

# COPARENTING CHILD BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

How to Support Parents to Reduce Child Behaviour Problems by Strengthening the  
Coparenting Relationship: A Delphi Consensus Study

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### **Declarations - Statement of Originality**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository\*\*, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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### **Acknowledgement of Collaboration**

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has been done in collaboration with other researchers. I have included as part of the thesis a statement clearly outlining the extent of collaboration, with whom and under what auspices.

Freya Powe contributed to the design of the current study in collaboration with her primary supervisor Dr Linda Campbell. Freya contributed to the development and implementation of the surveys, undertook and interpreted the results, considered the implications of the findings and wrote the current body of work with editing provided by her primary supervisor, Dr Linda Campbell.

### **Statement of Authorship**

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains a manuscript of which I am a joint author. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, attesting to my contribution to the joint work.

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This thesis has been formatted as a manuscript to be submitted to the Journal of Behavior Modification. See Appendix A for author guidelines. Please note that the tables and figures have been included in-text for the purpose of thesis to be easily reviewed and examined.

How to Support Parents to Reduce Child Behaviour Problems by Strengthening the  
Coparenting Relationship: A Delphi Consensus Study

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### **Abstract**

Parenting programs addressing coparenting skills, are very effective in reducing problematic child behaviours. Barriers to participation in parenting programs highlight a need for flexible and accessible programs. The current study is the first step in designing a text-message based intervention aimed at strengthening coparenting skills to reduce child problem behaviours. A three phase Delphi study was conducted with two panels, which consisted of 13 multidisciplinary professionals with expertise in child behaviour problems and 10 parents with experience of child behaviour problems. A series of structured online surveys explored participant's opinions. Results found 19 overarching themes for the professional group and 106 subtopics. There were 14 overarching themes for the parent group, with 98 subtopics. Topics had high consistency between panels and with existing literature and ranged from communication and behaviour management skills to parenting practices. Sample messages were screened for further development, to improve coparenting and address problem child behaviours.

## How to Support Parents to Reduce Child Behaviour Problems by Strengthening the Coparenting Relationship: A Delphi Consensus Study

Coparenting plays a central role in the family unit and has been widely demonstrated to uniquely predict child behaviour problems (McConnell & Kerig, 2002; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001). Coparenting includes, at least, two individuals regardless of the couple's sexual orientation or whether the child is biologically related to their caregivers (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). Coparenting can be defined as the ways that parents or parental figures relate to each other in their role as parents (Feinberg, 2003). Importantly though, coparenting is considered triadic in nature, as it relates not only to the interactions between the parents, but also the relationship and interactions with the child. Coparenting certainly overlaps and is influenced by other facets of the relationship as well as societal norms. However, coparenting is considered a distinct construct that serves the specific function of meeting a child's needs for physical, social and emotional support, safety and development (Feinberg, 2003; Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). Evidence has consistently found that poor coparenting is linked to an increased risk of child and adolescent emotional and behavioural problems (Feinberg, 2003; Jones et al., 2018). This provides a strong argument for targeting the coparenting relationship when aiming at reducing child behaviour problems.

### **Coparenting**

Family systems theory played an important role in the emergence of coparenting research. According to family systems theory, the family unit is made up of different subsystems, with the coparenting relationship forming part of the executive subsystem that regulates family interactions and outcomes (Minuchin, 1985). Coparenting research also has roots in object relational theory, where the parenting alliance is described as a distinct and significant process that facilitates family cohesion. It has been proposed that coparenting is