)

[At this age] differences between the sexes becomes even more marked than they were before 5 and the activities of boys and girls must be considered separately.

(p. 102)

In the short pre-adolescent period they learn to give up the physical pleasures of their childhood and must adjust to the sudden cessation of indulgence.

(p. 113)

# Laws and culture

Some of the influences of Law and Culture on the child rearing process are documented in this section

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – ‘Working Together Everyone and Listening’*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

The rules for bringing up little children have been passed from generation to generation through the *Tjukurpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] and a central focus of child rearing is the imparting of stories, rules and knowledge embedded in Tjukurpa.

(p. 24)

“All the rules for living come from *Jukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law]. All the rules for bringing up little kids come from Jukurrpa. It is the main thing. So little kids can learn all the rules, like ceremony and marriage.”

(Nungarrayi Brown, personal commentary 2001, p. 24)

From a young age children are educated about significant landforms and the part they play in the *Tjukurpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law], particularly Dreaming stories that explain the creation of, and ancestral activities that occurred at, certain places.

(p. 69)

Families refer to, and inform their children about, the location of their mother’s and father’s country. The child inherits ‘ownership’ and relationship with specific areas of land according to *Jukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] (Nungarrayi Brown & King, personal commentary 2001).

(p. 70)

“... when Galikali [aged 4] and her family went to the beach to cook damper and tea, the place they went to was chosen based on the relationship of the family members to that area of land. While they were there, they told ‘history stories’ about this area of land – their mother’s land and its associations with different family member and ancestors. They explained the linkages with

different areas, recounting creation stories for specific features of the land as well as stories about the children's *momu* [paternal grandfather] – the whale.”

(Lowell, Gurimangu, Nyomba & Yingi 1996, cited on p. 71)

“From the time that we were little children we learnt things, right up until we grew big and became old. It was as a child that I began to learn and carry it on... We are still holding it, we are still looking after it. Our understanding continues forever. We keep the Law eternally.”

(Molly Nungarrayi, translated from Warlpiri, in Vaarzon-Morel 1995, cited on p. 74)

While children learn aspects of *Tjukurpa*, *Ngura* and *Waltja* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] from many people and experiences, certain family members are given the responsibility to pass specific knowledge of Tjukurpa to a child. When a child is very young, that person is pointed out to the child and the special relationship between them is made clear. The child is told the need to listen and learn from that person.

(p. 74)

“Our grandparents showed us when we were children and we understand everything now because we were well educated... It was as a child that I began to learn and carry it on [Jukurpa, the Law]. We are holding it, we are still looking after it. Our understanding continues forever. We keep the Law eternally.”

(Molly Nungarrayi in Vaarzon-Morel 1995, cited on p. 109)

“When we grow old the children can take over the Law... We tell them what to do, we teach them so they understand. They listen very carefully and learn what to do – how to dance – and they understand everything we tell them. From the older children down to the little ones... they learn about it little by little as they grow up, and when they are grown up they will understand everything.”

(Lucy Nampijinpa in Vaarzon-Morel 1995, cited on p. 109)

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**REFERENCE**

Hammond, C 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 29 May 2009, Newcastle

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Moree

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

We used to speak language and do ceremonies, but now we just acknowledge them. This is my way of keeping Lore and Culture alive within me and my kids, without practicing it. I know and feel strongly about my culture as much as the Aboriginal people that still speak language and dance it in the traditional way. Our cultural and spiritual beliefs and how we live is different.

When I see our people do traditional song and dance, I am dancing and singing in my heart with them.

Culture has changed, and the way we live has changed. So we need to connect with what we have got and what we feel about being Aboriginal.

NSW State Aboriginal Rugby League (and in Victoria and the top end) AFL are part of the Aboriginal cultural heritage and bring us together. That is consistent with culture, it's our big gathering, it is like a corroboree. It is like a meeting place.

There are lots of ways of connecting with identify and culture. Having a yarn, going bush, or just spending time with your family, or connecting with your land.

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**REFERENCE**

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G 2001, 'Family for the Future Project – Buai sei boey wagel: parenting in the Torres Strait Islands', *Family Matters*, no. 59, Winter

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu, Mabuig, Warraber, Mer (Murray Island) and Thursday Island)

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal in collaboration with community

[With an emphasis on] the spiritual significance of their attachment to the land and sea... the parents acknowledge the importance of passing down traditional knowledge and skills to their children and grandchildren. This special attachment to the physical environment has taken on a new political and legal significance in the context of land and sea rights following... the Mabo case [see afterword, pg?]: 'it is important to know this native title stuff... they [children] have to know their lands for... all custom and tradition' (Boigu experienced mother).

(p. 50)

Intimate contact with the physical environment is a continuing and integral part of the growing up of Islander children. It provides the site for children to be initiated into the historical and spiritual significance of their physical environment, for training in traditional food-gathering activities, and for the enjoyment of physical recreational activities.

(p. 51)

Grandparents served as the font of cultural knowledge, and mediated family conflict, while aunts and uncles had

responsibility for initiating girls and boys (respectively) into adulthood.

(p. 52)

Traditional Island culture was informed by respect for the land and sea as sacred domains; by a range of values emphasising sharing and respect for others, especially one's elders; by the value of kinship; and by the authority of the older males within families and clans.

(p. 52)

Many [Torres Strait] Islander parents were strenuously seeking to maintain and hand down to their children aspects of their traditional culture.

(p. 52)

Islander parents have been generally successful in maintaining aspects of their culture.

(p. 52–3)

Parents [on the Islands] were exhibiting something of a cultural assertion as they revealed pride in their culture and sought to assert its value, especially for subsequent generations.

(p. 53)

Intimate contact with the physical environment was an integral part of the growing up of Islander children. Children are initiated into the historical and spiritual significance of the environment and trained in traditional food-gathering.

(p. 53)

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#### REFERENCE

Longbottom, S 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 1 July 2009, La Perouse, Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Koori

AUTHOR

Aboriginal

Culture happens through dancing, listening to stories, art – the older cousins can see that and will teach my youngest son things.

The children are involved in ... Aboriginal art and culture. My kids have always been brought up to know they are Aboriginal, not from the colour of their skin or their eyes, but in their heart.

Place is important – you find a lot of people saying, 'I'm Wiradjuri'. Country is important. Where am I from? You need to know your language group. Where you are from. Who your grandparents are.

## REFERENCE

De Ishtar and the Women Elders of the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre, Balgo, WA, 2009, 'Strong for Law, Strong for Culture: growing up resilient kids in a remote Kimberley community', *Redress*, December

REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA  
Kimberley region

AUTHOR  
Aboriginal organisation

As the *nintipuka tutju* (Law Women) and *tjarrtjurra* (women healers) of their peoples, the Kapululangu elders' role is to heal women, men and children by 'mending' their connection with their cultural heritage. As *tjarrtjurra* they have traditionally always been responsible for the wellbeing of their families and the wider community. They are supported in this by the male elders and by Balgo's middle-generation women.

(p. 6)

*Law* (philosophy) and *Culture* (customs) are the foundation stones upon which the future of Balgo must be built... From Kapululangu's perspective, Balgo's people (particularly young ones) are suffering from diminished self-esteem resulting from a rupture in their cultural heritage and lack of contact with their land-based traditions. The solution lies in creating opportunities for young people to engage in ways that empower them to know who they are, to feel proud of their Aboriginality. Cultural knowledge transmission must play a central role in any attempt to rectify the problems.

(p. 6)

Kapululangu... encourage children and youth to learn their peoples' philosophies and practices, in the hope of sustaining resilience and empowering active citizenship, enhancing individual and collective wellbeing, alleviating poverty, lessening conflict and violence, and advancing sustainable development.

(p. 6)

The elders had wanted the girls to know that they were the inheritors, the beneficiaries, of 'Strong Law, Strong Culture'. They wanted them to understand the *Law*... which had been held and carefully nurtured and passed on to each successive generation, so that they would be strong and 'without shame' for who they were. This knowledge was impossible to relay in words; it had to be experienced. And the only way to experience it was through ceremony. The elders were teaching the girls to be proud daughters of their ancestors.

(p. 8)

The elders remind the girls that ... they should never be ashamed of how their people lived, of who they once were, or of who they are today.

(p. 8)

The elders pass on their knowledge, and their confidence in that knowledge, to their grandchildren and the community's girls.

(p. 9)

The elders' concern is respected by the girls, who are just as eager to learn. Their willingness to listen was reflected as they reached out their hands to draw in the sand... These girls were prepared to follow the elders' footsteps. And the elders... gained strength in their insistence that the *Tjukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] can heal the soul wounds caused from decades of cultural disruption.

(p. 9)

The elders know that they are the descendents of strong women who lived by themselves and danced the land many eons ago, and they want to pass this knowledge on to the girls as a protective talisman.

(p. 9)

'Long as we got old people we can tell those kids culture. And take them to the place of the *Tjukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] where they been dance, all the women – the old people. So that they can know that Dreamtime culture. They gotta know singing for every soak-water. They gotta know the name – that from Dreamtime, name'.

(p. 9)

'The kids been do painting too... they been learn from (since) little girls, before their mother been get away. Then they started singing and doing painting for everything and that made them strong. They been travelling and singing, and that made them strong. No sick. Make them better.'

(p. 9)

'Young children they like culture. We teach them in workshop. We take them travelling, look around Country. Show Dreamtime to all the young children. Teach them and keep culture strong. We tell them to straighten them. Tell them what Dreamtime been belong in any place, what *Tjukurrpa*. What medicine for the sick one or whatever.'

(p. 9)

'We want to make them strong. That's why we got really strong culture. For the kids, keep them strong. So, this culture, we can't leave it. We gotta pass it to the young children, to our grandchildren.'

(p. 9)

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**REFERENCE**

Howard, S 2001, 'Fathering and Indigenous Families – a North Queensland community partnership', Paper presented at the Helping Families Change Conference, Melbourne, 22–24 February

Clan groups were connected to specific areas of land that represented to them their very being and spiritual existence. From birth to death and beyond, Indigenous people were governed by clear principles and values that determined their cultural and social responsibilities, passed down from generation to generation through child-rearing and other practices.

(p. 2)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North Queensland/general

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

Training for cultural ceremonies, initiation for achieving adulthood and moral education through story telling and performance were included as primary responsibilities (Gibbs, RM 1993).

(p. 2)

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**REFERENCE**

Bourke, E 1993, 'The First Australians: kinship, family and identity', *Family Matters*, August, no. 35

Women generally are concerned that all the traditional skills and knowledge of the past be passed on as they have always been. The dispersal of Aboriginal people and families across greater distances is seen as an impediment to the older women continuing to pass on knowledge to their immediate younger generation.

(p. 5)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2004, *Indigenous Parenting Project: Executive summary*

The connection to traditional child rearing and parenting practices depends on families' exposure to them. Yarns and stories about traditional methods of parenting and child rearing need to be gathered and shared with other Indigenous parents, especially those who have little or no knowledge of their cultural heritage.

(p. 13)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

Many Indigenous children have more than one culture. We need to find ways to nurture difference in culture in a caring and sharing way.

(p. 25)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

In many Aboriginal communities there are a number of skin groups within language groups, and all people in these communities are born with a skin name... As well as skin groups, in some communities all people belong to one of two basic divisions, or moieties. Children belong to the same moiety as their father; their mother belongs to the other moiety.

(p. 22)

Clan boundaries are passed from one generation to the next, generally through the father.

(p. 23)

Today, many children are born 'outside' their country. It is their relationship and identity with their language group that give a child the connection to their country.

