

TUNING IN TO KIDS: EVALUATING AN EMOTION-COACHING PARENTING
PROGRAMME AMONG STEPFAMILIES

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Abstract

Transitioning into a stepfamily can be an emotionally turbulent time for everyone involved. Stepfamily members, as well as the stepfamily as a whole, are faced with many unique challenges, including adapting to changes in family dynamics and routines, forming new step-relationships, and establishing solidarity within the stepfamily system. The stepparent-stepchild relationship is thought to be one of the most critical relationships to the overall functioning of the stepfamily. Yet, the involuntary nature of the relationship, the ambiguity that surrounds a stepparent's role and boundaries, non-biological ties, and lack of shared history means the development of a positive stepparent-stepchild relationship can be one of the most difficult tasks. This study explored the effectiveness and suitability of an emotion-focused parenting programme on stepparents' emotional parenting styles and practices, stepchildren's behaviour, and stepparents' overall family satisfaction. Participants were nine stepparents from around Christchurch who agreed to participate in a six-week Tuning in to Kids parenting programme, specifically adapted for stepparents. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected via pre- and post-programme questionnaires and brief phone interviews. Results from the quantitative analyses showed improvements in stepparents' emotion regulation, emotion coaching and empathy, lower emotion dismissing, increased warmth and sensitivity, and lower over-reactivity. Stepparents also reported greater overall family satisfaction. No significant differences were found for stepparents' lax/inconsistent discipline or stepchildren's behaviour. Five main themes were generated from the qualitative data relating to the positive experience; increased emotional awareness, group connectedness, impact of adaptations, and identified challenges. Results are discussed in relation to a family systems perspective underlying the stepfamily literature, emotional development research, and in comparison to previously established parenting programmes. Overall, the study shows promising preliminary findings to suggest that an emotion-focused programme is a suitable and potentially effective approach for providing support to stepparents.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Contemporary families of New Zealand look considerably different compared to what they looked like half a century ago. Consistent with international trends, New Zealand families have experienced rapid changes over the past 50 years, resulting in greater diversity of family forms and structures, and fluidity of relationships among families (Families Commission, 2008). Changes in family formation, such as cohabitation, dissolution of relationships and re-partnering, have become far more common across the last few decades (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). As such, family structures of step and blended families are becoming increasingly recognised as distinct family types.

The New Zealand census is yet to collect specific data on stepfamilies; therefore, there is little information regarding the prevalence of step and blended families in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). However, in 2015 almost half of the divorces registered in New Zealand involved children under the age of 17 years and approximately one third of marriages registered were considered remarriages whereby for one or both partners it was not their first marriage (Statistics New Zealand, 2016). It is important to note that these statistics only reflect marriages and divorces that were legally registered in 2015. With cohabitation and de facto relationships becoming increasingly common in New Zealand, the above statistics do not account for children under the age of 17 years involved in unregistered relationship dissolutions and re-partnering.

Data from the Christchurch Health and Development study provides some indication of the proportion of New Zealand children who have experienced family transitions throughout their childhood. For example, of a birth cohort of 1265, around 1 in 6 children lived in a step/blended family for a period between the ages of 6 and 16 years (Nicholson, Fergusson, & Horwood, 1999). Likewise, Dharmalingam, Pool, Sceats, and Mackay (2004)

estimated that approximately 1 in 5 New Zealand children under 17 years of age live in step/blended families for some length of time. In this way, it seems that in today's society many New Zealand children have experienced, or will experience, multiple family transitions across their childhood.

A majority of both children and adults involved in the formation of a step or blended family demonstrate resiliency through family transitions and are able to cope effectively with changes to their family situation (Hetherington, 2003). Nevertheless, on average, children and adults in stepfamilies tend to experience more challenges, daily stressors and problems with family relations than those in first marriage families (Hetherington, 2003). Children and adolescents often struggle to accept a stepparent and adapt to their new family situation (Cartwright, 2005). Consequently, studies have consistently shown that, on average, children in stepfamilies are at an increased risk for adjustment problems and poorer outcomes compared to children in first-marriage families (Pryor, 2004).

In addition, adults in stepfamilies often experience unique challenges throughout the transition from one family structure to another, such as ambiguity around their role and boundaries as a stepparent (Mobley, 2011). Due to a lack of biological ties, shared history, and attachment with a stepchild, stepparents can have difficulty establishing a close, warm relationship with stepchildren while taking on parental responsibilities (Hetherington, 2003). Further, stepparents may also face the challenges of negative stereotypes, conflict with the non-resident biological parents of stepchildren, and resentment or rejection from stepchildren (Pryor, 2014). As such, previous research has indicated that adults in stepfamilies report higher levels of depression (Foley et al., 2004), and greater exposure to conflict (Pasley & Garneau, 2012).

The complexities stepparents experience regarding their parenting role, such as the approach taken to develop a relationship with their stepchild, appears to play a vital role in the success of stepfamily transitions and children's adjustment in stepfamilies (Mobley, 2011; Pasley & Garneau, 2012). In this way, providing stepparents with appropriate research-based parenting information may benefit stepfamily transitions and assist stepparents with building a positive relationship with their stepchild (Miller & Cartwright, 2013). Despite a growing understanding of the challenges that step and blended families face, particularly in the early stages of family formation, and the prevalence of such families in New Zealand today, there appears to be a considerable lack of parenting support and resources available for stepparents going through these family transitions.

This thesis addresses the unique challenges faced by step and blended families and the need for an appropriate parenting-based resource for stepparents through the modification, implementation and evaluation of an emotion-based parenting programme targeting stepparents. The remainder of this chapter will focus on two major domains of psychological research and related theoretical perspectives that provide the context for this thesis. Namely, stepfamily functioning based on a family systems framework and children's emotional development and parenting, grounded in social learning mechanisms. This chapter ends with integrating the two literature domains to form the theoretical foundations of the current thesis.

1.1. Stepfamilies

Stepfamilies have always existed throughout history, however they are becoming increasingly prevalent in today's society and the pathway that leads to the formation of a stepfamily has dramatically changed over time (Pryor, 2014). In the past, the majority of stepfamilies formed after the death of a parent and there was a need for a second parental figure to help raise the children. Today, stepfamilies are commonly formed through the process of divorce and subsequent remarriage or re-partnering. As a result, stepfamily

structures of today are considerably diverse, fluid and complex (Pryor, 2014). This diversity leads to the difficulty of defining and classifying the different stepfamily structures.

A myriad of terminology can be found in the stepfamily literature to refer to stepfamilies in a broad sense, such as ‘reconstituted’, ‘blended’, ‘reorganised’ and ‘merged’ (Mobley, 2011). Further, the taxonomy used to differentiate specific stepfamily structures varies among researchers (Pryor, 2014). For this thesis, terminology has been adapted from Dharmalingam and colleague’s (2004) report on patterns of family formation and change in New Zealand to classify the three major stepfamily structures. A ‘simple’ stepfamily will refer to one where the stepparent has entered into an existing family unit with no biological children of their own. The two ‘complex’ stepfamily structures are divided into ‘partial-blended’ families involving the addition of biological children (half-siblings to stepchildren) into the stepfamily after the stepfamily has formed, and ‘full-blended’ families involving biological children of both partners from previous partnerships in the new family unit. Henceforth, the term ‘stepfamily’ will be used as an overarching term to refer to all step/blended family structures, including ‘simple’ stepfamilies, partial-blended families, and full-blended families.

When attempting to explore and understand something as complex as stepfamilies, it is important to utilise a framework as a foundation for making sense of the data gathered and interpreting information (Pryor, 2014). Several different theoretical perspectives are currently guiding stepfamily research, including family systems theory, cognitive theory, life course theory, and evolutionary theory (Mobley, 2011; Pryor, 2014). This thesis is guided by a family systems perspective along with other frameworks of child development and parenting discussed later in this chapter. A brief overview of family systems theory and the application of it to stepfamilies is provided below. Research on the challenges of establishing and living

in a stepfamily, for both children, parents, and the stepfamily as a whole, will then be discussed.

1.1.1. Family systems theory.

Family systems theory is a key theoretical framework that features frequently in the stepfamily literature. From this perspective, a family is conceptualised as being made up of dynamic and interdependent subsystems - including individual members, dyadic and triadic relationships - that form a complex integrated whole family system (Cox & Paley, 1997). These subsystems are said to be hierarchically organised with interactions occurring within and across levels (Cox & Paley, 1997). The subsystems mutually influence and inter-relate with each other as well as the system as a whole. In this way, the individual functioning of family members is dependent on the functioning of all the other individual, dyadic and triadic subsystems, relationships between these subsystems, characteristics of the whole family system, and larger systems in which the family system is embedded, such as the community (Cox & Paley, 1997). In turn, the functioning of the overall family system is both influenced by, and influences the individual, dyadic and triadic subsystems within the family (Pryor, 2014).

Murray Bowen's Family System Theory (Bowen Theory) is one theoretical model, grounded in systems thinking, that was developed to understand family processes and their influence on the individual functioning of family members (Bowen, 1978). Bowen Theory views the family as an emotional unit in which the individual members are emotionally connected to each other (Kerr, 2000). Fundamental to Bowen Theory is the idea that families live under an "emotional skin" established from each member's individual thoughts, feelings, actions, and interactions (Kerr, 2000). The family system's emotional skin is believed to directly influence all family processes and contribute to interpersonal relationships within the system and the overall functioning of the system (Kerr, 2000). In this way, Bowen Theory

implies that it is the emotional atmosphere created in a family system that is pertinent to the adaptive functioning of both the whole family system and its individual members, and not biological or historical ties of a family, albeit these certainly contribute to the emotional atmosphere.

A family systems perspective is an effective framework for studying stepfamily dynamics and relationships between different subsystems of a stepfamily, such as the parent-child, stepparent-child, parental, or stepsibling (Pryor, 2014). The change in family structures with the formation of stepfamilies means a change in both the quantity and quality of subsystems within a family system. Figure 1 depicts the organisational complexity of one particular stepfamily structure. Organisational complexity refers to all of the smaller subsystems within a family, namely the individual members, dyadic and triadic relationships, that together make up the overall family system (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011). In the figure, the black arrows represent the dyadic relationships while the coloured triangles represent the triadic subsystems. Figure 1 illustrates that in an original family system involving two parents and one child only three dyadic relationships exist (partner and two parent-child relationships) and one triadic relationship exists. In contrast, when a transition into a stepfamily occurs, in which one parent has re-partnered with another adult who has a child (the stepsibling), the number of dyadic relationships increases to nine and the number of triadic subsystems increases to seven.

The depiction classifies the stepfamily system based on the composition of the stepfamily, comprising those individuals living in one household; as such, the non-resident parent is excluded from the stepfamily system. However, as many non-resident parents continue to be involved in their children's lives, the relationships they have with the stepfamily members may influence the stepfamily systems and subsystems. That is, changes in pre-existing dyadic and triadic subsystems, and new dyadic and triadic subsystems that are

formed involving the non-resident parent are all likely to impact on the functioning of the overall stepfamily system. It is important to note that Figure 1 illustrates a pre-existing family structure with an only child that has changed into a stepfamily structure involving a stepparent and one stepsibling. A pre-existing family system involving more biological siblings, or a stepfamily structure involving more stepsiblings or half-siblings, would lead to an even greater number of dyadic and triadic relationships within the overall system. Similarly, the number of subsystems would also significantly increase if the non-resident parent were to re-partner, particularly if this partnership involved more children. In this way, it is clear that the organisational complexity of various stepfamily structures is elaborate and heterogeneous. The complexity of such family structures is simply too difficult to depict.

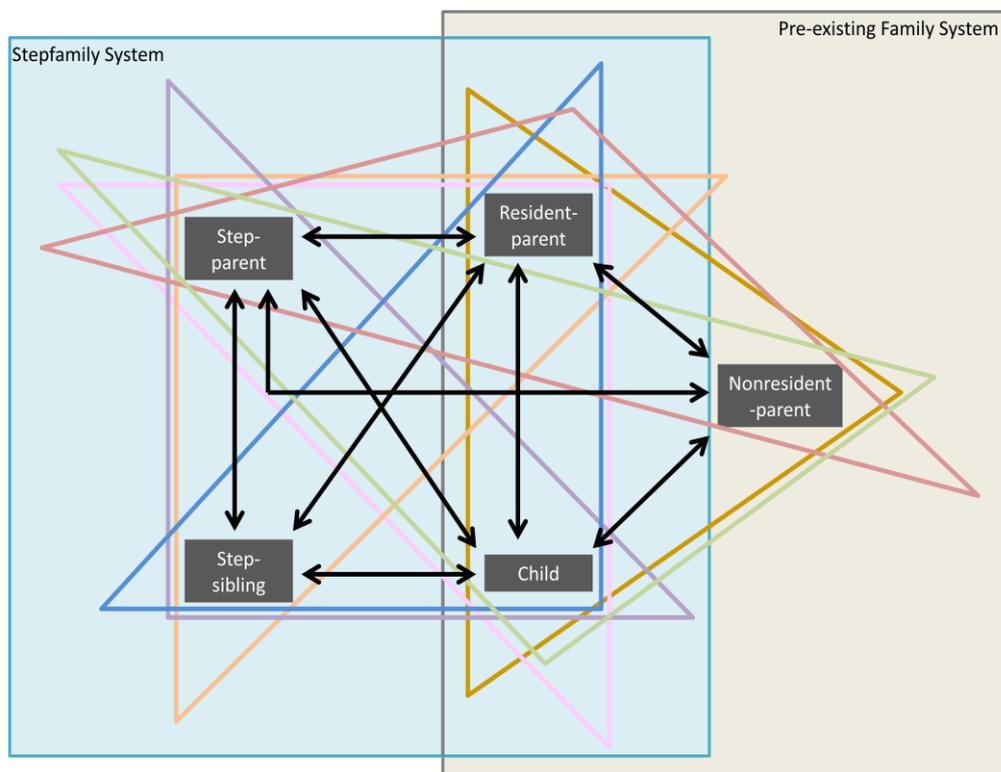


Figure 1. Graphic depiction of the organisational complexity of a stepfamily comprising of one child, a resident parent, a stepparent and one stepsibling, and a non-resident parent.

Every stepfamily shares the task of transitioning from a previous family climate and culture to a new household context involving new people, new relationships and dynamics, and perhaps even a new community. All individuals within a stepfamily will experience changes in, or a loss of, emotional connections with their original family, at the same time as living in a new household with people they are yet to form emotional connections with (Visher & Visher, 1990). Therefore, the way individuals of a stepfamily cope with this emotional turbulence through the transition period and other challenges they are faced with, will impact on the nature of the new emotional climate established in the stepfamily, and thus the adjustment of each individual, the relationships formed and the functioning of the whole stepfamily system.

The complexity and diversity of stepfamily structures means there is a multitude of factors that have the potential to influence the establishment of a stepfamily and the individual stepfamily members' adjustment into the stepfamily (Cartwright, 2012; Dunn, 2002; Hetherington, 2003; Pryor, 2014). As such, not all stepfamilies will experience the same issues. Nevertheless, it is evident that unique challenges exist for all stepfamilies when transitioning and adjusting to stepfamily life (Visher & Visher, 1990). The particular challenges faced by children in a stepfamily, stepparents, and the whole stepfamily system, and how these challenges influence the adjustment and functioning of the members and the stepfamily system are discussed in turn.

1.1.2. Stepchild challenges and adjustment.

Stepchildren may experience a number of challenges when faced with the task of adjusting into a new stepfamily. First, when transitioning into a stepfamily, stepchildren often have a considerable lack of choice and control throughout the transition process. Although the transition has a significant impact on the child's own life, stepchildren may not be consulted about the progression of the transition or living arrangements. They are required to

live with a new adult whom they did not choose and perhaps with new children as well (Pryor, 2004). Further, stepchildren who live between two households in a shared-care arrangement - which likely introduces even more challenges in itself - can experience two separate stepfamily transitions in the two different households.

Second, stepchildren have the task of re-negotiating their role within the stepfamily system and establishing functional boundaries between their relationships with different stepfamily members as well as their non-resident biological parent. They must determine what role they perceive the stepparent to play in their life and whether this is consistent with how the stepparent perceives their role in the child's life. This task can be made more complex when a stepchild faces a conflict in loyalty towards the non-resident biological parent (Pryor, 2004). Stepchildren may also feel a displacement in their existing role within the family, with the addition of other children in the household. As such, ambiguity may exist for stepchildren around their own role within the new stepfamily and where they sit in relation to other children present.

Third, stepchildren are likely to experience changes in their relationship with their biological parent as the parent begins to have less time to spend with the child and devotes increasing time and attention towards the stepparent (Pryor, 2004). The biological parent's time and attention may have to be shared even further if the stepparent brings children into the stepfamily. The interdependent nature of a family system means that the generation of these additional subsystems between the biological parent and new stepfamily members will influence, and be influenced by, existing relationships between the biological parent and their child (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011). Therefore, stepchildren are likely to experience a change in the emotional connections they have with their biological parent. In addition, the biological parent's parenting practices and styles may change throughout the transition as a result of either environmental or family stressors, or as the biological parent determines their own role

within the stepfamily. In this way, stepchildren also have the task of adapting to their biological parent's changing role within the family and determining the function of all stepfamily members. These challenges are only a few of what is likely to be a very comprehensive list of tasks and challenges that may be experienced by stepchildren.

As a result of these challenges, in the initial few years following change in the family structure, it is common for children to experience feelings of confusion, apprehension and resentment. For the majority of children, this emotional turbulence diminishes over time following the family transition (Pryor, 2004). However, empirical research has consistently shown that children in stepfamilies are at increased risk for adjustment problems and long-term negative outcomes compared to children in first-marriage families (Bray, 1992, 1999; Dunn, Deater-Deckard, Pickering, O'Connor, & Golding, 1998; Hetherington, 2003; Jaynes, 2006).

For example, a review by Hetherington (2003) has drawn together key findings from three longitudinal studies of marriage divorce and remarriage - namely the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage (Hetherington, 1993), The Hetherington and Clingempeel Study of Divorce and Remarriage (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992), and the National Study of Nonshared Environment (Hetherington et al., 1999). One of the studies lasted for approximately 30 years, and between the three studies, the findings reported by Hetherington (2003) were based on data collected from over 1400 families and 2500 children.

Overall, Hetherington concluded that marital transitions appear to have the most consistent effects on children's adjustment in the particular domains of externalising behaviour, social responsibility, and academic achievement (Hetherington, 2003). On average, children in stepfamilies display greater levels of aggression, non-compliance, and conduct disorders compared to children in first-marriage families (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Further, children in stepfamilies also show decreased social and

academic competence (Hetherington, 2003; Jeynes, 2006), and an increased risk for internalising difficulties, including depression, anxiety and low-self-esteem (Hetherington, 2003).

The literature examining the impact of divorce and remarriage on children's adjustment suggests that it is particular characteristics of the stepfamily that act as risk factors for later child adjustment problems (Dunn, 2003). The experience of multiple marital transitions has been shown to be a significant risk factor for poor developmental outcomes in stepchildren, including emotional maladjustment, behavioural difficulties, cognitive abilities and academic achievement (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007; Martinez & Forgatch, 2002). For example, the total number of family transitions has been shown to be positively associated with levels of offending in 11-13-year-old New Zealand children (Fergusson, Horwood, & Lynskey, 1992).

Other risk factors that have been identified as placing stepchildren at greater risk for adjustment problems include living in a 'complex' stepfamily environment that involves the combination of two pre-existing families, parental mental health problems, family conflict, and economic and social stress (Dunn, 2002). A study conducted by Tillman (2008) used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health carried out in the United States to examine the impact of living in a complex stepfamily on youths' academic achievement. The results showed that overall, living in a stepfamily during adolescence was associated with significantly lower levels of academic achievement and increased school-based behaviour problems compared to living in a two biological parent household. Further, youth living in a complex stepfamily with step- and/or half-siblings, displayed significantly poorer academic outcomes and heightened levels of school-based behaviour problems, above and beyond the effects seen as a result of living in any stepfamily structure (Tillman, 2008).

Therefore, while many stepchildren experience a brief period of emotional turbulence during the stepfamily transition and then recover to show adaptive development long-term, a substantial minority of children in stepfamilies show elevated risks for developing psychological, behavioural, social or educational problems later on in life. In particular, children who experience multiple family transitions over time or transition into a complex stepfamily structure tend to be more at risk of poorer outcomes long-term. In this way, it appears that the more instability and change that occurs to the child's overall family system or the greater the level of organisational complexity within the stepfamily system, the larger the impact on children's long-term adjustment.

1.1.3. Stepparent challenges and adjustment.

Similar to stepchildren, stepparents are also likely to face a number of challenges when establishing a new family system. First, adults involved in re-partnerships often dedicate little time to developing a positive, intimate relationship with each other prior to transitioning into a stepfamily (Cartwright, 2010a). As such, stepparents are commonly trying to establish a relationship with both their new partner and stepchildren simultaneously. Resistance or rejection from stepchildren, along with poor communication with their new partner regarding roles, parenting practices and boundaries prior to the transition, can exacerbate the difficulties and stress stepparents experience when establishing these relationships (Cartwright, 2010a, 2010b; Pryor, 2014).

Second, the creation of the stepparent role must occur alongside the development of the couple relationship, step-relationship, and new family climate. In first-marriage families, the shared history and emotional bonding of the relationship between partners becomes the foundation of the family system from which children are added. As such, in first-marriage families, negotiation of parenting roles between couples is often a gradual process that can begin to be established during pregnancy and infancy of a child, after a strong, mutual

relationship between the couple has formed (Graham, 2010). In contrast, within stepfamilies, a shared history and emotional bonding has already been established between the biological parent and their child, with the addition of a stepparent altering the system. Therefore, unlike in first-marriage families, in stepfamilies there is no implicit assumption between the biological parent and stepparent that they will play equally important roles in a stepchild's life (Graham, 2010). The lack of role negotiation and agreement between partners about their parenting roles creates ambiguity about the scope and nature of a stepparent's responsibilities to their stepchildren and the stepparent acting as a parental figure to the child (Graham, 2010). The difficulty of defining the stepparent role within a stepfamily is further compounded by this task occurring over a short time period in conjunction with establishing the couple and step-relationship.

Third, not only are stepparents required to establish new relationships within the stepfamily, they may also be experiencing changes in previously established relationships with their own biological children or ex-partner. In addition, many stepparents will be involved in the challenge of staying connected and cooperating with the stepchild's previously established household, most likely the biological parent's ex-partner, to enable children to keep in contact with both biological parents and live in a shared-care arrangement. With the involvement of the non-resident biological parent of the stepchild, comes different parenting styles and perhaps a sense of competition between the two adults, leading to possible conflict between adults in the two different households (Pryor, 2014).

Due to the lack of shared history and emotional bonds within the stepfamily, it is difficult to implement family roles, routines and household rules when positive relationships between all members are yet to be established. The relationship between the stepparent and the child plays a pivotal role in long-term outcomes and has been shown to be strongly associated with positive child adjustment in stepfamilies (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000).

Yet, the establishment of this relationship is believed to be one of the most challenging and stressful relationships in stepfamilies (Pryor, 2004). The involuntary nature of the relationship means that both the child and the parent can be less motivated to form close bonds.

Research suggests that the parenting style a stepparent chooses to adopt with their stepchild is related to the development of the stepparent-stepchild relationship and adjustment of stepchildren (Cartwright, Farnsworth & Mobley, 2009; Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims, 1994; Ganong, Coleman, Fine & Martin, 1999; Graham, 2010). Often adults in stepfamilies enter the transition with unrealistic expectations and attempt to establish the new stepfamily system as a typical ‘nuclear’ family (Vischer & Vischer, 1990). In this way, stepparents may take on a disciplinary role early on in the transition as a way of striving for the ‘nuclear’ family unit. However, when the stepparent-stepchild relationship has not adequately developed, children will often react negatively to their stepparent’s attempts at discipline and socialisation (Vischer & Vischer, 1990). As such, stepparents who take on a disciplinary role too quickly within a stepfamily may hinder the development of a positive stepparent-stepchild relationship.

For example, stepparents who are considered “laid-back” and focus on becoming friends with the stepchild rather than disciplining them appear to be more successful at developing a positive relationship with their stepchild than those stepparents who tend to “take-charge” and have more controlling personalities (Ganong et al., 1999). Likewise, stepparents that adopt a parenting style characterised by high levels of support and low control has been found to be associated with the highest levels of adjustment in adolescent stepchildren (Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims, 1994).

A qualitative study conducted by Cartwright et al. (2009), which involved conducting thematic analyses on eighteen young adult stepchildren’s life stories provides support for the

previous findings. The life stories illustrated the idea that stepparents who showed acceptance and gave support to their stepchildren, without taking on disciplinary responsibilities, fostered the development of a positive stepparent-child relationship. In contrast, stepparents who had attempted to discipline their stepchildren, led to stepchildren becoming angry and resistant and the development of a negative relationship (Cartwright et al., 2009).

Although research suggests that stepparents are better to initially take on a role akin to a 'friendship' with their stepchild rather than a parenting role, often stepfamily circumstances do not allow for this to occur. That is, once a stepfamily has formed, it may be necessary (or expected by their partner) for stepparents to take on parenting responsibilities, to establish routines within the family, and achieve daily tasks. This difference between the ideal role of the stepparent and the actual role stepparents take on within stepfamilies is what leads to the ambiguities in the stepparenting role and the boundaries that surround the role (Pryor, 2014).

Further, how each member within a stepfamily perceives the stepparenting role adds to the complexity of defining and establishing the role. In this way, discrepancies in how the stepparent, partner, and stepchild perceive the role of the stepparent can influence the development of the stepparent-stepchild relationship and a stepfamily's overall functioning. Graham (2010) sought to examine how each individual within a stepfamily define and negotiate the stepparenting role and the impact this had on family functioning over a 12-month period. Stepparents, their partners (i.e., the resident biological parent), and stepchildren of the stepparents completed questionnaires at two time points to assess both intra-role discrepancies (incongruence between an individual's perceptions of the actual and ideal stepparent role) and inter-role discrepancies between the stepfamily members.

Findings showed that all of the stepfamily members, including stepchildren, wanted stepparents to be warmer and more supportive towards their stepchildren than they actually were. In contrast, while stepparents and their partners wanted the stepparent to ideally be

more involved in disciplinary parenting behaviours than they actually were, children reported wanting their stepparents to be less involved in a disciplinary role than they were at the time (Graham, 2010). The study showed that over time both stepparents and children reported less discordance between what they perceived as an ideal and actual stepparent role (lower intra-role discrepancy) and more role agreement between them (lower inter-role discrepancy). However, a greater degree of both intra- and inter-role discrepancies at Time 1 was associated with children's reports of decreased parent-child relationship quality and stepparent-stepchild relationship quality, as well as increased levels of family conflict 12 months later (Graham, 2010).

Similarly, Mobley (2011) investigated parents', stepparents', and children's views of the stepparent role within a stepfamily. The study looked at both the perceptions of stepparents' discipline/control behaviours and warmth/support behaviours towards the children. The findings showed that children were open to stepparents taking on both of these parenting roles, but an essential part of this process was to allow time and space for the relationship to develop gradually (Mobley, 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to note that children found it harder to accept warmth and support from stepparents when they perceived the stepparent as taking on a disciplinary role (Mobley, 2011).

These findings from research regarding the stepparent-stepchild relationship and the stepparenting role are pertinent to the current thesis. Overall, there is evidence to suggest that it would be more beneficial for stepparents to foster their relationship with their stepchildren through warm and supportive parenting behaviours prior to taking on a disciplinary role. As such, parenting education resources designed to target stepparenting practices may be better to focus on warm, supportive stepparenting and the development of a positive stepparent-stepchild relationship rather than parenting strategies concerned with behaviour management.

1.1.4. Stepfamily challenges and adjustment.

Visher and Visher (1990) identified four tasks that stepfamilies must achieve to successfully transition from one family to another. These tasks include solidifying and developing the new partner or marital relationship within the context of a family household, maintaining or enhancing previously established parent-child relationships, developing positive new step-relationships, and also developing a sense of group membership in the family unit overall. Establishing a co-operative parenting partnership between the children's two households, so that children can continue to spend time with both biological parents, is also linked to the successful adjustment of a stepfamily (Vischer & Vischer, 1990). However, the complex histories leading to stepfamily formation and, as discussed above, the differences in stepfamily members' attitudes, thoughts and behaviours regarding the transition means stepfamilies need to overcome many challenges to achieve these tasks.

A qualitative study conducted by Golish (2003) examined challenges faced by stepfamilies and the communication strategies used to manage these challenges. Interviews were conducted with stepparents, resident biological parents, and stepchildren from 30 stepfamilies. Regardless of how strong the stepfamily appeared to be, Golish (2003) identified seven key challenges that all stepfamilies appear to experience. These include: "feeling caught" between other members involved for both children and adults; regulating boundaries with non-custodial families; ambiguity of parental roles; "traumatic bonding" that occurred between mothers and daughters during a preceding divorce process resulting in the displacement of the child's role once the stepparent enters the family; vying for resources; discrepancies in conflict management styles; and building solidarity as a family unit. The way in which stepfamilies communicated about and managed these challenges related to the strength of the stepfamily (Golish, 2003). As such, although some of the challenges refer

directly to individuals or dyadic relationships within stepfamilies, all of them contribute to the overall functioning of a stepfamily.

