The Aboriginal Fathering Project

QUOP MAAMAN

Good Fathering

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Purpose of the Workshop series
Being a Noongar maaman (man and father) involved in raising koorlangka (children) brings lots of happiness and excitement, along with many challenges. Noongar maaman have always helped one another learn about the fathering role and how to be effective in the role. Indeed one of the key features about Noongar traditions is that our moort (family) help out so that men are not alone when it comes to looking after kids. Many changes imposed on us by Wedjela (non-Aboriginal people) have made it hard for Aboriginal men to bring up their kids with good support. Our old people had kids taken from them, were punished for speaking language and practicing culture and had their authority to be maaman as fathers, uncles, brothers and pops stripped by governments. Despite this, our history is also full of maaman who have quietly maintained their status as boordier (leaders and bosses) and who have been inspirational as maaman (fathers, uncles and pops). They have allowed the old karla mia (home fires) to continue to burn for many moorditj maaman (strong men). Today this karl (fire) for kaarnya maaman (respectful fathering) is heating up again and many Noongar maaman (fathers) are getting together to support young men as they step into roles that involve looking after koorlangka (children).

The Aboriginal Fathering workshop series has been designed by Noongar men for Noongar men. It has been set up to provide maaman (father) with a chance to get together and try some new and old activities with their koorlangka (children). The goal is to support Noongar men as they work at katatjiny bidi (go along to become learned and do good) for their koorlangka (children).
Boordier (facilitator) wanjoo (welcome) and introductions:

Begin by asking the oldest maaman or man in the group to welcome people to the session in a traditional Noongar way. It would be good to use Noongar words, phrases and protocols. For example, a man may say:


‘G’day, g’day, welcome, welcome Noongar men. This is (insert local group i.e. Wadjuk) Noongar country we are sitting on. Yesterday, today and in the future Noongar maaman (men) are bosses of this country. Today my heart is happy to see you.’

The boordier then will let people know who they are, their family connections, what their interests are in fathering work, and what their role will be in the group.

They then will offer an overview of the purpose of the workshop.
Ngeern nguny – Who am I?

Ask the men to go around the circle introducing themselves by answering the following questions:

- My name?
- Where was I born?
- Were did I grow up?
- What are three things I love doing?

Review workshop agenda.

Locate toilets, refreshments, and emergency drill.
Maaman wangkiny – words for fathering and what they do

Rationale:
Noongar boordier (leaders or facilitators) have talked about the importance of maaman (fathering) and their koorlangka (children) reclaiming Noongar wangkiny (language). They say that quop wangkiny (good language speakers) make quop maaman (good fathering). Many remember how important it has been to their own development to have father figures teach them elements of Noongar language. The value of language learning is backed by research from around the world and in other parts of Australia¹.

Goal:
For maaman (fathers) and their koorlangka (children) to participate in exercises where they learn together Noongar words associated with maaman (fathering and parenting).

Video:
‘Wangka’ – The importance of Noongar language.
Screen the video and ask men to discuss the following:

- How is Noongar language important for you as a father?
- Why do you think Len believes that language is important?

Steps for exercise: Maaman wangkiny – words for fathering

Ask maaman (fathers) and koorlangka (children) to work together.

Using resources such as Noongar dictionaries, give each man and young person ten minutes to find at least six words they think may be related to the practices they associate with quop maamaniny (good fathers and parenting).

Ask them to also try and work on phrases or short sentences that explain what good fathering looks like. One at a time, invite each pair to say out loud these words while one man writes them on a whiteboard or butcher’s paper. Be clear to point out that the man acting as scribe is not expected to spell the words in any fixed or ‘right’ way.

Resources needed:

Examples of Noongar dictionaries, wordlists or websites.

Whitehurst dictionary: http://ecampus.polytechnic.wa.edu.au/pluginfile.php/88711/mod_resource/content/2/Noongar%20language%20dictionary%5B1%5D.pdf


**A gift for maaman (men)**

At the end of the first workshop provide a gift of a Noongar koorlangka (children’s) book to each father. These can be purchased through the Noongar Language Centre: [http://noongarboodjar.com.au](http://noongarboodjar.com.au)

Invite maaman to spend time with their sons and daughters reading this book as a nighttime story at least twice between sessions.
Moortaluniny ngeern nguny doorndookaniny nguny moort – who is my family and how do I connect to my relations?

