



A weekend to remember: Effective Parenting at the First Steps Course



"Welcome to First Steps!"

After 15 long years, the First Steps Course is back in Perth.

Fremantle was on the cusp of springtime when the First Steps Course was held successfully on August 29 to 30, 2015, at the Foley Hall of the University of Notre Dame Australia. Twenty three couples participated in the course sessions and nine couples received training for moderating case studies and leading parenting group sessions.

The parenting course, designed for parents with children aged 0 to 5 years old, tackled issues and challenges common in the early childhood years and provided practical lessons on how to raise children with good character.

The Family Club: Focusing on the goals

The course was organised by the Family Club (familyclub.com.au), a non-profit organisation which aims to provide an inviting and fun-filled venue for families to gain home life skills and friendships.

The organisers worked closely with Family Education Australia (FEA), a non-profit organisation established in 1986, which is responsible for bringing the course to all Australian capital cities and

New Zealand. FEA is a member of the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), a non-denominational, non-profit organisation that works in 63 countries in five continents and holds a consultative status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council. IFFD began in the mid 60s, starting with the development of support programs for parents, using the Case Study Method.



Maurice Watson presenting

The Case Study Method, a proven and reliable way of promoting dialogue of real-life situations, uses real-life cases that have been collated and intensively prepared and studied by presenters. The process avoids imposing one's ideas or disregarding others and proves to be a healthy and vibrant way of discussing parenting and family issues.

Experienced presenters: Walking the talk

We were fortunate to have Jane and Maurice Watson as presenters. Their tandem possesses a wealth of experience that only comes with having presented and facilitated the course for close to 30 years.



Jane and Maurice Watson in action – running the case study method

Jane & Maurice have been involved with the FEA since its inception in 1986. They have spoken at many conferences throughout Australia and overseas. Their work has also brought them to different parts of the globe: from Ireland to Spain and other parts of Europe, Americas and Asia, sharing best practices with their counterparts and working under the IFFD.

Jane and Maurice have been married for over 30 years. They have eight children, their ages ranging from 17 to 29 years old. Maurice, a partner at a chartered accounting firm in Sydney, and Jane, a physiotherapist who runs a private practice, have managed to juggle their professional work with their work in the home. The pair says that even until today, they are still learning from the course and are able to apply the lessons at home. The more they do it, they add, the more they are able to practice what they learn from preparing, delivering and engaging with participants in the course.

The First Steps Course method: Effective and reliable

The weekend course covered the following topics:

- Introductory talk on parents as the primary educators of their children
- Discipline and Authority
- Effective Communication within the Family
- Enriching the Family Environment



Jane presenting an informative talk on Discipline and Authority

Each session consisted of:

A case study

- This method is used by Harvard Business School to train future CEOs.

- Participants reviewed and analysed real life cases as a means of learning how to identify issues objectively, set attainable goals and solve problems.

Small group discussions

- Guided by a set of key questions, participants were provided an opportunity to explore in-depth discussions over typical family scenarios.
- Facilitated by a moderator couple, participants were able to share their own personal experiences and also learned from the other members of the group. This informal setting of smaller group fostered friendships amongst its members. Most of the participants found this as a most enjoyable and fulfilling part of the process.



Maurice delivering an informative talk

Informative presentations

- The presenters summarised the key lessons on each topic, providing participants with relevant information, practical lessons and possible effective strategies.

Feedback: Happy participants, new insights

There is a legal axiom that says, "Res ipsa loquitur," meaning, the thing speaks for itself.

The organisers hope that with the statements shared by the course participants, any parent couple will be interested in investing their time on a weekend filled with parenting tips, life lessons and burgeoning friendships.

“A weekend very well-spent.”

Thanks for giving us the opportunity to give feedback on the First Steps Course.

The topics that were discussed during the course were already familiar to us. There were two things which the course have given us: Firstly, it served as a reminder of the importance

of the relationship between the husband and the wife. The love, unity and formation of the couple translates into effective and strong parenting. Secondly, the course served as an affirmation of the things we have done right as parents. The fact is we do not get much affirmation as parents in a society that delegates the responsibility of disciplining children to the teachers and school administration.

The course was run in a very systematic and orderly manner. The presenters showed confidence and much experience on the topics discussed.

It took us almost an hour to travel to the venue but we did not mind the long drive because Fremantle is such an interesting place. It also gave us a chance to talk about the topics discussed on our way home.

The highlight of the weekend would be the fellowship among the couples from various backgrounds, cultures and family sizes. It is always wonderful to be amongst positive people who try their best to be better parents.

Our overall feedback was that it was a weekend very well-spent. We had a wonderful time and we had no regrets attending the course.

- Martin and Ann Lugod

Martin is an engineer while Ann is training as a teacher assistant for children with special needs. They have five children. They have been active leaders in the monthly sessions of the Family Club.



Building friendships amongst them: Participants in discussion while on a break

“Great opportunity to meet other couples.”