Building solidarity as a family unit is one challenge in which every stepfamily member plays a part. When a stepfamily forms, a new family culture needs to be established (Papernow, 2008). Each member within a stepfamily will bring their own individual personalities, behaviour patterns, and thought processes that have been shaped within a pre-existing family system. Therefore, the challenge for every stepfamily member is to successfully negotiate and adapt these individual characteristics to create a new family culture which reflects a sense of membership within the stepfamily unit while maintaining members' individual identities (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011). Further, stepfamilies have the task of blending together two different sets of family routines and rituals in such a way that they continue to hold meaning for every member (Pryor, 2014). Rituals that successfully incorporate aspects of old families yet are distinct and unique to the new stepfamily have the potential to promote the formation of a new family identity by creating shared understanding between family members, develop cohesion and communication within the stepfamily, and encourage a sense of inclusion within the individuals (Pryor, 2014).

The process of transitioning into a stepfamily and forming a new family identity will be different for every stepfamily and move at different rates, with some stepfamilies quickly establishing a sense of solidarity while other stepfamilies never completely accomplishing this task (Pryor, 2014). During this time, the emotional environment of the stepfamily may be fragile and unstable, such that emotions are easily aroused. For some stepfamilies and their members, the transition might be a very positive experience evoking emotions of joy, hopefulness, trust, and satisfaction. Yet, for other stepfamilies, the transition might be a testing experience where individuals are likely to feel a number of negative emotions such as sadness, anger, resentment, confusion, and guilt. In this way, the stability and predictability

of the emotional environment, as well as the degree of positive and negative emotionality within the family, all contribute to the nature of the emotional climate within a family (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, and Robinson, 2007).

Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson (1999) employed a retrospective interview design to examine developmental trajectories of stepfamilies. In particular, whether different trajectories were associated with differences in family culture and identity. Parents, stepparents and stepchildren were interviewed about turning points they had encountered in the first four years of living in a blended family and how these contributed to their sense of 'feeling like a family' or family solidarity. Baxter et al., (1999) defined a turning point as 'a transformative event that alters a relationship in some important way, either positively or negatively.'

A total of fifteen different turning point event types were reported by stepfamily members with the most common turning points including changes in the household/family composition (such as marriage of partners, stepchildren moving in or out, and birth of sibling), conflict or disagreement, holidays or special celebrations, and family crisis (such as major illnesses, deaths, accidents, or financial disasters). Some of these turning points, including quality time and prosocial actions, were related to perceived positive changes within the family while others, such as conflict/disagreement and breakup/divorce of the remarriage, were associated with more perceived negative change within the family.

Based on these turning points, a cluster analysis revealed five different trajectories for the development of stepfamilies over the first four years - accelerated, prolonged, stagnating, declining, and high-amplitude turbulent (Baxter et al., 1999). These trajectories all differed in the ratio of perceived positive to negative turning points, the frequency of conflict-related events, the average degree of change in feeling like a family, and the current reported levels of family cohesion. That is, the accelerated and prolonged pathways characterised stepfamily

development that progressed in a positive direction over time, albeit the prolonged trajectory moving at a slower rate, resulting in mid- to high levels of feeling like a family. In contrast, the declining pathway comprised of negative change over time, the stagnating trajectory was characterised by low levels of feeling like a family with little change over four years, while the high-amplitude turbulent path reflected a fluctuant pattern of rapid change in family solidarity as turning points occurred.

The emotional climate is believed to be a reflection of family dynamics and processes that occur, and are displayed through relationship qualities within the family (Morris et al., 2007). Therefore, the quality of the stepfamily transition defined by the harmony, or lack thereof, in forming new relationships, family roles, boundaries, family culture and identity, will quickly set the foundations of the family emotional climate over time. These processes and negotiations that must occur within the stepfamily system will be exhibited through the interaction and relationship quality between stepfamily members. For example, a stepfamily characterised by a stepparent taking on a disciplinary role, resistance from stepchildren and a poor stepparent-child relationship, is likely to reflect a negative stepfamily emotional climate. Thinking back to Bowen's theory, the emotional climate of the stepfamily will both influence, and be influenced by, the adjustment of each individual and the stepfamily unit as a whole.

This chapter will now turn to children's emotional development and the role that parenting plays in shaping a child's emotional development, relating it back to stepfamilies.

1.2. Children's Emotional Development

"People's emotions are rarely put into words; far more often they are expressed through other cues. The key to intuiting another's feelings is in the ability to read non-verbal channels: tone of voice, gesture, facial expression, and the like" (Goleman, 1995, p. 96).

In recent years, the role of an individual's emotional abilities in shaping their development and functioning in society has become a focus for many researchers. The concept of emotional intelligence, often termed emotional competence in child development literature, refers to a number of essential skills that assist people to appropriately identify and respond to emotions in themselves and others (Goleman, 1995). Mayer and Salovey (1997) have provided one of the most comprehensive definitions of emotional intelligence stating that 'emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.' That is, emotional intelligence, or competence, is the ability to regulate, express and communicate emotions, integrate emotional reactions with cognitions to effectively evaluate situations, and be aware of and understand others' feelings to successfully engage in social interactions. This definition suggests that emotions are multi-faceted in nature, involving physiological responses, cognitions, feelings and behaviours. Solomon (2002) posits that emotions comprise of five different aspects - behavioural expressions (including verbal behaviours); physiological (hormonal, neurological, and neuromuscular); phenomenological (sensations or ways of construing the objects of emotion); cognitive (appraisals, perceptions, reflections, and judgements about one's emotions); and the social context in which an emotion occurs. Solomon argues that emotions are a holistic phenomenon where all five aspects are interwoven with the others (Solomon, 2002).

Children begin to learn skills such as expressing, understanding and regulating their emotions from a young age, as well as learning how to understand and respond to situations that involve emotions (Denham, 1998). Children as young as 2 years of age demonstrate the cognitive and emotional capacity to broadly interpret another's emotional state, affectively experience this emotional state themselves, and adapt their behaviour to respond to the

emotional state, such as attempting to alleviate others' feelings of discomfort (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990).

By the time children are 3-years-old, they experience and express a variety of emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, and the expression of such emotions becomes increasingly differentiated (Denham, 1998). The context begins to play an important role in the expression of children's emotions as they start to be able to inhibit or intensify emotional expressiveness as the situation demands. As such, some emotions begin to be expressed more frequently than others (Denham, 1998). For example, in peer interactions happiness and anger have been shown to be expressed more often than sadness or distress (Denham, 1986). Thus, over the preschool period, expression of emotions becomes more complex, differentiated and flexible (Malatesta, Culver, Tesman, & Shepard, 1989).

Changes in children's understanding of emotions also occur between the toddler and preschool years (Denham, 1986). Prior to language acquisition, emotions are important social signals for young children as they learn the facial expressions, vocal tones, goals, and behaviours associated with a number of different emotions (Denham, 1998). In this way, as children's cognitive and language abilities begin to develop, the emotional signals children have been exposed to will facilitate a coherent understanding of their own and others' emotions (Bretherton, Fritz, Zahn-Waxler, & Ridgeway, 1986).

Children's language abilities contribute to their emotional development with expansion of their emotional vocabulary and knowledge (Greenberg & Snell, 1997). In this way, language development can facilitate acquisition of emotion regulation in children by providing them with an appropriate way of expressing their emotions and also facilitating cognitive interpretations of emotional experiences (Denham, 1998; Greenberg & Snell, 1997). A study conducted by Schultz, Izard, Ackerman, and Youngstrom (2001), showed that verbal ability in preschool children predicted their emotional knowledge two years later. That

is, children who demonstrated greater verbal abilities in preschool were better able to label emotional facial expressions and also accurately identify what emotion would be felt when experiencing particular events (Schultz et al., 2001).

Emotional competence (sometimes called emotional intelligence) plays a fundamental role in children's development. Acquiring emotional competence begins in early childhood and includes the awareness and understanding of emotional displays in the self and others and the ability to regulate one's own emotions. These are key skills that influence social and behavioural development, and children's later outcomes (Denham, 1998). For example, children who exhibit greater emotional competence are more likely to develop positive social friendships and display fewer behaviour problems (Saarni, 1997). As such, emotional competence assists children with comprehending social situations, and developing meaningful relationships (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Losoya, 1997; Saarni, 1997). In contrast, Shultz et al. (2001) found that low levels of emotion knowledge in first-grade children significantly corresponded to social problems and social withdrawal.

In line with these findings, emotional understanding has been shown to be associated with children's development of Theory of Mind (ToM) which is the ability to understand others' cognitions as separate and different from their own cognitions (Weimer & Guajardo, 2005). Interestingly, longitudinal studies examining the relationship between children's understanding of emotions and ToM have led to contrasting conclusions. That is, while one study provides evidence that emotion knowledge predicts ToM development (O'Brien et al., 2010), another study supports the idea that children's ToM contributes to the development of emotional understanding (Seidenfeld, Johnson, Cavadel, & Izard, 2014). It is suggested that ToM and the development of emotional understanding likely have bi-directional associations dependent on developmental age and particular skills essential to the two constructs (Seidenfeld et al., 2014). Despite the inconsistent longitudinal findings, it appears that

children's ToM and emotional understanding are linked in some way allowing children to take on another's perspective and identify emotions one may be experiencing.

A number of longitudinal studies have shown that difficulties regulating emotions, negative emotionality, and negative biases when interpreting others emotions, occur prior to the onset of social and behavioural difficulties (Barth & Bastiani, 1997; Sanson, Smart, Prior, & Oberklaid, 1993). As such, poorly developed emotional competencies in children may place them at greater risk for later problems. There is evidence to suggest that children who have problems regulating and understanding their own emotions, and misinterpret others' emotions by perceiving them as intending aggression, are at an increased risk for developing oppositional and aggressive behaviours (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). In addition, difficulties understanding and regulating sad emotions have been shown to be associated with an increased risk for depression (Fernández-Berrocal, Alcaide, Extremera, & Pizarro, 2006), while difficulties regulating worry, sadness and anger, as well as experiencing high intensity emotions, underpin later anxiety problems (Suveg & Zeman, 2004).

In contrast, the development of emotional competence in children has been found to be related to a number of positive outcomes later in life. Children who demonstrate high levels of emotional competence are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour, develop successful social relationships, and display better academic achievement (Eisenberg et al., 1995; 1996; Izard et al., 2001). For example, Eisenberg and colleagues (1996) examined the associations between prosocial behaviours, and individual differences in negative emotionality, attentional regulation and social skills for primary-school aged children. Findings showed that children who were reported to have more prosocial reputations, tended to demonstrate greater levels of constructive social skills and regulation, and were lower in negative emotionality (Eisenberg et al., 1996). Further, Izard et al. (2001) found that children's emotion knowledge at preschool contributed significantly as a predictor for

children's social skills and academic competence at third-grade. Therefore, children's emotional competence - that is, their knowledge, regulation and understanding of their own and others' emotions - appears to play a fundamental role in children's later social and behavioural functioning.

1.3. The Role of Parenting on Children's Emotional Development

A number of factors influence children's emotional development and can promote the acquisition of skills that foster emotional competence. A child's temperament, neurophysiology, cognitive processes and socialisation, all work together to contribute to the development of emotional competence (Goldsmith & Davidson, 2004; Morris et al., 2007). For example, a study examining the effects of infant temperament and maternal socialisation on the development of emotional competence in young children found that temperament appeared to mediate the association between maternal responses and the child's coping and regulation strategies (Fitzpatrick, 2001). In this way, a child's own emotional style can influence the way in which their mother, or others, respond to them and in turn their ability to learn about and regulate their emotions.

There is substantial evidence to highlight the link between parenting practices and the development of children's emotional competence (Denham et al., 2001; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinard, 1998; Gottman & DeClaire, 1997; Morris et al., 2007). In a model proposed by Eisenberg and colleagues (1997), three categories of emotion-related socialisation behaviours were outlined as playing a role in children's emotional development, namely parents' regulation and expression of their emotions, parents' reactions to their children's emotions and parents' coaching and discussion of children's emotions. It is thought that these emotion socialisation practices all contribute to children's emotional competence by providing a framework for children to learn about their own and others' emotions and emotional reactions (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Havighurst, Harley, & Prior, 2004).

Each of these parenting practices, and how they influence the development of children's emotional competence, will be discussed further below.

Although the above parenting themes have been conceptualised in emotion-related terms, they reflect the underlying social learning mechanisms that occur through parenting practices and are involved in shaping children's emotional development – modelling, contingent responses, and coaching respectively (Havighurst et al., 2004). Bandura posits that learning is a cognitive process that takes place within a social context (1971). Expanding on previously established learning theories of Pavlov's classical conditioning and Skinner's operant conditioning, Bandura proposed that children learn behaviours simply through the process of observational learning and imitating others' behaviours without direct reinforcement (Bandura, 1971). As such, children learn through both direct experiences with the environment and through mimicking others in their environment.

Social learning theory assumes that learning can occur through modelling behaviours and that observing these modelled behaviours results in the development of symbolic representations for the observer to refer to in later situations (Bandura, 1971). Bandura stated that a major function of modelling is to transmit information to the observer regarding the particular behaviour or response. In terms of emotional responses, the process of modelling means that parents communicate information about the appropriateness of particular emotional responses in certain scenarios and shape children's patterns of emotional responses to various situations. For example, infants and young children appear to use emotional cues expressed by their caregivers to evaluate ambiguous situations - a phenomenon known as social referencing (Eisenberg et al., 1998). According to Bandura, this information can be conveyed, not only through physical demonstration, but through pictorial representations and verbal descriptions. As such, parents may continue to model emotional response information to children through coaching and discussion of emotions.

1.3.1. Parents' regulation and expression of emotions.

The degree to which parents exhibit and express emotions is associated with children's own emotional expressiveness and their socio-emotional development (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Morris et al., 2007). Findings from research studies have shown that parents' positive emotional expressivity within the family context is linked to children's own positive emotionality and expressiveness, prosocial behaviour, emotional understanding, and social competence (Cumberland-Li, Eisenberg, Champion, Gershoff, & Fabes, 2003; Dunn & Brown, 1994; Eisenberg, Gershoff, et al., 2001; Eisenberg et al., 2003; Halberstadt, 1986). For example, mothers who exhibit more positive affective expressions tend to have children who display more positive than negative emotions with their peers (Denham, Mitchell-Copeland, Strandberg, Auerbach, & Blair, 1997).

Despite a thorough literature search being conducted, there appears to be a lack of recent research studies regarding potential mechanisms through which parents' emotional expressiveness influences their children's emotional expressiveness and emotional competence. It is plausible that genetic inheritance may account for many of the similarities between parents' and children's emotional expressivity, yet there is little evidence in the literature that this link has been sufficiently investigated. Nevertheless, a number of other mechanisms have also been speculated as possible explanations for the link between parents' emotion regulation and expression and their children's emotional expressiveness (Denham, 1998; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Losoya, 1997). First, the idea that children learn through observation is well-established (Bandura, 1971; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). Parents are often considered children's primary agents of socialisation and most children tend to learn and mimic similar behaviours, such as emotional expressiveness (Bugental & Grusec, 2006; Morris et al., 2007), as their parents. As such, parents' regulation and expression of

their own emotions may directly influence children's emotion regulation and expression through the processes of observation and imitation (Eisenberg et al., 1998).

Second, parents' emotional expression may be related to other aspects of parenting which also influence children's emotional competence. That is, parents' emotional expression may be a mediator to, or correlate with, other parenting practices. For example, parents who value emotional expressiveness and are very expressive themselves may be more likely to reinforce children's strong expressions of emotion (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Another possibility is that the nature of parents' emotional expression may parallel their emotional responses towards children, which in turn influences children's emotional expressions.

A study conducted by Eisenberg et al. (2001) examined the link between parents' socialisation of emotion, including warmth, emotional expressivity, and discussion of emotion, and children's emotional expressivity and behavioural difficulties. Both parents' and children's emotional expressivity were measured by having them look at 12 different slides with pleasant, neutral, and unpleasant valences, which were videotaped and coded. The results showed that parents' positive emotional expressivity during pleasant slides was significantly associated with parental warmth (Eisenberg et al., 2001). Further, both parental warmth and parents' expression of positive emotions during pleasant slides were related to children's own positive emotion expressions during pleasant slides and were negatively associated with children's problem behaviours. Structural equation modelling analyses suggested that parents' positive emotional expressions were associated with parental warmth, which in turn influenced children's expression of positive emotions (Eisenberg et al., 2001). Similarly, maternal emotional expressivity has been found to partially mediate the link between other maternal dispositions, such as maternal emotionality and regulation, and children's adjustment (Cumberland-Li et al., 2003).

Third, the way parents express emotions may influence children's interpretations and understanding of different emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Emotional expression provides information to children about the significance of an event, others' emotional reactions, and behavioural responses that occur alongside particular emotions (Denham, 1998). However, research findings have been inconsistent regarding the link between parents' emotional expressivity and children's understanding of emotions. Dunn and Brown (1994) reported that mothers', siblings', and children's levels of negative emotional expression within the home was associated with children's poor performance on an emotional understanding task. On the other hand, no association was found between the degree of positive emotional expression within the household and children's superior performance on the emotional understanding task (Dunn & Brown, 1994).

Further, another study found no significant links between parents' emotional expressiveness and their children's understanding of emotions (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992). However, the findings of this study did show that children's understanding of emotions did influence the link between parents' negative emotional expressiveness and children's poor peer relations. That is, a child's greater understanding of emotions may act as a buffer against the poor peer acceptance associated with negative parental expressivity within the home context (Cassidy et al., 1992).

1.3.2. Parents' reactions to emotions.

The way parents react and respond to their children's emotional expressions has been shown to have a profound influence on the development of emotional competence in children (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Gottman & DeClaire, 1997; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). Research conducted by Gottman and colleagues (1996, 1997) has found that the way in which parents respond to their children's emotional experiences shapes children's emotion regulation. Within this research, Gottman et al. (1996) introduced the idea of a meta-emotion

philosophy. This phenomenon refers to an individual's thoughts and feelings regarding emotions and emotional expression in themselves and others. Gottman and colleagues argued that a parent's meta-emotion philosophy influences the way in which the parent is aware of their own emotions as well as how they respond to their children's emotions. From their research, they have identified three parenting approaches towards emotions – disapproving, dismissive, and emotion coaching.

Disapproving or punitive responses to children's emotions involve becoming angry at the child and punishing them for their emotional expression. Gottman and DeClaire (1997) characterised parents who demonstrate a disapproving parenting style as being more concerned about the child's behaviour and obedience and often being judgemental or critical of the child's emotional experience. Dismissive responses to emotions refers to parents minimising the emotion by ignoring or distracting the child, or otherwise turning straight to problem solving without focusing on the emotions the child is experiencing. Parents who demonstrate a dismissive parenting style are often warm and caring but do not like to encourage expression of emotion in children and thus avoid focusing on the children's emotional experience (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997).

The two parenting approaches of disapproving and dismissive have been found to be associated with poor emotion regulation in children (Havighurst et al., 2004). For example, Ramsden and Hubbard (2002) found that dismissive parenting was related to poorer emotion regulation and increased aggressive behaviour in preschoolers. Further, a more recent study looked at the link between mothers' and fathers' unsupportive emotion socialisation behaviours and children's emotion regulation of negative emotions, in particular anger and sadness, and depressive symptoms (Sanders, Zeman, Poon, & Miller, 2015). Parents' unsupportive emotion socialisation practices combined both dismissive and disapproving characteristic responses. Findings from this study showed that unsupportive parenting

responses to children's emotional expressivity of anger and sadness was associated with greater emotional dysregulation in children, poorer emotional coping and depressive symptoms (Sanders et al., 2015).

In contrast, an emotion coaching parenting style has been found to promote children's emotion regulation and competence (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). Emotion coaching involves being aware of a child's emotions, viewing the child's emotional expression as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching, reflecting the emotion and helping the child label what they are feeling, empathising and validating the emotion, and assisting the child in problem solving when necessary (Gottman, Katz & Hooven, 1996). Through validating children's emotions and helping children to better understand what they are feeling, emotion coaching helps children learn skills important for the development of emotional competence, such as self-soothing, inhibiting negative affect and developing a greater awareness of emotions (Gottman et al., 1996).

Referring back to the quote by Goleman (1997) at the beginning of this chapter section, it is important to note that individuals, particularly children, express positive and negative emotions through facial expressions, gestures, and behaviours, more so than verbally stating what they are feeling. For young children who are just beginning to develop an emotion-related conceptual framework, it is possible that they do not have the words to describe how they feel or do not understand what emotion they are experiencing and thus use alternative ways to express and communicate their emotion. As such, a central skill of emotion coaching for parents is tuning in to their children's emotions by becoming aware of and reading their non-verbal displays of emotions.

Previous research has shown that parents who are classified as using an emotion coaching parenting approach towards their children's emotions are more likely to raise children who have better cognitive abilities, stronger social skills, display more prosocial

behaviour and have fewer physical illnesses (Denham et al., 1997; Dunsmore, Booker, & Ollendick, 2013; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Eisenberg et al., 2001). For example, one study compared mothers' emotional awareness and coaching practices of children with and without conduct problems (Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2004). They also wanted to explore whether mothers' awareness and coaching of emotions was linked to peer relationships in these children. Findings showed that mothers of children with conduct problems demonstrated less of an awareness and coaching strategies compared to parents of children without conduct problems. Further, for all children, regardless of whether they exhibited conduct problems, mothers who showed more emotional awareness and coaching tended to exhibit more positive and less negative peer interactions. Therefore, this study suggests that all children may benefit from parents being more aware of their emotions and engaging in emotion coaching practices (Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2004).

1.3.3. Parents' discussion of emotions.

A parent's attitudes and values around emotions, that is their meta-emotion philosophy, can greatly influence the way they communicate and discuss emotions with others. For example, the strength of a parent's positive, negative and overall emotional beliefs has been shown to differentially impact on that parent's labelling, discussion, and encouragement of different emotions in emotion-talk with children (Lozada, Halberstadt, Craig, Dennis, & Dunsmore, 2016). As such, the way a parent communicates and discusses emotions with their child plays a fundamental role in the development of the child's emotional competence and their attitudes around emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). Families that discuss emotion-related topics more frequently and in a positive manner, are more likely to convey to children that emotions are acceptable and important as well as facilitate children's awareness of their own emotional states (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Further, discussion of emotions in everyday family conversations fosters the

development of an emotion-related conceptual framework for children, promoting emotional vocabulary and knowledge (Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987).

Through discussion of emotion-related topics, parents create an opportunity to emphasise and encourage certain emotions, explain the causes of particular emotions, help children to understand their emotional experiences, and provide them with skills to facilitate emotion regulation (Eisenberg et al., 1998). In this way, it is likely that a child who grows up with parents who openly accept and encourage discussion of emotional experiences, both positive and negative, will be better able to communicate their own emotions as well as interpret and understand others' emotions. There is evidence in the literature to suggest that parents who encourage discussion and labelling of emotions in everyday conversations have children who display more prosocial behaviours, greater empathy and a higher degree of emotional competence (Brownell, Svetlova, Anderson, Nichols, & Drummond, 2013; Drummond, Paul, Waugh, Hammond, & Brownell, 2014).

For example, Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, and Youngblade (1991) examined the relationship between individual differences in young children's understanding of others' feelings and the discourse of emotions they were exposed to in the family household. Fifty children were observed conversing with their mothers at 33 months old and were subsequently tested on their affective labelling and perspective-taking abilities 7 months later. Findings showed that children's abilities of understanding feelings were significantly associated with the level of discourse about feelings that they had been exposed to previously (Dunn et al., 1991). Similarly, differences in discourse about feelings that children participated in at 3 years old has been shown to be related to their abilities in an affective perspective-taking task at 6 years old (Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991). The findings from these two studies highlight the importance that emotional discourse within the family context

can have on children's later understanding of others' emotions and perspective-taking; two key components of emotional competence.

In contrast, families that do not communicate and discuss emotions freely, particularly negative emotions, may lead to the child having a poor understanding of how to appropriately express and effectively regulate negative emotions. That is, if parents discourage discussion of emotions this may implicitly teach the child that emotions are not acceptable and should not be expressed. When experiencing emotional situations, the child would have difficulty in regulating their own emotions and may not be able to successfully empathise with others' emotions. As such, children raised in families where communication and discussion about emotions is not encouraged may be at risk for social and emotional difficulties (Eisenberg et al., 1998).

1.3.4. Family emotional climate.

Not only do parenting practices and attitudes play a role in the development of children's emotional competence, but the family context and social relationships within a family that children experience are also believed to impact on children's emotional development (Morris et al., 2007). Morris and colleagues (2007) employed a tripartite model to evaluate the impact that family has on children's emotional regulation and adjustment. They identified three important themes in which the family context can influence the development of emotional competence. In line with the parenting factors previously discussed, Morris and colleagues identified the first two themes as observation and parenting practices and behaviours. The third theme they argued as playing a role in the development of children's emotional skills was the emotional climate of the family (Morris et al., 2007).

As discussed previously in this chapter, Morris et al. (2007) believe that the emotional family climate is a reflection of family processes and dynamics occurring within the home. They argued that the development of children's emotional regulation is likely influenced by

four important components of the family emotional environment - the emotional stability and predictability of the environment; parental expectations of children's emotional abilities; the degree of positive emotional expressivity in the family; and the degree of negative emotional expressivity within the family. It is important to note that this review focused on children's emotion regulation in particular and not their overall emotional competence. However, emotion regulation is essential to social development and has been identified as one of the core skills of emotional competence.

When a child's family climate is emotionally negative, coercive and unstable, children are at risk for displaying high levels of emotional reactivity and difficulty in emotion regulation (Morris et al., 2007). Conversely, when a child is raised in a warm, responsive home environment they will more likely feel emotionally secure, where their emotions are accepted and their emotional needs are met (Morris et al., 2007). They also know what behaviours are expected of them and therefore have clear expectations of what emotions and behaviours parents will respond with when they misbehave.

The four aspects of the family climate have been assessed via research examining parenting styles, family expressivity, and relationships within the household, such as parent-child relationship and the marital relationship (Garner, 1995; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002). For example, the study by Ramsden & Hubbard (2002) examined the link between overall family expressiveness and children's emotion regulation and aggressive behaviours. Findings showed that negative family expressiveness was indirectly related to children's aggression through children's emotion regulation. Further, a meta-analysis conducted by Halberstadt and Eaton (2002) found that positive family expressiveness was consistently associated with children's positive expressiveness across all ages. However, positive family expressiveness was not related to children's emotional understanding. Of particular importance to the present thesis is family expressivity and relationships within the household, their influence on the

emotional climate of the family, and in turn the influence of the emotional climate on children's emotional development.

In regards to stepfamilies, the emotional climate of the stepfamily is likely to be influenced by the nature of emotional expressiveness between members of the family unit. On the one hand, certain topics are often avoided within stepfamilies. These are likely to be emotionally-charged topics around the transition of the stepfamily, children's feelings towards the stepparent, and unfairness of situations. As such, children's emotions may go unexpressed meaning parents and stepparents are unable to coach them through these emotions. In contrast, feelings of confusion, resentment, guilt and jealousy may lead to all members showing a high degree of negative emotional expressiveness towards each other creating an unstable and destructive emotional climate.

It has been postulated that a curvilinear relationship between family emotional expressiveness and children's emotion regulation might exist, where moderate levels of negative family emotional expressiveness may facilitate children's emotional development (Morris et al., 2007). That is, too little negative expression of emotion does not allow children to experience a range of emotions and learn ways to deal with them, whereas, too much negative emotional expression may cause children distress and regulation on the part of the parent is not modelled. Therefore, in regards to stepfamilies the complex and often negative emotions that are possibly occurring may be under- or over-expressed, and lead to children's difficulties to regulate emotions.

The emotional expressiveness within a stepfamily is also likely to be influenced by the quality of relationships within the stepfamily unit, particularly between the stepparent and stepchild (Cartwright et al., 2009; Visher & Visher, 1990). For example, if a warm, supportive relationship has been established between stepparent and child, and the stepparent responds to their stepchild in a caring and open manner, stepchildren may be more

comfortable with expressing their emotions to the stepparent. Further, while there may be considerable individual differences in parents' meta-emotion philosophies, new partners in stepfamilies may not have had the time to understand and negotiate these differences in an attempt to better align their combined parenting approach. As such, the stepparent's meta-emotion philosophy and thus the way they respond to emotions may not be congruent with their new partner's approach, or be harmonious with the stepchild's expectations. In this way, the challenges that stepfamilies face will likely have an impact on the emotional family climate that forms and subsequent emotional development of the stepchild.

1.4. Integrating Stepfamily and Emotional Development Literature

It is clear that stepfamilies are faced with a number of unique challenges they need to overcome to successfully form a new stepfamily unit, including changes in previously existing relationships, establishing new relationships, defining roles, boundaries and routines, and creating family solidarity. Because of these challenges, children transitioning into stepfamilies are likely to experience a great deal of complex emotions such as confusion, guilt, resentment, and jealousy. Research has shown that stepchildren are at increased risk of experiencing adjustment difficulties and poorer long-term outcomes than children in first-marriage families.

Parental figures significantly influence children's emotional development through expression, coaching and discussion of emotion, with substantial evidence to suggest that an emotion coaching parenting style is associated with greater emotional competence, more prosocial behaviours and fewer conduct problems (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). With regards to stepparents, an emotion coaching approach towards their stepchild's emotions may be particularly pertinent where the absence of a shared history and biological connectedness with the stepchild leads to ambiguities in the stepparent's boundaries and roles. As research has consistently shown, stepparents who demonstrate warm and supportive behaviours

towards stepchildren, and allow space and time for their relationship to gradually develop, tend to have more well-adjusted stepchildren and better overall family functioning compared to stepparents who attempt to take on a disciplinary parenting role.