Rationale:

Noongar boordier (bosses) talked about the importance of moort (family) and how teaching koorlangka (young people) about their connections is crucial in helping them ‘attach’ to others. They say that maaman (or fathers) have an obligation to introduce their koorlangka (children) to their moort (relations) and their wider social connections and obligations. This is one of the central processes that leads to respect and care amongst Noongar. It teaches young people how to act in a responsible way towards others. The value of moort (family connections) is one of the central tenants of social life and is supported by research concerned with the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal men\(^2\).

Goal:
To have maaman (fathers) and their koorlangka (children) identify their family connections and examine the importance of a wide network of support.

Video:
‘Moort’ – The importance of family and connections.
Screen the video and ask men to discuss the following:

- Which one of the men in the video do you most identify with?
- How has your family been important to you as a father/child?
Steps for exercise: Moortaluniny – who is my family and community?

Shift any chairs or tables away from the centre of the room so there is plenty of shared space.

Give each father six coloured cards (5 cm x 20 cm).

Ask them to work with their koorlangka (children).

Ask each pair to write down at least six of their family names (eg. Collard, Garlett, Coyne etc.) and place them anywhere on the floor.

Next ask all the koorlangka (young people) to reposition the cards (with surnames) into groups with the same surnames (i.e. all the Collards in one group, all the Garletts in another etc.). It is crucial that the groups of moort (families) are spread out as much as possible.

Next ask each koorlangka (young person) to join their maaman (father), walking from each pile of surnames from their family explaining as the arrive at a new name pile their relationship (eg. ‘this is my nanna’s or pop’s family surname’). Most koorlangka will need to quietly consult with their maaman to check before speaking to the group.

Finally ask one or two young people to go around the room and explain where they may have relations in the group (be sure to have them explain their moort relationship i.e. cousin, uncle, etc.)
Resources needed:

Plenty of coloured cards (approximately 5 cm x 20 cm)

Textas or coloured markers
Bulla maaman – many fathers or dads

Rationale:

Noongar boordier (bosses) talked about the importance in Noongar life of the different roles many ‘father figures’ play in family life and the fact that all young people have ‘many maaman or fathers’. They say that maaman (fathers) have many different obligations to different koorlangka (young people). This is one of the central features of Noongar culture and traditions that have allowed families to survive and remain quop (good or resilient) despite the history of attacks on Noongar families.

The value of complex family connections is one of the central tenants of social life and is supported by research concerned with the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal men³.

Goal:

To identify the many roles that Noongar maaman (men) play in ‘rearing up’ koorlangka (children).

Video: Boola Maaman – many fathers

Screen the video and ask men to discuss the following:

- Name two or three men who were important to you.
- Name two or three koorlangka (children) you parent.
Steps for exercise: Boola maaman – many types of fathering

Set out the following table structure on a white board and ask one man to be the scribe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of father-figure</th>
<th>Eg. Biological father</th>
<th>Eg Uncle</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role they take on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name men in my life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Start by asking the men and young people to make a list of the kinds of father figures that exist in Noongar moort (Noongar families). Eg: biological father, uncle, stepfather, older brother, pop, aunty, nan. Then ask them to list the different roles each play. Eg: provider, protector, mentor, educator, cultural teacher, storyteller etc. Note: many roles may be included in each category. Ask each young person and father to start to fill out for themselves the one-page (blank) table, noting at least one name of a person in their life who fulfills each of these roles.

**Resources needed:**

Textas or coloured markers

A4 copy of ‘Bulla Maaman or many fathers’ (next page)
Nyinniny boodjar darboort – sitting quietly on country

Rationale:

Noongar boordier (bosses) reminded us that boodjar (country) is an important part of life, health and family. Boodjar (country) keeps us moorditj (strong), helps us with mubarrn (healing powers) and is our ngangk boodjar (mother earth). They say that koorliny boodjar (going on country) keeps us healthy and we in turn keep boodjar healthy. Maaman have traditionally had an obligation to katitjin boodjar (teach country) to their koorlangka (young people). In the same way boodjar katitjin maaman (country teaches fathering).

Goal:

To have maaman (fathers) and their koorlangka (children) sit quietly and reflect on the part boodjar (country) plays in keeping them healthy.

4 see Kura, yeye, mila and boorda Noongar people katitjin wangkiny: Noongar people, knowledge, stories from the past to the present and for tomorrow and the future.
Video: Boodjar – the importance of Noongar country

Screen the video and ask the maaman to yarn or discuss the following:

- When was the last time you spent time on country?
- What happens to you when you visit country?

**Steps for exercise: Maia wangkiny nitja boodjar – singing out and communicating to country**

Use what opportunities you can to boodjar koorliny (move out of a workshop space and ‘onto country’). This may involve arranging for men and young people to have one complete session outside and in a place ‘on country’ or it may involve re-convening in a spot outside of the workshop. Preferably this should occur in a quiet place where there is bush, birds and a breeze. Ideally there will be a karla (fire) and/or a barbeque.