We cannot say good enough words about the course. We quite enjoyed the way it was presented, its content, group dynamics and the experiences shared between the attendees. It was also a great opportunity to meet other couples dealing with the same issues which we see at home every day!



Big smiles from the participants

It certainly added value for us since it confirms what we've been learning about good parenting, and helped us identify areas where we are lacking.

The timing - in the development of our kids - was also spot on in regards to the age of our children and target audience of the presentation.

We also found good value in the suggested reading they mentioned (which the organiser photographed - thanks for that!). We already read "French Children Don't Throw Food" and we both believe it's remarkable and easy to read. We have even applied some tips from the book and is working for us!

Thanks again for all the good work and efforts in putting all this together.

- Andres Ortiz and Carolina Dote

Andres is an engineer while Carolina is a nurse. They are parents to five-year-old twin girls.

“Particularly helpful in hearing the experiences of others.”

We found the course to be a great opportunity to meet other families with young children. The small group sharing time was particularly helpful in hearing the experiences of others. We enjoyed hearing the talks as well from the presenters. We found them to be very knowledgeable and practical in the advice they gave.

The food was great and it was wonderful to have it at Notre Dame which meant that we didn't have to travel that far, coming from Secret Harbour. Although when it rained, it was hard to hear comments/questions from the audience.

We thoroughly enjoyed the course. Everyone was so accommodating with us having our then five month old with us and it was great to use the course as a platform in which to talk about the topics raised as a couple.

Thanks for organising it!

- Rebecca and Mark Cummins

Mark is an RE teacher at a private boys' school, while Rebecca is also a teacher at a private Catholic school and is on maternity leave to care for their two young kids, aged six and 20 months old.



A baby also listening intently to the presentations, or so it seems

“We felt welcomed in the small group discussions and we were happy to express our thoughts and opinions.”

We realise that we are not alone. All cases presented had something in common with our own family experiences. All study cases were real situations that we could compare and apply.

The course was run on time, was professionally organised, had good environment and tackled good topics.

The venue was a good spot, very quiet even if centrally located in Fremantle. We had time to walk around after the course.

We are thankful for having experienced presenters and the lunch pizza was excellent!

Most of all, we felt welcomed in the small group discussions and we were happy to express our thoughts and opinions. It was a friendly environment and we would be happy to come back.

- Daniel Martinez and Patricia Castro

Daniel is an engineer. On the other hand, Patricia is a veterinarian by profession and is currently working at home to care for two girls, aged one and six years old.



Intensive discussions, sometimes spilling into tea time

“Speakers and organisers were of a very high standard.”

We learned about key aspects of child development, discipline, authority and obedience, communication between parents and the family environment.

For me personally I needed to hear all of what was said. The best thing to say to your child is "No"! I liked! I tend to always want to please my little one, keep her happy. But the best lesson they can get is when they are denied and frustrated by not getting what they want all the time as it helps them to be more tolerant and be able to cope better as adults!

The course was well run and organised. The speakers and organisers were of a very high standard.

For us living in Melville, it was ideal! I liked especially the free parking!

For me, the best thing about the weekend was just being there listening to the wonderful speakers who are passionate on the subject! Also, being with and meeting other parents in the same boat was encouraging!

I am still digesting all that was relayed to us on the weekend! I have found recommended resources at my local library. Trying to get it all to sink in so I can be more effective at parenting! Like I said I really needed to hear what was said and it has given me more confidence and assurance in my role as a parent. There definitely is a right and wrong way to bring up a child! As the speakers said it is the MOST important job we have (over paid work etc)! That was great to hear too!

- Jeanette and Ante Zubac

Jeanette is an environmental scientist. Her husband, Ante, is an architect. They have a four year old girl.

“We...highly recommend this course to all married couples who have children and are open to learning to become better parents.”

We really enjoyed attending the First Steps Course. The presentations and case studies provided a good stimulus for further reflection and discussion regarding parenting issues. We found attending the course and participating in the small group discussions was a valuable and worthwhile experience. We would highly recommend this course to all married couples who have children and are open to learning to become better parents.

- Adrian and Annette Good

Adrian is a high school teacher. He and his wife, Annette, have three children.



Shared experiences and views, wider perspectives

“. . . [H]elped us to gain many practical tips to handle challenging situations.”

My wife June and myself were happy to attend a course organised by the Family Club in Perth, and conducted by a married couple of great personal experience in bringing up children - they were Jane and Maurice Watson from Sydney.

Our main challenge was to acquire a set of skills that would enable us to bring up our children with strong character. The three areas that the course was built around, namely, disciplining, communication and the family environment, helped us not only to see how we could achieve our goals for our children, but also how we needed to improve as a couple to be an example to them.

The mode of delivery (e.g. case studies, small group discussions and talks) helped us to gain many practical tips to handle challenging situations.