The relationship between the stepparent and stepchild has been found to be one of the most critical relationships within the stepfamily unit in influencing the overall functioning of the family system. The nature of the stepparent-stepchild relationship is likely to have an effect on the emotional climate of the family, which has also been shown to have an impact on children's emotional development. Therefore, a stepchild's emotional adjustment throughout the stepfamily transition and formation, and subsequent long-term outcomes, will be influenced by the unique stepfamily challenges, parenting style, the parent-child relationship, and the overall emotional family climate. The complexity of forming a stepfamily and the obstacles they encounter along the way means that they may benefit from additional support during this time. In particular, support for stepparents around the ambiguity of their role and the development of a positive relationship with their stepchild may be advantageous. Despite this, there currently appears to be a lack of resources and programmes available to stepparents and their families in New Zealand.

Chapter Two

Comparing and Contrasting Parenting Programmes

The literature discussed in the introduction suggests that programmes aimed at providing support and education to stepparents may be beneficial to stepchildren's adjustment and overall stepfamily functioning. In particular, a programme fostering a stepparenting role that is more in line with stepchildren's perceptions of an appropriate stepparenting role, such as a role high in warmth and low in control, may promote the development of a positive stepparent-stepchild relationship. This chapter begins with a review and critique of two current evidence-based parenting programmes available within New Zealand that concentrate on behaviour management training, namely Incredible Years and Triple P Positive Parenting Programme; as well as reviewing the Oregon Model of Parent Management Training, which is a programme that has been specifically assessed among stepfamilies. The chapter then introduces Tuning in to Kids, a recently developed parenting programme focusing on developing parent's emotion coaching skills, before turning to the present study.

2.1. Incredible Years

Carolyn Webster-Stratton developed the Incredible Years (IY) parent-, teacher-, and child-training series in America, beginning in the 1980's (Webster-Stratton, 2011). IY is a comprehensive series of interrelated group programmes targeting parents, teachers and children. The series aim to promote children's social and emotional competence and academic achievement, and reduce and/or prevent behavioural and emotional problems in children. As such, IY targets children from high-risk, socioeconomically disadvantaged families or children in welfare, as well as children with conduct problems, neurodevelopmental disorders and internalising issues. The parent series in particular focuses on improving parenting practices, parent-child interactions and building positive relationships

by teaching effective behaviour management skills and encouraging more nurturing parenting (Webster-Stratton, 2011).

Webster-Stratton's IY's BASIC parent training is divided into four different programmes, each designed for various age groups (2011). These include the baby, toddler, pre-school, and school-aged programmes. These programmes emphasise a range of parenting skills that are developmentally appropriate for each age group and rely substantially on videotaped vignettes to demonstrate target skills to parents (Pidano & Allen, 2015). For example, in the baby and toddler programmes the focus for parents is on helping their children successfully form a secure attachment with their parent, develop effective language and social expression skills, and begin to develop a sense of self. As such, parents are educated on topics such as child-directed play, language-rich environments, social and emotion coaching, and separation and reunion strategies. In contrast, the school-age programme emphasises children's development of independence, motivation for academic achievement and increased responsibility within the family. Topics covered in the school-age programme include reward systems for difficult behaviours, clear and appropriate limit setting, encouraging family chores, monitoring children, and logical consequences. A more extensive ADVANCED parenting programme is also available that focuses on parents' interpersonal skills, communication and their own self-management and problem-solving skills.

A number of theoretical stances provide the foundations for the IY training series, such as Patterson's coercion hypothesis, Bandura's observational learning theory, Piaget's cognitive development stages, Bowlby's attachment theory, and cognitive theories regarding parents' self-confidence and self-efficacy (Webster-Stratton, 2011). The conceptual framework of the IY parenting programmes is based on the idea posed by Gerald Patterson which suggests that family dynamics underlying the development of early conduct problems

in children involve coercive processes between the parent and child (Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1990/1993). This theory posits that if parents regularly respond to children's negative behaviours in a similar negative manner, a pattern of coercive behaviours between the parent and the child develops over time leading to increasingly aversive parent interactions. In line with Bandura's (1971) Social Learning Theory, these negative parenting responses directly model and reinforce the child's own behaviours leading to amplified disruptive behaviours on the part of the child.

Bowlby's theory of Attachment, which stresses the importance of the affective quality of the parent-child relationship for children's development, is also an important part of the conceptual framework for the IY parenting programmes. That is, research evidence suggesting that a warm, positive bond between the parent and child is related to more positive parenting practices and enhanced social competence in children provides the impetus behind many of the parenting skills and psychoeducation comprised within the parent programmes (Webster-Stratton, 2011). In addition, Webster-Stratton and Hammond (1999) recognised that along with ineffective behaviour management skills, parents' management of their own feelings and their reactions to family stressors also influences children's adjustment. As such, the IY ADVANCED parenting programme also target parents' thoughts, emotional responses and problem-solving skills (Webster-Stratton, 2011).

Webster-Stratton and colleagues have extensively evaluated the IY parent training programmes in a number of randomised control studies, both as a treatment intervention for children with early onset conduct problems, ADHD, and other neuro-developmental disorders, and a prevention programme for high-risk families (Webster-Stratton, 1984; 1990; 1998; Webster-Stratton, Hollinsworth, & Kolpacoff, 1989; Webster-Stratton, Kolpacoff, & Hollinsworth, 1988; Webster-Stratton, Rinaldi & Reid, 2011). Overall, the BASIC programme, when utilised as a treatment programme for children aged 3-7 years, has been

shown to significantly improve parents' attitudes towards their children and parent-child interactions, reduce parents' use of harsh discipline techniques, and mitigate child conduct problems (Webster-Stratton, 2001). Further, the ADVANCED programme has been shown to be successful in promoting parents' use of effective problem-solving and communication strategies, minimise maternal depression and improve children's social skills (Webster-Stratton, 2001). Results from randomised studies that evaluated the IY BASIC parenting programme as a universal prevention programme involving 500 Head Start families revealed significant improvement in the parenting skills of the Head Start parents who received training and their children's social competence compared to a control group (Webster-Stratton, 1998).

More recently, Pidano and Allen (2015) conducted a review of the independent research base for the IY Parent, teacher and child training series. The authors concluded that there is sound evidence for the effectiveness of the parenting programme among young children; however, further independent, randomised control studies are needed regarding the baby, toddler and school-aged programmes. In addition, while some evidence suggests that improvements in parenting skills and children's behaviour problems are sustained over time (e.g., Drugli, Larsson, Fossum, & Mørch, 2010; Posthumus, Raaijmakers, Maassen, van Engeland, & Matthys, 2012; Webster-Stratton et al., 1989; Webster-Stratton, 1990), more longitudinal studies are required to explore the long-term effects of the IY parenting programmes for different ages and specific populations (Pidano & Allen, 2015).

The IY research literature provides strong support for the programmes application on multicultural and international populations (Pidano & Allen, 2015). That is, randomised control studies conducted in England (Gardner, Burton, & Klimes, 2006), Wales (Hutchings et al., 2007), and Norway (Larsson et al., 2009) have demonstrated the effectiveness of the IY parenting programmes at reducing children's conduct problems. The IY BASIC parenting

programme has also recently been applied to a New Zealand context. A pilot study was established to examine the efficacy of the IY parenting programme within New Zealand, including the long-term impact and the programmes responsiveness to a Māori population (Sturrock & Gray, 2013). A total of 166 parents participated in the pilot study which involved three IY programmes run at different locations throughout New Zealand, mixed measurement methods (family interviews and teacher questionnaires), single case studies and a 6-month follow-up assessment. Findings showed significant improvements in children's behaviour, parenting practices and family relationship, and these improvements were mostly maintained at the 6-month follow-up period (Sturrock & Gray, 2013). Improvements were also seen within the Māori population; however, results suggest that further work is needed to maximise gains for the Māori population (Sturrock and Gray, 2013).

A follow-up study was subsequently conducted to investigate the influence of the IY parenting programme on parents' and children's outcomes in the pilot study approximately 30 months after starting the IY programme (Sturrock, Gray, Fergusson, Horwood, and Smits, 2014). It was evident from these results that the majority of positive outcomes from the IY programme were maintained over the 30-month period, suggesting long-term benefits for children and parents who participate in an IY programme. Further, there were no significant differences between Māori and non-Māori families in child behaviour, parenting practices, and family relationships at the 30-month follow-up (Sturrock et al., 2014). Therefore, these two studies suggest that the implementation of the IY parenting programme within a New Zealand context is successful for improving parenting practices and reducing children's behaviour problems, and that these benefits are sustained over time.

It is important to note that the programme was implemented through the Ministry of Education's Special Education Services and many were reported to have seen a psychologist (Sturrock & Gray, 2013). As such, the population of children involved in the pilot study

likely displayed a greater level of conduct problems and behavioural disorders compared to the general New Zealand population. Hence, it is not known whether similar results would be found if the IY programme was employed as a universal prevention programme within New Zealand. Previous studies that have found effect sizes associated with the IY programme to be substantially larger for treatment studies than prevention studies, have suggested that the IY parenting programme may be more appropriate as a treatment intervention option rather than a community prevention programme (Menting, Orobrio de Castro, & Matthys, 2013). Further research is also required to compare the IY parenting programme with other available, evidence-based programmes within a New Zealand context. The IY programme is an intensive parenting programme that is run on a weekly basis over 18 weeks. Investigations need to be made to examine whether other parenting programmes are more cost-effective and less demanding on parents but demonstrate comparable benefits to the IY parenting programme.

Interestingly, the IY parent training series has not yet been assessed on a distinct stepfamily population. An evaluation of the IY programme involving a population that most closely aligns with a stepfamily population would be that of foster parents. One study examined the effectiveness of the IY parenting programme and an additional co-parent component among pairs of biological and foster parents with children aged 3-10 years (Linares, Montalto, Li, & Oza, 2006). The co-parenting component comprised of one session where biological and foster parent pairs were provided with the opportunity to understand each other and their child better, practise open communication and negotiate any potential inter-parental conflict regarding topics of family visitation, family routines and discipline. Results showed significant improvement in positive parenting and collaborative co-parenting after attending the programme (Linares et al., 2006). Positive parenting was sustained at follow-up. These findings suggest that an additional co-parenting component may be

beneficial to families of children who have non-resident parents involved in their care.

Despite this, the nature of the relationship between a biological parent and foster parent is likely to be different to the nature of parental relationships within a stepfamily system. As such, these results cannot be generalised to a stepfamily population.

2.2. Triple P Positive Parenting Programme

The Triple P Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P) is a multi-level, parenting and family support strategy developed by Matthew Sanders and his colleagues at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia (Sanders, 1999). The primary aim of the programme is to prevent behavioural, emotional, and social problems in children by augmenting parents' knowledge, skills and confidence in positive parenting practices. Triple P incorporates five levels of intervention of increasing strength for parents of children aged between 0 and 12-years-old (Sanders, 1999). Level 1 involves a universal, population-level media and advertising campaign to raise community awareness of positive parenting practices. Levels 2 and 3 are brief primary care sessions targeting parents who have concerns regarding common but discrete and mild behaviour problems, with Level 3 including active skills training for parents (Sanders, 1999). Level 4 is an intensive 8- to 10-week parent-training programme for children with more severe behaviour difficulties, and Level 5 is an enhanced behavioural family intervention programme for families where children's behaviour problems are coexisting with other sources of family dysfunction, such as marital conflict or parental depression.

The rationale for the tiered, multi-level strategy of Triple P is based on the principle of minimal sufficiency. That is, the aim of Triple P is to provide a minimally sufficient intervention that a parent requires to produce change in children's behaviour and divert them away from a pathway leading to more serious problems (Sanders, 1999). In this way, the tiered nature of Triple P acknowledges that the severity of behavioural problems and

dysregulation varies greatly among children as well as the differing capabilities of parents (Sanders, 1999). As such, depending on the degree of children's behaviour problems and parents' skill-set, different levels of intervention will be required.

An important advantage of the Triple P multi-level strategy is that it allows a public-health approach to be adopted in regards to child and family behavioural intervention (Prinz & Sanders, 2007). The ethos behind the Triple P programme is the recognition of the important role that children's broader social contexts play in their development and the idea that reduction in children's problem behaviours not only requires possible change in parenting practices, but also change in perceptions of parenting within the wider community context (Sanders, 1999). Thus, the inclusion of the universal, population-wide media campaign in Triple P aims to normalise parenting experiences and participation in parent programmes as well as key pieces of parenting information to parents nation-wide (Sanders, 2008).

For example, one study examined the impact of the population-wide parent programme on preventing mild maltreatment across a number of American counties (Prinz, Sanders, Shapiro, Whitaker, & Lutzker, 2009). Eighteen counties were randomly assigned to either the dissemination of the Triple P Positive Parenting programme or to the services-as-usual control condition. Dissemination of the Triple P programme involved professional training to service providers of the complete Triple P multi-level strategy and universal media and communication campaigns. After 2 years of intervention, community members in the Triple P programme counties showed a significantly higher proportion of awareness regarding Triple P compared to members in the control counties (Prinz et al., 2009). More importantly, significantly differentiated preventive effects were found between the Triple P counties and control counties for substantiated child maltreatment cases, out-of-home placements, and child maltreatment injuries. That is, a larger increase in all three population

child maltreatment indicators was observed pre- to post-intervention for the control counties compared to the Triple P counties, with two of the population indicators decreasing over time for this group. This study demonstrates the positive impact the universal Triple P programme can have on preventing child maltreatment when a public-health approach is employed (Prinz et al., 2009).

Triple P draws on similar theoretical models regarding parent-child interactions as the Incredible Years parent, teacher, and child training series, in particular the social learning theories of Patterson's coercion hypothesis and Bandura's observational learning theory (Sanders, 1999). In addition, parenting skills and strategies taught throughout the Triple P programme are grounded in research on applied behaviour analysis, which emphasises the identification of behavioural antecedents and modification of the environment to mitigate factors maintaining undesirable behaviours (Catania, 2011). Other components of Triple P that focus on parents' self-efficacy, personal agency, and self-management, are theoretically derived from social-information processing models which highlight the contribution of parents' cognitions and attributions to their self-concept, as well as the influence of family stressors on parents' emotional responses, behaviours, and parenting practices (Sanders, 1999).

Like the IY parent training series, the Triple P programme is another behavioural parenting intervention that has been extensively evaluated over the past few decades. As such, a solid evidence base exists for Triple P as an effective parent training programme for the reduction of children's conduct problems (e.g., Dittman, Farruggia, Keown, & Sanders, 2016; Sanders et al., 2008). A systematic review and meta-analysis was conducted by Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, and Day (2014) to investigate the effects of the multi-level Triple P strategy on a number of parent, child, and family outcomes. The systematic review involved the analysis of 101 studies conducted over a 33-year period and comprising of 16,099

families. For the majority of the levels in Triple P, significant short-term improvements were found for children's social, emotional, and behavioural outcomes; parenting practices; parenting satisfaction and efficacy; parental adjustment; parental relationship; and child observational data (Sanders et al., 2014). Further, significant long-term improvements were found for all outcomes, including parent observational data. These positive results for all levels of Triple P provide sound empirical support for the effectiveness of Triple P as a behavioural parenting intervention and its utility as both a universal, population-wide programme and targeted parenting intervention (Sanders, 2014).

Triple P has also been evaluated among New Zealand populations. For example, a randomised control trial evaluated the efficacy of a level 3 Triple P programme involving a parent discussion group focusing on dealing with disobedient behaviours in preschool-aged children (Dittman et al., 2016). Findings showed that parents who participated in the discussion group reported greater improvements in disruptive child behaviours, parenting practices, and parenting confidence compared to parents in the control group, with these improvements reaching clinical significance. Further, all of these improvements were maintained at 6-month follow-up (Dittman et al., 2016). In addition, a group teen Triple P programme has also been examined within a New Zealand context with positive results reported for parenting practices, parenting confidence, the quality of family relationships, and fewer adolescent behaviour problems at post-intervention (Ting Wai Chu, Bullen, Farruggia, Dittman & Sanders, 2015). Both studies recruited families from Auckland and the ethnic breakdown of the sample in the latter study was representative of New Zealand as a whole. Therefore, these studies suggest that the Triple P programme is a suitable and effective parenting programme for reducing behaviour problems in children of a variety of ages within a New Zealand setting.

The primary focus of the Triple P programme is teaching parents behaviour management strategies for children's misbehaviours and demonstrating to parents how they can respond positively to children's desirable behaviours. Unlike the IY parent training series, Triple P does not incorporate any emotion-related content. One study conducted in New Zealand has explored the efficacy of a group-delivered enhanced Triple P programme including an additional emotion-related component compared to the standard Triple P programme widely offered (Salmon, Dittman, Sanders, Burson, & Hammington, 2014). Parents were randomly assigned to either the standard group Triple P programme (GTP) or and enhanced emotion Triple P programme (EETP). The additional emotion content involved encouraging parents to discuss emotional events with their child, attempt to label children's emotions and identify possible causes of emotions their child was displaying, offer their child suggestions of possible emotion management strategies and praise their child's efforts of managing their emotions. Parents in this group were also encouraged to model effective management of their own emotions and be aware of situations when emotion-related strategies are not appropriate such as when the parent is angry (Salmon et al., 2014). The additional programme materials of the enhanced Triple P group comprised of an instructional video demonstrating emotion conversations between parent and child, in-group rehearsal of these conversational strategies, and take-home tip sheets. The emotion-related content was woven throughout the programme for the enhanced Triple P group, in such a way that neither longer programme sessions were required nor was an additional session necessary to cover this extra emotion content.

Findings for this study showed that parents in the EETP group increased their discussion of emotion labels and causes with their child post-intervention compared to parents in the GTP group, although this was not sustained at follow-up (Salmon et al., 2014). Further, EETP parents demonstrated more emotion coaching post-intervention and at follow-

up compared to GTP parents. However, there were no differences between the two groups for children's emotion knowledge skills and greater improvement in children's disruptive behaviours was found for parents who attended the GTP compared to the EETP group, albeit this difference had diminished by follow-up (Salmon, 2014). As such, Salmon and colleagues concluded that the addition of the emotion-related content to the standard Triple P group programme provided little benefit to the programmes efficacy.

Nevertheless, these results must be interpreted with caution. First, this study did not report how much time was allocated to focusing on the emotion-related content. Yet, the fact that all of the original programme content was covered plus the additional emotion component but no additional sessions or longer sessions were required for the enhanced emotion Triple P group suggests that the focus on emotion-related content was brief. As such, the level of emotion content received by parents in the EETP group may not have been sufficient to show significant improvements above and beyond the standard Triple P programme. Second, combining information of how to manage both children's behaviours and emotions into one parenting programme may have resulted in a programme that was too conceptually demanding for parents in the time provided (Salmon et al., 2014). In this way, parents in the EETP group may have had more difficulty consolidating the information they received regarding both children's behaviours and emotions and implementing these newly acquired skills (Salmon et al., 2014).

Third, the children involved in this study were reported to have elevated levels of oppositional and disruptive behaviours. Research has shown that there are times and situations where emotion-related parenting strategies are not appropriate or effective such as when the child is in a highly elevated emotional state (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). It is likely that children who display such intense disruptive behaviours experience strong emotional states and have difficulty regulating and processing their emotions. Therefore, it may be that

children who exhibit highly elevated behaviours may first benefit from a behavioural intervention resulting in a more immediate reduction in the intensity of these behaviours before focusing on coaching children in identifying and regulating their lower-level emotional states to prevent elevated behavioural displays.

Similar to the IY parent-training series, since the multilevel Triple P parenting strategy was established it has not been evaluated specifically among a stepfamily population. However, prior to the creation of the Triple P programme, Nicholson and Sanders (1999) developed a behavioural family intervention targeting stepfamilies and conducted a randomised control study to examine its treatment efficacy for child behaviour problems in stepfamilies. In this intervention, behavioural family intervention approaches, which later became fundamental to the Triple P programme, were supplemented with components focusing on stepfamily education, cooperative parenting, conflict resolution skills, and family activities training (Nicholson & Sanders, 1999). In the study, stepfamilies were randomly assigned to waitlist-control, therapist-directed intervention, or self-directed intervention. The intervention involved 8 modules over a 10-week period. The therapist-directed intervention was delivered to individual families in a clinic setting, while the self-directed intervention was completed by the families in their own homes.

The results of this study showed that parents who received a behavioural family intervention, both therapist-directed and self-directed, reported significantly greater reductions in child behaviour problems and parenting conflict from pre- to post-intervention, compared to parents in the waitlist-control (Nicholson & Sanders, 1999). It is important to note that only the Parent Problems Checklist (Dadds & Powell, 1991) was administered to examine changes in parenting practices and stepfamily outcomes. As such, it is unknown whether the parenting practices of the individual parent and stepparent changed after participating in the behavioural family intervention. Further, other family outcomes were not

addressed, such as family cohesion, parents and stepparents' self-efficacy and confidence, and relationship quality between different family members. Long-term follow-up data were not obtained in this study; therefore, it is not known if the results found would be maintained over time. Nicholson and Sanders concluded that further research is required regarding the development and evaluation of interventions for stepfamilies, particularly preventative programmes targeting the early stepfamily formation process before problems become too severe and embedded within the family.

2.3. Parent Management Training - The Oregon Model

Parent Management Training - The Oregon Model (PMTO) was originally developed in the mid 1960's by Gerald Patterson at the Oregon Social Learning Centre (Patterson, Reid, & Eddy, 2002). PMTO is a manualised set of procedures that were established following the development of Patterson's theory regarding the causes of aggression and the contributions of parents, siblings and peers in determining later outcomes for children (Patterson, 2005). As such, the PMTO approach targets children who exhibit conduct problems and antisocial behaviours, or are at risk of following a maladaptive developmental trajectory leading to negative outcomes later in life.

The basic assumption of the PMTO approach is that aggressive behaviours are not inherent within children but rather a product of the social environment in which these children develop (Patterson et al., 2002). In this way, PMTO is built upon the idea that effective change for reducing aggressive behaviours in children is brought about by changing their social environment and how the environment responds to such behaviours. Based on this social interaction learning theory, the PMTO approach, like the IY parent training series and the Triple P Positive parenting programme, focuses on training parents in contingency management strategies, such as the principles of reinforcement and consequences. The aim of the PMTO approach is to increase positive interactions between parents and their children by

teaching positive parenting strategies and effective discipline skills to parents (Kjøbli, Hukkelberg, & Ogden, 2013). PMTO sessions provide training to parents related to five core parenting practices, namely skill encouragement, discipline, monitoring, problem solving and positive involvement (Patterson, 2005).

PMTO is recognised as a well-established parenting programme with a substantial evidence base demonstrating the effectiveness of the programme at reducing children's problem behaviours through training parents in positive parenting practices (Eyberg, Nelson, & Boggs, 2008). For example, research examining the PMTO programme has shown that the programme is superior to alternative treatments for reducing aggressive and disruptive behaviours in children, albeit this was not maintained at follow-up (Bernal, Klinnert, & Schultz, 1980). Nevertheless, more recent randomised controlled studies have shown significant positive short- and long-term effects of PMTO in America (Forgatch, Patterson, DeGarmo, & Beldavs, 2009), Norway (Hagen, Ogden, & Bjornebekk, 2011; Ogden & Hagen, 2008), and Iceland (Sigmarsdóttir, Thorlaciuss, Guðmundsdóttir, & DeGarmo, 2015). The PMTO programme has not yet been evaluated within a New Zealand context.

An important difference to make note of between the PMTO approach and the other parenting programmes discussed earlier in this chapter is that the PMTO programme was established as a therapist-delivered, individual training programme for families. That is, the majority of research on PMTO involves parents receiving one-on-one therapy sessions as opposed to a group-programme format. One study has examined the PMTO programme delivered in a group-format with a wait-list control group (Kjøbli et al., 2013). Findings for this study showed that parents who attended the PMTO group-programme reported significant reductions in their children's externalising behaviours, as well as improvements in their children's social competence and their own mental health and parenting practices. These positive results were maintained at 6-month follow-up. As such, these findings provide

promising preliminary evidence that the PMTO programme can be adapted into a group-delivered format. However, further studies are necessary to replicate these findings and ascertain long-term outcomes for the group-delivered PMTO programme.

The PMTO approach appears to be the only pre-established parent training programme that has been adapted for a stepfamily population. The Marriage and Parenting in Stepfamilies (MAPS) programme (Forgatch, DeGarmo, & Beldavs, 2005) involved 110 stepfather families with 61% randomly assigned to a PMTO-based intervention and 39% assigned to a non-intervention control group. The PMTO intervention provided training in the five core parenting practices recognised in previously established PMTO programmes and further enriched by the addition of topics regarding stepfamily issues, such as cooperative parenting and the role of the stepparent (Forgatch et al., 2005). Couples were also offered a marital-enhancement component prior to the parent-training component. However, this was not a compulsory element and approximately one quarter of the couples opted out of the marital-enhancement component.

Forgatch et al., (2005) found that the MAPS intervention resulted in both significant improvements in couples' parenting practices and significant reductions in children's problem behaviours as reported by mothers and stepfathers and measured through clinic observations. The unique influence that stepfather parenting has on children's behaviours has also been examined in the MAPS intervention through stepfather-stepchild observations and Likert-type scales (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007). Findings showed that stepfathers' parenting practices significantly improved over 6 and 12 months; however, this improvement had diminished by 24 months. Yet, controlling for changes in mothering, the improvements in stepfather parenting as a result of the MAPS intervention predicted greater reduction in children's non-compliance and aggression at 2 years compared to the control group (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007). Further, improved co-parenting practices at 6 months

following the MAPS intervention was associated with enhanced marital-relationship skills and marital satisfaction at 2 years (Bullard et al., 2010).

The MAPS intervention, like the majority of the PMTO programmes evaluated, was delivered to stepfamilies by therapists in an individual setting with an average of approximately 12 sessions over a 27-week period (Forgatch et al., 2005). As such, it is not known whether the same results would have been achieved through a group-delivered format of the programme and comparisons cannot be made with other group-delivered parent training programmes. In addition, only 'simple' stepfather families (where a stepfather was added to a biological mother and her children) were included in the MAPS intervention, such that the findings cannot be generalised to all stepfamily structures such as stepmother families, partial-blended families, or full-blended families.

A common feature of the IY parent training series, Triple P, and PMTO is that they all derive from a social interaction learning perspective (Snyder et al., 2013). That is, they all emphasise a balance between positive parenting strategies and firm consistent discipline techniques to foster children's compliance and behaviour regulation. It is believed that effective parenting practices also involve parents being attuned and mindful of their own emotions and those of their children, yet the majority of parenting interventions grounded in a social interaction learning perspective often overlook this element (Snyder et al., 2013). As discussed in Chapter One, an emotion coaching parenting style that encourages awareness, empathy, and validation of children's emotions plays an important role in children's social and emotional development. Further, a meta-analysis reviewing components of parenting interventions associated with programme effectiveness found that programme characteristics consistently associated with greater programme effectiveness included promoting the parent-child relationship and fostering parents' emotional communication skills (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008). In this way, a parenting intervention that promotes emotion skills

may complement and enhance previously established, behaviourally-driven parenting programmes (Snyder et al., 2013).

2.4. Tuning in to Kids

Tuning in to Kids (TIK) is a parenting programme that focuses on parents' emotional awareness along with the emotion socialisation beliefs and practices they demonstrate towards their children (Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, & Prior, 2009). The primary purpose of TIK is to promote parents' own emotion regulation and their emotion socialisation behaviours with the aim of fostering children's emotional competence from an early age. Parents who participate in TIK are trained in a range of emotion-related skills, including being more aware of their own attitudes regarding emotions, becoming more attentive to their children's emotions and responding to these emotions in a supportive manner (Havighurst et al., 2009).

The theoretical underpinnings of TIK align closely with research by Gottman and Declaire (1997), suggesting that parents' attitudes and beliefs around emotions, that is their meta-emotion philosophy, along with their emotional well-being, influences their emotional parenting style and in turn their children's development of emotional competence. Parents are thought to model emotion-related skills, which are fundamental for successfully interacting with others, through their expression, reaction, regulation, and discussion of emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1998). As such, TIK is based on the assumption that children develop their ability to be aware of their own and others' emotional experiences as well as regulate their responses through their parents attending, supporting and validating their emotions and teaching them effective strategies for regulating emotions (Havighurst & Harley, 2007).

A typical TIK programme involves weekly 2-hour sessions over a 6-week period run by trained facilitators. The programme sessions follow a standard progression of procedures involving a variety of teaching techniques including psycho-education, group discussions and

activities, brainstorming, video vignettes, role-plays, and homework exercises (Havighurst & Harley, 2007). An important part of the programme involves educating parents on the topic of emotional competence in children and how it relates to later outcomes, the way in which children develop emotion-based skills over time, and the link between emotional parenting styles and the development of such skills (Havighurst, Harley & Prior, 2004). The programme seeks to build upon the five elements of emotion coaching identified by Gottman and colleagues (1996; 1997) as outlined in Chapter One - namely being aware of the child's emotions; viewing the child's display of emotion as a time for intimacy and teaching; helping the child to verbally label their emotions; empathising and validating the child's emotions; and helping the child to problem-solve. Throughout the programme, focus is also placed on parents' own emotional self-care and well-being to promote effective management of their own emotions to maintain a healthy family emotional climate.