Invite men to share food and give plenty of time for yarning.
Ask the most senior men to tell a story about their memories of how the ‘old people’ (those who have passed) made arrangements for men to come together around fire and on country. This should include talking about the part that smoke, welcoming people from outside, noticing weirn (spirit), wind, birds and the activity of the bush. What is important is that young people get a sense of the value of quietly spending time in the bush with one or two others.

Have everyone practice this phrase:

Kaya Noongar boordier wiern. Ngeern kwel (say their name). Ngeern maaman (say their father’s name). Nitja ngulla Noongar boodjar, kura, yeye, boordawan (this is our peoples land long ago, today and in the future). Nguny katatj nitja (I know this).

Hullo to the Noongar old spirits. My name is …. My father is …. This is our Noongar people’s country from a long time ago, now and in the future.

Play Noongar welcome to country: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU5uGWH-HrU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU5uGWH-HrU)
Steps for exercise: Nyinniny boodjar darboort – sitting quietly on country

Next, ask each participant to find a place to sit with their father/young person.

Ask them to close their eyes, and begin to notice their breath for two minutes. Then ask them to say their full name in Noongar to the old people and thank them for looking after country. Then ask people to notice the breeze, birds, the smells and any thoughts or ideas that come into their mind.

Ask them to sit and contemplate all the things that important men have done for them during their life. Then ask them to contemplate the women in their lives and the things women have given them.

The key to this exercise is that they not try and think; rather they listen to what the old people give them.
Katatjiny yarn koorl quop wangkiny ngulluck maaman – telling stories about good fathers

Rationale:
Noongar boordier (bosses, leaders and fathers) reminded us that an important role of maaman (fathers and men) is to teach koorlangka (young people) knowledge and skills for life. This process of katatjiny yarn koorl quop wangkiny ngulluck maaman (fathers passing on knowledge of good examples of being a dad) also helps maaman spend quality time and help koorlangka yaakiny koorliny daabakarn (young people stand up and go along steadily), or what some people call doorndookaniny (become connected or attached).5

Goal:
To have maaman (fathers) go through a process of teaching their koorlangka (children) a skill or piece of knowledge and encourage them to spend time together.

Yarn:
Ask those present to have a yarn or a solid conversation about a time when they learnt something from a father figure and what happened and what did you learn?

5 see ‘Growing up our way”
Steps for exercise: Katatjiny koorl woorlbininy – making things and goingalong together

Ask maaman (men) to pair up with their koorlongka (son or daughter). Give each pair a boorna wangkiny (bare message stick). The stick should be approximately 15-20 cm long x 3-5 cm wide and prepared so that the surface is smooth enough for texta markings to be made.

Ask the maaman (father) to share a story they have about growing up and being taught something by their father or father figure.

Ask them then to work together ‘putting’ a story on the boorna wangkiny (message stick) using the coloured textas.

Resources needed:

Enough ‘blank’ boorna wangkiny (message sticks) for each maaman and koorlangka. Packs of coloured textas.

Video: Katatjin – learning and fathering

Screen the video and move straight into the next exercise.
**Steps for exercise: Daabakarn katatjin quop maaman – steady stories about good healing men**

Start by asking men to describe what makes for a good Noongar yarn and describe how it works.

Ask one or two of the men to offer a yarn or a story about a Noongar mubarrn maaman (healer man) that helped someone in a time of need. Get them to tell the story or yarn with as much detail as possible (who, what, where, what happened etc.).

When the yarn is finished ask others to think about the qualities this maaman (man) showed and what we can katatj (learn) from djinanginy barl (seeing him) do what he did.

Ask another maaman (father) to make a list of what you found, thinking about the things men can do to help each other heal or stay healthy.
Workshop Five

Maia wangkiny quop maaman – singing and talking up good fathering

Rationale:

Noongar boordier (bosses and leaders) reminded us that the deman and dembart (elders from the past) often took care of the health of moort (community) by using activities that we now describe as mubarrn, art and song (healing through song). One maaman said, ‘Noongar sing up the health of their koorlangka (children) through the maia (voices) as songs of the deman and dembart (old people)’. Not only do we learn through maia via song, we bring moort doorndookaniny (family together) through maia (song)⁶.

Goal:

To have maaman and koorlangka explore the value of music and the ‘arts’ in helping them bond and deal with life’s challenges.