(p. 23)

An Aboriginal child's identity is determined by their parents. A child is born into their tribal/clan practices, customs and law. In traditional Aboriginal communities, this may determine who they can marry and what they can eat, and identifies the part of the country for which they are responsible. This also includes their religious practices and laws to abide by. The child's kinship system determines this.

(p. 23)

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**REFERENCE**

Yorganop Child Care  
Aboriginal Corporation,  
unpublished 'Noongar  
Knowledge of Child  
Rearing Project'

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA:**

Noongar nation, Western  
Australia (Medina,  
Rockingham, Mandurah;  
Armadale, Kelmscott and  
Gosnells; Midland; Fremantle  
Hilton area; and Koondoola,  
Balga, and Girrawheen)

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

"Child rearing practices, patterns and beliefs are based on culturally-bound understanding of what children need and what they are expected to become."

(Evans and Myers 1994, cited on pp. 10-1)

"Traditional Yapa and Anangu child rearing practices strengthen relationships and foster cultural knowledge. Cultural knowledge is strong and extremely valuable for children."

(Warriki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku, 2002, cited on p. 11)

# Values

This section provides a glimpse of some of the values that inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices

## REFERENCE

Yeo, S 2003, 'Bonding and Attachment of Australian Aboriginal Children', *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 12, pp. 292–304

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General (none noted)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

The children could be given more autonomy in their daily functioning, such as feeding themselves whenever they wanted, and non-compliance to adults' directives is permissible... expression of negative emotions towards someone who is older and more knowledgeable may be interpreted as a sign of disrespect. This perspective requires restraint in the expression of negative emotions.

(p. 301)

Aboriginal children are also encouraged to distinguish between in-group (family) and out-group (non-family) members. Aboriginal caregivers would tell misbehaving children that the 'welfare or the police' would take them away.

(p. 301)

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Unselfishness and compassion are highly desirable behaviours in Aboriginal society.

(p. 83)

There is an expectation on adults to be very unselfish with children in terms of food, love and attention; to give as much as they are capable of and to respond to all needs and wants of the child.

(p. 83)

"By never denying the child his wants (the same as his needs) the adult demonstrates unselfish behaviour. Children copy this... Generosity is seen as the natural way of behaving and consequently becomes so."

(Hamilton 1981, cited on p. 83)

Pintupi children were overtly encouraged to be generous and compassionate and to feel sympathy for others. If a child possessed something which another wanted, she or he would be actively encouraged to give the things to the child who desired it.

(p. 83)

“Generosity is instilled into young children from a very early age, with older relatives urging toddlers to share highly valued commodities with others.”

(Brady 1992, cited on p. 84)

“Typically young children in possession of something desired by another are told to ‘be compassionate, give it to him’ (*ngaltujarra, yuwarra*). Adults play at this with children, pleading for an item, and even the very young become accustomed to sharing.”

(Myers 1986, cited on p. 84)

“When you are given something it is with the understanding that it will not be yours exclusively and that it may require something in return at some stage. Other family members give kids big money, about \$20 or \$50. Kids share their clothes and toys.”

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001, cited on p. 84)

Hearing and listening are highly valued attributes in Aboriginal child rearing. A person’s ability to understand and to think is intimately tied to their ability to listen. Myers (1986) comments that Anangu from the Pintupi language group perceive that the ear is the ‘organ of thought’.

(p. 110)

Anangu and Yapa children sleep, eat and play whenever and wherever they choose.

(p. 16)

## REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

[Early] accounts... describe the treatment of Aboriginal children by adults as 'indulgent'.

(p. 9)

The child's security of attachment to the mother and other caretakers is never threatened... the child's wishes, expressed by crying, are still acceded to without demur, the child has considerable control over what happens to her. She never fears being left alone or behind. She is never harassed or scolded... She is never rejected physically by her mother. She has other children to attend to her, and a large circle of friends... He is never expected to sleep alone in a dark room... He is never put off by being distracted with toys from pursuing some other purpose... whatever foods he demands, he is given.

(p. 57)

Aboriginal [Anbarra] theory seems to be based on the principle of following the expressed desires of the child.

(p. 61)

There are no doors, cupboards or storage areas where a specially desired object might be hidden. Almost all possessions, apart from a few adults' belongings, lie about the camp area where the child can readily pick them up... A reliance on non-verbal communication does not hinder the child in an environment where there is nothing much to ask for and nothing is out of reach.

(pp. 64-5)

There is little argument over the possession of things... the usual course is that if two children want the same thing the one who starts to cry first will be given it. When such a dispute occurs a nearby adult will say authoritatively 'Give it to him, see he's crying, he wants it.' This is considered a perfectly adequate reason for possession. Older children soon learn this lesson but instead of crying first themselves they forestall a younger child by giving him whatever he wants as soon as he wants it.

(pp. 76-7)

Adults ... make no demands on children. They are content if a child remains unhurt, does not hurt other children and keeps out of their way. As children approach 5 they are expected to do more tasks for their mothers such as keeping younger children amused, running errands from shelter to shelter, or carrying cups of water

for those who want to drink... if the child chooses not to obey that does not cause concern... the adult either does the job herself or asks another child to do it.

(pp. 77–8)

Adults recognise that although the child will do as he chooses, in some fields the adult must obey the child. This is especially true where food is concerned.

(p. 78)

Children's desires are immediately indulged, as much by older children as by adults.

(p. 78)

In the Aboriginal [Anbarra] camp, where there is little privacy and no particular value is placed on privacy in camp, people's interactions are open to all.

(p. 97)

There are... occasions on which the child will vent anger against a mother and, rather than seeing these instances of disrespect to be severely punished, the adults laugh them off and, in fact, tend to admire the child sticking up for its rights.

(p. 100)

The attitude of group tolerance of young children and group responsibility for their care remains true for the older child... children are still free to go from camp to camp, sitting by the fire without invitation and cajoling food and drink from resigned hosts.

(p. 111)

... The normal everyday behaviour of children is not divided into 'goodness' and 'badness', nor are there moral tales about 'good' and 'bad' children.

(p. 111)

The expressed reason for sharing is not of a general type but devolves around notions of relationship and need, indicating that the one who has is obliged to give to the one who lacks, as long as the latter indicates his [sic] desires. When a child refuses to share,

his right to do so is unquestioned, but he is described as odd, ungenerous and 'deaf'; people talk and act as if they are surprised by such behaviour and treat it in a wondering kind of way.

(p. 151)

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**REFERENCE**

Rebecca Mayberry, SNAICC Conference 2010: Ampe Anwernekenhake – For Our Children, Alice Springs Conference Centre, 27–29 July 2010

Children need to know we will be there: when they go to bed, while they are sleeping, when they wake up, and for the rest of our lives!

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Gunditjmara – Western Victoria

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G 2001, 'Family for the Future Project – Buai sei boey wagel: parenting in the Torres Strait Islands', *Family Matters*, no. 59, Winter

... [We value] the extended family for *okadikes* (advice or role modelling) and for inculcating in young people a sense of right and wrong (Murray Islander).

(p. 49)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu, Mabuiag, Warraber, Mer (Murray Island) and Thursday Island)

Island communities were highly valued as sites for the growing up of children. Participation in community activities and interacting with a range of adults were seen as important means of raising children.

(p. 53)

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal in collaboration with community

Islander culture presents a mix of traditional and contemporary values related to nature, religion, community and family.

(p. 53)

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**REFERENCE**

Hammond, C 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 29 May 2009, Newcastle

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Moree

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

It's about teaching respect to kids, respecting your Elders and also respecting your culture and traditions ... work is important and family is important. We think about what they want to achieve, get them to think about what they want to do.

Teach our kids to treat others how they would like to be treated, this will set them on a good path in life.

Work is important these days because we need to survive in a white man's world, and to do this we have to work hard and take care of our family.

Education plays a big part in our lives and we need to embrace it and pass it on to our kids, so that they can be our next lawyers and doctors.

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**REFERENCE**

Malin, M, Campbell, K & Agius, L 1996, 'Raising children in the Nunga Way', *Family Matters*, no. 43, Autumn

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Nunga

**AUTHORS**

Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal

[The mother's]... belief was that to a large extent the children should be able to regulate certain aspects of their own lives, including their access to food, decisions about what they wore, and about when and where they slept. Regarding food, the children were able to help themselves to the fridge as needed. They also had access to virtually any object in the house ...

(p. 47)

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**REFERENCE**

Winch, J 1999, 'Aboriginal Youth', *New Doctor*, Summer Edition

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

"Aboriginal children are still brought up in an autonomous manner that is in keeping with values appropriate to hunter gatherer peoples."

(Kearins undated, cited on p. 23)

Children are treated with indulgence, by all, to be part of family interaction, even if it's one in the morning.

(p. 23)

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**REFERENCE**

Longbottom, S 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 1 July 2009, La Perouse, Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Koori

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

It's never a problem at our house to take someone in, to share. The house is always full, we take kids in. With our relatives it is never a problem for people to stay, whether you have space or not... It is part of our values that relatives are always welcome.

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**REFERENCE**

Malin, M 1997, 'Mrs Eyers is no Ogre: a micro study in the exercise of power', in G Cowlshaw and B Morris (eds), *Race Matters*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**  
Metropolitan Adelaide

**AUTHOR**  
Non-Aboriginal

... Aboriginal families valued, and worked to develop in their children, an autonomous or independent, self-sufficient bearing on life.

(p. 141)

The important aspects of childrearing ... included encouraging autonomy by expecting that children would be self-reliant, able to make decisions for themselves regarding their basic needs, naturally observant and practically competent, and prepared to seek help from their peers as much as from adults.

(p. 142)

Parents would allow their children both time and space to tackle new tasks and situations cautiously so as to avoid making mistakes, and they would expect them to be both emotionally and physically resilient. To balance this individual independence, the parents encourage their children to be affiliative – that is, to be affectionate and nurturant with those younger than themselves, to maintain an awareness of the whereabouts of everyone, to help those needing it and to trust that their peers will be similarly dependable.

(pp. 142–3)

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**REFERENCE**

Yorganop Child Care Aboriginal Corporation, unpublished 'Noongar Knowledge of Child Rearing Project'

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**  
Noongar nation, Western Australia (Medina, Rockingham, Mandurah; Armadale, Kelmscott and Gosnells; Midland; Fremantle Hilton area; and Koondoola, Balga, and Girrawheen)

**AUTHOR**  
Aboriginal organisation

"...peoples of the south west of Western Australia believe that these traditional family values and the culture that sustains it have not been destroyed. They also believe their system has the ability to re-flourish and that Aboriginal kinships systems can work proudly and effectively again"

(Collard et al. 1994, cited p. 12)

"...it is clear from the stories from central and Western Australia and from the Torres Strait that traditional practices are still being used and valued ... it is also clear that traditional values and practices continue to exist outside of discrete Indigenous communities."

(Penman, 2006, cited on p. 13)

...little is known outside the Noongar world about our beliefs, values and practices associated with child rearing. It is not surprising that there is continuing breakdown of Noongar families and high number of Noongar children in care when so little is known about Noongar ways of growing up children.

(p. 13)

# Ceremonies

With reference to child rearing and culture, this section provides some information on child involvement in cultural ceremonies

## REFERENCE

Yeo, S 2003, 'Bonding and Attachment of Australian Aboriginal Children', *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 12, pp. 292-304

Some of the reasons for a child to stay with another person may be due to sacred initiations or ceremonies leading to spiritual development.

(p. 299)

## REGION/ GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General/non specific

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku - 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

*Tjukurpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] is taught to children gradually as they grow. Children learn through storytelling, dancing, ceremony, designs, drawing, all aspects of family life.

(p. 73)

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

... very young children may be allowed to attend some women's ceremonies; however, they are prohibited when they get to the age (about 6 or 7 years) when they might start to take in or understand the content of the ceremony.