The growing evidence-base for the TIK programme indicates promising findings for the effectiveness of the intervention among parents across both clinical and community samples (e.g. Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, Prior, & Kehoe, 2010; Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2012). For example, one study conducted by Havighurst et al. (2013) evaluated the TIK programme among parents with young children exhibiting behaviour problems. The results showed that parents who participated in TIK reported greater empathy towards their children and demonstrated improvement in their emotion coaching skills compared to the waitlist control group. Further, the children of the parents who participated in the programme showed greater emotional knowledge and their teachers reported fewer behaviour problems (Havighurst et al., 2013).

The TIK programme has also been adapted for a number of target populations, such as Tuning in to Toddlers, Tuning in to Teens, and Dad Tuning in to Kids. The research on all of these adapted programmes provides preliminary support for the positive impact emotion-

coaching parenting programmes have on both parents' emotion parenting styles and children's internalising and externalising difficulties (Havighurst, Kehoe, & Harley, 2015; Kehoe, Havighurst, & Harley, 2014; Lauw, Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, & Northam, 2014; Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2014). However, the Tuning in to Toddlers and Dad Tuning in to Kids were preliminary pilot studies. In addition, all studies conducted for the TIK programmes thus far have involved the creator of the programme. Therefore, additional research on these programmes from independent researchers is required to replicate findings. In addition, stepfamilies, along with single-parents and foster parents, have not yet been specifically targeted with the TIK parenting programme.

Due to the recency of TIK's development, long-term outcomes have not been able to be evaluated yet, nor has the programme yet been examined within a New Zealand context. Nevertheless, one recent study has conducted a direct comparison between the TIK emotion-focused programme and a behaviour-based programme (Triple P) to examine any differences in effectiveness for children with early conduct problems (Duncombe et al., 2016). Families were randomly assigned to the TIK programme, Triple P programme, or waitlist control. Findings showed that both the emotion-based and behaviour-based programmes were equally effective at reducing children's conduct problems, and the effectiveness of them was significantly different to the control group. These results support the idea that either programme is a suitable choice for reducing behaviour problems, providing more choice to both families and practitioners (Duncombe et al., 2016).

It is important to note that both parenting programmes in this study were part of a wider multi-systemic early intervention also involving child and teacher programmes. As such, further comparisons between an emotion-focused parenting programme and behaviour-based programme are needed in isolation of other programmes going on that may be contributing to the child outcomes. Interestingly, moderation analyses revealed that parents'

psychological well-being moderated response to intervention (Duncombe et al., 2016). That is, parents who reported poorer psychological well-being at pre-intervention appeared to benefit more from the TIK programme compared to the Triple P programme. Duncombe and colleagues speculated that the focus on the parents' own emotional awareness and regulation may be advantageous to parents with poorer psychological well-being and increase their sense of control, allowing them to be more responsive to their children's emotions. In turn, this would likely enhance the parent-child relationship and subsequently improve children's behaviour. Therefore, this finding suggests that an emotion-focused parenting programme may be a better option for parent-child dyads where the relationship is compromised.

2.5. Present Study

New Zealand families have significantly changed over the last few decades with co-habitation and stepfamilies becoming increasingly common. Many children will experience at least one family transition before the age of 17-years-old (Dharmalingam et al., 2004). Although the majority of children in stepfamilies will thrive, research has consistently shown that children in stepfamilies are at increased risk for poorer long-term outcomes and adjustment problems compared to children who have been raised in a stable first-marriage household.

Stepfamilies experience many unique challenges to successfully forming a new family unit. These include changes in previously existing relationships, establishing new relationships, defining roles, boundaries and routines, and creating family solidarity. Because of these challenges, transitioning into a stepfamily can be an emotionally turbulent time for all members involved, but particularly for children, and many complex emotions are likely to be experienced, such as confusion, guilt, anger, sadness, resentment, and jealousy.

The concept of emotional competence refers to a set of skills relating to children's expression and understanding of emotions in themselves and others as well as their ability to

effectively regulate their emotions to function successfully in society. Greater levels of emotional competence has been shown to be related to better peer interactions, increased prosocial behaviour, reduced behaviour problems, and increased academic achievement (Saarni, 1997). As such, how stepchildren attend to, express, and regulate the emotions they may be experiencing through the stepfamily transition will reflect aspects of emotional competence and in turn their long-term adjustment outcomes.

In addition, research by Gottman et al., (1996) has shown that parental figures significantly influence children's emotional development through expression, coaching, and discussion of emotion. An emotion coaching parenting style is characterised by attending to, empathising and reflecting children's emotions, and has been associated with greater emotional competence, more prosocial behaviours and fewer conduct problems (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). Within the stepfamily literature, sufficient evidence suggests that the nature of the role a stepparent takes can significantly influence the stepparent-child relationship and adjustment of the stepchild. That is, stepparents appear to be more successful at establishing a positive relationship with their stepchild when they take on a warm and supporting role as opposed to a disciplinary role. As such, an emotion coaching parenting style may be beneficial to stepparents and facilitate the formation of a positive relationship between the stepparent and stepchild.

Because of the myriad of challenges that stepfamilies experience during the transition and formation of the stepfamily unit a parenting programme for stepparents that focuses on promoting the stepparent-stepchild relationship may be advantageous to stepfamilies. Yet, there is little support and few resources currently available to stepfamilies in NZ. Further, most parent education programmes that have been empirically-validated and currently available are behaviour-based programmes. The Tuning in to Kids programme is one

parenting programme that focuses on the skills of emotion coaching and promoting the parent-child relationship.

Research is yet to be conducted in assessing the effectiveness of the TIK parenting programme with a target population of stepparents. However, the TIK parenting programme seems like a suitable choice of intervention for stepfamilies because of the importance it places on emotional development and relationship building. Therefore, the overall purpose of the present study is to investigate whether there is a need for parenting programmes to specifically cater to stepparents and if an emotion-based parenting programme is an appropriate option for stepparents. Small adaptations were made to the emotion-focused TIK programme in an attempt to make it more relevant to stepparents and the unique challenges stepfamilies experience. An exploratory mixed methods design was employed to examine the following primary aims and research questions:

1. To explore the effectiveness of an emotion-coaching parenting programme among stepparents:
 - a. What are the effects of an emotion-focused parenting programme on stepparents' emotional parenting style and practices?
 - b. Are there any effects of the programme on stepchildren's behaviours?
 - c. Does the programme have any impact on stepparents' reports of family satisfaction?
2. To explore the need for and appropriateness of the adapted TIK programme for stepfamilies:
 - a. Is an emotion-focused parenting programme suitable for stepfamilies?
 - b. Were the changes made to the TIK programme applicable to stepfamilies?

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1. Study Design

The present study was an exploratory programme adaptation and evaluation to examine the suitability of the Tuning in to Kids (TIK) parenting programme for step- and blended families. As such, no hypotheses were proposed. A mixed methods design was chosen for the study, where distinct quantitative and qualitative methods and analyses were employed to evaluate different aspects of the present study. According to Caracelli and Greene's (1997) typology of mixed methods design, the current programme evaluation study would be considered a complementarity and expansion component design (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). That is, the two methods were implemented as separate components of the study to generate and evaluate information regarding different aspects of the programme (expansion). In addition, the findings gathered from the qualitative methods of the present study complement and enhance the findings from the dominant quantitative methods used.

This design was selected as it provides the best opportunity to collect data that allows for the description and comparison of parents' judgments on their parenting and family life and their subjective experiences and perspectives of participating in the parenting programme. Quantitative data was collected via pre- and post-programme questionnaires to examine any changes that may have occurred in stepparents' parenting behaviours, the stepchild's behaviours and stepfamily dynamics. Some of the measures used in the current study are scales that have been frequently employed in previous TIK research. In contrast, the qualitative data was collected through a brief phone interview to gain further insight into participants' reactions and evaluations of the Step-TIK programme, including how applicable it was to their family situation. In this way, the use of a mixed method design allowed for a

broader understanding of the appropriateness of the Step-TIK programme for step and blended families.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

The present study was reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. It was important to identify ethical considerations not only regarding data collection but also surrounding programme administration for the Step-TIK study. Separate information sheets and consent forms were developed for the two data collection methods, with the pre-questionnaire information sheet also making reference to ethical matters regarding the parenting programme (See Appendix A and B for the information sheet and consent form regarding the online questionnaires). A number of ethical issues that were considered for the current study are discussed below.

3.2.1. Respect of choice.

Stepparents who expressed interest in the Step-TIK parenting programme were given the choice of participating in the study. It was made clear to all stepparents that participating in the study was optional and no ramifications would occur if they decided not to participate in the study. That is, all stepparents who expressed interest in the parenting programme were able to attend the programme regardless of whether or not they agreed to participate in the study. In addition, the researchers only confirmed study participation after stepparents had signed up to attend the programme.

For those stepparents who did agree to participate in the study, all information sheets reiterated that participation in the study was optional and they were able to withdraw from the study at any time up until the date that data analysis occurred. The information sheet for the questionnaires stated that participants were not obligated to complete the questionnaires once started, and if they chose to opt out of the study that this would have no implications on attending the parenting programme.

Participants who completed the post-questionnaire were given the choice to partake in a brief follow-up phone interview. The information sheet stated that it was an option to only participate in the study questionnaires and not complete the phone interview. That is, unless otherwise stated, participants' questionnaire data would not be withdrawn if they did not agree to take part in the phone interview. Participants were also informed that they were not obliged to answer all questions and could terminate the interview at anytime. Again, participants were reminded that they were able to withdraw any of their data up until the date that data was analysed.

As part of the Step-TIK programme, stepparents were encouraged to share relevant family experiences and provide examples of their emotion-coaching attempts to identify aspects they were finding easy or difficult. At the start of the first session, it was made clear to all stepparents that it was their choice as to what information they shared with the group. In this way, stepparents were told to only share information that they felt comfortable sharing. It was also made clear to all stepparents that no information shared during the programme sessions would be used as part of the study data and the only data being collected was the data gained from questionnaires and the phone interview.

3.2.2. Confidentiality.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity when completing the questionnaires, participants were provided with a unique code that was automatically emailed to them once they completed the study pre-questionnaire. This code allowed the researchers to track the participants' responses from the pre-questionnaire to the post-questionnaire without using any identifying information. At the end of the post-questionnaire, participants who agreed to take part in the phone interview were asked to provide a contact number to enable the researcher to contact them.

At the outset of the parenting programmes, confidentiality of any information shared among the groups was discussed. This was to ensure that both the facilitators and stepparents understood that any personal experiences shared was private information and would not be discussed outside of the group sessions. Due to the nature of the parenting programme, stepparents were informed of the limits of confidentiality. As such, stepparents were aware that if any information was shared that caused the facilitators to be concerned about the health, safety, and/or well-being of the participants or their children, this information would be discussed with a registered psychologist.

Participants who agreed to participate in the phone interview were also reminded about all confidentiality issues prior to the interview beginning. To ensure confidentiality of interview participants was preserved, each participant was allocated a code during the transcription process, with all names and any other identifying information being removed. These transcripts and all other data collected were stored on secure electronic storage devices accessible only by a user name and password.

3.2.3. Cultural sensitivity.

The present study was open to participants who identified as any ethnicity. As such, it was important to ensure that the Step-TIK study and programme procedure demonstrated cultural sensitivity. The present study was approved by the Māori Advisory Committee at the University of Canterbury after Māori consultation took place. A Māori Cultural Enhancement Framework (Macfarlane, 2013) was applied to the Step-TIK programme in an attempt to enhance programme delivery in a culturally responsive manner.

3.3. Recruitment

Participants were recruited from around Christchurch and the wider Christchurch area. A brand was created for the current study, named 'Step-TIK' that was used in all advertising material (see Figure 2). To promote the study, a website was created using a free

website host provider (Weebly). The website provided information about the study and the TIK programme for both participants and those interested in helping with recruitment (see Figure 2 for a screenshot of the Step-TIK study's homepage). A sign-up form was also included on the website, which stepparents could complete if they intended to attend the parenting programme. A flyer was also made which included brief details about the study, contact details of the researchers, and the link to the study website (see Appendix C).

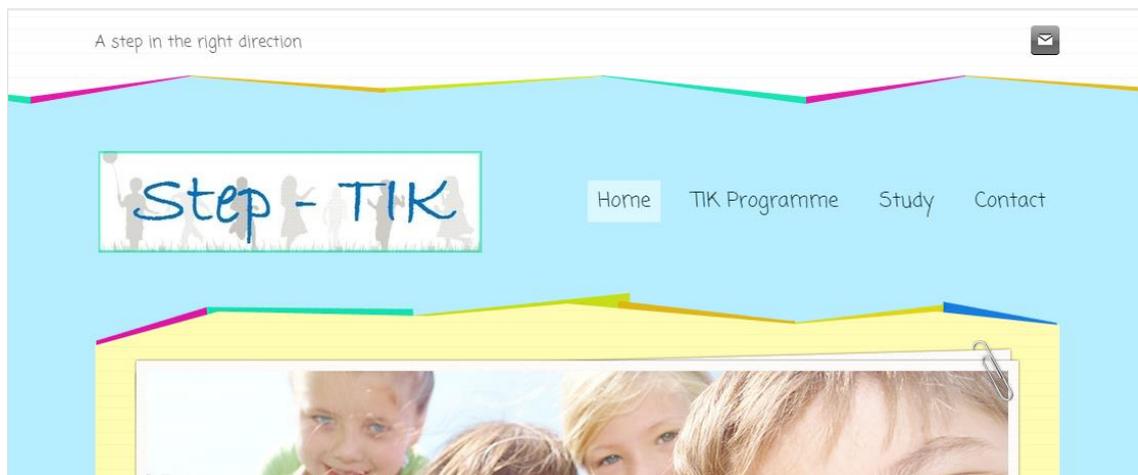


Figure 2. Screenshot of the Step-TIK study's website homepage.

The main method of recruitment was through email correspondence to primary and composite schools across Christchurch as well as relevant organisations, agencies, community initiatives and churches. Emails were sent out containing a brief description about the study, along with a flyer attached and the link to the study website. All parties were asked if they would be willing to advertise the study within their community or share the website link on some form of social media. Of the 120 organisations and schools that were contacted, only a very small proportion responded to the email agreeing to promote the study. The majority of organisations who agreed to help with recruitment were primary schools confirming that they would place some advertising material in their school newsletter. Flyers

were also placed in the Pukemanu Dovedale (Child and Family Psychology) Centre on the Education campus at the University of Canterbury and the programme was advertised on the University Clinic webpage.

3.4. Step-TIK Parenting Programme

Small adaptations were made to the TIK parenting programme in the present study. These changes were made in an attempt to make it more applicable and relevant to stepfamilies. Throughout this process, the researchers made an effort to ensure that the changes made did not alter the goals of any programme activities and no content was removed from the programme. The adaptations included modifying and adding additional programme exercises along with changing scenarios on activity worksheets that parents completed during the programme sessions.

First, in session one of the TIK programme, parents are asked to brainstorm the joys and difficulties of parenting children. The goal of this exercise is to normalise difficulties the parents are experiencing with their children's behaviours and demonstrate that these difficulties are often common experiences for all parents. In the Step-TIK programme, this brainstorm was changed such that stepparents were asked to brainstorm about stereotypes, pleasant surprises and difficulties of living within a stepfamily. The goal of the Step-TIK programme was to also normalise the difficulties stepparents experience with living in a stepfamily and establish common ground among the stepparents attending the programme.

Second, in session three of the original programme parents are asked to complete two activity worksheets involving scenarios of everyday issues that may occur within a household. The first activity, called 'Spot the Emotion Coaching Opportunity,' asks parents to identify the situations when it would be appropriate to emotion coach and times when it would not be appropriate. An example scenario from the TIK programme is 'Your child is taking a very long time to get dressed in the morning and if you don't leave the house in five

minutes you will be late for work.’ For the Step-TIK study, some of the scenarios in this worksheet were changed to reflect a situation that may occur within a stepfamily household. For example, ‘You ask your stepchild to get ready for bed but they start making a fuss because their stepsibling who is 2 years older than them does not have to go to bed yet.’

In the second activity worksheet of the original programme, called ‘The Emotion Detective,’ parents are provided with a list of scenarios that evoke strong emotions in children and are asked to think of comparable adult situations for each scenario. An example of a scenario is, ‘starting preschool or school for the first time.’ The goal of this activity is to have parents imagine the situation from the child’s perspective, enhancing their ability to respond to their child in an empathic manner. Again, in the Step-TIK study, some scenarios were changed to situations unique to stepchildren that likely evoke strong emotions such as ‘living with your new stepparent for the first time.’ See Appendix D and E for copies of both the original activity worksheet and the adapted worksheet for ‘Spot the Emotion Coaching Opportunity’ and ‘The Emotion Detective’ respectively.

Third, sessions four and five of the TIK programme focus on specific emotions that parents often find more difficult to manage; namely, fears and worries in session four and anger in session five. As part of these sessions, the TIK programme asks parents to brainstorm common fears and worries for children in session four and causes of children’s anger in session five. For the Step-TIK programme, in addition to these two activities the facilitators asked the stepparents to brainstorm fears/worries and causes of anger that are more specific to circumstances that stepchildren face. Finally, a new set of example role-play scenarios was created for stepparents to use during the sessions if they were not comfortable with bringing a scenario that occurred at home (See Appendix F).

3.5. Programme Procedure

In the current study, the six-week long Step-TIK programme was run twice over a year-long period. The weekly sessions occurred on a weekday evening for both programmes. The sessions were 2.5 hours long, with a short refreshment break midway through. These programmes were held in a clinic room at the University of Canterbury. Trained facilitators of the TIK programme, including the primary researcher of the present study and her primary supervisor, ran the two programmes. The procedure for the Step-TIK programmes followed the original TIK parenting programme as described in Chapter 2, with the exception of the small adaptations made to the programme identified above.

The first Step-TIK programme ran from late June to early August. Five stepparents (two female, three male) attended the first programme. The second Step-TIK programme ran from mid-August to mid-September. Six stepparents (all female) attended the second programme, resulting in a total of 11 parents attending the two Step-TIK programmes. Despite all stepparents consenting to participate in the present study, not all stepparents completed the study questionnaires. As such, only data regarding study participants who completed all questionnaires will be reported.

3.6. Quantitative Methods

3.6.1. Participants.

A final sample of nine participants (six female, three male) who completed one of the two parenting programmes and both the pre- and post-questionnaires were included in the analyses. Table 1 shows the basic demographic details of the participants, including age, gender, and ethnicity. The mean age of participants was 36.7 years at the time of completing the pre-questionnaire, while the average at which participants first became a stepparent was only slightly lower at 31.9 years. The majority of participants were New Zealand European, with only one parent identifying as New Zealand Māori.

To measure participants' socioeconomic status (SES), educational qualifications and occupational status were used as proxy variables. Education was assessed by developing a 4-point scale to indicate participants' highest educational level achieved. The scoring was 4 = University Postgraduate Degree, 3 = University Undergraduate Degree, 2 = Alternative tertiary education such as Diploma or Trade Certificate, 1 = Secondary school. No parent reported having a University Postgraduate Degree, 3 had an Undergraduate degree, 4 had a diploma or trade certificate, and 2 indicated secondary school as their highest educational level. A 5-point scale was developed for participants' occupation. The scoring was 5 = Upper Management, 4 = Upper-level professionals and high-level technicians, 3 = Lower-level professionals and mid-level technicians, 2 = Labourers, support workers, and low-level technicians, 1 = Unemployed (including stay-at-home parents and students). The proportion of parents on each level of the scale were 0, 0, 5, 2, and 2 respectively.

Apart from the one participant who reported being single, the majority of stepparents lived with their current partner ($n = 8$) with the average time of living together being 5.4 years. Three of these participants reported being in a steady/de facto relationship, while the remaining five participants were married to their partner. The average number of previous marriages/live-in partnerships of the participants was 0.7, ranging from 0 to 2 previous relationships.

The participants reported that the number of stepchildren they cared for ranged from 1 to 3, whereas the number of biological children participants had ranged from 0 to 4. Participants were also asked to provide demographic information for their current partner and the stepchild they chose to focus on during the Step-TIK programme and while completing the questionnaires. Refer to Table 1 for partner and focal stepchild demographics.

To participate in the Step-TIK study, stepparents were asked to have at least one stepchild between the ages of 5- and 10-years old at the outset of the parenting programme. This

child was required to be living in the same household as the stepparent for at least a few days per week or at times when active parenting was necessary. Parents indicated on a 6-point Likert Scale approximately how often their stepchild lives at home. The scoring ranged from never to fulltime. The majority of stepparents reported that their stepchildren lived with them either four to six days a week or full time, with only one parent reporting that their stepchild only lived with them for one to two weeks per month. In addition, any major transitions in family structure or dynamics that may have taken place within the stepfamily must have occurred more than 3 months prior to the parenting programme beginning. All participants met these criteria apart from one parent who identified her child as a foster-child. After consultation with the supervisors of this project, it was decided that sufficient overlap existed between the experiences of stepparents and foster parents, particularly with regards to parent-child relationships, such that this parent's responses were not excluded from data analysis. Refer to Table 1 for a summary of details regarding participants' family structure and living arrangements.

Four participants (one female, three male) attended the first programme and five participants (all female) attended the second parenting programme. Across both programmes three parents reported living in a full-blended family household, three were living in a partial-blended family, and two parents would be considered to be living in a 'simple' stepfamily (refer to Table 1). The final parent was the foster parent. In addition to the participants completing the questionnaires, data was also collected from participants' partners through a post-programme questionnaire. A total of three partners (all male) completed this questionnaire. Due to the poor response rate, this data was excluded from analysis.

Table 1.

Demographic Details of Participants, their Partner, their Focal Stepchild, and Family Structure

	Mean (SD) or frequency	Range
Participant Demographics (N = 9)		
Gender		
Male	3	
Female	6	
Age		
Current Age	36.7(7.52)	25 - 47
Age when became a Stepparent	31.9(9.03)	19 - 44
Ethnicity		
NZ European	8	
NZ Māori	1	
SES		
<u>Education</u>		
University Postgraduate Degree	0	
University Undergraduate Degree	3	
Tertiary Diploma/Trade Certificate	4	
Secondary School	2	
<u>Occupation</u>		
Upper Management	0	
High-level professionals and technicians	0	
Mid-level professionals and technicians	5	
Labourers, support workers & low-level technicians	2	
Unemployed	2	
Relationship		
Current Partner	8	
Length of Time Living Together	5.4(6.97)	.75 - 22
Previous Marriages/Live-in Partnerships	0.7(0.71)	0 - 2
Current Relationship Status		
Steady Relationship/De Facto	3	
Engaged	0	
Married/Civil Union	5	
Single	1	
Number of Children		
Stepchildren	2.1(0.78)	1 - 3
Biological Children	1.7(1.32)	0 - 4
Partner Demographics (N = 8)		
Gender		
Male	5	
Female	3	
Age	40.6(7.01)	25 - 47
Ethnicity		
NZ European	8	
SES		
<u>Education</u>		

University Postgraduate Degree	0	
University Undergraduate Degree	3	
Tertiary Diploma/Trade Certificate	2	
Secondary School	3	
Occupation		
Upper Management	2	
High-level professionals and technicians	0	
Mid-level professionals and technicians	3	
Labourers, support workers & low-level technicians	1	
Unemployed	2	
Stepchild Demographics (N = 9)		
Gender		
Male	5	
Female	4	
Age		
Current Age	8.7(1.87)	6 - 12
Age they began living with Stepparent	4.8(3.19)	0 - 9
Ethnicity		
NZ European	9	
Living Arrangements		
Years living with Stepparent	3.6(2.78)	.75 - 8
Frequency of contact with Stepparent	5.2(0.97)	3 - 6

3.6.2. Materials.

An online questionnaire programme hosted by the University of Canterbury's Qualtrics survey software was used to distribute the pre- and post-programme questionnaires. These questionnaires involved previously established Likert-based scales selected from relevant literature, adapted scales and a small number of open-ended questions. The pre- and partner questionnaires included demographic information and the post-questionnaire included a brief evaluation of the Step-TIK programme.

3.6.3. Procedure.

Programme participants were provided with information sheets about the study at the first programme session and then sent a web-link to the pre-questionnaire via email the day after the first programme session. The information sheet (included again at the beginning of the questionnaire) and the consent form were presented prior to any of the study measures. Participants were not able to continue on to the questionnaire without agreeing to all items on

the consent form. A reminder email was sent to participants at the beginning of the following week encouraging them to complete the pre-questionnaire prior to the next Step-TIK session. The majority of participants had completed the pre-programme questionnaire prior to the second session of the Step-TIK programme taking place, with only two participants completing it shortly after the second session, one of these being due to technical difficulties.

The post-questionnaire was sent out to participants no later than a week after the Step-TIK programme ended. Participants were informed that the post-questionnaire would be very similar to the pre-questionnaire they completed and that by continuing on to the survey items their consent to continue participating in the study was assumed. At the conclusion of the post-questionnaire, an invitation to participate in a brief phone interview was displayed and a request for a contact number if participants were interested. Participants were then asked if they would like to receive a summary of the results and thanked for their participation in the study before exiting the questionnaire. All participants had completed the post-questionnaire no more than three weeks after completing the Step-TIK programme.

3.6.4. Measures.

3.6.4.1. Stepparent measures.

The online questionnaires that participants completed consisted of a battery of self-report measures. The measures, with the exception of demographics and programme evaluation, were the same in both the pre- and post-questionnaire. These measures were used to assess stepparents' emotion regulation, their parenting attitudes and styles, and their satisfaction with living in a stepfamily. Each measure is discussed in further detail below.

Emotion Regulation. The Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) was used to assess stepparents' own emotional awareness and regulation. This 36-item questionnaire measures six dimensions of emotion competence, including acceptance of emotions, ability to engage in goal-directed behaviour when emotionally aroused, impulse control, awareness of emotions, strategies used to regulate emotions, and

clarity of one's emotions. Participants were instructed to rate how often each item applies to them using a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater difficulties in emotion regulation. The scale provides an overall score as well as six subscale scores for the different dimensions. The DERS has been shown to demonstrate high internal consistency, good test-retest reliability, and adequate construct and predictive validity (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Salters-Pedneault, Roemer, Tull, Rucker, & Mennin, 2006). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the total scale were .95 at Time 1 and Time 2.

Parenting Attitude and Behaviours. Four dimensions of parenting were assessed including warmth, sensitivity, over-reactivity, and lax and inconsistent discipline. The items for these four dimensions were drawn from recent research by the Christchurch Health and Development Study (Raudino, Woodward, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2012). Warmth comprised of 13 items focusing on a stepparent's positive regard towards their stepchild, such as *'I joke and play with my stepchild.'* Sensitivity consisted of six items regarding the stepparent's attentiveness towards their stepchild's needs and emotional states. For example, *'I do realise when my stepchild is upset or worried about something.'* The over-reactivity scale consisted of 10 items asking stepparents about their reactivity and regulation of their behaviour towards their stepchild's misbehaviour. An exemplar item for over-reactivity includes *'When my stepchild misbehaves I raise my voice and yell.'* Lax and inconsistent discipline comprised of seven items regarding the stepparent's behaviour management strategies they use, such as *'I threaten my stepchild with punishment more often than giving it.'* Participants were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 = Definitely not like me, to 5 = Just like me.

In the present study, across the four dimensions Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .74 to .96 at Time 1, and .76 to .95 at Time 2. Warmth and Sensitivity were strongly associated with each other both pre- and post-programme, with correlations of .72 and .83

respectively. Further, Over-reactivity and Lax/Inconsistent Discipline were significantly correlated pre-programme but only moderately correlated post-programme. A strong negative correlation of $-.77$ was also observed between Sensitivity and Lax/Inconsistent Discipline post-programme.

Parent Emotion Style. The Parent Emotion Style Questionnaire (PESQ; Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, & Prior, 2009) was used to assess participants beliefs and behaviours about children's emotions. This 21-item scale was adapted from the 14-item *Maternal Emotion Style Questionnaire* (MESQ; Lagace-Se'guin & Coplan, 2005). The MESQ asks mothers to rate on a 7-point Likert scale how they cope with their children's emotions of anger and sadness. The extra seven items included in the PESQ scale were added to assess parents' responses to children's fears and worries. Three subscale scores can be produced to measure parents' emotion dismissive parenting, emotion coaching parenting, and their empathy and connection towards their child. Havighurst and colleagues have reported good internal consistency for the 3-factor PESQ (Havighurst et al., 2010). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for Emotion Dismissing, Emotion Coaching and Empathy were $.84$, $.65$, $.55$ at Time 1 and $.92$, $.79$, $.89$ at Time 2 respectively.

Relationship Satisfaction. In order to assess stepfamily relationship satisfaction a custom scale was created with three items taken from an exploratory investigation of stepfamily roles as part of a doctoral thesis (Mobley, 2011) and four items written specifically for the present study. These seven items include the following (items from Mobley (2011) are presented first: "*How satisfied are you with your stepfamily situation?*" "*How satisfied are you with your relationship with your stepchild/ren?*" "*How satisfied are you with your partner as a parent?*" "*How satisfied are you with you and your partner's ability to work together in parenting?*" "*How satisfied are you with your role as a stepparent?*" "*How satisfied are you with your involvement in your stepchild/ren's life?*" "*Do*

you experience many positive interactions with your focal stepchild? Participants were asked to rate how much each item applied to them on a 5-point Likert scale from *'Not at all'* to *'Very much'*, unless not applicable was chosen. The internal consistency reliability of this scale was good at both the pre- and post-programme assessment (Cronbach's alpha = .85 at Time 1 and .86 at Time 2).

