



## **Baby Makes 3** **Information for Referring agencies**

### ***A violence prevention program***

First time parents are a key target group for primary prevention activity. The transition to parenthood represents a 'window period' during which it is possible to engage and work with both men and women when traditional notions of parenthood are exerting a powerful influence on how they approach and negotiate their parenting roles. The decisions that couples make during this key stage of life can have important consequences on the level of equality within their relationship, and between men and women more generally. It is a time that families often expect to be filled with happiness and joy but unfortunately, it is also a time when relationship difficulties can become established, and male family violence can escalate. As a form of *primary* prevention, the program, rather than responding to incidents of family violence, is aimed at promoting respectful relationships, safety and wellbeing. In this way the program seeks to influence relationship dynamics at a crucial stage of the life cycle, *before* violence occurs.

### **Aim**

To promote equal and respectful relationships between first-time parents, by raising awareness of the importance and benefits of maintaining gender equality during the transition to parenthood.

### **Objectives**

To increase the capacity of first time parents to build equal and respectful relationships in response to the lifestyle and relationship changes that follow the birth of a child.

### **What happens?**

Mum, dad and baby attend a two hour session, once a week for three weeks. Information is provided by two group leaders– a male and a female.

### **Couples learn:**

With the birth of a baby, a couple becomes a family -

- At the level of the family, a whole range of new activities and responsibilities come into being.
- These new activities and responsibilities, in turn, impact at the level of the couple's relationship.
- The impacts on their relationship are not always immediately obvious because parents are focussed on the needs of their baby.
- The *Baby Makes 3* program is an opportunity to pay close attention to relationship changes and to think about the ways couples can respond to relationship demands following the birth of a child.

- The best thing any couple can give their baby is a healthy relationship between mum and dad.

**Topics covered over the 3 weeks of the program:**

- Lifestyle changes
- Housework – who does what and what does that mean
- Communication
- Maintaining Intimacy
- Expectations of mums and dads
- Balancing work and family
- What we mean by ‘healthy relationships’
- Dealing with conflict.

**We look at:**

- What messages do we get from society and our family about how to be a new mum/new dad?
- What does it mean to be a good mum/dad?

These expectations change the balance in a couple’s relationship. Relationships that were relatively equal before the birth can suddenly become unequal and if the impact of ‘expectations’ is not acknowledged, it can have negative implications for any couple’s relationship.

We look at ways of responding to this change in ways that can help maintain a healthy relationship –

- To develop a shared understanding that *equality* is fundamental to a healthy relationship
- To gain an understanding of what is meant by ‘meaningful equality’
- To understand the two aspects of meaningful equality – ‘respect’ and ‘responsibility’
- To assist couples to develop a shared understanding of what behaviours constitute violence and abuse
- To raise awareness of the difference between anger and violence
- To draw linkages between intimate partner violence and the transition to parenthood

Baby Makes Three was developed, piloted and evaluated by Victorian Health. In January 2015, Victorian Health came up to Port Stephens to train our staff.

For more information phone Port Stephens Family and Neighbourhood Services 49874674 and ask for Ali or Sue.