⁶ see ‘Promoting Aboriginal health through the arts.’
Steps for exercise: Maia wangkiny maaman – singing up good fathering

Ask people to get into groups of four. Use smart phones, laptops and/or iPads provided to search on YouTube for songs.

Choose at least three songs that remind you of either:

- a good man
- a time you spent with good men
- a time when you had to deal with difficulties and a good man helped you

What songs did you come up with?

What was it about this man/men that was so important?

How was this song important to you?
Video: Gina Williams – Maambart

Play, watch and listen to Gina Williams song ‘Maambart’ on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mYTb-E9Rig

Here are some other online resources that may be used:

‘Wandjoo’ on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cSUJxNo-34

Listen to ‘Maia Wabirn’ and watch Dr Clint Bracknell talking about Noongar songs https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPdzY4pbWts

Listen to Middar the Noongar dancers and performers on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JoN7gni9mw

Ask all the maaman or men to share what they felt about these songs.
Steps for exercise: Milli milli benanginy quop maaman – picturing goodfathering using drawings

Give each man and young person a piece of paper about A4 in size. Offer them textas or pencils with which to draw.

Boordier (facilitator):

- I am going to say two words in just one moment. I will only say them once, so be prepared. What I’d like you to do, once I have said the words, is draw a picture or produce an image that shows the first things that come into your head.

- Don’t use any words. Try and use images and or pictures as much as possible. For example, if I said the word ‘forest’ some could draw trees with birds & animals, some chainsaws and workers, some trees with bushwalkers, others the explorer John Forrest. There are no right or wrong answers. This is not a test. It is all about what you know.

- Get yourself prepared to draw. The words are: ‘Noongar maaman or fathering’.

Give men ten minutes to create their drawing and then ask each man to stand up and show and explain their work.
Resources needed:

Pieces of good quality A4 drawing paper

Packs of coloured textas and/or pencils
Ngulluckiny boorda koorliny – We are going together into the future

Rationale:

Noongar boordier (bosses) reminded us that koorlangka katitj (young people learn) a lot through the ways their maaman (fathers) speak with them. The best things happen when maaman (fathers) share their experiences, get close to their koorlangka (kids), talk about what is happening around them, and take time to listen to what their koorlangka are saying.

Noongar boordier also reminded us that maaman moorditj (fathers are strong) when they combine kura, yeye, boorda (things from the past, present and future) and when old Noongar culture and practices are combined with contemporary ways of doing things. As one man said, ‘we are at our strongest when we go along in both the Noongar and the Wedjela ways, together combining the best of both.’ We can be both strong modern men at the same time as strong cultural men.

Goal:

To have maaman and koorlungka compare and contrast what Noongar and non-Noongar systems of fathering we can bring to our lives.

Steps for exercise: Koorliny koodjal bidi – going twopathways

Draw a Venn gram (see below) with two intersecting circles on a whiteboard. This needs to use the whole whiteboard space so a scribe can write plenty of words inside the circles.

Over the left circle write: Noongar maaman. Over the right circle write: Wedjela fathering.

Ask men to share what is unique about fathering to Noongar (write in left circle). Then ask men what is unique about parenting for Wedjela (write in the right circle).

Ask the men what is similar between the two cultural systems. Write these in the overlapping section between the circles.

Ask the men to discuss what stands out for them about the similarities and differences in parenting.

Were there any surprises?
Noongar  Wedjela
Steps for exercise: Quop maaman – elements of good fathering

Offer each man the ‘wheel and spokes’ diagram on an A4 page (see below).

Ask each to fill out as many of the circles on the outer rim of the ‘wheel and spoke’ diagram with elements of good Noongar fathering they now identify having attended all of the workshops.

Have them share what they have written and design a group diagram using the most popular elements identified. Write these on the whiteboard.
Quop Noongar maaman – elements of good Noongar fathering
Boordawan nguny djinanginy noonar – I will see you later on

Ask the group to spend a few minutes talking about what they have thought about the workshop series.

Hand out the evaluation worksheet to everyone.

Have a yarn about what they have learned and what they would like to do something about. Maybe they learned something, were reminded about something, or have a new question they would like to get answered.

Video: Boorda djinanginy – looking forward into the future

Screen the last video and thank the men for coming to the group.

Ngarniny damper, meriny dartj or having a feed of bread, fruit, vegetables, and meat

Arrange a celebratory gathering around a BBQ.
On a scale of 0–5 (5 being outstanding) rate today’s session

0 1 2 3 4 5

What were some of the highlights of the workshop series?

What did you learn? What was new?

Which activities were useful and how?

Do you have any ideas about how things could be different?