3.6.4.2. Child measure.

An additional scale was also included at the end of the participants' questionnaires to assess their stepchildren's emotional competence, behaviours, and social functioning.

Eyberg Child Behaviour Inventory. The Eyberg Child Behaviour Inventory (ECBI; Eyberg & Robinson, 1983) is a 36-item scale that uses parent report to measure conduct problem behaviours of children (Behaviours such as, dawdling, refusing to comply, temper tantrums, verbally or physically fighting with others, and easily distracted). Parents rate the severity of the behaviours on a 7-point Likert scale from *'Never'* to *'Always'*, providing a single overall behaviour intensity score. They also report 'yes' or 'no' as to whether or not each behaviour item is a current problem, which are summed to provide a current problem score. The ECBI is a psychometrically strong measure and has demonstrated high internal consistency (Eisenstadt, McElreath, Eyberg, & McNeil, 1994), good construct validity (Boggs, Eyberg, & Reynolds, 1990; Burns & Patterson, 1991), and good convergent validity (Webster-Stratton & Eyberg, 1982). In the present study, the behaviour intensity score was summed pre- and post-programme, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .95 at Time 1 and .83 at Time 2. The current problem behaviour score was excluded from the analysis due to a large amount of missing data.

3.7. Data Analysis

All data collected from the measures above were exported from the Qualtrics software programme. The statistical software package IBM SPSS (Version 23) was used to analyse the quantitative data obtained from the pre- and post-questionnaires.

Descriptive analyses were first carried out to examine the level and pattern of responding across the pre- and post-questionnaire for the total sample. With the exception of the problem behaviour scores on the ECBI, the amount of missing data for both the pre- and post-questionnaire was minimal and judged to be missing at random. Therefore, any missing data were replaced by the mean of the participants' responses on the other items in that subscale or scale. Composite variables were subsequently created for each measure overall and any sub-scales within a measure. Where necessary, individual items were reverse-coded prior to creating the composite variables. For well-established measures, scoring procedures were followed to produce the composite variables. That is, the DERS scale (and related subscales) and ECBI behaviour intensity score require summation of individual item scores to provide an overall score. The current study also summed the individual items within each measure to produce a total score (and six DERS subscale scores) for each participant on the two variables. Composite variables for all other measures were created by averaging across all individual items, or a specific group of items if subscales were involved, within the measure to produce a score for each participant within the same range as the original scale.

Paired-samples t-tests were employed as a way of assessing the mean level of change across participants on each variable from pre- to post-programme. In turn, Cohen's *d* was used to estimate effect sizes. It is important to note that studies with small sample sizes often result in inflated effect sizes (Lakens, 2013). Due to the low recruitment rate and the small amount of data collected, Modified Brinley Plots were constructed to gain further insight into individual changes that occurred among participants from pre- to post-programme. Modified Brinley Plots provide a way of analysing any trends over time using an exploratory visual analysis (Jacobsen, Follette, & Revenstorf, 1984). These scatter plots graph individual data points for the same measure over time.

To create these scatter plots, a participant's mean score for a variable in the pre-questionnaire is plotted along the x-axis against their score on the same variable in the post-questionnaire along the y-axis (See Figure 3 for an example Modified Brinley Plot). Thus, for one variable, the two means of each participant form coordinate pairs that are plotted on the graph. In this way, the 45° diagonal line of a Modified Brinley Plot indicates no change over time (Jacobsen et al., 1984). Change in time can then be analysed by examining the dispersion of the plots and their deviation from the line of no change. For example, if the Step-TIK programme had no effect on an individual then their data points will lie on or close to the 45° diagonal line of no change, irrespective of how the group mean score of a variable changed over time. If an individual's score increases on a variable after completing the programme their data point will lie above the diagonal line, whereas if their score decreased after programme completion their data point will lie below the diagonal line.

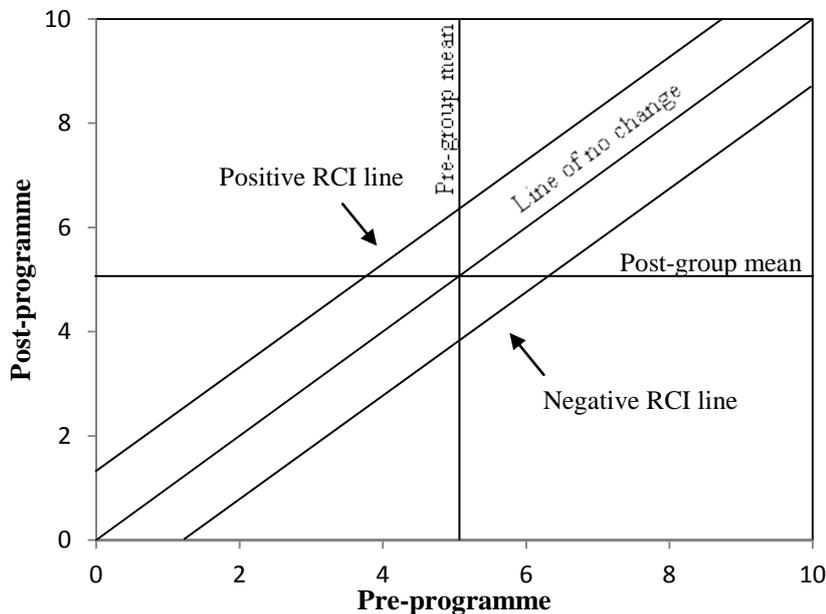


Figure 3. Labelled depiction of a Modified Brinley Plot Graph including line of no change and RCI lines.

For each composite variable a Reliable Change Index (RCI: Jacobsen et al., 1984), was also calculated using the formula

(<https://www.psychoutcomes.org/OutcomesMeasurement/ReliableChangeIndex>):

$$\sqrt{(2 \times (\textit{Standard error of measurement})^2)}$$

On each graph, the lines parallel to the 45° line of no change indicates the RCI value. The RCI for a variable represents the change in an individual's score required from pre-programme to post-programme to estimate that a reliable change has taken place. That is, the change is not due to natural variation or measurement error. As such, if a participant's score falls above/below the parallel line it is a better estimate of change not conflated by the reliability issues of the measure. If a participant's score falls between the line of no change and the RCI line then any change they report may be due to measurement error or natural variation and must be interpreted with caution.

Chapter Four

Quantitative Results

A total of nine participants completed both the pre- and post-programme questionnaires in the present study. The following chapter will report on the quantitative findings obtained from these questionnaires. This chapter relates to the first aim regarding the effectiveness of an emotion-focused parenting programme among stepparents. The results are reported in two sections, stepparenting style and then stepchild behaviour and family dynamics. The stepparenting style section is further divided into two categories to focus on different aspects of parenting; emotion-based stepparenting and parenting behaviours. Each section begins with an outline of the results from the statistical tests conducted to examine the effect of the Step-TIK programme. Modified Brinley Plots are then presented to gain further insight into individual change over time reported by the participants.

4.1. Stepparenting Style

4.1.1. Emotion-based stepparenting.

Paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted to examine the effect of the Step-TIK programme on the stepparents' emotion regulation and emotional style. In keeping with previous research that has used the DERS scale (Havighurst et al., 2009; 2010; 2013; Kehoe et al., 2014) only the overall DERS score will be reported, not the separate subscales (See Appendix G for the statistical analyses of the sub-scales). The means, standard deviations, *t* values, probability values and effect sizes for the DERS, Emotion Dismissing, Emotion Coaching, and Empathy are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2.

Paired-sample T-test Statistics for Emotion-based Stepparenting Variables

Variable	Pre-programme		Post-programme		<i>t</i> -value	df	<i>p</i> -value	Effect size Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
DERS	77.11	16.32	65.00	16.86	2.87	8	.021*	0.73
Emotion Dismissing	3.32	0.61	2.72	0.79	3.91	8	.005**	0.85
Emotion Coaching	3.51	0.42	3.96	0.47	-3.16	8	.013*	1.03
Empathy	3.27	0.54	4.31	0.53	-5.84	8	.000**	1.96

Note. SD = Standard Deviation; df = degrees of freedom; DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Score

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .005$. Cohens *d*: 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, 0.8 = large effect

The results show that there were significant decreases in stepparents' Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Score (DERS; *M* difference = -12.11) and emotion dismissing parenting (*M* difference = -0.60). Further, Cohen's effect size value for both the DERS ($d = 0.73$) and Emotion Dismissing ($d = 0.85$) suggest the programme had a moderate to large effect on participants' emotion regulation and emotionally dismissive parenting strategies. There were significant increases in stepparents' emotion coaching (*M* difference = 0.45) and empathy (*M* difference = 1.04) after attending the Step-TIK parenting programme. The effect sizes were 1.03 and 1.96 respectively, suggesting that the programme had a very large impact on participants' emotion coaching strategies and empathy.

The Modified Brinley Plots for the DERS, Emotion Dismissing, Emotion Coaching, and Empathy are shown in Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7, respectively. These scatter plots show how the individual participants' scores changed for these four variables after completing the Step-TIK programme and whether participants' scores can be considered reliable change. The Modified Brinley Plot for the participants' individual DERS scores shows there was a wide range in scores both pre-programme and post-programme. Four stepparents reported such an improvement in regulating their emotions to indicate an estimated reliable change, including the two individuals who reported the highest scores on the DERS pre-programme. That is, the

participants' score were below the RCI line. Three other stepparents reported a decrease in their difficulty to regulate their emotion after completing the Step-TIK programme, indicated by the data points being below the line of no change, although, their change in scores is not enough to conclude reliable improvement in regulating their emotions. One participant reported no change in their DERS score after completion of the programme while only one participant, who reported a high DERS score pre-programme, showed an increase in their difficulty to regulate their emotions post-programme.

The Emotion Dismissing scores show a general linear trend such that individuals who reported a low level of emotion dismissing behaviours prior to the Step-TIK programme continued to report low scores after attending the programme. In contrast, participants who reported higher Emotion Dismissing scores pre-programme remained relatively high post-programme. Three stepparents reported a substantial decrease in their emotion dismissing parenting behaviours after completing the Step-TIK programme, with their scores suggesting reliable improvement in their emotion dismissing parenting behaviours. Four other stepparents reported a decrease in their emotion dismissing behaviours; however, this decrease may be a result of measurement error or natural variation. The scatter plot shows that only two parents reported no change in emotion dismissing behaviours before and after the programme.

Concerning the stepparents' emotion coaching behaviours, six individuals reported an increase in their emotion coaching behaviours after attending the Step-TIK programme. It is interesting to note that the stepparent who reported the lowest level of emotion coaching behaviours prior to attending the programme, showed the most improvement in emotion coaching behaviours after the programme and this improvement is possibly a reliable change. Of the other five stepparents who reported an increase in Emotion Coaching scores, two of the individuals change can be estimated as a reliable improvement, while the remaining three

stepparents improvement may be due to other factors at play. Three stepparents reported no change in emotion coaching behaviours after completing the Step-TIK programme. It is possible that slight regression to the mean occurred for this variable as indicated by greater variance of the scores around the pre-programme group mean compared to the range of scores related to the post-programme group mean.

The Modified Brinley Plot for Empathy shows that all stepparents reported an increase in their empathy towards their stepchild after attending the parenting programme. Further, there was more variation in scores pre-programme to post-programme, suggesting again that regression to the mean might have occurred. Of the nine participants, four individual's data points are above the RCI line suggesting a reliable improvement in empathy following the programme for these individuals. Similar to the Emotion Coaching scores, it can be noted that the individual who scored the lowest on empathy prior to attending the Step-TIK programme, reported a substantial improvement in empathy following the programme. Further, this was the same participant for both emotion coaching and empathy (labelled number 3 on the graphs). Another stepparent reported a very substantial increase in empathy, approximately two scale scores, such a change is difficult to interpret. This was the same participant who reported the biggest improvement in difficulty regulating emotions (number 6 on the graphs). Although five of the stepparents' data points fall under the RCI line, the majority of these individuals' scores were nearing the RCI line, with only one stepparent closer to the line of no change.

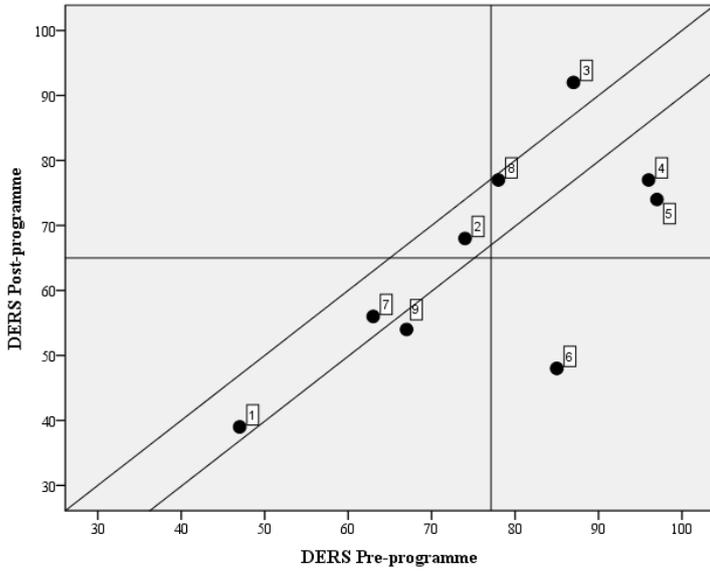


Figure 4. Stepparents' DERS scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 10.12.

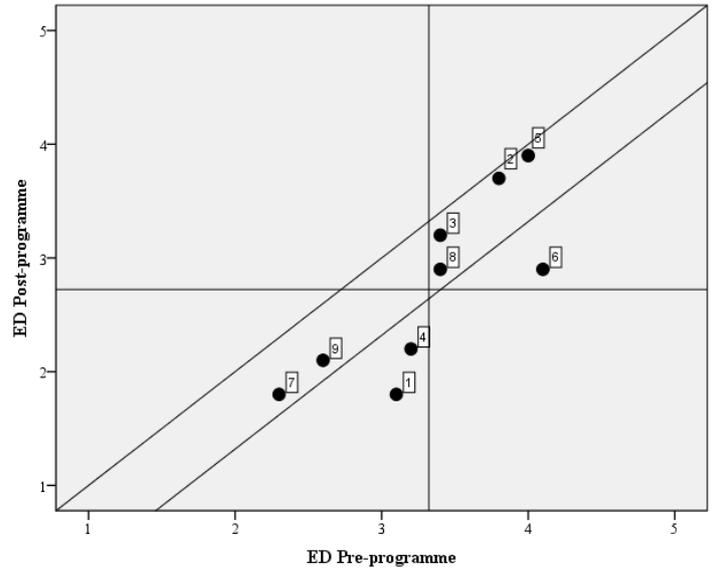


Figure 5. Stepparents' Emotion Dismissing scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 0.68.

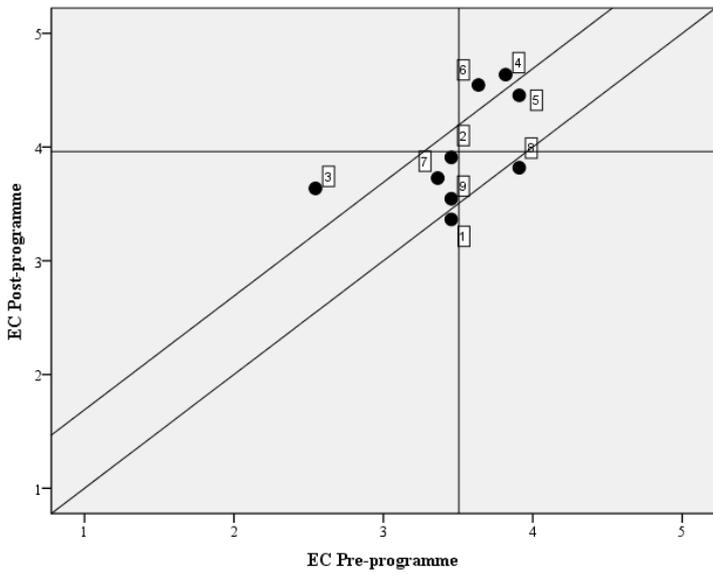


Figure 6. Stepparents' Emotion Coaching scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 0.69.

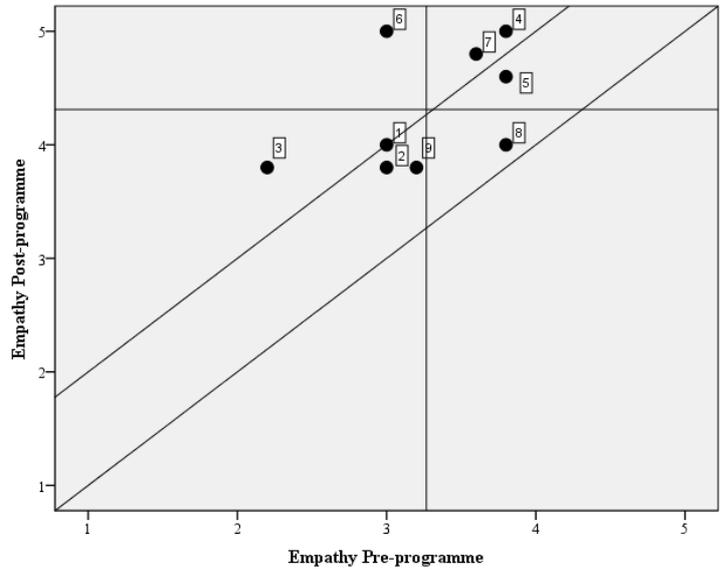


Figure 7. Stepparents' Empathy scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 1.00.

4.1.2. Stepparenting behaviours.

Stepparents' warmth, sensitivity, over-reactivity and their discipline behaviours towards their stepchild were also assessed before and after attending the Step-TIK programme. Paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted to examine the effect of the programme on these stepparenting behaviours. Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, *t* values, probability values and effect sizes for the four variables.

The results show that there were significant increases in stepparents' warmth (*M difference* = 0.62) and sensitivity (*M difference* = 0.54,) after completing the Step-TIK programme. Cohen's effect size values of 0.70 for Warmth and 0.94 for Sensitivity suggests that the Step-TIK programme had a moderate to large effect on stepparents' warmth and sensitivity towards their stepchildren. In addition, there was a significant decrease in participants' over-reactivity (*M difference* = -0.52) and a medium effect size of 0.64. No significant changes were reported for stepparents' lax and inconsistent discipline.

Table 3.

Paired-sample T-Test Statistics for Stepparenting Behaviour Variables

Variable	Pre-programme		Post-programme		<i>t</i> -value	df	<i>p</i> -value	Effect size Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Warmth	3.21	0.85	3.82	0.90	-4.44	8	.002**	0.70
Sensitivity	2.93	0.58	3.46	0.57	-2.96	8	.018*	0.94
Over-reactivity	2.22	0.97	1.70	0.61	2.62	8	.031*	0.64
Lax/inconsistent Discipline	2.49	0.88	2.10	0.80	1.82	8	.106	0.47

Note. SD = Standard Deviation; df = degrees of freedom

p* ≤ .05 *p* ≤ .005. Cohens *d*: 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, 0.8 = large effect

Figures 8, 9, 10, and 11, show the Modified Brinley Plots for Warmth, Sensitivity, Over-reactivity, and Lax/inconsistent Discipline respectively. These graphs give a visual representation for any changes in parenting behaviours that the participants reported following the Step-TIK programme.

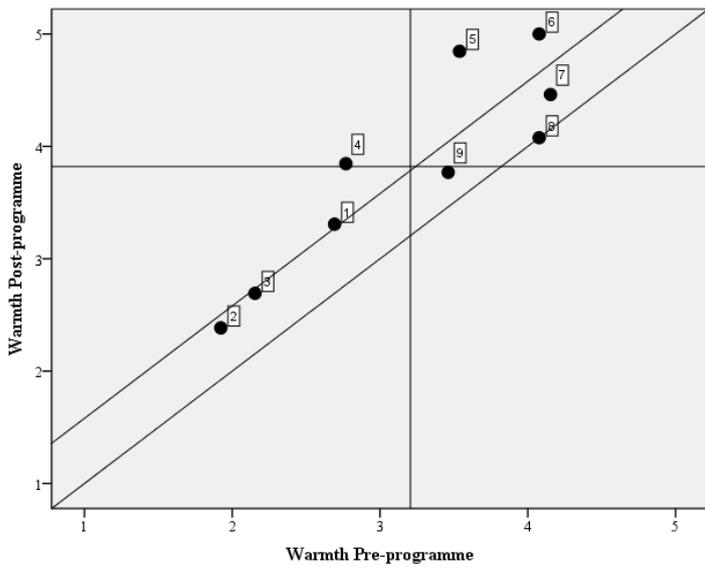


Figure 8. Stepparents' Warmth scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 0.58.

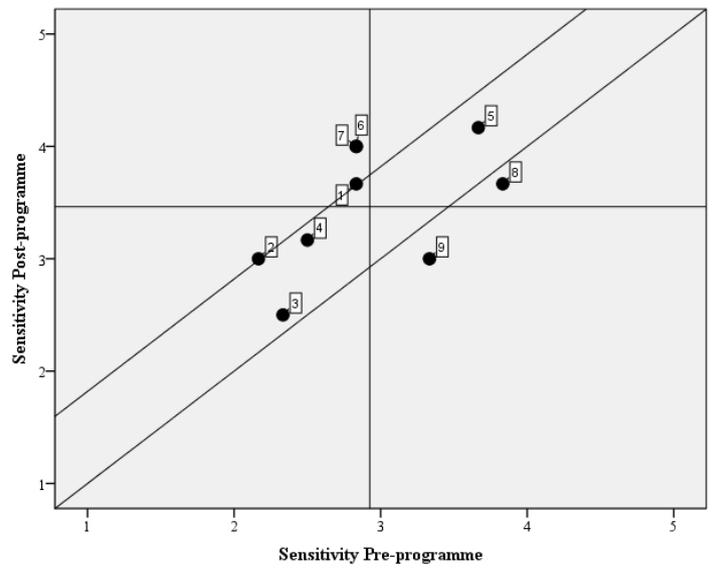


Figure 9. Stepparents' Sensitivity scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 0.82.

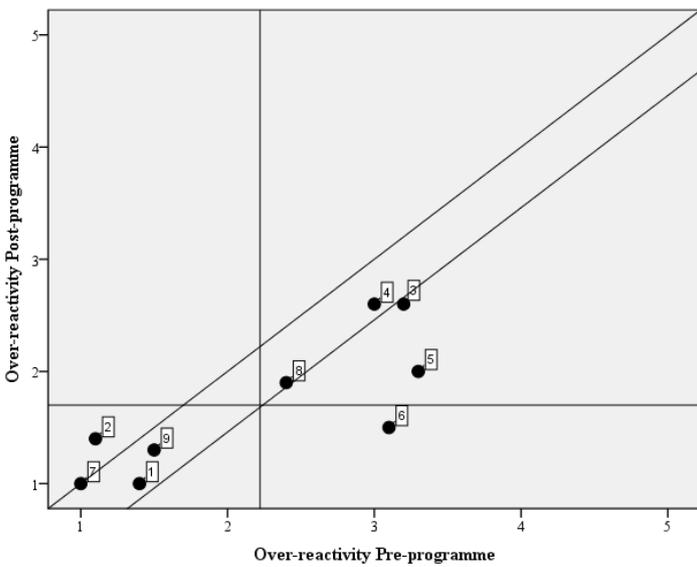


Figure 10. Stepparents' Over-reactivity scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 0.54.

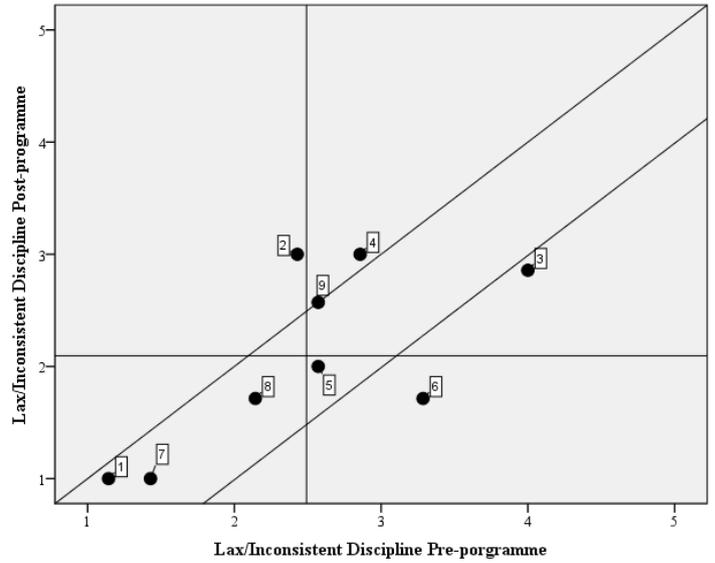


Figure 11. Stepparents' Lax/Inconsistent Discipline scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 1.01.

The Modified Brinley Plot for Warmth shows a wide range of scores both before and after attending the Step-TIK parenting programme. The scores appear to illustrate a general linear trend, with those individuals reporting lower warmth prior to the programme also scoring lower on warmth after completing the programme. In contrast, those who reported high warmth before the Step-TIK programme remained relatively high in warmth after the programme. Eight participants reported increases in their warmth scores after attending the Step-TIK programme. Of these eight stepparents, four individuals reported a substantial improvement in their warmth towards their step-child from pre-programme to post-programme, indicated by the four data points above the RCI line. That is, unreliability due to measurement error can be ruled out for the change reported by these participants. The scores of two other participants neared the RCI line while the remaining two participants who reported improvement cannot be considered reliable change. Only one participant reported no change in their warmth towards their stepchild following the programme.

In regards to each stepparent's sensitivity towards their stepchild, two participants reported an increase in their sensitivity score large enough to be estimated as reliable improvement after attending the Step-TIK programme, with two other participants' scores falling directly on the RCI line. Another two individuals reported an increase in their sensitivity scores from pre- to post-programme; however, the reliability is questionable. Two participants reported no change in their sensitivity towards their stepchild following the programme, indicated by the two data points being close to the line of no change.

Interestingly, one participant reported a slight decrease in their sensitivity towards their stepchild after attending the Step-TIK programme.

In contrast to Warmth and Sensitivity, seven of the nine participants reported a decrease in their Over-reactivity scores following the programme. However, only three of the participants reported enough change to rule out measurement error. One participant showed

no change in their Over-reactivity score from pre-programme to post-programme, while another participant reported a slight increase in over-reactivity. Yet, these two stepparents were the participants who scored the lowest on Over-reactivity prior to the programme. As such, there was very little margin for improvement to be made post-programme. The graph indicates regression to the mean might have occurred with a greater range in scores around the group mean pre-programme compared to the range of scores around the mean post-programme.

Five stepparents reported a decrease in Lax and Inconsistent Discipline scores after attending the programme, however, only two individuals' data points indicate reliable change. The two participants who did report the most substantial changes over time were the two who scored the highest on their lax and inconsistent discipline behaviours prior to attending the Step-TIK programme. Three participants reported no change in their discipline behaviours towards their stepchild following the programme. Only one participant showed an increase in their Lax/Inconsistent Discipline score after attending the parenting programme.

The participant labelled number 6 on the graphs indicated reliable change in the appropriate directions on all variables, reporting significant improvement in their emotional parenting style and behaviours towards their stepchild. It is also interesting to note that the participant labelled as number 8 tended to report no change for positive parent emotion behaviours, such as Emotion Coaching, Empathy, Warmth and Sensitivity. In contrast, for negative parent emotion behaviours, including Emotion Dismissing, Over-reactivity, and Lax/Inconsistent Discipline, participant number 8 did indicate improvement, albeit often not reliable.

4.2. Stepchild Behaviour and Family Dynamics

Along with stepparenting practices, three other aspects of family life were examined via the pre- and post-programme questionnaires. These variables were the stepchild's

behaviour that the stepparent chose to focus on, the stepparents' satisfaction of being part of a blended or stepfamily, and differences in parenting strategies between the stepparent and their current partner. The variable Co-parenting Differences has been excluded from the analyses because it was assumed little change would occur for this variable with only one parent attending the Step-TIK programme, with the exception of the husband and wife who both attended as stepparents. Paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted to examine the change in the stepchildren's behaviour and satisfaction after programme completion. The means, standard deviations, *t*-values, probability values and effect sizes for the two variables are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Paired-sample T-Test Statistics for Stepchild Behaviour and Family Dynamics Variables

Variable	Pre-programme		Post-programme		<i>t</i> -value	df	<i>p</i> -value	Effect size Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Behaviour Intensity	125.44	38.29	117.56	42.53	0.81	8	.440	0.20
Satisfaction	3.49	0.88	3.94	0.76	-3.26	8	.012*	0.55

Note. SD = Standard Deviation; df = degrees of freedom

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .005$. Cohens *d*: 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, 0.8 = large effect

No significant changes were reported for the intensity of the stepchildren's behaviours (*M difference* = -7.89). The results show that after completing the programme stepparents reported greater satisfaction with their family situation and role as a stepparent (*M difference* = 0.51). Cohen's effect size value for Satisfaction of 0.55 suggests that the programme only had a moderate effect on stepparents' satisfaction.

The Modified Brinley Plots for the stepchildren's Behaviour Intensity and the stepparents' Family Satisfaction are shown in Figures 12 and 13, respectively.