(p. 73)

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

... a young boy might be informed about which of his male relatives will take him through men's initiation business (Nungarrayi Brown & King, personal commentary, 2001).

(p. 74)

“Although the learning environment is not modified and graded, there is some control over the knowledge the child is exposed to. For example, a child would not be allowed to participate in all types of ceremony.”

(Bavin 1993, cited on p. 74)

“Touching her baby everywhere with smoking leaves. Telling the baby not to use bad language, how to behave themselves, having respect for older people, especially what foods to eat, listening to her mother, father and grandmother, telling her baby not to just walk into someone’s home but to knock on the door first, not to steal anything either” (Narration by Polly Widaljul, in Stewart 1998) ... babies are talked to in a similar fashion during the Warlpiri smoking ceremony. The mother or woman performing the ceremony may also talk about her ambitions for the baby to take on her own particular skills or talents. There may also be another ceremony at a later date in which a grandfather addresses a grandchild directing him or her to grow into a strong, healthy and good person.

(p. 91)

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#### REFERENCE

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G  
2001, ‘Family for the Future  
Project – Buai sei boey wapel:  
parenting in the Torres Strait  
Islands’, *Family Matters*,  
no. 59, Winter

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu,  
Mabuiag, Warraber, Mer  
(Murray Island) and  
Thursday Island)

#### AUTHORS

Non-Aboriginal in  
collaboration with community

... Various activities [such as tombstone openings, special ceremonies and kai kai (eating together)] in the community helped in the growing up of children. (Boigu experienced mother)

(p. 50)

Changes have also taken place in traditional Islander customs and practices ... ceremonies such as tombstone openings and first shave for boys [still] remain important.

(p. 52)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

Aboriginal men have a specific role in the process of a boy's transition to manhood, and this is a very significant time for all. While it is a time for serious business, celebration as dance and song are part of the ceremony.

(p. 24)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

Grandparents are sometimes required to perform certain ceremonies over a baby, particularly if the child is weak or sick.

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

(p. 25)

# Language and communication

Documented below is some of the available information on language and communication and the ways in which these are used to promote child development

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Children may be introduced to several languages and dialects within their family and community context.

(p. 78)

English is used infrequently and usually only for certain linguistic purposes. Some parents may use some English with children to prepare them for school. For example, they may try to teach children to count, sing nursery rhymes, say 'please' and 'thank you' and use English greetings.

(p. 78)

Even when mothers were fluent speakers of English, they stated that they rarely used English to speak with their children, which the investigator attributed to the women's preference for 'intimate or emotional' speech in communication with their children (Jacobs 1988).

(p. 78)

In the Yolngu context, most parents did not stress the teaching of English at home and some furthermore expressed concern about young children being exposed to a very different language such as English at the same time as learning their first language, *Yolngu Matha* (Lowell et al. 1996).

(p. 78)

'Baby talk' is a linguistic system governed by rules and generally used with young children, from birth to 3 or 4 years old.

(p. 79)

... baby talk was used by older siblings to 'ease' the younger children into talking (Kaika 1993). Bavin (1993), in her study of Warlpiri language socialisation, also referred to the teasing

element in 'baby talk'. She commented that adults and older siblings tease the children by attempting to mimic the way that a young child might use language. By speaking in this way, the adult teases or plays with the child, thereby encouraging the child to learn the adult way of using language.

(p. 80)

...the Yolngu use ... 'baby talk', which they refer to as *yalngi matha*, soft or easy language; as opposed to *dal matha*, strong or difficult language. *Yalngi matha* is used with young children up to about 2 or 3 years of age or when the child indicates an understanding of *dal matha*. Commonly used words like those for 'mother' or 'mine' may go through five stages (starting with the simplest to pronounce [and progressing] through to the adult form) as the child passes through stages of language development from babyhood to school age. Yolngu do not regard it as a form of teasing; rather, it is considered a deliberate form of facilitating a child's learning of language in a way that is uniform and accessible to them.

(p. 80)

"That's their first language – to make them understand before they learn adult language... it's easy to make them understand through *yalngi matha* [soft or easy language]..."

(Lowell et al. 1996, cited on p. 80)

... up to 18 months of age vocal interactions and exaggerated gestures are more important than verbal interaction (Hamilton 1981) ... [there is an] extensive use of non-verbal interactions with babies, in particular in the Western Desert context ... some of the infants' language development milestones occurred at an earlier age than [among] non-Aboriginal children in Australia (Jacobs 1988).

(p. 81)

... sign language and the use of non-verbal communication and the way that this is taught and encouraged in young children [is important] ... babies and toddlers are taught these signs through repeated modelling and by being helped manually to perform the gesture or sign.

(p. 81)

... hand signals are used in all Yolngu families to communicate with babies and young children. However, in families with children or adults with communication disorders and/or hearing problems there is a prolonged use of sign language to assist their understanding. In two cases of profound hearing loss amongst children in central Australian communities (Pipalyatjara and Mount Liebig) the families have communicated in traditional sign language and have also taken on aspects of international sign language.

(p. 82)

Children with hearing, speech or other developmental problems are not set apart from the normal routines of community life or interaction with the peer group. People may use more signing and adults may urge other children to be supportive of that child but generally they are neither shunned nor overly protected by adults (King & Nungarrayi Brown, personal commentary 2001).

(p. 82)

... children are exposed to different language and behavioural expectations when they start to participate in the 'kids' group' or peer group. With adults, a child can demand attention but in the kids' group, they must look after themselves and learn to follow and give verbal and non-verbal commands during play and other activities.

(p. 82)

In the area of language, the prevalence of Aboriginal languages in contemporary life in desert and Arnhem Land communities is explored, the features of 'baby talk' and non-verbal communication are examined and the use of language for imparting knowledge contained in the principles of *Tjukurpa*, *Waltja*, *Kanyini* and *Ngura* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] is presented. The peer group is shown to be a rich domain for language learning.

(p. 35)

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**REFERENCE**

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

Just as 'verbal' behaviour becomes more important for the child over 6 months, so does the message-bearing gestural system... these become more significant in the overall pattern of adult-child communication... Children aged 6-18 months receive as many gestural messages as they do verbal ones.

(p. 63)

Children between 18 months and 5 years receive more explicit verbal behaviour, often concerned with practical instructions, and less physical contact with adults.

(p. 90)

The children become the source and storehouse of gossip, and if adults wish to find out what is going on in the local area they often turn to the children for an answer.

(p. 102)

[Children] occupy one most important role - as go-betweens... they are a useful bridge for communication of goods and information.

(p. 109)

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**REFERENCE**

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G 2001, 'Family for the Future Project - Buai sei boey wagel: parenting in the Torres Strait Islands', *Family Matters*, no. 59, Winter

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu, Mabuiag, Warraber, Mer (Murray Island) and Thursday Island)

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal in collaboration with community

... For earlier generations [yarning] was not only significant for communication but also for entertainment and conviviality between families. Yarning was considered an informal way of 'shaping the mind' of children, with the expression of values done indirectly through legends and stories. Grandparents played a vital role in passing on this knowledge.

(p. 51)

... this form of intergenerational communication for traditional purposes is less common today, with the young forming peer groups of cousins and friends to enjoy music, videos and other forms of popular culture: 'More disruption came in when we got the computers and TV. Before, we'd go and sit with the grandfathers out on the beach... and our grandfathers were telling us stories and myths and legends and all that. That's why we have some [local knowledge] in our heads and the younger generation haven't. They go to watch videos' (Mer key informant).

(p. 52)

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**REFERENCE**

Lisa Coulson, SNAICC  
Conference 2010: Ampe  
Anwernekenhake – For  
Our Children, Alice Springs  
Conference Centre, 27–29  
July 2010

Children learn *palawa kani* (Tasmanian Aboriginal language)  
in our childcare centres, playgroups and after school.

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Palawa

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Anson, E 1988, 'Child  
rearing on Darnley Island:  
an Islander's account',  
*Queensland Researcher  
QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

People communicate in every situation possible... when walking  
along the street, they call out to people in each house they pass.  
Children also talk to their friends but, more importantly, they ask  
for the baby and call out names and blow kisses to the baby and  
sometimes come in to the house just to kiss the baby.

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Erub (Darnley Island)

(p. 67)

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

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**REFERENCE**

Winch, J 1999, 'Aboriginal  
Youth', *New Doctor*, Summer

[Aboriginal children] tend to speak later... others pre-empt  
their needs, which leaves little need for the use of language.  
This is also a cultural trait, as reflected in... urban [Aboriginal  
people] still using a vast amount of body language.

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

(p. 23)

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Hammond, C 2009, Interview  
with Jane Harrison on 29 May  
2009, Newcastle

When I hear language it makes me feel as if I'm speaking it also. It  
makes me proud that language is still strong within some of our  
communities.

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Moree

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Bourke, E 1993, 'The First Australians: kinship, family and identity', *Family Matters*, August, no. 35

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

Women in communities still following the old ways are concerned that the increasing use of English will diminish the use of Aboriginal languages. Speaking a mixture of Aboriginal and English languages is not acceptable to some.

(p. 5)

# Learning and teaching

This section details some of the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learn, and how they are taught by family and community

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

... non-Aboriginal teachers in the classroom will often notice an older sibling completing a writing or drawing task for their younger relatives, particularly if the younger ones are having difficulty. According to *Jukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] this is an older sibling's responsibility, as it is unacceptable to watch someone struggling when assistance is required. Individual merit has little value in such a learning environment.

(p. 17)

Intellectual risk taking, use of questions and answers, visual and spatial skills and the need to reassess previous assertions that children learn through observation, imitation and trial and error with verbal interaction as a secondary means.

(p. 35)

"During early childhood the child is expected to adapt rapidly to new circumstances, to accept the peer group as the most significant force in its daily life and to look to other children for support and learning experience rather than to the mother and father."

(Hamilton 1981, cited on p. 64)

... a significant part of an Aboriginal child's learning, care and support comes from within the peer group.

(p. 65)

Traditionally much of the knowledge and language associated with the land would have been explained to children as they walked through the land.

(p. 69)

“As children walked through the country with their parents, they learnt how to recognise animal tracks and how to hunt. They came to know the features of the landscape intimately and began learning *Jukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] stories about life and land. The social and economic aspects of Warlpiri society were thus integrated with religion in a very personal way.”

(Vaarzon-Morel 1995, cited on p. 70)

Nowadays, significant features are often described and pointed out from car windows as families travel between communities or go out bush for hunting or food collecting (Jacobs 1988).

(p. 70)

“When families go out from Yuendumu to gather food or to stay at outstations, the adults point out who ‘owns’ the land which is being driven through; for example, Jakamarra-Juppurula land. This indicates the historical significance of the land and shows that they are responsible for the land. The children are also told about significant sites on the land. The old people will point out rockholes and perhaps sing a traditional song that is related to the place.”

(Bavin 1993, cited on p. 70)

Children learn firstly who they are related to and as they grow older they learn about the behaviours that should accompany the relationship; for example, fathers-in-law and sons-in-law maintain an avoidance relationship.

(p. 72)

Children learn [unselfishness and compassion] through observing adults modelling generosity and empathy.

(p. 83)

Encouraging and teaching children to be emotionally resilient and responsive is an aspect of child rearing ... Teaching children about the dangers that exist (both emotional and physical); who they can rely on for support and love; how they can share with and show support to others; and the reciprocal obligations that are integral to Waltja are all important aspects of emotional development. Overt signs of this are urging children to share, to show compassion, to look after younger family members, to take risks, and the controlled teasing, scaring, and cheek pinching.

(p. 83)

Exposing children to controlled dangers within the realms of warmth and security, and the testing and applauding of their responses, is another topic that emerges out of the literature.