We have gained confidence that by applying an acquired set of skills, we can bring our children up with strong character and integrity, children who grow up as confident adults.

We recommend this course to parents who want to better understand effective parenting.

- Keith and June Gracias

Keith is an IT consultant and June is an office executive. They have been active participants in the Family Club sessions. They have three children, aged one, eight and 10.

“It lets us see how 'normal' our issues were!”

We enjoyed the First Steps course.

Learning through case studies was excellent and we found the topics very familiar.

Case Study learning gave us topics to address as a couple and we talked about these in the Small Group discussions.

It lets us see how 'normal' our issues were!

Thanks again.

- Tony and Joanne Hicks

Tony and Joanne Hicks, who have five children, have been leading parenting groups for more than 15 years in Perth. At present, they are one of the group moderators. They have also been leading and participating in parenting classes during monthly Family Club sessions.



Small group discussions

“Use of real life case studies is a really effective, enjoyable and powerful way to learn.”

This is a terrific course that we can recommend without hesitation. The use of real life case studies is a really effective, enjoyable and powerful way to learn.

Many thanks to the University of Notre Dame, Family Education Australia and the Family Club for running this course.

- Deon and Pauline Matthys

Deon and Pauline Matthys have been leading parenting groups in Perth for more than 15 years and are presently one of the moderator couples. They are also one of the organisers for the Family Club. They have 10 children (aged two to 23 years old) and are always open to learning and putting into practice their keen interest in 'parenting for character.'

“It gave us tools to implement in our family.”

We enjoyed the way in which it was structured, felt very comfortable sharing our opinions, thoughts and ideas. It gave us tools to implement in our family.

We highly recommend it to any and all parents.

- Rod and Sofia Campbell

Rod and Sofia Campbell are active leaders in the Family Club. They are also active participants in parenting group sessions. They are parents to four children.



Opinions, thoughts...many ideas

“We learned a lot from this course.”

We learned a lot from this course especially the importance of discipline, unity and communication in a family. We particularly liked the small group discussions because we got to hear the views/ideas of other parents and to share our thoughts as well.

Henry also liked the lunch!

- Henry and Maribel Villegas

Henry is a medical doctor while Maribel is currently working at home to care for their four children.

“We are glad we attended.”

Once again, thank you for organising the successful and fruitful First Steps course. We are glad we attended.

- Daryl and Christina Pranata

Daryl is an engineer. He and his wife, Christina, are raising a two year old daughter.

“The quality of the couples assembled... was worth every hard work . . . We are very happy to be part of it.”

We learned that one of our important duties as parents is always to be open to learning, and learning from other families and parents who have done it so gracefully and intelligently through the years is the best way. Jane and Maurice Watson are very experienced presenters on the topics that were covered during the weekend course. They presented the topics in a way that is not prescriptive but more of a sharing of nuggets of learning that, as

listeners and participants, gave us the re-affirmation and confidence, as well as a perspective of effective re-assessment of our parenting skills.

For us, one of the best lessons imparted was never to lose sight of using our common sense as parents. That and equipping ourselves with knowledge - that is what the First Steps Course is all about.

For Discipline and Authority, we learned how saying 'no' to our children is good for them – to teach them important virtues early on in life. As they say, “No is a loving word.”



Connected couples, better-equipped parents

A topic that we are passionate about is Communication, between us as husband and wife and as parents. In this day and age where the institution of family and marriage is challenged, learning about effective communication and parental unity is valuable. After all, these provide the hinge for building a solid family foundation and for rearing children with strong character.

We loved the topic on Family Environment. Jane Watson held credibility when she shared with us how important family meals are. Later on, we learned how they, as a family, make family meals an important, if not the most important, part of their day. They make an effort as a family to always make the meals special (not going down to the dining area in singlets!) and always be present as a unit, no matter how busy and challenging the work demands are (with Maurice going home for dinner and its preparation and going back to the office if there are urgent matters to be taken care of – talk about putting family first!)

Many topics were familiar but we also learned many new lessons, especially from parents who have been doing it longer than us. That is the best part – learning from them and also from young parents who bring lots of relevance and practicality into the small group discussions.

Having the course at Notre Dame lent a professional and respected air to the course – big thanks to the Campus Ministry, through Tom Gourlay, for making this possible! An added

bonus is Fremantle's interesting, multi-cultural environment – the participants appreciated this, especially those who took walks or those who stayed the night at a local hotel.

We especially loved talking with the presenters and the couples who were very engaging, intelligent and open – you cannot have a better group! ***The quality of the couples assembled and the tried-and-tested effectivity of the First Steps Course method were worth every hard work.*** It didn't hurt to have delicious meals either.

We are very happy to be part of it.

- Benna and Jorge Masbate

Benna and Jorge Masbate are one of the organisers of the course. Jorge is a chemical engineer while Benna is a barrister who is presently working at home to care for their five children – aged one to 17 years old.



Happy participants all around!