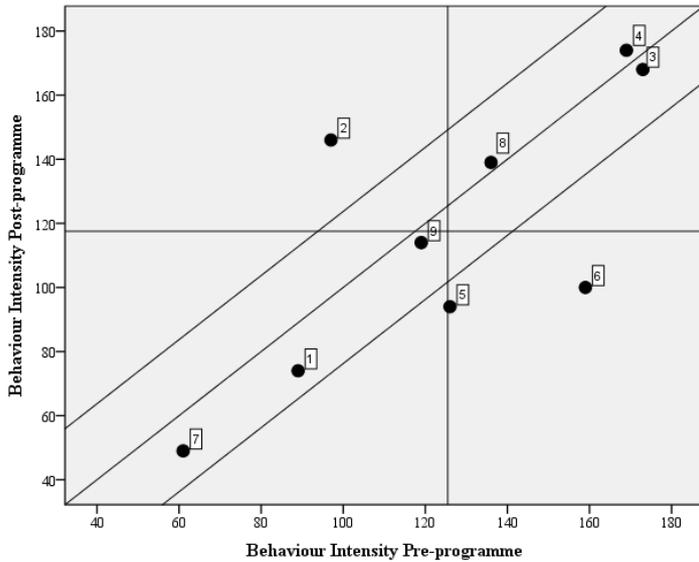


Figure 12. Stepparents' reports of Stepchildren's Behaviour Intensity scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 23.73.

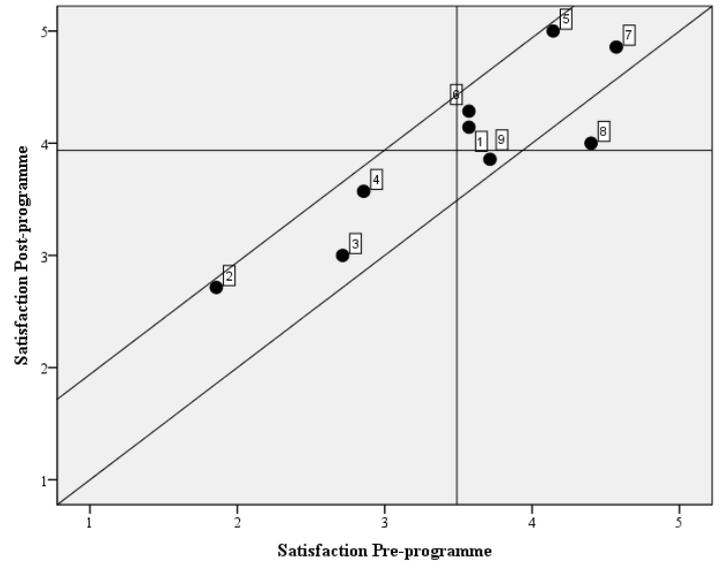


Figure 13. Stepparents' family Satisfaction scores compared before and after the Step-TIK programme. RCI = 0.94.

The scatter plot of the stepchild's Behaviour Intensity scores shows that there was wide variation in the behaviour scores both pre- and post-programme. In general, the scores demonstrate a linear trend whereby stepparents who reported a high level of intensity in their stepchildren's behaviour prior to the programme, remained relatively high following the Step-TIK programme, and vice versa. Four stepparents reported a decrease in the intensity of their stepchildren's behaviours, with two stepparents' data points falling below the negative RCI line indicating reliable improvement in the stepchildren's behaviour intensity over time. One of these data points was Participant 6. Four participants reported no change in the intensity of their stepchildren's behaviour. It appears that one stepparent reported a substantial increase in their stepchild's behaviour intensity, falling above the positive RCI line. The change in this participant's score is markedly different to all the other individual participants and can be considered an outlier.

The participants' satisfaction regarding their stepfamily and role as a stepparent also illustrates a general linear trend, such that participants who reported high levels satisfaction pre-programme continued to report high levels of satisfaction after the programme. Whereas, individuals who reported low levels of satisfaction with their stepfamily prior to the Step-TIK programme remained low on their satisfaction scores following the programme. Seven individuals reported an increase in family satisfaction after attending the Step-TIK parenting programme. However, although two participants' scores neared the RCI line, neither of these participants' changes in scores can be considered reliable change. It is interesting to note that the stepparent who reported the lowest level of satisfaction with their stepfamily and role as a stepparent was one of the individuals who showed a substantial change on completion of the programme. Nevertheless, this stepparent's satisfaction score remained the lowest score post-programme of all the participants. One participant did not report any change in their satisfaction level, while another reported a decrease in their satisfaction from pre- to post-programme.

Chapter Five

Qualitative Methods

The quantitative analyses and results described in the previous two chapters provide an insight into the potential effectiveness of the modified Step-TIK programme when delivered to stepparents. An important aspect of programme evaluation is assessing participant satisfaction of the programme being studied (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Qualitative methods were utilised as a way of gathering information on participants' subjective evaluations and reactions of the Step-TIK parenting programme. The following chapter outlines the qualitative methods, including participants, development of the interview schedule, procedure, and data analysis, before moving on to the qualitative results in Chapter six.

5.1. Participants

Six of the nine participants gave their consent to be contacted for a phone interview. All stepparents who agreed to take part in the interview were contacted but one stepparent was not available for a prolonged period of time after completing the Step-TIK parenting programme and questionnaires. Hence, a total of five interviews were conducted. The majority of interviewees were female, with only one male interviewee. Two of the participants would be considered to be living in a full-blended family, one participant in a partial-blended family and one would be classified as living in a 'simple' stepfamily. The remaining participant was the one foster parent who attended the Step-TIK programme.

5.2. Development of Interview Schedule

The purpose of the brief phone interviews was to address the research questions regarding the need and suitability of a parenting programme for New Zealand stepfamilies, along with the applicability of the adapted Step-TIK programme. In collaboration with a research supervisor, the primary researcher created a short set of questions focusing on the

participants' evaluations and opinions of the Step-TIK programme, including any adaptations that were made to the programme (See Appendix H for the full Phone Interview Schedule). The length of the interview schedule was considered to be an important factor, with the aim of keeping the interviews brief. In this way, a total of eight or nine predetermined questions were included in the interview schedule to prevent the interviews from becoming too long.

The interview started off with two very general questions; '*How was the Tuning in to Kids programme for you?*' and '*How suitable was the Tuning in to Kids programme for your family situation?*' These questions allowed for a range of possible answers and provided the opportunity to participants to state their own opinion about the Step-TIK programme. If necessary, more information was gathered from their responses by asking them to elaborate on their answer.

Following these questions, three to four questions were asked that focused on the individual activities of the programme where adaptations were made in an attempt to make them more specific to stepfamilies. For each question, the interviewer first provided a brief description of the activity and the modification made before asking the participant how they found the exercise. The adaptations for two of the worksheet activities in the programme involved changing some of the scenarios to situations that stepfamilies would likely experience. As such, for the two questions about the worksheet activities, participants were also asked about the applicability of the scenarios to stepfamilies.

Throughout the Step-TIK programme with the second group, stepparents provided examples during the sessions of their attempts to use emotion coaching with their stepchildren across the previous week. These examples provided excellent anecdotes which illustrated the stepparents' progress and learning across the course of the programme. The researchers agreed that a question should be included in the interview for participants who attended the second group, reviewing one of the anecdotes that the participant had provided

to reflect and draw upon the participants' learning and knowledge of the programme contents. To ensure this question did not exceed the boundaries of the interview objectives, the wording of the question was carefully constructed to focus on the parent's learning from the programme. That is, the question asked was *'Back in session # you provided an example from what you had learnt in the class the week before where . . . How was your parenting different in this example from what it might have been prior to attending Tuning in to Kids?'* Including this question provided the opportunity for the responses to demonstrate that the purpose of the original TIK programme was maintained after the adaptations made to the programme.

The final two questions of the interview were again very general and gave parents the chance to evaluate the remaining parts of the programme that were not modified and suggest any other changes that could be made or additional topics that were not covered to make the Step-TIK programme more suitable for stepfamilies. When conducting the interviews, the researcher maintained awareness of the participant's responses to encourage, reflect or re-direct the participant's responses where necessary. For example, if more information was desired, the participant was asked to elaborate on their answer or asked to focus on how they found completing the exercise at the time within the group.

5.3. Procedure

Participants of the study who had completed the post-programme questionnaire were invited to participate in a brief phone interview at the end of the post-questionnaire. If participants agreed to take part in the interview, they were subsequently asked to provide a contact number so the researcher could contact them by phone. In this way, participants who did not agree to take part in the interview were not asked to provide a phone number at the end of the questionnaire. Participants who did agree to participate in the phone interview were then sent a Qualtrics web-link via email to the information sheet and consent form for the phone interview (See Appendix I and J for the interview information sheet and consent

form). The consent form, included consent to be audio recorded throughout the interview and consent for these recording to be transcribed for the purpose of reporting the information, removing any identifying information.

After the participants had completed the online consent form, they were contacted to organise a time for the interview that suited them. Participants were asked for this to be a time where they were unlikely to be interrupted and if possible, to find a quiet location during the interview to maintain privacy. During this call, it was also recommended to participants to have their programme resources available to them during the interview so they could refer to the specific activities that were modified from the original programme to suit the purposes of a stepfamily cohort. Each participant was then contacted at the organised time to complete the phone interview.

Prior to the interview starting, participants were again asked to provide consent for the interview to be audio recorded before the recording device was turned on. To record the interviews, the interviewer's phone was turned onto speaker phone and a digital recording device was placed right next to the phone so the recording could pick up both the interviewer's and the participant's responses. The interviews were conducted in a private, secure room where the interviewer would not get interrupted or the interview be overheard by anyone.

Once the recording began, confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality were discussed, and the participant's consent confirmed before moving on. Following this, a brief overview of the interview objectives and questions was given before the interview began. The interviews lasted for approximately 15 minutes. At the end of the interview, participants were again asked for their consent to include all the information they had provided in the analyses, with all identifying information removed. Participants were then thanked for taking part in the interview, the parenting programme, and study. Due to technical difficulties, two of the

participants' original audio recordings were deleted and could not be recovered. These two participants' kindly agreed to re-do their interview a second time. Following this incident, two audio recordings were taken for every interview allowing for a back up version. Two of the five recordings involved interruptions at the participant's end. One of these was a young child entering the room and another was a dog misbehaving. The interviews of these stepparents were paused until they were ready to continue.

After all the interviews had been conducted, they were transcribed verbatim. Each participant was given a code to ensure anonymity. The interviews were transcribed by the primary researcher of the study, facilitating a high degree of familiarity and memory of the information to assist in the data analysis stage. Transcription by the primary researcher also meant confidentiality of the participants was upheld. During the process of transcription, sentence fillers, such as '*Mmmm,*' '*Yea,*' '*You know,*' and '*Um,*' were all captured as well as other conversation features, including laughter, pauses, stutters, and interruptions on the recipient's end. In addition, a great deal of effort was made to capture the exact timing of these sentence fillers as the conversation flowed back and forth between the interviewer and the participant. Capturing these conversation details, increases the likelihood that attention was sustained throughout each recording resulting in accurate verbatim transcriptions of the data.

When personal information about the stepfamily was given, such as names or age of a stepchild, these aspects were anonymised in the transcription by writing 'stepchild's name' in brackets where it was said during the interview. Any examples of family activities or routines that were provided were judged on a case-by-case basis for how revealing they were to that particular family. That is, was it a situation that could occur in any family or stepfamily, or a situation specific to that particular family? All examples provided were deemed to be generic situations that could occur in any family or stepfamily.

5.4. Data Analysis

The current study employed a qualitative content analysis framework (Sandelowski, 2000) to conduct a thematic analysis on the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The idea of qualitative content analysis is to summarise and describe the information obtained in the qualitative data to gain a basic understanding of an individual's perceptions, thoughts and opinions of a particular topic (Sandelowski, 2000). As such, this is an appropriate framework to use for exploring participants' evaluations and satisfaction of the Step-TIK programme. The way in which the data is condensed and summarised is through the use of a coding system which, often with qualitative data, is generated from the responses themselves throughout the analysis process (Sandelowski, 2000).

A thematic analysis is one such coding process where general ideas are extracted from the data through the creation of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Conducting a thematic analysis means patterns and commonalities across the participants' data can be identified and grouped into themes that reflect the overall contents of participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Generating over-arching themes of the data allows the information to be reported in a succinct manner and the participants' evaluations of the programme to be summarised and interpreted.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe six phases of a thematic analysis that were used as a guide for analysing the data of the current study. These are 1) becoming familiar with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) producing the report. Once the interviews were transcribed, the recordings were listened to again and the transcripts reviewed to ensure all transcripts were accurate. Initial codes were then written next to the participants' responses throughout every transcript. Following the coding process, all quotes from the transcripts were transferred onto a new document under the code categories; these categories formed the foundations of

generating themes. Similar codes were placed together and from this, themes and sub-themes were identified. After identifying and naming the themes and sub-themes, the participants' responses were then reviewed once more to ensure that all the information was captured in the generated themes and each unit of coded text from the interviews applied to at least one of the themes.

Chapter Six

Qualitative Results

A total of five participants completed the brief phone interview in the present study. The following chapter will report on the qualitative findings obtained from these interviews. All nine participants of the current study were also asked a small number of descriptive questions in the online questionnaires regarding change in their responses to their stepchildren's emotions, along with their evaluations of the programme. A separate thematic analysis was not conducted for this qualitative data due to the small number of descriptive questions asked within these questionnaires and thus the limited amount of information received from these questions. However, some of the participants' responses to these online questions do provide support for the overall themes generated by the interview data. Therefore, the participants' responses to the online descriptive questions have been amalgamated with the interview data to present an overall illustration of participants' evaluations of the Step-TIK programme. This chapter relates to the second and third research questions: *Is an emotion-focused parenting programme suitable for stepfamilies?* and *Were the changes made to the TIK programme applicable to stepfamilies?*

From the qualitative data five main themes were generated with each theme having multiple sub-themes. The five main themes include: 1) Positive Experience; 2) Emotional Awareness; 3) Group Connectedness; 4) Impact of Adaptations; 5) Identified Challenges. Table 5 provides a list of the final themes and sub-themes. While some of the themes apply more to one particular research question than the other, it is thought that sufficient overlap exists and many of the themes provide important information regarding both of the research questions. As such, the themes will each be presented below without being split into sections based on the research questions. Further, it is important to note that the identified themes are all likely to be inter-related to each other and the sub-themes may be applicable to more than

one major theme. The primary researcher categorised the sub-themes in a way that she believes results in each sub-theme being most closely associated to the particular main theme it falls under.

Table 5.

List of Final Main Themes and Associated Sub-themes.

Theme	Sub-theme
Positive Experience	Learning and application of programme content. Engagement in programme and continued use of programme content.
Emotional Awareness	Stepparent's awareness of own emotions. Awareness of children's emotions. Change in emotional parenting style.
Group Connectedness	Sharing experiences. Learning from each other. Safe group environment and sense of belonging.
Impact of Adaptations	Awareness of stepchild and stepparent-child relationship. Identification of common experiences. Relevance to the whole family.
Identified Challenges	Limits to programme content. Unidentified stepfamily issues and future adaptations.

6.1. Positive Experience

The majority of participants provided very positive feedback regarding the Step-TIK programme and used considerable positive descriptors throughout the interviews such as *“It was brilliant”*, *“I found it really useful”*, and *“It was fantastic, I felt like it was that missing piece.”* Many of them also referred to the usefulness of the different resources, handouts, and activities presented throughout the programme, as well as the variety of mediums through which the programme content is presented, such as videos, role-plays and discussions. The evaluations that the participants reported are reflected in the sub-themes of participants’

learning and applying the programme content as well as their engagement with the programme material and continued use of the material on completion of the programme.

Many of the comments that the interviewees made when discussing the Step-TIK programme indicated to the interviewer that the stepparents had taken on board and thoroughly learnt the information that was presented in the programme. For example, one participant pointed out one of the key take-home messages of the programme stating *“Emotion itself wasn’t wrong it’s just what you can do with it that can be wrong, the behaviour.”* Another woman demonstrated her learning of the emotion coaching steps saying *“... just how important it is to actually stop and think about what emotions the children are going through before you, and dealing with that rather than trying to problem solve or, or to second guess what they’re feeling.”*

The participants’ learning was particularly salient when asked about the specific activity called ‘*Spot the Emotion Coaching Opportunity.*’ This activity asked participants to identify times and situations where emotion coaching may be more appropriate compared to other situations families may commonly experience. It was during this point in the interview that one participant responded *“While we kept getting told its [sic] can be used about 30% of the time . . . It’s not when they’re about to flip their lid or it’s not necessarily even just when they are having a negative emotion or a very strong one. It’s about when they’re experiencing joy or positive ones as well . . .”* One participant also mentioned the importance of being aware and in control of their own emotions and being aware of the intensity of their stepchildren’s emotions before attempting to emotion coach. That is, *“It really comes down to how you’re feeling in the moment, I mean if you’re in control of your own emotions then . . . you can turn any moment into an emotion coaching moment, depending you know if you’re equipped, if you’re feeling calm and, and open then um you can work with that . . . as long as you’re open to recognising when the child isn’t.”*

Many participants' statements also suggested full engagement and involvement with the course material throughout the duration of the programme. That is, one woman said that the programme provided her with a lot to think about and gave her a lot to learn, while another woman said she took a lot of notes during one of the sessions. The latter participant also spoke about engaging with the programme content within the home setting, such as discussing with the family what she had learnt each session, teaching her child "the turtle" (a self-control strategy for children's anger provided to parents for them to teach their children), and making many attempts to practise the emotion coaching skills. For example, she mentioned "*I was always saying to my husband what, what I'd learnt, and what notes I'd taken that night and what I was going to try and so it felt like as a family we went on this journey.*"

Further, this woman along with two other participants provided responses to suggest that they were continuing to refer to the course material and apply the emotion coaching steps within the home at the time of the interviews, which were a few weeks after the programme completion. That is, comments were made such as "*[The folder is] Still sitting on the kitchen bench . . . right there accessible, so that's how relevant I think it is*", "*well I'm still doing it*" and "*I work with that a lot now with the children.*" This theme also parallels the evaluation ratings that participants scored at the end of the post-questionnaire, with six out of nine participants rating their participation in the Step-TIK programme as enjoyable or very enjoyable and 8 out of 9 participants rating the Step-TIK programme as effective or very effective for stepfamilies.

6.2. Emotional Awareness

One apparent theme generated by the qualitative data was the change in the stepparents' overall awareness and attitude regarding emotions, for both their own emotions and their children's emotions. Some participants' reports also reflected a change in their

emotional parenting style after participating in the Step-TIK programme. Many of the participants' comments reflected a growing awareness of their previous attitudes towards emotions. That is, one woman alluded to her pre-existing meta-emotion philosophy, stating "*I guess I was being afraid of, ahh everything turning into a drama because I can get dramaed out quite easily. Um so from the course it was to not be afraid of any emotion.*" while another participant demonstrated an awareness of the absence of emotional learning during her own upbringing through her comment "[I] realise in that growing up we probably missed all that [Learning about emotions] and I could see a lot of people have missed that, and that actually it makes a huge difference." In addition, one stepparent reported an understanding of her emotion socialisation behaviours prior to attending the Step-TIK programme and what the programme highlighted for her. This participant reflected "[It] really made us reflect on all the times when we were actually being quite dismissive when we actually thought we were being nice."

The participants provided many responses that illustrated their awareness of how important it is to attend to their children's emotions and attempt to reflect these emotions. As one participant said ". . . if you see something happen and it's upsetting them trying to compare that to how you might feel in a similar situation and you reali[se], like start to actually feel what that would feel like for the child, how big and extreme that could be." Some participants also reported a desire to further explore and understand their children's emotions. For example, "*Unpacking the kids fears and angry, and why kids get, do what they do. Um and getting them to reflect more about their feelings has been a really good learning because it's something . . . we don't take enough time to go over.*"

Based on the interviewees' comments, the activity called '*The Emotion Detective*' appeared to be particularly effective at encouraging stepparents to take on a child's perspective and develop a greater understanding of the possible emotions children may be

experiencing. Two participants were not able to comment on this exercise as one was absent from the programme session and the other could not recall the exercise. However, of the three who were able to evaluate the activity, all three of them gave very positive reviews with comments such as *“Now that was the stand out hand-out for me,”* *“Really good and really sort of eye-opening about how that stepchild might be feeling,”* and *“That one blew me away actually because that’s not something I do very regularly is um compare what the child’s feeling to what it can, you know to, comparative to what an adult might experience.”* The three participants provided statements indicating how much this activity made them become aware of their children’s perspectives. For example, *“It really made you get yourself into the child’s thinking and the child’s mind.”* and *“When you start to really put it into context for yourself. . . it just makes it a bit more real. I think as adults it’s really easy to just um play the feelings of children down and not realise how big and monstrous they might feel to the child.”*

Three interviewees also gave responses that suggested that they believed their emotional style had changed after attending the programme. When discussing one example with a participant about her daughter becoming upset after losing a sports game, the participant responded *“Well prior to attending [the programme] I probably wouldn’t have given as much time. I would’ve said ‘oh yep life is tough and, yep that’s a bit tough’ and then let’s [sic] just move on and not given it really any time or any focus.”* Whereas, after attending the programme her view on emotions appeared to change and in this scenario she reported *“. . . actually taking the time to hear all the emotions was absolutely fine and helping her find a way to work through that was fine too, and then it actually was over.”* One of the other participants reflected that emotions were often overlooked in her household, stating *“It wasn’t something we gave a lot of time because we were dealing with the actions of the behaviour.”*

Responses that participants gave for the descriptive questions in the online questionnaires provide further support for the theme of emotional awareness and stepparents' changes in their desire to explore their children's emotions. Participants were asked in both the pre-programme and post-programme questionnaires how they reacted and responded to their stepchildren when the child was angry or upset. The majority of responses at pre-programme demonstrated that the parent attempted to calm their child down. However, there was little evidence that they focused on and explored the children's emotions. In contrast, the stepparents' responses in the post-programme questionnaire were indicative of more emotional exploration after the child had calmed, labelling of children's emotions, and empathising with the child. For example, one participant provided the response on the post-programme questionnaire ". . . *When she was ready I emotion coached her through a range of feelings she was having, and explained it was ok to get angry, but not to behave the way she did. We talked about ways to calm down and she wanted to stay outside to read. When she was ready she came inside and we all learnt the turtle.*"

Further, when asked about what aspects of the programme the participant found most relevant to their family, two participants responded with "*Understanding how important acknowledging emotions is and how to emotion coach. I have seen a difference in our children's understanding of their emotions and this has helped them behave in a more acceptable manner when they feel intense emotions.*" and "*The 'stopping' to think before reacting and dealing with child's emotion differently, which results in a more effective and faster approach to helping child calm down.*"

6.3. Group Connectedness

All of the interviewees offered responses at some point during their interview to reflect the theme of group connectedness. Many participants commented on the usefulness of sharing experiences with each other during the sessions providing the opportunity to learn

from each other as well as develop a sense of belonging. One participant was of the opinion that the structure of Session One led to the development of a strong, safe group environment that “*Set the scene of honesty and friendship.*” In addition, another woman suggested that “*It [discussion of typical stepfamilies] made the group bond, I think, really well too.*”

A woman reported that for her, hearing other peoples’ experiences and sharing her own experiences established a level of trust and honesty within the group, creating an environment where they could discuss issues that everyone was going through and also be open about any negative experiences they had encountered when attempting to emotion coach. For another participant, on hearing other group members’ thoughts and experiences, she was able to relate to these stepparents and what they were going through but it also provided her with different perspectives and new ideas. For example, she stated “*People said other things that they were going through and it was like oh . . . I hadn’t thought of that so it was quite eye-opening but also nice because other people had had the same thoughts and ideas, experiences.*” In addition, for the question on the post-programme questionnaire asking participants what part of the programme they found most relevant to their family, two of them responded “*The shared experiences of the other families/mums present.*” And “*Main thing was being with other stepparents and sharing stories/challenges/solutions.*”

The majority of interviewees also reflected the benefit of learning from each other through their experiences and discussion around the particular issues that arose. One woman reported that she gained as much learning from hearing both positive and negative experiences of others in regards to their attempts at emotion coaching. As another participant mentioned “*It was just good hearing what other people try and do.*” Another stepparent also acknowledged the contributions that every group member made and how these provided different ideas and ways of thinking about particular issues. That is, “*Everyone brought*

something to the table, something different, different perspectives . . . I just remember it being quite a spark of conversation of lots of different ways of dealing with certain things.”

Some participants’ comments appeared to reflect a real sense of belonging, stemming from the shared experiences that were discussed throughout the sessions. For example, as one woman said *“The actual programme and coming together with a group of like-minded people as well was really beneficial. And being stepparents as, [sic] as well we had a lot to offer each other so I found that really, really beneficial.”* Even the topic of multiple surnames which arose during one session provided a sense of group membership and belonging as indicated by one participant’s comment *“. . . see my family we have three surnames . . . but then everyone else in this, in the room has more than one surname and you know suddenly, it was like oh thank goodness I’ve found my group.”*

6.4. Impact of Adaptations

Participants’ responses to questions regarding the adaptations made to the programme and their applicability to stepfamilies alluded to the idea that the adaptations had a positive impact on the participants’ experiences of the Step-TIK programme. As one woman stated *“The paperwork I have in front of me you’d never know that it had been adapted, you’d think it was particularly wri [sic], you know written specifically for stepfamilies originally anyway.”* The sub-themes identified for this theme included an awareness of the stepchild and the stepparent-child relationship, relevance to the whole family, and identification of common experiences. Many comments made by the interviewees reflected a developing awareness around their stepchild’s emotions in particular. For example, one participant commented *“Thinking about them as a step-child what emotions they could be going through . . . that was a whole new thinking area for me.”*

Having participants brainstorm not only fears and worries common to all children but also fears and worries specific to step-children appeared to be particularly insightful for some

participants with comments received, such as “[I] *Feel quite sad when you think about what extra stressors the stepchildren might be going through and what extra fears and worries because they’re a stepchild that brings to them,*” and “*What was also quite scary I guess was the fact that how big the list got to. How they’re just going through sooo many things that they could possibly be [sic], have worries about . . . that’s a lot compared to the average child.*”

Further, three participants expressed how the Step-TIK programme highlighted and provided greater insight into the quality of their relationship with their stepchild. For one woman she expressed that “*I didn’t realise . . . the lack of emotional connection there, back and forwards.*” This woman went on to say that the programme provided a good reminder to take opportunities to emotionally connect with her stepchild when they happen. Another participant also mentioned the relationship, stating “*It really just made me reflect and think more about that relationship and giving that child space.*”

Part of the adaptations involved making changes to some scenarios that were presented in the activities ‘*Spot the Emotion Coaching Opportunity*’ and ‘*The Emotion Detective.*’ When asked how applicable they thought these scenarios were to their family, all participants provided positive feedback with comments such as “*Very applicable*”, “*It was very suitable*”, and “*Most of them were really relevant. Things like being told by a stepparent to share something, cos [sic] that’s, that’s just real-life situations, that happens in nearly every stepfamily.*” The feedback received was also from interviewees who were part of partially-blended and fully-blended families where their biological children were also part of the stepfamily unit. Reports from these parents indicated that the adaptations made to the programme were relevant and applicable to the whole family. For example, one woman stated “*As a blended family as well, you know having # children is always um kids that have got something they can learn,*” as well as “*They [the scenarios] were good because some of*

them were quite specific that only a stepchild would be going through that [sic] but also some of them were general that would be applicable to any child, stepchild or actual child and because yea often you have both so it's good to think about both scenarios . . . they were definitely applicable."

Relating to the theme of group connectedness, one participant reported that it was often the scenarios and brainstorming that raised issues unique to stepfamilies and initiated discussion around them. The comments she made were *"There were quite a few times that it was these questions here that brought out issues that quite a lot of us were having as stepparents,"* and *"We were finding common interests and they were stemming from these topics that were coming up because they are real."*

6.5. Identified Challenges

While the majority of responses received from interviewees would be considered positive feedback, some participants did provide evaluations regarding some challenges and complications they encountered during the programme. In addition, a small number of suggestions were made as possible future considerations. Two participants made comments about the relevancy of some parts of the programme for what they were experiencing at home. For example, one participant stated *"I sort of felt like other people got more out of it than I did personally."* The other participant reflected that there were some sessions of the programme that she felt were more relevant for her than other sessions. That is, *"We don't have anxieties happening in the house or, or worries or those sorts of, or shyness or any of those sorts of things happening. We do have anger."* However, she did acknowledge that for other group members, the fear and worry session was very beneficial in her comment *"Lots of light bulbs going off for people um, not so much for me, but I could see for other people what, what insightful [sic], helpful that was."*

Comments from the participant, who felt like others received more from the programme than he did himself, revealed that shared day-to-day care arrangements limited his opportunities to practise his emotion coaching skills in the home setting. As he mentioned *“I didn’t feel like I um got to put enough into practise really that I would’ve liked.”* This particular stepparent reported the most negative experience out of all of the interviewees. However, the negative experience he encountered appears to be primarily because of the timing issue with the shared day-to-day care arrangements. There were a number of other issues that arose during the programme as participants shared their experiences and in the post-programme evaluation questionnaire. These included issues around finances, legal proceedings some families were experiencing, and stepparent boundaries when discussing certain topics with stepchildren.