(p. 84)

[There is] a process designed to teach young children to be cautious about venturing away from immediate family; to teach them about who they could trust and rely on for support; to introduce them to possible dangers, and encourage a healthy fear of strangers and unknown situations ... women sometimes play and tease younger children by enticing them away from the security of their immediate family. When the infant has made the move and is enjoying the interaction, the child is suddenly stopped by the adult removing themselves or making it unpleasurable in some way. The child then cries and goes back to its mother. If a child becomes very frightened, people laugh with amusement and fondness, until the mother comes over to pick up and comfort the infant (Hamilton 1981).

(p. 85)

Children learn to share and be compassionate to others by observing adults and by older relatives urging them to share highly valued commodities with others from a very young age.

(pp. 87–8)

“Imperatives are frequent: the child is told to do things such as take, give, come or leave something. The adult expects appropriate behavioural responses but is not upset if the child does not respond as expected. It is assumed that children will eventually take responsibility for their own actions.”

(Bavin 1993, cited on p. 90)

“Very early children learn to recognise the tracks of animals and the footprints of everyone in the community. A favourite game played by children and adults is to copy the tracks of various animals by pressing the palm, fist or fingers into the sand, thus children learn an essential skill.”

(Thompson 1983, cited on p. 96)

As the child starts to play and explore with a peer group, older children in that group take on a teaching, behaviour modelling and modification role.

(p. 96)

“Find out fire is hot by mother or grandmother letting the child touch a little. Learn about knife the same way, by feeling it.”

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001, cited on p. 96)

“Kids are left to experiment as long as there is no real danger of seriously hurting themselves... Children are allowed to touch anything – power points, doors, animals and water tap but not allowed to put their hand in toilet bowl or touch snakes or red back spiders.”

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi, 2001, cited on p. 96)

Adults implicitly encourage learning through risk taking by not placing too many restrictions or guidelines on children’s play and explorations.

(p. 96)

“... his mother softly drew her husband’s attention; their son was about to deliberately use fire. They watched with interest, making no attempt to stop or warn him as other parents might do. He toddled to the fire where the flames were licking at a long piece of mulga bark. There he picked up the burning bark and approached his mother, Napananga with it.”

(Kimber, 1993, cited on p. 97)

... little children are not specifically trained but that they learn over a period of time through copying others.

(p. 101)

“Adults are usually quite permissive and show no anxiety about a child who has not yet learnt to defecate away from the camp by the time he can walk... But once he is fully able to walk and run on his own, he is likely to be laughed at and taunted by other children... as well as adults.”

(Berndt & Berndt 1988, cited on p. 101)

“Toilet training is very casual and often learnt from copying older siblings.”

(Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi, 2001, cited on p. 101)

... knowledge is passed from generation to generation (Vaarzon-Morel, 1995). This is done through story telling, dancing, ceremony, designs, drawing, all aspects of daily life ... and the *Jukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] is taught to them gradually as

they grow. Learning continues throughout a person's life and as they grow they pass their knowledge on to the next generation.

(p. 109)

"Non-Aboriginal teachers often notice, some with frustration, that older siblings or Aboriginal Education Workers will complete writing and drawing tasks that have been set for their younger relations, particularly if they are struggling with the task. Yet this is part of an older sibling's responsibility, to assist with and role model an activity until the younger child is able to do it on their own. From an Indigenous perspective 'this is normal and reinforces learning by observation and team effort.'"

(Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi, 2001, cited on p. 113)

Aboriginal people use two methods of teaching and learning. Briefly these are:

- 1 experiential learning which involves observation and doing, and
- 2 teaching and learning through verbalisation in real life contexts

Yolngu learning may be suitably described as occurring by both methods. Given other similarities in culture, tradition and contemporary contexts, it seems plausible to suggest that learning in central Australian desert communities may also occur through this combination of methods.

(p. 117)

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#### REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land  
(Anbarra)

#### AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

The result of settled life in a foreign territory is that, although children still learn something about the location of water and the recognition of plants and animals, they do not learn the intimate social connections which bind them to their lands.

(p. 59)

[Grandparents] will call out to a child, beckoning it over and pointing out something of interest such as a canoe in the stream or a game older children are playing. But as soon as the child moves toward them beyond the 3 metre 'safety zone' it will be summoned back.

(p. 62)

... Initiative and independence are encouraged; on the other [hand] the child is left in no doubt that adventures beyond the home area are unpredictable and often unpleasant.

(p. 62)

In terms of 'early learning' ... the Aboriginal child's capacities are developed... toward a more integrated understanding of the whole environment... While preschools attempt to fill the gap for older children, there is nothing to replace the travelling through familiar countryside and the listening and learning, which used to be the life for the 6-18 month old child.

(p. 66)

Their main source of learning is by emulation of other children and adults not by any special training, and certainly not by threats or promises.

(p. 80)

Anbarra 3 and 4 year olds ask very few questions... children do not ask about the 'why' of things... seldom ask about the 'when' or 'how' of things, though 'where' is by contrast an important and frequent question.

(pp. 80-1)

... Adults... enjoy showing children certain things, especially natural forms such as shells, leaves and pebbles, and living things such as beetles, fish and tiny birds, but these are offered, given and then abandoned; no emphasis is ever placed on keeping them or making any further use of them, unless of course they should be edible.

(p. 99)

Adults make no systematic attempts to train children, either in social behaviour or in any other area. Instead, they expect the children naturally to learn what they need to know... children explore the environment and learn what they can from adults and other children, but this remains fragmentary and unstructured.

(pp. 100-1)

[The boys] sit or stand quietly, watching the actions of the adults [making a spear or repairing a canoe]. They ask no questions and receive no instruction in technique, not verbally at least... No

pressure is put upon them to participate or practise these skills themselves; adults expect that children will, as a matter of course, be interested in such things but do not think them yet ready to devote special learning to a task.

(pp. 104–5)

Adult expectations of girls are somewhat different... [adults] make demands on their time and energy [such as caring for babies, gathering food etc.]... Like the boys they learn by watching.

(p. 105)

Anbarra children from 5 to 9 continue to receive little or no instruction in social codes or beliefs.

(p. 112)

... There is no doubt in anyone's mind that all children are capable of these skills [speed, endurance, accuracy and a keen eye, the ability to swim and climb, to estimate distance and ration energy, to walk many kilometers and wait silently], and rather than constant warnings about being careful and minimising exposure to risk, each child is allowed to try whatever he or she will, and it is assumed that the outcome will be a good one.

(p. 139)

Frightening and warning the child not only kept it safe at home but alerted it to potential hazards before it was actually going to face them alone and, as well, it indicated to the child that only the familiar faces and the ring of warmth around the camp fire spelt real security.

(p. 143)

[Traditionally]... the immediate recognition of animal and man [sic] tracks, the knowledge of patterns in the natural cycle of food resources, the recognition of climatic events by a sensitivity to humidity and wind direction, the keen ability to hear and understand the significance of minute sounds... are some of the abilities for which the Aboriginal child's growth and development must prepare him.

(p. 144)

Adults start from a 'modelling' rather than a training approach... The first principle in encouraging unselfishness is the unselfishness of the adults, most especially the mother. By never denying the child's wants (which are considered identical to its needs) the adults demonstrate unselfish behaviour.

(p. 150)

The element of coercion in learning is present, but is not carried out by parents in the domestic setting but by older men surrounded by ritual paraphernalia and imbued with the power of the past and of the extranatural.

(p. 153)

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#### REFERENCE

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G  
2001, 'Family for the Future  
Project – Buai sei boey wagel:  
parenting in the Torres Strait  
Islands', *Family Matters*,  
no. 59, Winter

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu,  
Mabuiag, Warraber, Mer  
(Murray Island) and Thursday  
Island)

#### AUTHORS

Non-Aboriginal in  
collaboration with community

'Yourself, family, community, everyone around. They become an object of teaching... parents, aunt and uncle, athe (grandfather) and aka (grandmother), everyone in the community. They don't have to sit and teach, they learn from look' (Warraber young father).

(p. 50)

Parents... viewed education... as a passport to understanding and achievement within the wider Australian society.

(p. 51)

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#### REFERENCE

Anson, E.. (1988, 'Child  
rearing on Darnley Island:  
An Islander's account',  
*Queensland Researcher  
QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Erub (Darnley Island)

#### AUTHOR

Torres Strait Islander

Children begin to learn things at a very early age, and, throughout the child's life, they are repeated by the mother, father, and grandparents.

(p. 71)

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**REFERENCE**

Lisa Coulson, SNAICC  
Conference 2010: Ampe  
Anwernekenhake – For  
Our Children, Alice Springs  
Conference Centre, 27–29  
July 2010

Children learn from their families and then through playgroups, childcare and school. Many parents who attend childcare return to the centres as parents.

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Palawa

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Malin, M., Campbell, K. &  
Agius, L.. (1996, 'Raising  
children in the Nunga Way',  
*Family Matters*, no. 43,  
Autumn, 1996

[The mother] also relied on the children to imitate her actions, which they did much of the time from when they were young... [the children] did not try to separate themselves from adults and adults actions.

(p. 47)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Nunga

**AUTHORS**

Aboriginal and Non-  
Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Hammond, C 2009, Interview  
with Jane Harrison on 29 May  
2009, Newcastle

It was all about me learning from my father, mother and my extended family about all the things about being Aboriginal through to surviving in the white man's world.

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Moree

From my dad, he would show me things and how to do them; he didn't speak that much, he only spoke when he needed to speak and I would listen to what he had to say.

**AUTHORS**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

de Ishtar and the Women  
Elders of the Kapululangu  
Women's Law and Culture  
Centre, Balgo, WA, 2009,  
'Strong for Law, Strong for  
Culture: growing up resilient  
kids in a remote Kimberley  
community', *Redress*,  
December

Indigenous teaching and learning [are] a creative force... we watch women elders anxious to heal and protect their grandchildren, and the future of their community's children.

(p. 8)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Kimberley Region

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

'We are really strong for women's culture. We teach them young kids. Teaching them culture. Long as there's old people, we can pass culture to young girl. They gotta keep their own culture. Soon as they grow, these young girls, they can give it to their grandchildren, young daughter. We gotta teach so the girls can keep him that culture. Culture is really strong. Teaching

is important – so that all the way they can know’.

(p. 9)

‘We can take the kids and show them bush tucker and teach them dancing, every Country, to look around what this Dreamtime. We can show and we can tell story. Every place. Tell them what *Tjukurrpa* (Dreamtime) they been come from’.

(p. 9)

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#### REFERENCE

Malin, M 1997, ‘Mrs Evers is no Ogre: a micro study in the exercise of power’, in G Cowlshaw and B Morris (eds), *Race Matters*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**  
Metropolitan Adelaide

**AUTHOR**  
Non-Aboriginal

...the skills and characteristics of the Aboriginal students which were positively valued, or simply considered normal, at home became irrelevant or disabling in school because of the contrasting cultural practices embedded in the way the classrooms function.

(p. 140)

The skills and abilities of these students... their zest for learning, their resourcefulness and ingenuity, and their awareness of and concern for the needs of the other students.

(p. 140)

... The self-sufficiency of the Aboriginal children meant that they relied on their own observations to learn new things. If they needed assistance in doing something, they were more likely to seek it from their older brothers and sisters than from the adults.

(p. 141)

... The Aboriginal children of this study were skilled observers and possessed a good deal of practical competence at a relatively early age... As well, they were used either to helping those younger than themselves or to relying on the help of children older than themselves.

(p. 142)

The autonomous bearing of the Aboriginal children ... meant that, given an unfamiliar situation, they would expect to be allowed the time and space to sit back and examine the whole situation from afar before having to plunge into it and try to be competent.