Two participants reported involvement of other parents within the child’s life and the complications that can bring. For example, as one woman stated *“... actually there is another adult that ... may not be emotionally tuning in to the child, which we can’t control that and that’s fine but there is still things that can come across from the other home because of different styles so even that’s impacting the child, impacts relationships in this house with parents.”* It was this same participant who commented, both in the interview and in the online post-programme questionnaire, that this issue was something that was not covered in the programme, along with differences in parenting style between the stepparent and the biological parent. That is, when asked about any topics not covered, she responded with *“... the parenting styles and how the two, the mother and the father, are dealing with situations together. And the impact the biological other parent and their parenting style, also how that influences and impacts the relationships in the home, the dynamics in the home setting.”*

A similar topic was also noted by another participant on the online questionnaire, which read *“Maybe bit more info/background/discussion on role of stepparent in general at*

start of course would be good. Discuss dynamics of managing behaviours / emotion coaching as a parent vs. stepparent - is it different? When is it different? When to do individually / as a team etc.” Two other changes regarding the Step-TIK programme that were also mentioned by two different participants included more involvement of the stepchild, such as more homework activities that the stepparent and stepchild can complete together, and the wording of some scenarios, however, this participant did not have a specific example to illustrate what she meant by this change.

The five themes generated from the qualitative data provide greater insight into the participants’ experiences and evaluations of the Step-TIK programme. These themes will be explored further in the following discussion chapter in relation to the quantitative findings of the current study to examine the suitability of the Step-TIK programme with stepparents.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

The current study examined the need for and suitability of an emotion-based parenting programme for stepparents through a mixed-methods programme evaluation. This chapter discusses the main findings of the present study in relation to key stepfamily literature and emotional development research, as well as comparing the present findings to the evidence base of previously established parenting programmes. The following discussion is organised according to the two aims of the study: (1) to explore the effectiveness of an emotion-coaching parenting programme among stepparents; and (2) to explore the need and appropriateness of the adapted TIK programme for stepfamilies.

This discussion will begin by examining the quantitative results from the pre- and post-programme questionnaires in relation to previous TIK research and other parenting programmes. Following this, the qualitative results from the stepparents' evaluations of the programme are considered in relation to the suitability and appropriateness of the programme, drawing on step-family literature and emotional development research. In line with the exploratory nature of this research project, the strengths and limitations of the present study are incorporated throughout the discussion. This chapter ends with a brief discussion regarding implications and future directions for research and support services working with stepfamilies.

7.1. Aim One: To Explore the Effectiveness of an Emotion-coaching Parenting Programme among Stepparents

To investigate the effect of the Step-TIK programme among stepparents, quantitative data was collected involving 11 variables concerning stepparents' emotion parenting styles and practices, their stepchild's behaviour, and family satisfaction, that were measured both

prior to and shortly after completing the TIK programme. These variables correspond to the three research questions outlined below that were investigated under this aim.

7.1.1. What are the effects of an emotion-focused parenting programme on stepparents' emotional parenting style and practices?

The first research question targeted the primary focus of the emotion-based Step-TIK programme, which is changes in stepparents' emotion socialisation behaviours and parenting practices towards their stepchildren. Significant improvements were found in stepparents' abilities to regulate their emotions, their emotion dismissing and emotion coaching behaviours, and their empathy following completion of the programme. That is, stepparents reported becoming more supportive and less dismissive in their interactions with their stepchild after attending the Step-TIK programme. These findings are consistent with previous TIK studies, which have also shown improvements in parents' emotion dismissing, emotion coaching and empathic behaviours (Havighurst et al., 2009, 2010, 2013).

For example, Havighurst et al. (2009) found effect sizes, measured with Cohen's *d*, for emotion dismissing, emotion coaching, and empathy to be 0.86, 0.64, and 1.08 respectively. Similarly, another study found Cohen *d* effect sizes of 1.11, 0.59, and 0.92 respectively, suggesting moderate to large effect sizes (Havighurst et al., 2013). In the current study, the Cohen *d* effect sizes were 0.85 for emotion dismissing, 1.03 for emotion coaching, and 1.92 for empathy. As such, these effect sizes are comparable to the previous studies, albeit slightly stronger for both the Emotion Coaching and Empathy variables. Further, the effect size found for emotion coaching in the present study is equal to the effect size documented for parents' emotion coaching in the enhanced emotion Triple P programme study (Salmon et al., 2014). However, the effect size of the Triple P study is a between-group effect size in comparison to the standard Triple P intervention. In addition, Salmon et al.

(2014) measured emotion coaching through observations of mother and child interactions in contrast to the self-report measures used in the current study and the previous TIK research.

Interestingly, the current study showed a significant reduction in stepparents' difficulties to be aware and regulate their emotions, a finding that has not yet been observed in the previous TIK research from pre- to post-programme. The effect size for the DERS measure in the present study was 0.73, in contrast to 0.26 for Havighurst et al.'s 2010 study and 0.01 for the 2013 study. When comparing these effect sizes, it is also important to note that in the Havighurst et al. (2010) study, a quadratic interaction effect was found for the DERS scale, such that there was a very slight increase in parents' difficulties with awareness and regulation of emotions immediately after the programme. As such, the effect size for this study was based on the 6-month follow-up measure of the DERS and therefore not directly comparable to the current study.

There are a number of possible reasons for this difference in parents' emotional awareness and regulation between the current study and previous TIK research. First, the mean DERS score (77.1) of stepparents prior to attending the Step-TIK programme appears to be relatively higher than the mean DERS score in comparison studies (67.2; Havighurst et al., 2010), potentially suggesting that the stepparents in this study were facing greater emotional regulation difficulties than the biological parents. Relating back to the stepfamily literature, the various challenges stepparents face around the development and change in interpersonal relationships, means the stepfamily formation process is likely to be an emotionally turbulent time for stepparents (Cartwright, 2010a, 2010b; Pryor, 2014). Baxter et al. (1999) identified five different developmental trajectories of stepfamilies, based on stepfamily members perceptions of positive and negative turning points, over the first four years of stepfamily living. Of the 51 participating stepfamilies, 16 were classified as showing an 'accelerated' pattern towards family cohesion. However, remaining families demonstrated

developmental trajectories characterised by some degree of emotional instability within the family climate after experiencing different turning points, while others had established a pattern of negativity and poor family cohesion over time (Baxter et al., 1999).

Stepparents involved in the current study reported an average of 3.6 years for living with their stepchild. Assuming that participants of the Step-TIK programme were experiencing difficulties within their stepfamily and seeking help as a result, it is possible that these stepfamilies were still experiencing significant turning points common to the formation of the stepfamily unit. In this way, these stepfamilies might have developed emotional turbulent or negative patterns of interactions within the household, leading to stepparents having greater difficulty regulating their emotions. Yet, it is possible that these salient emotional experiences occurring within the stepfamily meant stepparents' emotional expressions and reactions were more accessible to them throughout the programme and more malleable to change once regulation strategies were introduced.

Second, the small sample size of the current study means it is possible that the quantitative findings, including the DERS score and the other parenting emotional-style variables, are over-inflated. Very small sample sizes with insignificant statistical power run the risk of inaccurate results being found. Therefore, the current study's quantitative data must be interpreted and compared to previous research studies with caution. Such methodological considerations are further explored in section 7.1.4.

In line with the existing evidence base of the TIK parenting programme, the current study suggests that the Step-TIK programme successfully targeted stepparents' beliefs and practices about emotions, particularly their own emotions and those of their stepchild. Gottman et al. (1996) found that a parent's meta-philosophy, that is their beliefs and attitudes about emotions, influences the way in which parents respond to their children's emotions. The TIK programme aims to encourage parents to develop a meta-emotion philosophy, or

alter a pre-existing one, that views children's emotions with acceptance and validation (Havighurst et al., 2009). As such, the primary focus of the TIK programme is to teach parents the steps of emotion coaching as well as encourage them to become more aware of their own emotional states and their attitudes regarding emotions. The results of the current study indicate that changes in stepparents' beliefs and practices about emotions did occur over the length of the Step-TIK programme, even with the adaptations that were made to the programme.

In addition to the parenting emotional styles and practices, positive changes in stepparents' warmth, sensitivity, and over-reactivity towards their stepchild were reported. These changes are consistent with the above findings, again suggesting that stepparents reported being warmer and more supportive, as well as less reactive, towards their stepchildren's emotions and behaviours. However, no significant change was found for stepparents' lax and inconsistent discipline. This finding was not surprising due to the little focus placed on behavioural management strategies in the Step-TIK programme. Further, stepparents may play a less active parenting role in their stepchildren's lives, particularly around discipline, meaning a change in disciplinary strategies could be less likely.

Previous TIK literature has not used the current parenting scale as an evaluation measure; therefore, no direct comparisons can be made. However, one TIK study (Wilson et al., 2012) examined general parenting practices using the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Shelton, Frick, & Wootton, 1996). The APQ involves two subscales - namely Involvement and Positive Parenting, which were combined to form one variable of Positive Involvement in the TIK study. The Involvement subscale includes items pertaining to interactions with the child and involvement in the child's life, such as helping out at school, while Positive Parenting includes items relating to praising and rewarding the child for desired behaviours. Inconsistent Discipline (involving items about following through with

consequences and appropriate responses for misbehaviour) was another APQ scale also examined in the TIK study. Wilson et al. (2012) found that parents' showed improvements in their positive involvement with their child; however, no differences were found for inconsistent discipline. These findings parallel closely to the results of the present study regarding stepparents' warmth, sensitivity, and lax/inconsistent discipline.

Sturrock and Gray (2013) also employed the APQ scale, along with the Arnold-O'Leary Parenting Scale (Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff, & Acker, 1993), when examining the effects of the behaviour-based Incredible Years (IY) programme on parents' parenting practices among a New Zealand community sample. The Arnold-O'Leary Parenting Scale is a 30-item measure that examines ineffective parenting practices when dealing with misbehaviour. This scale yields a total score as well as three subscale scores - these are laxness, over-reactivity, and hostility. Interestingly, the ineffective parenting behaviour variables of the current study (Over-reactivity and Lax/inconsistent discipline) showed comparatively similar results to those found for the relevant subscales on the APQ and Parenting Scale in Sturrock and Gray's IY study. That is, the effect sizes for the APQ's inconsistent discipline scale and Arnold-O'Leary's Lax Discipline (0.54, 0.53, respectively), and the effect size for Arnold-O'Leary's Over-reactivity subscale (0.71), are only slightly stronger than the effect sizes found for Lax/Inconsistent Discipline (0.47) and Over-reactivity (0.64) in the current study.

In contrast, the effect sizes for the APQ scales focusing on positive parenting in the IY study (Positive Parenting, 0.46; and Parental Involvement, 0.53) were substantially weaker than the effect sizes of the related positive parenting behaviours (Warmth, 0.70; and Sensitivity, 0.94) of the current study. Because of the methodological differences between the two studies, these effect sizes cannot be compared too explicitly. However, it is interesting to note that for most variables the effect sizes were comparable. The few variables where there

appears to be larger contrast in the effect sizes are reflective of the different areas of focus of the two programmes and points to opportunities for future research.

Together, the changes that occurred for both stepparents' emotional parenting style and their parenting behaviours provide preliminary support for the effectiveness of the Step-TIK programme at enhancing stepparents' emotion parenting styles and practices. The findings for the parenting variables are consistent with evidence from previous TIK literature. Further, the positive changes that stepparents reported still occurred in light of the adaptations made to the emotion-focused parenting programme.

7.1.2. Are there any effects of the programme on stepchildren's behaviours?

In contrast to the changes in the stepparents' parenting, no significant differences were found for the intensity of stepchildren's behaviours from pre- to post-programme. There was a wide range in stepparents' reports of their stepchild's behaviour intensity both before and after attending the Step-TIK programme. This finding is inconsistent with the earlier TIK literature that provides evidence for a reduction in children's behaviour problems following the TIK programme (e.g., Havighurst et al., 2004; 2009; 2010; 2013; 2014). For example, Cohen's *d* effect size for children's behavioural intensity in Havighurst et al.'s (2010) study is 0.57 compared to an effect size of 0.20 for the current study.

The discrepancy between the finding of the present study and previous TIK research may be explained by the difference in the nature of the relationship between a biological parent and child compared to a relationship between a stepparent and stepchild. That is, a stepchild's relationship with a stepparent, no matter how positive it is, is likely to be more distant than the stepchild's relationship with their biological parents. In addition, the Step-TIK programme was a reasonably short 6-week parenting programme that focused on upskilling stepparents' emotional parenting behaviours. In this way, while a change in a biological parent's responses to their child's behaviours and emotions may contribute to a

change in their child's behavioural displays, any change in a stepparent's responses towards their stepchild might be less influential on the child's behaviour. This would be particularly so if the stepparent plays a less active role in parenting the stepchild, making any changes in their parenting style less salient to the stepchild.

It is possible that with the Step-TIK programme, a change in the dyadic relationship between the stepparent and stepchild would be expected to occur prior to observing a change in the stepchild's behaviour. Alternatively, change may have taken place for other behaviours of the stepchild more relevant to the stepparent-stepchild relationship that were not captured using the ECBI scale. For example, initiating a conversation with the stepparent, approaching the stepparent for help and support, and being more responsive to their stepparent's requests. As such, this alternative explanation raises the question as to whether the ECBI was an appropriate measure of the stepchildren's behaviours in the current study. This issue is further explored in the Methodological Considerations section.

7.1.3. Does the programme have any impact on stepparents' reports of family satisfaction?

The current study showed that in general, stepparents' indicated being slightly more satisfied with their current family situation and their role as a stepparent after attending the Step-TIK programme. This result suggests that the parenting programme not only had a positive effect on the stepparents' parenting behaviours but also in the way they perceived their stepfamily situation, co-parenting with their partner, and their involvement in their stepchild's life. The finding is consistent with previous parenting programme research among stepfamilies, which has reported reduced couple conflict over parenting matters and enhanced marital satisfaction (Bullard et al., 2010; Nicholson & Sanders, 1999).

For example, Bullard and colleagues (2010) examined the effects of the PMTO parenting programme on marital adjustment in stepfamilies. Findings showed that PMTO had

positive, indirect effects on marital relationship skills and marital satisfaction 24 months after baseline. Further, this relationship was mediated by the impact of the PMTO programme on co-parenting practices 6 months after baseline. As such, the authors concluded that their findings were in line with a family systems perspective, where changes in parenting practices were related to changes in marital relationship dynamics and marital satisfaction (Bullard et al., 2010).

Based on a family systems perspective, previous stepfamily research has explored the associations between marital quality and (step)parent-child relationships within a stepfamily (Fine & Kurdek, 1995; Hetherington et al., 1999). Fine and Kurdek (1995) examined the relationship between perceived marital quality and perceived (step)parent-child relationship quality among two independent samples of couples living in stepfamilies in America. Between the two samples, a total of 186 stepmother families and 534 stepfather families participated. Findings showed that for both samples, the perceived quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship was more strongly associated with perceived marital quality, compared to the perceived quality of the biological parent-child relationship (Fine & Kurdek, 1995).

The family satisfaction finding from the current study is consistent with a family system perspective and provides further support for the interdependent nature of the stepparent-stepchild relationship and the marital relationship, as well as perceived satisfaction with the overall stepfamily system.

7.1.4. Methodological Considerations

There are a number of methodological concerns that have been identified in the discussion above, all of which have limited the accuracy, comparability, and generalisability of the current study's quantitative findings. With a total of nine participants, the small sample size is severely under powered for the statistical analyses that were employed, possibly leading to either an over or under estimation of the size and significance of these changes in

parenting attitudes and behaviours. The reason for such a small sample size was due to the difficulty in recruiting stepparents to attend the programme and participate in the study. Several articles have documented the difficulty of engaging stepparents in individual and group stepfamily-focused intervention programmes (Esses & Campbell, 1984; Nicholson & Sanders, 1999). In line with this, the evaluations of previous parenting interventions among a stepfamily sample (e.g., Forgatch et al., 2005; Nicholson & Sanders, 1999) also reported the issue of analysing a small sample size. Several reasons can be speculated to explain why stepfamilies, particularly stepparents, are reluctant to seek assistance or engage in stepfamily-focused programmes.

First, it has been argued that stepparents may feel hesitant to reveal their stepparent status because of perceived negative societal views regarding stepfamilies as well as a personal reluctance to admit to a previous failed marriage (Esses & Campbell, 1984). Second, there is the possibility that some stepparents are less motivated to establish a close relationship with their stepchildren or seek support when they are experiencing relationship problems with their stepchildren. As discussed in the Introduction chapter, the lack of biological ties, shared history, and involuntary nature of the relationship between the stepparent and stepchild means both members can be less motivated to form close bonds (Pryor, 2004). As such, some stepparents might place little importance on their interactions with their stepchild and therefore not be motivated to attend a programme focused on the stepparent-stepchild relationship.

Third, the stepparent-stepchild relationship is a process that continues to change and develop over time. Previous research examining changes in the stepparent-stepchild relationship over time have shown mixed findings (Pryor, 2014). Kinniburgh-White, Cartwright and Seymour (2010) identified five developmental trajectories for the development of the stepfather-stepchild relationship. These trajectories indicated that there is

great diversity in the way that relationships between a stepfather and stepchild progressed, with some becoming closer overtime, while others became more distant. This study did not examine the development of the stepmother-stepchild relationship; however, it is likely that there would also be diversity in the development of this relationship among stepfamilies. With this in mind, although it is not certain that the stepparent-stepchild relationship will improve over time, it is possible that many stepparents experiencing relational issues with their stepchild perceive this as a temporary challenge that will improve with time.

In an attempt to overcome the small sample size of the present study, Modified Brinley Plots were constructed for every variable to measure individual participant change. The Brinley Plots for each variable illustrated similar findings to the respective paired-sample t-test, providing additional support to the quantitative findings. However, in all of the Modified Brinley Plots, only a small number of participants' scores indicated estimated reliable change, falling outside of the RCI line. That is, for the majority of stepparent's scores on every measure, any change reported may have been a result of measurement error or natural variation. This technicality is important to note in the case of Participant 6 who appears to have reported substantial improvement on the majority of the measures, particularly on the four parenting emotional style and behaviour variables. In this way, it is possible that this one particular stepparent influenced the over-inflated paired-sample t-test results.

Interestingly, the value used to represent reliability in the RCI formula significantly influenced the RCI values of the variables. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency, of the variables at pre-programme, was selected to represent reliability and calculate the RCI values. Yet, substituting Cronbach's alpha for Pearson's R correlations between the pre- and post-programme variable means, results in larger RCI values for all study variables, except family satisfaction. The differences in RCI values were

particularly large for the DERS score and stepchild's behaviour intensity. Larger RCI scores mean participants must show greater change from pre- to post-programme for the change to be considered reliable. Despite the differences in RCI values because of the two alternative measures of reliability, the number of individual scores that fell outside of the RCI line was similar for most variables of the present study regardless of which RCI value was used.

Regression to the mean is another methodological concern in any repeated measures design. It is conceptualised as the statistical phenomenon where extreme scores for a variable when first measured will tend to move closer to the average score when measured a second time (Maraun, Gabriel, & Martin, 2011). The article by Maraun et al. (2011) discusses controversies that exist with conceptualising and assessing regression to the mean in quantitative research, particularly whether individual- or group-level change indicates regression to the mean. Despite this, in the current study there are a few variables where regression to the mean may have been evident but not severe.

Due to time constraints, this research project did not involve a short- or long-term follow-up time point. As such, it is not known whether any effects found post-programme would be maintained long-term after completing the programme. The TIK literature has shown promising findings for long-term effects of the programme on parents' emotional styles and parenting practices, of up to six months following programme completion (Havighurst et al., 2004; 2010; 2013). In the study conducted by Havighurst et al. (2013) the variable trajectories were analysed from baseline to a six-month follow-up. The results showed that curvilinear relationships were found for the Emotion Dismissing, Empathy, and children's behaviour variables. Hence, while improvements were maintained at six months follow-up for these variables, further improvements were not observed. In addition, quadratic relationships were found for the Emotion Coaching and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation variables. That is, parents' emotion coaching improved immediately after attending the TIK

programme but had reduced again by the follow-up time point. In contrast, no significant differences were found from baseline to post-intervention for the DERS scale, but by six-months follow-up, improvements were reported. These relationships suggest that improvements in Emotion Coaching were not maintained at follow-up, yet delayed effects occurred for parents' difficulties in regulating emotions. Therefore, it is possible that the improvements found in the current study would be maintained over time, or delayed effects may have also been identified.

One other significant caveat of the present study is the absence of a quantitative measure evaluating the quality of the stepparent-child relationship. No specific measure was included to examine change in the stepparent-stepchild relationship, despite this relationship being an important focus throughout the Step-TIK programme. Kinniburgh-White et al., (2010) suggested that stepparents with authoritarian personalities may have more difficulty engaging with stepchildren and establishing role boundaries, while stepparents with greater emotional competence may be more equipped to effectively relate to their stepchildren. Previous stepfamily research has provided substantial evidence for this idea, with studies showing that stepparents who demonstrate warm and supportive behaviours tend to have relationships with their stepchildren that are more positive than stepparents who take on a disciplinary role (Cartwright et al., 2009; Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims, 1994; Ganong et al., 1999). Based on the literature, it can only be assumed that the improvements found for stepparents' emotional beliefs and parenting practices would be reflected in a positive change in the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Future research is recommended to examine change in the quality of the relationship between the stepparent and stepchild, after the stepparent has completed a parenting programme.

As discussed in the section above, the insignificant change reported in stepchildren's behaviour outcomes may be a result of the ECBI not being an appropriate scale of choice for

the present study. In a stepfamily context, changes in the stepparent's parenting style might not be as influential on the behaviours covered in the ECBI, compared to a change in a biological parent's parenting style. The development of a reliable and valid measure evaluating change in stepchildren's behaviours and interactions with stepparents would be a valuable addition to the stepfamily literature.

7.2. Aim Two: To Explore the Need for and Appropriateness of the Adapted TIK

Programme for Stepfamilies

The second aim of this study was to investigate the need and suitability of the Step-TIK programme for stepfamilies. Qualitative data were collected through brief phone interviews with five of the participants and post-programme online evaluation questionnaires. This analysis was an important addition to the current project as a way of gaining insight into the stepparents' subjective experiences and opinions of the Step-TIK programme, along with developing a greater understanding of the triumphs and challenges stepparents encounter with living in a stepfamily.

7.2.1. Is an emotion-focused parenting programme suitable for stepfamilies?

A review of the background literature regarding stepfamilies led to an assumption that there is a need for a parenting programme to target stepparents and their relationships with their stepchildren, particularly in a NZ setting where there appears to be a lack of resources and services available to stepfamilies. Yet, the small sample size of the current study could suggest otherwise and imply that stepfamilies do not require support or are not seeking external support. Nevertheless, the stepparents who participated in this current study reported the Step-TIK programme to be very useful and worthwhile, providing them with a lot of new ideas, perspectives and skills.

In general, participants reported positive evaluations of the Step-TIK programme and the adaptations made, with most participants rating the programme as both useful to their

family situation and an enjoyable experience. Participants' overall experiences of group education programmes is an important factor to take into account when evaluating an intervention programme as it can influence participant engagement, learning of the material, and the impact the programme has on change occurring (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). The lack of attrition across the two programmes also reflects the suitability of the Step-TIK programme for stepparents. While participants may have missed individual programme sessions, no one missed more than two. Further, in one of the programmes, when a few of the participants had timetable conflicts with the schedule, the remaining participants were happy to extend the programme a week so that all could fully participate.

It is necessary to acknowledge possible biases that exist surrounding stepparents' positive evaluations about the parenting programme. First, participants were given the option to participate in the brief phone interview at the end of the post-programme questionnaire. A potential selection bias could have been created such that the participants who agreed to partake in the interview were only stepparents who found the Step-TIK programme to be enjoyable and beneficial. Further, the primary researcher of this study had three different roles throughout this project - namely, the primary researcher, a group programme facilitator, and the phone interviewer. Being a group facilitator, the researcher had developed good rapport with all of the participants over the six weeks of the Step-TIK programme. The participants also appeared to be aware of the significance of this research project for the primary researcher. In this way, it is possible that a strong participant bias occurred, with stepparents providing answers they believed the interviewer would want to hear so as not to offend her or to ensure positive results for this study were found.

In line with the quantitative results, interviewees demonstrated an increased awareness concerning their attitudes about emotions, their own emotional states, and their stepchild's emotions. The examples that participants provided throughout the interviews

illustrated changes in parenting styles and practices. This theme of increased emotional awareness, adds to the study's other findings and provides support for the idea that the Step-TIK programme successfully targeted stepparent's emotional beliefs and parenting behaviours. Of particular importance is this change in awareness being reported in the presence of the adaptations made to the TIK programme, suggesting that the adaptations did not interfere with the original TIK programme objectives.

Although learning of the programme content and changes in parenting practices can be inferred from the participants' comments, it cannot be concluded that significant change in stepparents' attitudes and emotion socialisation behaviours within the home has occurred. That is, stepparents' reports of changes in parenting styles were self-report and anecdotal. No objective measure, such as an observation or video recording of stepparents' interactions with their stepchild, was included in the present study. In this way, while the stepparents' comments reflect a learning of the programme content, it is recommended that future research includes an observation or video recording measure to examine whether emotion coaching behaviours are being applied within the home setting and the appropriateness of such behaviours for the particular context.

7.2.2. The Value of Group Connectedness.

Interviewees' comments strongly reflected group connectedness and a sense of belonging during the parenting programme through discussion of their shared experiences and learning from each other. This theme relates back to the difficulty in recruitment of stepparents due to the possible perceived social stigma stepfamilies experience. Researchers have argued that stepparents and stepfamilies may be reluctant to seek support and engage in stepfamily-focused group intervention programmes because of the social stigma surrounding stepfamilies (Esses & Campbell, 1984; Nicholson & Sanders, 1999). Yet, previous parenting programme research has demonstrated the usefulness of group intervention programmes for

reducing social stigma surrounding marginalised populations (Webster-Stratton, 1984; Webster-Stratton, 1998). It was postulated that the development of close bonds between the group members results in the creation of a safe learning environment and facilitates the therapeutic process of the group intervention (Webster-Stratton, 1996).

Based on the current study's findings, it can be speculated that this group phenomenon occurred between the stepparents. It is possible that stepparents gained a sense of support and understanding from the other group members, normalising any experiences they were facing within their own stepfamily and reducing any perceived social stigma of the stepparents. The group delivery format of the Step-TIK programme is in contrast to the previously established PMTO programme for stepfamilies, which was delivered through individual, therapist-led sessions (Forgatch et al., 2005). This delivery technique has the advantage of being tailored and personalised to the individual needs of a stepfamily. However, the one-on-one nature of the PMTO programme would not have provided stepparents with the opportunity to bond with other stepparents who may be going through similar experiences and share any triumphs or challenges. The current study's theme of group connectedness suggests that the experience of sharing stories and bonding with other stepparents is an aspect of the Step-TIK programme that the participants highly valued and an important component to consider when developing a stepfamily-focused parenting intervention.

In addition, Pryor (2014) suggested that as stepfamilies become more prevalent and normalised within society, the social stigma and stereotypes that surround stepfamilies lessens. Research supports this idea that society's attitudes concerning step and blended families are beginning to change. For example, Rigg and Pryor (2007) examined children's perceptions of families by presenting them with a variety of vignettes comprised of different groupings of people and asking the children if they perceived the grouping as a family.

Findings showed that stepfamilies were only slightly less likely to be viewed as ‘real’ families by children as biological families were. With greater acceptance of stepfamilies in society, stepparents will potentially become more willing to seek support and participate in a group parenting programme targeted towards stepparents.

7.2.3. Were the changes made to the TIK programme applicable to stepfamilies?

Reports from participants suggest that the additional activities added to the TIK programme, relating specifically to stepchildren and stepfamily life, resulted in stepparents maintaining focus on their stepchild’s emotions throughout the programme. As such, findings suggest that stepparents appeared to develop an awareness of the complexity of situations stepchildren may encounter in their lives and an understanding of the emotions stepchildren could be experiencing. The changes made to the emotion detective exercise, as well as the additional brainstorming exercises of fears/worries and causes of anger specific to stepchildren, seemed to be particularly pertinent to facilitating this awareness in stepparents. The interviewees provided positive evaluations of the adaptations made, stating that the scenarios were applicable to their specific family situation. In particular, stepparents who were members of partial- or full-blended stepfamilies commented on the balance between scenarios specific to stepchildren and other scenarios common to all children. In this way, while the adaptations encouraged stepparents to place more focus on their stepchild, they allowed for the programme to be applicable to the whole family unit.

When asked about the exercises in the phone interviews, many of the participants’ comments implied that they understood the objective and underlying rationale for these exercises. This knowledge, along with the changes observed in stepparents’ awareness and understanding of their stepchildren’s emotions, suggest that the adaptations made to the Step-TIK programme did not interfere with the purpose and aims of the original Step-TIK programme. However, because the original TIK programme has not been evaluated among

stepfamilies, it is not known whether these adaptations are an essential component to the effectiveness of the Step-TIK programme for stepfamilies. That is, it is possible that similar results would have been reported in a sample of stepparents attending the original TIK programme involving no adaptations.

7.2.4. Identified barriers for stepparents.

Although the majority of the interviewees' feedback was positive, a few participants did identify some limitations and challenges of the Step-TIK programme. First, one participant reported difficulties with finding opportunities to apply the programme content because of day-to-day care arrangements being incompatible with the programme night. This logistical constraint is one that many stepparents might experience when attending a group programme involving weekly sessions, and something that was not considered prior to implementing the programme. Perhaps it would have been beneficial to address any unidentified barriers for stepparents early on within the programme and facilitate active problem solving regarding such issues so stepparents receive maximum benefit from the programme. Such a constraint is another possible explanation for the poor show of interest in the Step-TIK programme. This logistical challenge warrants further research to investigate how it may best be addressed.