(p. 142)

... Not wanting to plunge into a relatively unfamiliar situation reflects both the autonomy... granted at home and the importance... of not risking being shamed or for doing her assignment incorrectly in front of her peers.

(p. 146)

Apart from the acute observation skills... they also generally had the ability and tendency to orient themselves successfully within a wider geographic area.

(p. 149)

The world of the Aboriginal children and students ... was a very social one. At home, they were encouraged to play with other children rather than with things... It was therefore not surprising to find that the Aboriginal students often indicated that they perceived themselves as collaborating with others and of achieving collectively.

(p. 151)

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#### REFERENCE

Windisch, L. E., Jenvey, V.B. and Drysdale, M. 2003, 'Indigenous Parents' ratings of the importance of play, indigenous games and language, and early childhood education', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, vol. 28, n. 3, September

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General/non-specific

#### AUTHOR

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

... where the parents had an opportunity to detail their Indigenous play activities with their children they were often explicit about how they transmitted their specific cultural groups' identity. For example, parents reported teaching their children how to use Indigenous objects such as boomerangs, the use of traditional instruments such as clapping sticks in conjunction with *Midnight Oil* rock music videos, participation in traditional dance classes, and going for walks in the bush which included teaching the children about bush tucker.

(p. 55)

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#### REFERENCE

SNAICC 2004, *Indigenous Parenting Project: Executive summary*

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General/non-specific

#### AUTHOR

Aboriginal organisation

The education and socialisation of young children took place within the rhythms of family life with an emphasis on observation, imitation and interaction with the extended family and the land.

(p. 9)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

Mothers, grandmothers and aunties also have responsibilities to teach male babies and young boys respect for women. In some, particularly remote, communities, they also teach basic hunting techniques such as tracking small animals and knowing which types of plant foods are edible.

(p. 24)

# Behaviour

## Describing the ways in which children are encouraged to behave, this section provides information on childhood behavioural expectations

### REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

### AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Children are encouraged to behave in very specific ways. For example, an important feature of Aboriginal child rearing is the emphasis placed on a child's ability to learn compassion for others and to share. Unselfishness and compassion are seen as highly desirable behaviours. Parents and family members demonstrate this by never denying children what they want. Generosity is seen as the natural way of behaving and consequently becomes so (Hamilton 1981).

(p. 16)

... there is an expectation on adults to respond to all the needs and wants of a child as determined by the child. By rarely denying a child, the adults model a behaviour that is considered highly desirable in Aboriginal society; that of generosity (Hamilton 1981).

(p. 87)

"Even very young children are seen to share with others. Food sharing is a major requirement. Looking after younger kin is also stressed ... When a child refuses to share his right to do so is unquestioned but he is described as odd, ungenerous, and 'deaf'; people talk and act as if they were surprised by such behaviour and treat it in a wondering kind of way."

(Hamilton 1981, cited on p. 88)

## REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

It is remarkable how often... a child will give up a treasured piece of food without protest... if a child does not give up [an] item willingly no pressure is brought to bare on him to do so.

(p. 42)

The child has free run of the camp... and may go from one fire to another, spending 5 minutes with a grandmother, 5 more with an aunty, and 5 watching its [sic] father make a spear... But, while all children are free to do this, the stresses of the 'frightened' time make many of them reluctant to venture far and some sit dejectedly next to their mother.

(p. 70)

[Sometimes] children from 3 to 5 often manage to get in an adults way by hanging around, taking things an adult is using, making too much noise and insisting on accompanying adults when they would prefer to be alone ... although they inconvenience they are tolerated.

(p. 82)

While most children fully deserve the appellation 'cheeky', there comes side by side with this a growing ability to join their parents in important activities from which both receive much pleasure.

(p. 83)

Whenever a dance is in progress a ring of children forms around the performers, and some get up and try the dance movements themselves... At night performances, children stay awake as long as they can, watching the dancing and listening to the songs.

(pp. 83-4)

... Generous behaviour is required between those defined as 'kin', and trust in their reciprocating generosity is presupposed.

(p. 151)

Laughter or indifference greets aggressive behaviour by children to adults... [the child] is made the butt of jokes... the tendency to ridicule [the child showing aggression toward an adult is] no doubt important in conditioning the child's view of aggression in adult society.

(p. 151)

The main agent for conformity in childhood is the peer group, and within this children work out... appropriate behaviour patterns.

(p. 152)

Symbolic acts as well as material obligations place people in networks of exchanges determined by the kinship system and are instigated early in life.

(p. 152)

Unbound by possessions of a durable material kind, free from the obligation to work in a particular place in a particular manner, the individual who is inserted into a situation of potential conflict between his own needs and those of others can resolve the situation by simply moving away. This must be the deepest and most significant freedom in Aboriginal society.

(p. 153)

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#### REFERENCE

Christine Mayberry, SNAICC Conference 2010: Ampe Anwernekenhake – For Our Children, Alice Springs Conference Centre, 27–29 July 2010

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Gunditjmarra – Western Victoria

#### AUTHOR

Aboriginal

Behaviours come from learning. Don't judge our Booris (children) unless you know why, when and where they have come from.

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#### REFERENCE

Malin, M, Campbell, K. & Agius, L.. (1996, 'Raising children in the Nunga Way', *Family Matters*, no. 43, Autumn, 1996

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Nunga

#### AUTHORS

Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal

... [all the children], between them, would be keeping an eye on [the toddler] and ensuring that she was safe when she was out of [the mother's] line of vision.

(p. 45)

[The toddler] tottered over towards the merry-go-round and, as she got closer, [the mother] called out to [the] seven-year-old [son] to stop the wheel. He did so and then told [the toddler] to move away from it, which she did... [the mother] explained how her children are used to carrying such responsibilities and are in fact very capable of supervising and protecting children younger than themselves.

(p. 45)

... Although [the] children often failed to comply with [the mother's] directives, in an emergency they responded to her direction immediately... They did what she asked when her voice changed; they could tell from the tone of her voice if it was an emergency.

(p. 45)

An example of the independence of [the] children [is] not always doing what [the mother] wanted.

(p. 45)

The competence of [the] four older children at looking after [the toddler] during the picnic was evident in their intermittent but continual and spontaneous offers to her of food or drink. They would also carry her away from perceived danger, and they often played with her or cuddled her.

(p. 45)

It can be seen that consistently those practices, values and child behaviour reflecting independence and affiliation (or social concern) occur... more frequently.

(p. 46)

[The mother's] children directed her to do things, admonished her, and talked to her in ways similar to how she spoke to them... there was an apparent equality between them [mother and children].

(p. 47)

... The Aboriginal children in [this family] were encouraged to be independent, self-regulating and self-reliant – characteristics that have been observed in other Aboriginal families elsewhere in Australia. ... Children began to learn to be competent at looking after their younger kin from when they were very young.

(p. 47)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2004, *Indigenous Parenting Project: Executive summary*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

The influence of 'Americanism', media and technology were reported as having a negative impact on children's lives as they were often chosen as favoured activities. For instance violent movies and music, particularly rap music was seen to be a negative influence on young people's behaviour, parents feeling that young people were trying to imitate what they watched and listened to.

(p. 22)

# Discipline

The information provided in this section details some of the beliefs surrounding discipline and some of the approaches used to encourage culturally appropriate behaviours

## REFERENCE

Yeo, S.. (2003, 'Bonding and Attachment of Australian Aboriginal Children', *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 12, pp. 292–304

Prior to 2 years of age, Aboriginal children are discouraged from exploring the environment by threats and distracting them with offerings of food.

(p. 300)

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General/non specific

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

Knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour becomes known to the child over a period of time through group reaction and peer group pressure to conform ... children were rarely disciplined for minor misbehaviour, that family members shared the discipline and that laughter was used by parents in response to naughty behaviour (Waltja, 2001).

(p. 88)

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

Napangati, mother of Nangala, aged 6, from Walungurru community described her method of discipline, saying that when Nangala misbehaves she sends her to her aunties to play with her cousins. If she is still misbehaving she tells her off but this is infrequent (Waltja Tjutangkui Palyapayi, 2001).

(p 88)

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Humour, teasing and surprised responses are commonly used by adults or peers to indicate to children that their behaviour is undesirable or non-conformist.

(p. 88)

“Number of indirect means such as selective attention, non-intervention, modelling and loaded conversation were employed to encourage desirable behaviour.”

(Malin, 1996, cited on p. 89)

Rather than being told by adults how to behave and being punished for misbehaving, it is expected that children through trial and error and observation over a period of years will recognise what is expected of them and in so doing develop their own controls’ (Ellis & Petersen, 1992).

(p. 89)

The use of scary beings to encourage desirable behaviours or actions is a widespread practice ... *Mamu* (a harmful spirit being that is part of *Tjukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law]) is frequently mentioned by Anangu to scare or cajole children into appropriate behaviour. For young children, Warlpiri use *juju* and *kuku*, also a type of spirit monster. For older children, Warlpiri and Pintupi refer to a scary being in the form of a giant who lives in the hills which they call, *bangalang* (Warlpiri) or *pangkalangka* (Pintupi).

(p. 89)

Reference to scary beings is also used in a more serious manner: in relation to avoidance of sacred or prohibited areas, in which case adults convey to children their belief that spirit beings inhabit an area, thus rendering it dangerous to enter.

(p. 89)

... attempts to control behaviour through verbal means were not common.

(p. 90)

“Yolngu adults were also observed to use indirect – but still verbal – forms of control, such as teasing and distraction. Non-vocal communication (sign language), which is often not apparent to an outside observer, can also play an important role in behaviour control.”

(Lowell, 1996, cited on p. 90)

... [there is] the use of verbal commands between adults and children but ... there was not an undue emphasis on these being carried out. The child has the ultimate choice to obey or not and adults are not overly upset if the command is not complied with.

(p. 90)

“Since small Aboriginal children are not required to limit their activities according to adult verbal instructions, there are consequences for both adult expectations of children’s conduct and learning styles developed by children. In order to be considered disobedient, a child must be expected to obey another. Instead of practicing unquestioning obedience to the will of another, Aboriginal people grow up following the examples set by others and respecting whom they like and admire.”

(Kearins 1983, p. cited on p. 90)

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**REFERENCE**

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North-central Arnhem Land  
(Anbarra)

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

Parents were much attached to the child and rarely punished or corrected them.

(p.10)

Adults rarely punish children physically but use stereotyped threat gestures.

(p. 100)

There is no punishment [if a girl does not do as she is asked]. She is not abused or struck, others making no attempt to influence her... and when a girl refuses others merely shrug saying ‘perhaps she is deaf’, and that is the end of the matter. There is no subsequent reminder of her behaviour. Events of the past have no effect on the present; each new interaction is treated on its own merits, unaffected by past history or the girl’s behaviour.

(p. 107)

By the same token, there are no rewards for obedience... it is assumed that people do what they are asked because they wish to do so; if they did not wish to they would refuse.

(p. 107)

... Whatever problems the children might cause they are never made to feel that their existence is unwelcome to their parents.

(p. 109)

... The Anbarra child hears of no rules and receives no punishment.

(p. 113)

In the traditional environment the survival of each child is something to be contributed to, not by badgering it and bullying it into eating its peas or going to bed on time, but by listening to its own suggestions and obeying them.

(p. 128)

Aborigines are aghast at the way European people treat their children, especially at physical punishment.

(p. 129)

... Authoritarian practices are entirely absent. No demands are made for unquestioning obedience or externally regulated development; adults expect little of children while children can demand all from adults, at least up to a certain age. The father is not chastising and demanding but is more likely to protect an unruly child from a mother's exasperation.

(pp. 149-50)

... Certain subtle pressures are brought to bear on children, which while not overtly punitive are none the less effective in producing certain attitudes towards the areas of life most likely to produce conflict.

(p. 150)

... The protection of young children from outside forces is accomplished primarily by restricting their exploratory behaviour until they are physically able to cope with external difficulties.

(p. 151)

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#### REFERENCE

Malin, M., Campbell, K. & Agius, L.. (1996, 'Raising children in the Nunga Way', *Family Matters*, no. 43, Autumn, 1996

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Nunga

#### AUTHORS

Aboriginal and  
Non-Aboriginal

[The mother] said that she allowed her children to swim because she believed that if it was too cold for them they would not go in ... they were old enough to decide such things for themselves... This was one way in which her children learned to accept the consequences of their own decisions by being allowed to make decisions about actions.

(p. 45)

[The mother] stated that if the kids play up in public she delights in telling them off straight, in a loud voice, knowing that it would shame them into submission.

(p. 45)

Teasing and scaring were very direct ways by which [the mother] controlled her children when they were in situations that she could see were dangerous or inappropriate but which they themselves could not see... The fearful creatures she summoned were from movies and real life such as Kujo, Boopa and Freddy Kruegger [sic], Mrs Gaddy's ghost (from a storybook, mamu (a Pitjantjatjara harmful spirit being, policemen, and Goonya's (Nurungga and Kaurna for white skinned person) or 'whitefellas'.

(p. 46)

Apart from using teasing and scaring, which were quite overt and invasive... [the mother] relied primarily on more indirect and subtle measures for socialising her children. Non-intervention or selective attention in child affairs... was a common strategy... Another way in which [the mother] indirectly exerted influence and control over the children was through 'loaded' conversation or story-telling meant to communicate a particular value-laden message.

(p. 47)

[The mother]... used a number of indirect means such as selective attention, non-intervention, modelling and loaded conversation. In addition, teasing and scaring were a means of helping the children to become emotionally resilient, in order to prepare them for the exploitation and racism that she anticipated they would encounter.

(p. 47)

# Playing

This section lists some of the beliefs regarding children and play, as well as the relationship of the peer group

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS  
Project Team 2002, *Warrki  
Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu  
Purananjaku – 'Working  
Together Everyone and  
Listening'*, Aboriginal Child  
Rearing & Associated  
Research: A Review of the  
Literature, Department  
of Family & Community  
Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature  
review instigated by  
Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi  
Aboriginal Corporation  
working with communities  
in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

There is no concept of 'mine' in regard to a plaything. Children are actively encouraged to give away objects if another child desires them.

(p. 16)

[There is a] significance of the 'kid's group' for its role in determining behaviour, learning and a child's sense of being ... play is predominately a child controlled activity with minimal adult involvement.

(p. 35)

The children are ... challenged and encouraged to take physical risks to imitate older members of the peer group.

(p. 82)

Risk taking is an acknowledged characteristic of Aboriginal children's play. Because adults do not have a heavy supervisory role, they encourage the early establishment of children's own capabilities and limitations and the ability to make the appropriate judgements (Johns, 1998; Flear, 1999).

(p. 96)

... children are given a lot of trust and freedom to be responsible for one another during play, to sort out their own disagreements or troubles without adult interference.

(p. 97)

"... [there is] a policy of non-interference with a child's activities unless s/he is in distress or is causing distress to another child."

(Harris, 1984, cited on p. 97)

As a rule, adults stay out of children's play, but will react swiftly if one child has behaved violently towards another.

(p. 97)

The lack of adult intrusion in most children's activities means that play and exploration is very much child directed.

(p. 97)

... a significant part of an Aboriginal child's learning occurs within the peer group. The peer group or 'kid's group' is defined ... as being made up of a group of children, usually related to one another who spend most of their time together almost completely free of adult supervision.

(p. 112)

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**REFERENCE**

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

At rituals children do play with others whom they do not see frequently but usually these are children of distant kin...

(p. 73)

[The] most important function [of the peer group] is the setting for play which it provides, the kind of play that children indulge in, unregulated by adults... At the under 5-years level most peer group play goes on in the sight of adults, although as children get older they start to slip off into the bush.

(p. 76)

There is also no superiority/inferiority based on relative age... and the dominance of 'big kids' is unknown.

(p. 76)

[Younger] children spend almost all their time in close physical contact with others... a great many [older] children are found to be alone or exclusively in company with other children away from immediate adult supervision.

(p. 85)

The peer group remains the main focus of interest to the boys and often includes many children, so that up to 20 boys are seen racing, swimming, climbing trees and disappearing into the bush.

(p. 102)

Small groups of young girls, usually no more than 4 or 5 in number, frequently go off alone into the bush or to the beach, and usually return with a small amount of food to share with their female relations.

(p. 104)

The peer group for boys remains the most important source of companionship.

(p. 104)

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**REFERENCE**

Longbottom, S 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 1 July 2009, La Perouse, Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Koori

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

We would go diving, fishing for abalone, oysters off the rocks and diving for mussels. The kids enjoyed it and it is good for them, all the kids are together and they have freedom together. At night time we'd sit around the camp fire toasting marshmallows. All the Aunties and Uncles and everyone together.

Through [footy] they came in contact with other boys and relatives they didn't know existed. Then they keep in touch. Sport is a meeting place, rugby, netball etc. that is our culture as well, because so many of our young people are so talented.

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**REFERENCE**

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G 2001, 'Family for the Future Project – Buai sei boey wagem: parenting in the Torres Strait Islands', *Family Matters*, no. 59, Winter

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu, Mabuiag, Warraber, Mer (Murray Island) and Thursday Island)

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal in collaboration with community

One of the strengths of Islander families was the sharing of activities between parents and children: 'They go fishing together, work in the house together, go to functions in the community together, go to church together' (Warraber key informant).

(p. 49)

... In the past, parents said that the games and toys they played with were largely a product of their imagination.

(p. 52)

'Children before – we used to make our own toys... it gives you imagination, you learn to create things' (Mer key informant).

(p. 52)

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**REFERENCE**

Hammond, C 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 29 May 2009, Newcastle

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Moree

**AUTHOR**

Living on a mission, and playing with up to 40 kids at a time. We'd go camping, fishing, fix-up old bikes and play footy. Back then it felt like a very safe place to be and live. We didn't have anything to worry about... We had a sense of security, that group of 30, 40, 50 kids ... that sense of belonging ...

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**REFERENCE**

Winch, J 1999, 'Aboriginal Youth', *New Doctor*, Summer Edition

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

Children of all age groups mix and mingle with each other; in particular, older children helping looking after younger ones. They are very caring together.

(p. 23)

Older children take over the guidance role when away from the mother figure. They have quite a large play range and feel comfortable in play at some distance from their caretaker.

(p. 23)

The Aboriginal child is physically skilled and rarely has bad accidents when at play.

(p. 23)

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**REFERENCE**

Windisch, LE, Jenvey, VB and Drysdale, M 2003, 'Indigenous Parents' ratings of the importance of play, indigenous games and language, and early childhood education', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, vol. 28, no. 3, September

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General (Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales and Western Australia)

**AUTHORS**

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

[There is] a rich and varied store of Indigenous games and toys. These range from, for example, arrangements of leaves to represent family and kinship groups and toys from natural materials (Haagen, 1994).

(p. 53)

Indigenous parents... placed strong emphasis on early childhood education, and the transmission of their culture through maintenance of Indigenous-specific play and recreation, toy-making skills, and the use of Indigenous language(s).

(p. 56)

... there was generally a very high opinion of ... the importance of play [and] the importance of playing Indigenous games and maintaining Indigenous toy-making skills.

(p. 53)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2004, *Indigenous Parenting Project: Executive summary*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

Safety in the community was not an issue a generation ago. Parents feel there is now more pressure on them to provide recreation/play options for children because they feel it is no longer safe for children to play 'on the streets'.

(p. 21)

In regards to technology, parents felt that video games and the like were also violent and that children preferred these games to more traditional recreation options.

(p. 22)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

The peer group is mainly made up of siblings and cousins as well as some outside their kinship structure.

(p. 25)

Within this group a child is able to test his/her independence and develop within a caring structure. Often this group will be either all boys or all girls, and will be the same peer group all throughout their adult life.

(p. 25)

# Eating

The information contained in this section lists some of the values and practices around eating and food sharing

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

"Children from an early age are expected to take food as they want it whenever it is available, and if they want to eat damper while the parents eat other foods, then that is their decision... No one ever 'feeds' the child. Food is made available and children eat, or not, as they choose."

(Hamilton 1981, cited on p. 102)

In Yapa (Aboriginal) child rearing practices the 'right time' to feed a child is when they are hungry ... This is in contrast to the mainstream practice of establishing routines for sleeping, feeding and activity.

(p. 52)

"... Babies and small children are fed when ever they are hungry. Breast-feeding is on demand and where ever the mother is at the time. Sometimes another mother will breast-feed a relation's baby... Breast milk any time when hungry. Kids get it themselves."

(Waltja Tjutangku Palapayi 2001, cited on p. 52)

## REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

Babies are fed at any time. They are fed whenever they cry, but not only then. Traditionally the child received only mother's milk until its first teeth were cut.

(p. 31)

They learnt [what 'good tucker' is] when adults gave them pieces of different kinds of food to chew [as soon as they are able to hold it themselves]. Beyond this, if a child felt hungry it should get food for itself by crying or cajoling food from someone who had it. In their [Anbarra] thinking, if a child

did not demonstrate a need for solid food by crying or begging then it was not hungry, and if it was not hungry there was no point in feeding it.

(p. 52)

When demands [for food] occur they are readily and freely met, without strain or anger from the mother... she takes little trouble to structure eating patterns, so that food is usually snatched in between some other activities and eaten casually and hurriedly.

(p. 52)

Most 18-month-old children are quick to use the 'supplication gesture' to obtain food for themselves.

(p. 53)

Much exploratory activity is directed at food... Items of food that the child can hold in its hands are gazed at, touched, tasted and explored in all possible ways by young children, even at the expense of not eating them.

(p. 56)

The child eats as the food supply allows and becomes better at cajoling; somewhere in this period children recognise the approach of people with food and run to get their share whenever they can.

(p. 70)

Children are not only willing but anxious to share the food they receive.

(p. 76)

No young child is weaned unless another sibling is born.

(p. 126)

The infant cries, the caretaker feeds. When it is old enough it grabs the breast for food itself. If it does not grab it, it does not want it...

(p. 128)

One of the most consistent pressures brought to bear on children from their earliest years is the requirement that they share food.

(p. 150)

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**REFERENCE**

Anon, SNAICC Conference 2010: Ampe Anwernekenhake – For Our Children, Alice Springs Conference Centre, 27–29 July 2010

Eating together as a family – not in front of the TV – allows us to yarn, laugh and enjoy togetherness.

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Torres Strait Islands

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

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**REFERENCE**

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G 2001, 'Family for the Future Project – Buai sei boey wagel: parenting in the Torres Strait Islands', *Family Matters*, no. 59, Winter

In earlier generations fishing, hunting, gathering and gardening were the major, if not sole, means of sustenance. While many of these activities are maintained today, they have taken on a more recreational character as well.

(p. 50)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu, Mabuig, Warraber, Mer (Murray Island) and Thursday Island)

**AUTHORS**

Non-Aboriginal in collaboration with community

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**REFERENCE**

Malin, M, Campbell, K & Agius, L 1996, 'Raising children in the Nunga Way', *Family Matters*, no. 43, Autumn

She [the mother] finds it far better to let the children come and help themselves to food... children each know how much they want and what they want and they waste less if it is left up to them to serve themselves. It is also up to them as to whether they let the food get cold before they eat it or not.