Second, some of the programme sessions, particularly those focusing on specific emotions, appeared to have limited applicability for a few stepfamilies. For example, a participant reported anger as being a salient emotion within the household but not worry or anxiety. The TIK programme, along with the adapted Step-TIK programme, attempts to cover a diverse range of emotions at different levels of intensity, common to children. As such, it is expected that some sessions will be more applicable to parents than others will be. Nevertheless, the general principles and skills of emotion coaching are promoted in all sessions, regardless of whether a particular emotion is the focus of a session.

Third, three stepparents identified challenges regarding co-parenting differences with both their partner (the stepchild's biological parent) and the non-residential biological parent. That is, concerns were raised about the role and boundaries of the stepparent in relation to appropriate times to emotion coach and how these differed from the roles and boundaries of the biological parents. In line with the stepfamily literature, these comments reflect the ambiguity that stepparents often experience around their parenting role (Graham, 2010). These issues are discussed further in the section below.

7.3. Implications and Future Directions

There are a number of implications that can be drawn from the findings of this study. This section focuses on such implications as well as future areas of development regarding stepfamily intervention literature that arise from both these implications and methodological limitations of this study.

The Step-TIK programme demonstrated promising findings, suggesting the suitability and effectiveness of an emotion-coaching parenting programme among stepfamilies. However, from the theoretical perspective of family systems theory, the Step-TIK programme did not adequately acknowledge the complexity of stepfamilies. Previous research has argued that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is one of the most critical relationships during the formation of a stepfamily and the most influential on overall stepfamily functioning (Coleman et al., 2000). As such, the relationship between a stepparent and stepchild was the primary focus of the Step-TIK programme, with little time given to exploring the quality of other dyadic and triadic relationships that exist within the stepfamily system.

From a family systems perspective, all dyadic and triadic subsystems within the stepfamily system will influence, and be influenced by, the stepparent-stepchild relationship as well as the overall family system (Cox & Paley, 1997, Pryor, 2014). As reported above,

stepparents raised discussion points throughout the programme regarding the interdependent nature of all existing relationships within the stepfamily and their impact on the household dynamics. In addition, some stepparents directly commented on this topic in the phone interviews and post-programme evaluation questionnaire. For example, one participant talked about parenting inconsistencies that are likely to exist between the stepchild's two households, such that a stepchild's experiences, attitudes, and emotions will not be mutually exclusive to the two households and may be transferred across homes.

The Step-TIK programme did not directly address the complexity of system interactions within stepfamilies. It is recommended that the development of future parenting programmes specifically targeting stepparents aim to encompass more dyadic and triadic relationships. Focus on relationships between adults within stepfamilies, including the non-residential biological parent, may be particularly beneficial for stepparents where negotiations around roles, boundaries, and parenting differences present more areas of potential conflict (Pryor, 2014). To achieve such a programme, it would perhaps be easier to design and establish a targeted stepfamily programme derived from the theoretical stepfamily literature as opposed to adapting a pre-existing parenting programme. Participants in the current study also raised other particular topics that were not covered in the Step-TIK programme, such as legal proceedings, financial issues, and stepparent boundaries for discussing certain topics with stepchildren. A programme specifically developed for stepfamilies would also be able to address such topics and how stepparents can manage situations involving these matters.

The majority of stepfamily research has focused on relational factors within the stepfamily that influences individual and family adjustment, such as roles, boundaries, and relationships of stepfamily members (Cartwright, 2005; Mobley, 2011; Pryor, 2014). Unfortunately, little focus has been placed on these other topics raised by the participants of

the current study and the impact they might have on the developmental trajectory of a stepfamily. Additional research is necessary to investigate how these issues may relate to stepfamily functioning and effective ways of managing these factors before including them in a stepparent programme.

Only recently has stepfamily research begun to view stepfamilies from a strength and resiliency perspective as opposed to the deficit model that has dominated much of the stepfamily literature (Pryor, 2004). For example, Golish (2003) identified a number of strategies occurring within stepfamily households that differentiated strong stepfamilies, as perceived by the stepfamily members, from others. These strategies included spending time together, creating shared meaning, blending old and new family rituals to establish ones unique to the stepfamily, communicating a sense of inclusion, confronting problems, establishing boundaries and clear rules, and supportive communication. The development of a stepparent programme based on a strength and resiliency perspective that promotes the use of effective communication and relational strategies is another avenue that could be considered in future research.

Duncombe et al. (2016) recently compared a behaviour-based programme with the emotion-focused TIK programme to find that both programmes were equally effective at reducing children's behaviour problems. It would be interesting to conduct a comparison study for the two different programme approaches among a stepfamily sample. Previous research evaluating behaviour-based programmes with stepparents have demonstrated positive effects of these programmes, particularly for reducing children's behaviour problems (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007; Nicholson & Sanders, 1999). For example, the study examining the PMTO parenting programme with a stepfather sample, showed improvements in stepfathers' parenting practices, although these were not maintained one year after the intervention (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007). However, the intensity of these interventions and

the one-on-one therapist-led delivery format means direct comparisons cannot be made between these programmes and the Step-TIK programme.

A strong evidence base exists to suggest that stepparents who take on a warm and supportive stepparenting role are more likely to develop a positive relationship with their stepchildren than stepparents who attempt to adopt a disciplinary stepparenting role (Cartwright et al., 2009; Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims, 1994; Ganong et al., 1999; Mobley, 2011). Further, Duncombe et al. (2016) speculated that an emotion-focused parenting programme may be more advantageous when the parent-child relationship is compromised, after finding that parent mental health moderated the effects of the two different programme approaches (behavioural- and emotion-based). In line with these ideas, it is possible that an emotion-focused parenting programme, concentrating more on the relationship between the stepparent and stepchild, would be a more appropriate and effective choice of programme over a behaviour-based one.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the current study did not include any measure examining the nature and quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship in detail. This is a significant limitation of the research project. Further, the ECBI scale that was used to measure change in stepchildren's behaviours may have been an inappropriate choice of scale for a stepfamily context. The two studies that examined the behaviour-based PMTO and Triple P programmes among stepfamilies used the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983) to measure change in children's behaviour problems (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007; Nicholson & Sanders, 1999), with both studies reporting significant reductions in children's behaviours following the programme. As such, the CBCL may have been a more appropriate measure to use to examine change in stepchildren's behaviours in the current study.

Alternatively, a more suitable measure of stepchildren's behaviours could be one that examines behaviours more relevant to a stepfamily context and the stepparent-stepchild relationship. For example, the stepchild approaching their stepparent for help, initiating a conversation with the stepparent, as well as their responses and reactions to the stepparent's requests. These actions would not only reflect any potential changes in stepchildren's behaviours but also any change in the nature and quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Such a scale is likely to reflect the interactions that occur between the stepparent and the stepchild, as well as the nature of the stepparent's role within a stepchild's life, more appropriately. As such, the development of such a measure would benefit future stepfamily research, providing more choice when examining the stepparent-stepchild relationship.

Two other methodological considerations that have been identified previously in this discussion also provide avenues for future research. First, it is recommended that the present study be replicated with a larger sample size. The significantly small sample size of the current research project means there was very little statistical power in the quantitative results, meaning the conclusions made from the quantitative findings may not be accurate. It is necessary to replicate this research project with a sample size that would sufficiently reach statistical power. Only then, can we have confidence that the findings are accurately reflecting the effectiveness and suitability of the Step-TIK programme among stepfamilies. Second, while the adaptations made to the TIK programme appeared to be positively received by the participants in the current study, it is possible that the adaptations were not an essential component of the programme. That is, the original TIK programme might have produced similar results as those found in the current study. A study comparing the original TIK programme with the Step-TIK programme would reveal whether the changes and additional exercises related to stepfamilies are necessary to create change within a stepfamily sample.

7.4. Conclusions

This thesis project has demonstrated that an emotion-focused parenting programme for stepparents is a promising approach for providing support and assistance to stepparents who are experiencing challenges in their parenting and/or in relating to their stepchildren. Within New Zealand, step- and blended families are becoming more common in today's society and social stigma surrounding stepfamilies appears to be diminishing. Despite this, there appears to be a lack of resources and support services available to stepfamilies. With this apparent societal change in family structure, it is important that community support services are accessible and relevant to stepfamilies, providing assistance with managing the unique challenges many stepfamilies encounter and promoting positive functioning within the overall stepfamily system.

The stepfamily literature suggests that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is one of the most critical relationships within the stepfamily in terms of the impact it has on stepchildren's adjustment and later outcomes, as well as the stepfamily's overall functioning. Further, the parental approach that a stepparent adopts can influence the development and quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. The Step-TIK programme aimed to promote stepparents warmth and support towards their stepchild by enhancing emotion coaching skills and empathy, while placing less of a focus on discipline.

This thesis has identified and discussed many areas of focus for future development of the Step-TIK programme or alternative stepfamily-focused parenting programmes to further enhance applicability towards a stepfamily population. In addition, recommendations for future improvements regarding the methodological design of the present study have been provided to ensure a more rigorous evaluation of the Step-TIK programme among stepfamilies. Nevertheless, this study has found promising preliminary findings to suggest that an emotion-focused parenting programme is a suitable and potentially effective approach for providing support to stepparents and their families.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Participant Information Sheet



Department: Educational Studies and Leadership

Telephone: (03) 364 2987 ext. 8914

Email: kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Study: 'Tuning in to Kids': Examining an emotion-focused parenting programme among stepfamilies.

Step-TIK Study
Information sheet for step-parents

You are invited to participate in a study about emotionally intelligent step-parenting to help your stepchild learn to understand and regulate their emotions. This study will involve you participating in a parenting programme called 'Tuning in to Kids' (TIK). This programme will run over six weeks with weekly 2-hour sessions.

The study will investigate family dynamics, your emotional awareness, your relationship with your stepchild, and your stepchild's emotional competence and behaviour, before and after completing the TIK programme. Following the completion of the TIK programme, we will ask for your consent to contact your partner (the stepchild's biological parent) and ask them to complete a short questionnaire about any changes they have seen in parenting and family life during your participation in the TIK programme.

The study is being conducted by Kate Goonan as a requirement for her Master of Science, and supervised by Dr. Myron Friesen from the College of Education at the University of Canterbury (please see contact details below).

What does the study involve?

To participate in this study we ask that you parent at least one stepchild between the ages of 5 and 10 years old. This stepchild must live with you in the same household for at least a few days per week and/or at times when active parenting is required. In addition, we ask that if your family has experienced any major transitions in living arrangements, these changes have taken place more than three months prior to participating in this study.

To participate in the study you should have already signed up to one of the parenting programmes being run in term 2 or term 3 this year. For your participation we will ask you to complete the following questions included in this survey. The survey should take about 60 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participating at any time. If you participate, but decide to withdraw your information at a later date, you may contact the researchers and ask for both yours and your partner's data to be removed. This can be done until analysis of the data begins in November 2015. We are asking all step-parents that participate in the parenting programme to complete the following survey and the follow-up survey at the end of the programme. However, it is possible to opt-out of the research surveys if needed. Please contact Kate or Myron (contact details provided below) to discuss this.

Who will have access to the information that is collected and what will happen with the information?

Any information collected in this study will be confidential and securely stored. Only the researcher and supervisors will have access to the information as is required. The results from the study are intended to be published as a thesis, and will therefore be accessible via the University of Canterbury library. There is also a possibility for the results to be further published in an academic journal. However, all data that is published is done so at group level, not individually, such that no identifiable information will be published. Following publication of the study, data will be kept for a minimum period of five years, and then destroyed. A summary of the overall findings at a group level will be sent to step-parents if requested at the end of the post-questionnaire.

Are there any benefits or risks involved?

There are no physical risks posed to you by participating in this study. As in all parenting programmes, in the TIK programme, you will be encouraged to reflect on your parenting practices and styles to identify your strengths as well as areas for improvement. These reflections and discussions may lead you to experience emotional arousal, however, this may also be a positive and enlightening experience. The trained facilitators will be available to talk to during and after programme sessions if required. You will also be introduced to a registered Child and Family Psychologist at the beginning of the programme who will be available for referral if you so desire.

Completing the questionnaires about family relationships, communication and behaviours may also elicit some emotions as you reflect on your family dynamics and parenting styles. Again, these reflections may be a positive experience, particularly seeing any changes that occur overtime.

The study has been reviewed by and received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or concerns about this study you may contact the researchers via the details listed below, or you may contact the Human Ethics Committee directly at:

The Chair

University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kate Goonan (Primary Investigator)

Masters Student, University of Canterbury
Email: kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Dr Myron Friesen (Primary Supervisor)

School of Educational Studies and Leadership, University of Canterbury
Ph: (03) 364 2987 ext. 8914
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Appendix B
Participant Consent Form



Department: Educational Studies and Leadership

Telephone: (03) 364 2987 ext. 8914

Email: kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Study: 'Tuning in to Kids': Examining an emotion-focused parenting programme among stepfamilies.

Step-TIK Study
Consent Form for step-parents

If you agree to participate in this study, can you please tick the boxes next to each of the statements below to confirm that you have read and understood the information:

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet
- I understand that to participate in this study I am asked to attend a six-week TIK parenting programme, involving weekly, two-hour evening sessions. I also understand that as part of the study I will be asked to complete two questionnaires, one prior to starting the TIK programme and one after completing the TIK programme.
- I understand that with my consent, the researchers can contact my partner to invite them to also complete a brief questionnaire after I have completed the TIK programme.
- I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and I can withdraw from participating at any time. I understand that if I decide to withdraw my participation, all information I have provided so far will be withdrawn so long as this is practically possible. I also understand that if I do not wish to participate in the study I am still able to partake in the TIK parenting programme.
- I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors and any data that is published or any results reported will not identify any participants.
- I understand that the data collected from this study will be used in a Master's thesis which is a public document that will be available through the UC Library and may also be published in other academic publications (journal article, conference presentation, seminar poster).
- I understand that all information collected in this study will be stored in secure, locked facilities at UC or on secure computer files/documents and will not be accessed by anyone outside of the research team. This information will be destroyed 5 years after publication.

- I understand that I am able to receive a summary of the study's findings by contacting the research team.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher Kate Goonan (kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or her supervisor Dr Myron Friesen (myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information or to ask any questions about the study.
- I understand that if I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

Do you give your consent for the researchers to contact your partner (your stepchild's biological parent) to invite them to complete a brief questionnaire after completion of the TIK programme?

- Yes
- No

By entering your email address in the text box below, it will be understood that you have consented to participate in this research project.

Appendix C Step-TIK Study Flyer

Are you a Step-parent with a stepchild aged 5-10 years old? Are you interested in attending a free parenting programme? Please consider participating in the study:



What is the parenting programme?

The parenting programme that you will participate in is called 'Tuning in to Kids' (TIK). This parenting programme focuses on the emotions of both you and your stepchild – it teaches you skills to become more aware of your stepchild's emotions and how to respond to them. Past research has shown that this helps to improve the parent-child relationship as well as children's behaviour and social skills. The TIK programme is a 6-week long, group parenting programme, with weekly 2-hour evening sessions. The programme will involve group discussions, demonstrations, video clips, role plays, and homework activities.

What does the Step-TIK study involve?

Apart from attending the 6-week long TIK parenting programme, the only additional part you will be asked to do for the study is complete an online questionnaire before the programme begins and after the programme has finished – that's it! The questionnaires will ask you about family dynamics, parenting practices, and your stepchild's emotional competence and behaviours. With your consent, we may also invite your partner (the stepchild's biological parent) to complete a brief online questionnaire asking about changes in family dynamics and functioning. The TIK parenting programme is run by trained facilitators in group sessions with other step-parents. However, all information collected for the Step-TIK study will only be obtained through the online questionnaires that you complete in the privacy of your own home. Therefore, all study information will be kept confidential.

Who can participate in the study?

We are looking for step-parents who have at least one stepchild between the ages of 5 and 10 years old. This stepchild must live with you in the same household for at least a few days per week and/or at times when active parenting is required. In addition, we ask that if your family has experienced any major transitions in living arrangements, these changes need to have taken place more than three months prior to participating in this study.



Who is conducting the study?

This research is being carried out by Kate Goonan as part of her Master of Science in Child and Family Psychology under the supervision of Dr Myron Friesen. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the research team at kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, who may be contacted at human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

If you're interested in participating in the TIK programme and Step-TIK Study, or would like more information about them please visit:

www.step-tik.weebly.com

Appendix D

Adapted 'Spot the Emotion Coaching Opportunity' Worksheet

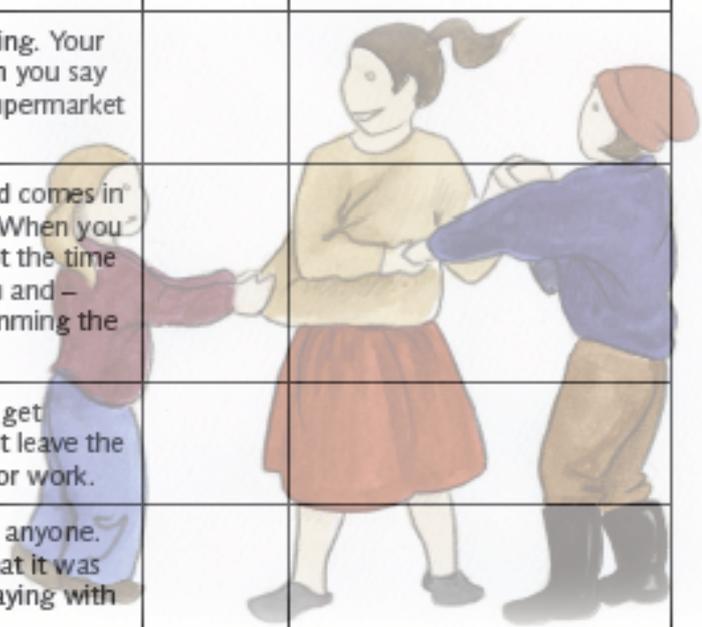
Spot the Emotion Coaching opportunity

Which of the following situations would be an opportunity to emotion coach?

The situation	Emotion Coach Yes/No	What could you do or say?
You pick your stepchild up from school and they seem quieter than usual on the drive home.		
Your stepchild has just tracked mud all over the floor you mopped half an hour ago. You are furious.		
After coming home from staying at their other parent's house, your stepchild refuses to do their chore because they weren't the one that made the mess.		
You and your partner have finally organised a special night out together. Your stepchild refuses to go to stay at your friend's house down the road.		
Your stepchild lets go of your hand and runs towards a busy road. There is a clearly stated household rule that they hold your hand when crossing the road.		
After school you take your stepchild shopping. Your stepchild asks for a chocolate bar and when you say 'No', has a tantrum. Everyone in the supermarket turns to watch.		
You are cooking dinner when your stepchild comes in and takes several cookies from the jar. When you say that it is almost dinner time and not the time to eat cookies, your stepchild scowls at you and says 'dad said I could have some' before leaving the room with cookies in hand and slamming the door on the way out.		
You ask your stepchild to get ready for bed but they start making a fuss because their stepsibling who is 2 years older than them does not have to go to bed yet.		
Your stepchild is not talking to anyone. Five minutes earlier you had insisted that it was time for your biological child to have a turn playing with a new toy to be shared among all children.		

Spot the Emotion Coaching opportunity

Which of the following situations would be an opportunity to emotion coach?

The situation	Emotion Coach Yes/No	What could you do or say?
You pick your child up from school and they seem quieter than usual on the drive home.		
Your child has just tracked mud all over the floor you mopped half an hour ago. You are furious.		
Your child is having a bath and playing with bath toys. You are watching. Suddenly your child says 'Dolly's scared. Her Daddy has gone away.'		
You and your partner have finally organised a special night out together. Your child refuses to go to stay at your friend's house down the road.		
Your child lets go of your hand and runs towards a busy road. There is a clearly stated family rule that they hold your hand when crossing the road.		
After school you take your child shopping. Your child asks for a chocolate bar and when you say 'No', has a tantrum. Everyone in the supermarket turns to watch.		
You are cooking dinner when your child comes in and takes several cookies from the jar. When you say that it is almost dinner time and not the time to eat cookies, your child scowls at you and – cookies in hand – leaves the room, slamming the door on the way out.		
Your child is taking a very long time to get dressed in the morning and if you don't leave the house in five minutes you will be late for work.		
Your school aged child is not talking to anyone. Five minutes earlier you had insisted that it was time for your toddler to have a turn playing with your child's new toy.		

Appendix E
Adapted 'The Emotion Detective' Worksheet

The emotion detective: discovering what your stepchild feels

Instructions

Read each of the following scenarios where your stepchild might have a strong emotional response. Write down a similar situation for an adult and how you would feel in that situation.

Stepchild's emotional situation	A similar situation for an adult	How you would feel in the adult situation
Living with your new step-parent for the first time		
Being told by a step-parent to share your special new toy		
Being told to eat something you don't like		
Being reprimanded by a step-parent		
Being left out of a family camping trip because you are staying with your other parent for the weekend		
Getting in trouble for scribbling on your stepsister's drawing when this was in revenge for something the stepsister did		
Thinking there might be monsters in the dark		

The emotion detective: discovering what your child feels

Instructions

Read each of the following scenarios where your child might have a strong emotional response. Write down a similar situation for an adult and how would you feel in that situation.

Child's emotional situation	A similar situation for an adult	How would you feel in the adult situation?
Starting preschool or school for the first time		
Being told by a parent to share your special new toy		
Being told to eat something you don't like		
Birth of a sibling		
Being left out of a group of children playing		
Getting in trouble for scribbling on another child's drawing when this was in revenge for something the other child did		
Thinking there might be monsters in the dark		



Appendix F
Example Role Play Scenarios Handout

Role play scenarios

Your stepchild comes in from outside and tells you that their stepsiblings are leaving them out of the game. They conclude their stepsiblings don't like them.

After coming home from staying at their other parent's house, your stepchild refuses to do their chore because they weren't the one that made the mess.

Your stepchild refuses to go to stay at your parent's house (the child's step-grandparents) when you and your partner have finally organised a special night out together.

Your stepchild refuses to share after you said their little step-brother/sister needed to have a turn playing with your stepchild's new toy.

Your stepchild becomes very quiet when you start discussing with your partner the family camping trip that the two of you are planning for the following weekend – a weekend your stepchild will be at their other parent's house.

Think of some other situations that you have experienced recently with your stepchild where emotions were involved.

Appendix G
Paired Sample t-test Statistics for the DERS subscales

Variable	Pre-programme		Post-programme		<i>t</i> -value	df	<i>p</i> -value	Effect size Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Nonaccept	1.98	0.61	1.80	0.67	1.00	8	.347	0.28
Goals	2.49	0.57	2.42	0.78	0.44	8	.674	0.10
Impulse	1.80	0.40	1.46	0.36	4.90	8	.001**	0.89
Aware	2.85	0.77	2.04	0.88	2.80	8	.023*	0.98
Strategies	1.81	0.54	1.59	0.54	1.37	8	.208	0.41
Clarity	2.09	0.49	1.66	0.41	3.17	8	.013*	0.95

Note. SD = Standard Deviation; df = degrees of freedom

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .005$. Cohens *d*: 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, 0.8 = large effect

- Following on from that exercise you also completed a task called the Emotion Detective, where you were given emotional situations stepchildren may experience and were asked to come up with a comparable adult situation and how you would feel in that situation:
 - How useful did you find this exercise?
 - How applicable do you feel these scenarios are to stepfamilies?

- Thinking back to Session 4 where we brainstormed common fears and worries of children, how did you find it also brainstorming fears and worries specific to stepchildren?

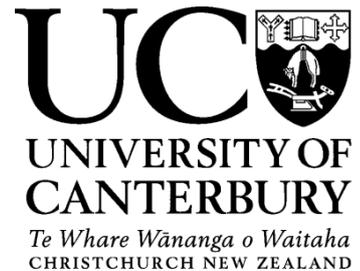
- [Only for Group 2] In Session 5 where we also asked you to brainstorm causes of anger common to all children as well as specific to stepchildren, how did you find this exercise?

- Back in Week 3, you provided an example of what you had learnt in the session before where (anecdote). How were your parenting strategies different in that example from what it might have been prior to attending the Tuning in to Kids programme?
 - (Gain consent to use this anecdote in thesis and inform them that no identifying information will be reported).

- Thinking back to the rest of the Tuning in to Kids programme, how did you find the other parts of the programme?
 - Were there any parts that you particularly enjoyed?
 - Were there any other activities you found particularly useful?

- Finally, do you think there are any other changes that could have been made to the programme to make it more suitable to your family situation?

Appendix I
Participant Information Sheet for Phone Interview



Department: Educational Studies and Leadership

Telephone: (03) 364 2987 ext. 8914

Email: kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Study: 'Tuning in to Kids': Examining an emotion-focused parenting programme among stepfamilies.

Step-TIK Study
Information Sheet for Programme Evaluation

You are invited to participate in a brief semi-structured phone interview regarding your evaluations and opinions of the 'Tuning in to Kids' parenting programme. In particular, we would like to hear your opinions on the suitability of the parenting programme for your family situation, and how the programme could be adapted to make it more applicable to step- and blended families.

The study is being conducted by Kate Goonan as a requirement for her Master of Science, and supervised by Dr. Myron Friesen from the College of Education at the University of Canterbury (please see contact details below).

What does the study involve?

To participate in this short phone interview you should have completed the 6-week 'Tuning in to Kids' parenting programme targeting step- and blended families, as well as completed a pre- and post-questionnaire. The phone interview is an additional component focusing on your evaluation of the programme in regards to step- and blended families. The interview will ask about your opinion of the suitability of the programme for step- and blended families, in particular about the adaptations that were made to the programme to make it more applicable to step- and blended families, and also whether there are any other topics specific to step- and blended families that were not covered throughout the programme. No questions will be asked about any changes you have experienced in your family life after completing the programme.

Participation in the interview is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participating at any time. If you participate, but decide to withdraw your information at a later date, you may contact the researchers and ask for both yours and your partner's data to be removed. This can be done until analysis of the data begins in November 2015.

Who will have access to the information that is collected and what will happen with the information?

The interview will be recorded, but only the primary researcher and her supervisors will have access to this recording. Once the recording has been transcribed and all identifying information removed, the recording will be deleted. Any information collected in this study will be confidential and securely stored. Only the researcher and supervisors will have access to the information as is required. The results from the study are intended to be published as a thesis, and will therefore be accessible via the University of Canterbury library. There is also a possibility for the results to be further published in an academic

journal. However, participant ID numbers will be used to ensure confidentiality and no identifiable information will be published. Following publication of the study, data will be kept for a minimum period of five years, and then destroyed. A summary of the overall findings at a group level will be sent to step-parents if requested at the end of the post-questionnaire.

Are there any benefits or risks involved?

There are no physical or emotional risks posed to you by participating in the interview. The focus of the interview is an evaluation of the ‘Tuning in to Kids’ parenting programme you attended and therefore no questions will be asked about any changes you may have experienced in your parenting style, emotional awareness, your stepchild’s emotions and behaviours, and overall family dynamics.

The study has been reviewed by and received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or concerns about this study you may contact the researchers via the details listed below, or you may contact the Human Ethics Committee directly at:

The Chair

University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Thank you for your time and consideration.

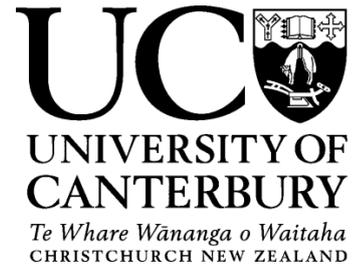
Kate Goonan (Primary Investigator)

Masters Student, University of Canterbury
Email: kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Dr Myron Friesen (Primary Supervisor)

School of Educational Studies and Leadership, University of Canterbury
Ph: (03) 364 2987 ext. 8914
Email: myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix J
Participant Consent Form for Phone Interview



Department: Educational Studies and Leadership

Telephone: (03) 364 2987 ext. 8914

Email: kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Study: 'Tuning in to Kids': Examining an emotion-focused parenting programme among stepfamilies.

Step-TIK Study
Consent Form for Programme Evaluation

If you agree to participate in this phone interview, can you please tick the boxes next to each of the statements below to confirm that you have read and understood the information:

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet

- I understand that to participate in this interview I should have attended a six-week TIK parenting programme and also completed two questionnaires, one prior to starting the TIK programme and one after completing the TIK programme.

- I understand that participation in this interview is voluntary and I can withdraw from participating at any time. I understand that if I decide to withdraw my participation, all information I have provided so far will be withdrawn so long as this is practically possible.

- I understand that the interview will be recorded and transcribed so analyses can be carried out on the information collected.

- I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors and any data that is published or any results reported will not include any identifying information of the participants.

- I understand that the data collected from this study will be used in a Master's thesis which is a public document that will be available through the UC Library and may also be published in other academic publications (journal article, conference presentation, seminar poster).

- I understand that all information collected in this study will be stored in secure, locked facilities at UC or on secure computer files/documents and will not be accessed by

anyone outside of the research team. This information will be destroyed 5 years after publication.

- I understand that I am able to receive a summary of the study's findings by contacting the research team.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher Kate Goonan (kate.goonan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or her supervisor Dr Myron Friesen (myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information or to ask any questions about the study.
- I understand that if I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

By entering your name and contact phone number in the text boxes below, it will be understood that you have consented to participate in this additional interview.