(p. 44)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Nunga

**AUTHORS**

Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal

... she [the mother] is always aware of who has eaten or who has not eaten, and ensures that there is enough food left for the last child who comes to eat.

(p. 44)

# Sleeping

## Some of the beliefs and practices surrounding sleeping and sleeping arrangements for children are detailed

### REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region

### AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Yapa children never sleep on their own, and it is rarely a quiet environment for sleeping because they are always with their mother and other family members.

(p. 16)

“Babies and small children fall asleep whenever they like, wherever they are... This may be a very noisy or busy place. Children often lie down together on one blanket or mattress...”

(Waltja Tjutangku Palapayi 2001, cited on p. 52)

In Yapa (Aboriginal) child rearing practices ... The 'right time' for a child to sleep is when they fall asleep.

(p. 52)

Many people may share a house, sleeping arrangements may alter frequently, and lots of human interaction, music, TV and visitors may punctuate an average day.

(p. 53)

“Where there is little kids there is noise! Televisions are on really loud and music is played loud. When people are in groups they often speak loudly. Noise levels do not drop for children to sleep. When kids play and make noise mother or other family members know that they are having fun but when there's no noise we'll worry something's happened.”

(Waltja 2001, cited on p. 53)

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**REFERENCE**

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

Adults do not expect children to go to sleep at any particular time. After the evening meal they generally play and shout around the camp area, and as darkness draws in, one after the other returns to the family camp fire and falls asleep.

(p. 71)

All children and most adults sleep at midday for as long as 3 hours if they can. Each mother lies on her own blanket with her children ranged beside her generally in order of age. The 18-month-old often sleeps beside his grandmother at midday and may fall asleep at her camp at night, to be carried home later.

(p. 71)

If it [the child] wants to fall asleep, then that is exactly what it will do. If it wants to be awake, that is also it's choice.

(p. 128)

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**REFERENCE**

Hammond, C 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 29 May 2009, Newcastle

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Moree

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

... for different children, different age groups, you adjust for that different child. They will have a different way of sleeping and who with. For example, my eldest fella felt better in a cot and not with his mother or me. But with my youngest, he had to sleep with his mother ... he had to know she was there and had to feel her.

# Hopes

This section includes positive reflections on the future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and culture

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

... [Aboriginal communities] hope that through education their children will be able to take over the management of all aspects of life in their communities, so that they can achieve a greater sense of political and economic independence (Vaarzon-Morel 1995; Harper 1999).

(p. 52)

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

## REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

For the Anbarra the child has freedom, the adult has responsibility, and perhaps the major responsibility is to ensure that the children of the next generation are given the same freedom as those of the previous one; that they, in turn, can grow up following Aboriginal law with confidence and a sense of personal worth.

(p. 113)

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land (Anbarra)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Malin, M, Campbell, K & Agius, L 1996, 'Raising children in the Nunga Way', *Family Matters*, no. 43, Autumn

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Nunga

**AUTHORS**

Aboriginal and  
Non-Aboriginal

'[I hope that] my kids are happy and loved and growing up in a way that they can look after themselves and do the right thing by their family. They know who they are and where they belong...'

(p. 43)

[The mother] wanted independent, self-resilient children who remembered who they were in terms of family and their Nunga heritage, and their accompanying obligations to immediate family and kin.

(p. 44)

It was important ... that the children learn to stand on their own two feet from as young an age as possible; that they are able to defend themselves when threatened; and that they develop acumen that would prevent them from being exploited ... to be physically and emotionally resilient, to be uncomplaining, to be able to laugh at themselves... to know what they wanted and how to get it.

(p. 44)

[The mother] hoped the children would always remember their family responsibilities, hold their heads up high and be proud of being Nunga.

(p. 44)

[Children] would be able and willing to care for each other, particularly their younger kin; that they would know how to offer physical assistance necessary to keep the very young fed, clothed, healthy and safe while also being able to offer them love, affection and emotional and spiritual support.

(p. 44)

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**REFERENCE**

Longbottom, S 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 1 July 2009, La Perouse, Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Koori

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

For me, the biggest thing that I have tried to teach my kids is that they need an education, they do need to be at school... I want them to know they can achieve... These kids can be our next lawyers and doctors, whatever they want.

The young people today have so much more opportunities to learn about culture too, and having a good education and being able to stay at school, and being a leader in their community.

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**REFERENCE**

Bourke, E 1993, 'The First Australians: kinship, family and identity', *Family Matters*, August, no. 35, 1993

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

"Children are vitally important. For us they are the future and hope. We cannot afford to lose our most precious resource. It is necessary we instil in them a sense of pride in their own history and culture so that they too have a chance, like other Australians, of knowing who they are and why."

(Daylight and Johnstone, cited on p. 5)

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**REFERENCE**

Malin, M 1997, 'Mrs Evers is no Ogre: a micro study in the exercise of power', in G Cowlshaw and B Morris (eds), *Race Matters*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Metropolitan Adelaide

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

In the Aboriginal families, the major restriction on a child's individual autonomy was the adults' expectation that children modify their independent drive with a nurturing and socially considerate orientation. In other words, it was hoped that the child would become self-reliant and self-regulating while also being always aware of others' needs and be able to help out when needed.

(p. 141)

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**REFERENCE**

Anon, SNAICC Conference 2010: Ampe Anwernekenhake – For Our Children, Alice Springs Conference Centre, 27–29 July 2010

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Noongar

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

Hope is something that drives you to survive, against all odds, against countless adversities. Hope exists with my mob because of the belief we are going to survive another 40,000 years and beyond.

# Child rearing practices compared with mainstream practices

Some differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices and non-indigenous child rearing practices are detailed in this section

## REFERENCE

Yeo, S 2003, 'Bonding and Attachment of Australian Aboriginal Children', *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 12, pp. 292–304

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

General (none noted)

## AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

There is no one Aboriginal child-rearing practice... within each clan there is wide variation in the child-rearing practices.

(p. 297)

## REFERENCE

Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, *Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Aboriginal Child Rearing & Associated Research: A Review of the Literature, Department of Family & Community Services, Canberra

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Australia wide literature review instigated by Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation working with communities in the central desert region.

## AUTHORS

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Ngaaritjan-Kessarlis (1994) articulates the role of the grandmother in describing her own upbringing... She notes that it differed from the non-Aboriginal nuclear families represented in books at school, in which grandparents were visited for short periods and had no real authority over their grandchildren's upbringing.

(p. 62)

The major differences observed [between] traditional or semi-traditional Aboriginal [and] mainstream child rearing were:

- 1 Punishments such as smacking, hitting or isolating the child were not in evidence.
- 2 The biological parents were not expected to exclusively control their own child's behaviours. Encouraging children to conform to codes of behaviour was a shared focus for the extended family and community.

There was not an undue emphasis on obedience to an adult's commands. If a child chose not to obey, their choice was accepted and not judged harshly.

(p. 87)

“Risk taking, trial-and-error and curiosity are often expressed in the western culture through questions and answers. (Harris 1984.) Since asking questions is neither modelled nor encouraged in most Aboriginal settings, children would not be exhibiting trial-and-error or curiosity through those avenues.”

(Bavin 1993, cited on p. 115)

“The question–answer routine found in some societies is not part of the interaction between a Warlpiri mother and her child. Such routines tend to be limited to societies with books and pictures, and books are not found in Warlpiri camps.”

(Bavin 1993, cited on p. 115)

This is not to say that Yapa and Anangu do not acknowledge and adhere to mainstream practices when they consider it appropriate to do so. Rather, many Aboriginal communities in the desert regions have a commitment to a ‘both ways’ approach. Keeping their cultures strong and following *Jukurrpa* [The Dreaming / Dreamtime / Lore / Law] does not mean rejecting change.

(p. 52)

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#### REFERENCE

Hamilton, A 1981, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

#### REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

North-central Arnhem Land  
(Anbarra)

#### AUTHOR

Non-Aboriginal

Whereas in [European] society (and others) the child and its mother are isolated as a separate, mutually dependent and exclusive dyad, the Aboriginal child is placed immediately into a group relationship ... Since the child does not attach exclusively to its mother, nor equally to each member of the group, a kind of balance emerges between the child as a separate individual in relation to its mother and as a member of a group.

(p. 164)

## REFERENCE

Batrouney, T and Soriano, G  
2001, 'Family for the Future  
Project – Buai sei boey wapel:  
parenting in the Torres Strait  
Islands', *Family Matters*,  
no. 59, Winter

## REGION/GROUP/ GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Torres Strait Islands (Boigu,  
Mabuiag, Warraber, Mer  
(Murray Island) and Thursday  
Island)

## AUTHORS

Non-Aboriginal in  
collaboration with  
community

They [the participants of the study]... reflected communities in transition from traditional to contemporary lifestyles.

(p. 50)

The experience of modern mainstream Australia leads many [Torres Strait] Islander families to encompass, often uncomfortably, two value systems.

(p. 51)

Parents strongly recognise the need to grow up their children to live in both worlds. Thus they are faced with the challenging task of passing on island traditions (which to a large extent are orally transmitted) yet at the same time helping their children acquire skills relevant to their future success.

(p. 51)

Island children are growing up in a social world marked by changing and at times conflicting values and norms... elders are seeking to teach them values and behaviour appropriate to their religious, social and family traditions. At the same time they are experiencing changes to the traditional authority structure within family and community.

(p. 52)

... the parenting of Island children needs to reconcile the influences of the two worlds they inhabit [Torres Strait Islander culture and mainstream culture].

(p. 52)

'We need modern life to fit with cultural life. If not, don't know where we are, who we are'.

(Warraber young father, cited on p. 53)

A lack of facilities and services [along with] excessive use of alcohol and drugs were mentioned as community disadvantages in bringing up children.

(p. 53)

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**REFERENCE**

Anson, E 1988, 'Child rearing on Darnley Island: An Islander's account', *Queensland Researcher QJER*, vol. 4, issue 2

Some of the child raising practices mentioned [previously] are changing with new circumstances.

(p. 71)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Erub (Darnley Island)

**AUTHOR**

Torres Strait Islander

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**REFERENCE**

Howard, S 2001, 'Fathering and Indigenous Families – a North Queensland community partnership', Paper presented at the Helping Families Change Conference, Melbourne, 22–24 February

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families... can be considered to be in a state of transition. Evans (2000) argued that when a 'modern' and a traditional Indigenous culture meet... the previously relatively stable norms, beliefs and practices become unclear.

(p. 3)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

North Queensland/general

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Winch, J 1999, 'Aboriginal Youth', *New Doctor*, Summer

In the classroom Aboriginal children are placed in a quandary... From the children's perspective all the rules have changed... they [may] become confused by the different cultural approaches... As time goes by the children either learn to code switch, adopting Western cultural styles, or drop out of the system (Groom & Hamilton 1995, Powdermaker 1966, Harkings 1951).

(p. 23)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

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**REFERENCE**

Malin, M 1997, 'Mrs Evers is no Ogre: a micro study in the exercise of power', in G Cowlshaw and B Morris (eds), *Race Matters*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

In Anglo families, the young children sought their parents' attention a great deal. However, the Aboriginal children, for much of the time that their parents were present, oriented to adults no more than to peers.

(p. 141)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Metropolitan Adelaide

**AUTHOR**

Non-Aboriginal

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[Children] were encouraged not to dwell on their own minor injuries or upsets and to resolve their own disputes. Several

Aboriginal parents stated that such characteristics as these were necessary if their children were to survive in a world ... largely hostile to their Aboriginality.

(p. 142)

The importance of autonomy for both the Aboriginal children and the adults of this study meant that direct, obvious control of children by adults towards their particular desired goals was considerably less than that exerted in the Anglo families.

(p. 142)

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2004, *Indigenous Parenting Project: Executive summary*

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

There are differences in the parenting and child rearing practices of Indigenous and non-Indigenous families in the main areas of child rearing such as sleeping, feeding, learning, discipline, playing, care and mobility.

(p. 13)

Indigenous parents with non-Indigenous partners reported the difficulty of raising a child with two cultures. Some said they felt pressure from the extended family of the non-Indigenous partner around parenting styles, with relatives pushing their belief that 'the white way is the right way'.

(p. 22)

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**REFERENCE**

Longbottom, S 2009, Interview with Jane Harrison on 1 July 2009, La Perouse Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Koori

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal

We have different ways of being. We're different at gatherings, when I am there with my Aboriginal relatives, you can be at ease, there is laughter and we have fun, and yet we are completely different with our white relatives. Even a funeral – a white funeral can be impersonal, while we show our love, respect and nurturing at an Aboriginal funeral.

With Koori families it is family first. The families know that education is important but families are first. For example, when there is a funeral, the whole community goes, not just one family, it is all the families. It is a cultural protocol... We all grieve differently, and non indigenous people don't understand the grieving process for us. Children are involved in things like a funeral as well, when they are often not exposed in non-Indigenous families.

In the non Indigenous world the expectations are that they will be doctors and lawyers but our expectations that they will be leaders in their own community. And the kids have those expectations too. They are helping their own community and making a contribution.

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**REFERENCE**

SNAICC 2010, *Working and Walking Together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are often larger than non-Indigenous families and provide connections that are of great strength for children and other family members (SNAICC 2005).

(p. 19)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

General/non-specific

Family is more broadly defined within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture than within white culture.

(p. 19)

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

The characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households are different from the majority of Australian households – they tend to be larger, non-nuclear and more fluid in composition.

(p. 20)

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**REFERENCE**

Yorganop Child Care Aboriginal Corporation, unpublished 'Noongar Knowledge of Child Rearing Project'

There is concern... about the effect of the imposition of Western child care values, practices and norms on their families.

(p. 11)

**REGION/GROUP/  
GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

Noongar nation, Western Australia (Medina, Rockingham, Mandurah; Armadale, Kelmscott and Gosnells; Midland; Fremantle Hilton area; and Koondoola, Balga, and Girrawheen)

**AUTHOR**

Aboriginal organisation

# Afterword

SNAICC hopes that this small sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices has provided some insights into the ways in which our children are brought up strong and proud. We hope to build a greater understanding of our culture, our families and our communities, so that our children are supported in all areas of life. When our children's family, community and culture are supported, our children will feel supported.

SNAICC urges all those supporting (and working with) our children to reflect the knowledge provided here, and to think about how this knowledge can be used

to provide a foundation on which to build culturally appropriate care, and service delivery.

SNAICC advocates for safe child care practices which promote children's wellbeing and a strong sense of pride in self and culture.

**NOTE:**

The Mabo Case was a milestone court ruling recognising *Native Title* in Australia. The High Court of Australia ruled against Terra Nullius, paving the way for Native Title claims by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

# Annotated bibliography

**Anson, E 1988,**

'Child Rearing on Darnley Island: an Islander's account',

*Queensland Researcher QJER*, vol. 4, no. 2

This paper is a personal account of child rearing on Erub (Darnley Island). This article discusses how families view child rearing and family responsibilities. It also provides details into practical life-skills taught to young boys and girls to assist in their development and community/family life on Erub.

**Batrouney, T and Soriano, G 2001,**

'Family for the Future Project – Buai sei boey wigel: parenting in the Torres Strait',

*Family Matters*, no. 59, Winter

This study was conducted with members of Boigu, Mabuiag, Warraber, Mer (Murray Island), and Thursday Island communities. Consultation was undertaken with community members to gain an understanding of parenting practices and child rearing approaches in the Torres Strait Islands. This article covers topics such as child rearing, family support, community life, and community access to services. This article also covers the conflict between traditional and contemporary lifestyles and practices.

**Bourke, E 1993,**

'The First Australians: kinship, family and identity',

*Family Matters*, no. 35, August

Examining family, kinship structures and cultural identity, Burke provides a brief overview of Aboriginal families and the growing up of Aboriginal children within the context of identity. Touching on traditional customs of child rearing and family life, Burke shows that, while traditional child rearing models are used today in many remote communities, those

living in urban or rural areas have a different family structure in which to raise children.

**Davis and Dikstein 1997,**

'It Just Doesn't Fit: the Tiwi family and the *Family Law Act* – can the two be reconciled?',

*Alternative Law Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, April

Davis and Dikstein's article investigates whether the *Family Law Act* (the Act) can sit comfortably with Tiwi Island culture and customary adoption protocols. Investigating the concept of 'family' under the Act, Davis and Dikstein highlight that Tiwi culture and family systems are not represented within the parameters of the Act. With a focus on Tiwi customary adoption principles, protocols and practices, and with an emphasis on the shared role of Tiwi women in the growing up of children, the authors argue that the Act does not take into consideration the cultural practices of the Tiwi family.

**de Ishtar and the Women Elders of the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre, Balgo, WA 2009,**

'Strong for Law, Strong for Culture: growing up resilient kids in a remote Kimberly community',

*Redress*, December

De Ishtar echoes the Women Elders of Balgo's argument that health and social issues facing their community of Balgo can be overcome by growing up children strong through Law and Culture. With an emphasis placed on combining traditional teachings with contemporary issues facing children, de Ishtar draws attention to the benefits of using traditional practices to instil a sense of strength in self (and pride in culture) in the lives of Aboriginal children.

(Please also see: *Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law*, Spinifex Press, 2005)

**Hamilton, A 1981,**

*Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in north-central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra

Hamilton's book provides an observers account of child rearing in North Central Arnhem Land during the 1960's. The families observed here have provided those interested in Aboriginal child rearing a thorough description of community child rearing practices, values and responsibilities. Hamilton's research covers areas of child development, family, community and cultural values, family obligations and reciprocal responsibilities, the child's peer group and the interaction between the social lives of children and their development of identity and understanding.

**Hammond, C 2009,**

Interview with Jane Harrison on 29 May 2009, Newcastle

**Howard, S 2001,**

'Fathering and Indigenous Families – a North Queensland community partnership',

Paper presented at the Helping Families Change Conference, Melbourne, 22–24 February

Howard draws attention to the lack of parenting programs for Aboriginal men. Howard believes culture plays a vital role in parenting programs and that the inclusive involvement of local community members is paramount in achieving positive outcomes for families and children. She argues that parenting programs for Aboriginal families and communities need to come from an Aboriginal perspective. The paper makes clear that, while parenting and family responsibilities, duties and expectations were once very clearly defined, the effects of colonisation have impacted greatly on family practices of Aboriginal Australians, particularly in relation to the role of men.

**Longbottom, S 2009,**

Interview with Jane Harrison on 1 July 2009, La Perouse, Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

**Malin, M 1997,**

'Mrs Eyers is no Ogre: a micro study in the exercise of power', in G Cowlshaw and B Morris (eds),

*Race Matters*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

Malin shows how the skills Aboriginal children bring with them to school are not valued in the classroom. In particular, she focuses on the autonomous, generous, attentive and helpful disposition of Aboriginal children. Malin shows that while Aboriginal children were more likely to provide other students with positive and supportive messages, they are less likely to receive positive messages from teachers. Malin concludes by contending that the cultural differences, both in values and in practical orientation, between the non-Aboriginal teacher and the Aboriginal children create a classroom in which the strengths, learning styles and perspective of Aboriginal children was not utilised, or valued.

**Malin, M, Campbell, K and Agius, L 1996,**

'Raising Children in the Nunga Way',

*Family Matters*, no. 43, Autumn

This article provides insight into Aboriginal child rearing in a contemporary urban setting. Using two families as case examples, Malin, Campbell and Agius attempt to show the cultural differences that affect child rearing practices, in a contemporary environment. The study examines the way in which culturally different families interact with their children. This is a comparative study that aims to highlight the differences between Nunga child rearing and European-based child practices by analysing family values and child-parent-sibling interactions.

### **SNAICC 2004,**

*Indigenous Parenting Project:  
Executive Summary*

This resource has been developed from the research conducted through SNAICC's Indigenous Parenting Project. It is a resource for policy makers, service providers and those working with, and supporting, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. Some of the values and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in relation to parenting are discussed in this resource.

### **SNAICC 2010,**

*Working and Walking together: supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*

From a strengths-based perspective, this resource details some of the child rearing practices that take place in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This resource covers areas such as the importance of grandparents, the roles of uncles and aunts, and the involvement of the wider community in the growing up of children. With an emphasis on promoting cultural competency in the family welfare services sector, SNAICC has developed this resource to support non-indigenous services to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with appropriate service delivery.

### **SNAICC Conference 2010: Ampe Anwernekenhake – For Our Children,**

Alice Springs Conference Centre,  
27–29 July 2010.

### **Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002,**

*Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku – 'Working Together Everyone and Listening'*, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra

Instigated by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation, this literature review details some of the available texts on Aboriginal child rearing practices, and discusses Aboriginal approaches to child rearing. The research contained in this review provides information on some of the values and practices that continue to inform and guide the growing up of Aboriginal children, and includes topics such as language, learning, culture, sleeping and eating.

SEE ALSO:

### **Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation,**

*Pipirri Wiimaku "for the little kids"*  
*Innovative Child Care Report 2000-2001,*  
2001

### **Winch, J 1999,**

*'Aboriginal Youth',  
New Doctor, Summer*

Drawing on the child rearing practices of Aboriginal Australians, Winch provides an account of the environment in which Aboriginal youth and children find themselves when they enter a school classroom. She highlights the conflict between Aboriginal child rearing practices (and values) and the processes of the western education system as played out in the classroom. She points to the different cultural messages received by the child within the classroom and shows how this creates a situation whereby a child must learn to 'code switch' between cultures in order to be able engage with, and learn, within the classroom setting.

**Windisch, LE, Jenvey, VB  
and Drysdale, M 2003,**

'Indigenous Parents' Ratings of the Importance of Play, Indigenous games and language, and early childhood education', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, vol. 23, no. 3

With a focus on early learning, Windisch, Jenvey and Drysdale draw attention to the low levels of Aboriginal engagement in 'mainstream early childhood education'. Highlighting that mainstream organisations are not considered culturally relevant or appropriate, the researchers attempt to gauge Aboriginal parents' beliefs regarding early childhood and their attitudes toward Aboriginal childcare programs. This small study examined to what extent parents valued and supported Aboriginal early childhood education programs.

**Yeo, S 2003,**

'Bonding and Attachment of Australian Aboriginal Children', *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 12, issue 5, September–October

Yeo shows that western concepts of child attachment do not reflect the child rearing practices or values in Aboriginal cultures. Within this context, Yeo provides a practical basis for this argument - highlighting the child rearing practices of a number of Aboriginal families and communities. Within a child attachment context, the differences in cultural perspectives, kin and family relationships and cultural values are discussed and analysed.

**Yorganop Child Care Aboriginal Corporation, unpublished**

'Noongar Knowledge of Child Rearing Project'



This resource details some of the available literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices from around Australia. It is a tool for researchers and policy makers, child care workers, educators, protection workers, family support workers and for all those working along side our children and families, and for those interested in learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing. It is vital that those who work with our children and families, and those who are involved in developing policy affecting our children and families, have an understanding of the way in which our children are brought up. It is also important to be aware of the values that guide such practices in order to provide culturally appropriate service development and delivery for our children and families.

### **This resource contains:**

- A guide on how to use the resource
- Quotes on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices from 15 published texts, and more
- Quotes ordered thematically for easy access to information
- A brief summary of each of these sources

#### **PUBLISHER**



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