



Speech by

**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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## CHILD PROTECTION

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—Lib) (12.00 pm): This parliamentary sitting is being held during National Child Protection Week, a most appropriate time to bring to the attention of this House and indeed the people of Queensland the urgent need to honour our children. Every single one of us must commit to undertake this responsibility seriously if we are to protect our great country's children from becoming victims of abuse and neglect. I urge all Australians to get behind NAPCAN's campaign called Children See, Children Do: Make Your Influence Positive. The ad campaign accompanying this NAPCAN initiative is hard hitting and a wake-up call similar to the Grim Reaper campaign to raise AIDS awareness some 20 years ago. In his enlightening book *Idolising Children*, Daniel Donahoo asks us to respect children and allow them to experience childhood fully. This often simply requires a degree of patience and reinforcement of values combined with appropriate behaviours.

We hear much about providing children with suitable role models, and none could be more important than their primary caregivers—in most cases, parents. Daniel's book says that it is time for us to find new ways of parenting and a new kind of childhood—that is, we need to honour childhood and respect children. This must come from the heart, he says, because it is at that level that we are equal with children and young people. They cannot compete with our level of education or years of lived experience, but they can love like we can. Mr Donahoo argues—and I am inclined to agree—that what is required is to realign our current culture and to instill a philosophy where the inheritance of the future is placed firmly in the reverence of our children.

Attachment theory is the term used to describe how children's early relationships affect their development and their capacity to form later relationships. Attachments are mutually reinforcing patterns of behaviour between a primary caregiver and a child, enabling the child to explore the world around them and learn new skills. A child who feels safe and protected is free from the anxiety and fear that accompanies a sense of abandonment or being alone. The effects of detachment have a profound impact on a child's healthy early years of development and emotional stability. Children denied this contact suffer from a range of disorders, confusion and uncertainty from inconsistent parenting. A family needs to provide not only the basics of food and shelter for a child but also needs to be a family that instills values, provides a loving environment and offers continuous support as offspring grow. This government has underplayed its role here with inadequate service provision.

In the Australian Childhood Foundation's *Out of sight—out of mind* 2006 report on community attitudes about child abuse and child protection in Australia, it was identified that the problem of child abuse remains literally out of sight and mind to many in the community. Rated a disgraceful 13th on a list of community issues in a survey, child abuse is rated of less concern than the price of petrol and public transport. Some elements of society find it difficult to look, to listen and to believe the extent to which our precious children are being violated. To the greater public it is an incomprehensible issue, yet many feel powerless to address it. History recorded the horror stories of children working as chimney sweeps, down mine shafts and in the workhouses of London in bygone eras. Here we are in 2008 in prosperous Australia where we are blessed with open spaces, blue skies and sunshine, where food is plentiful and our children go to school and have abundant opportunities. We are indeed the land of plenty, so what is going wrong?

Why are we losing our way and not honouring our children? John Smith in his 1988 book *Advance Australia Where, A Lack of Meaning in a Land of Plenty* warned us back then as a society that we were headed down this path.

Why has a culture of abuse seeped into our communities, a culture which we must do our all to repel? Children need nurturing and should be allowed to grow and experience life free from violence and abuse, be it verbal or physical. Some cultures such as European, Scandinavian and Asian cultures hold children in high regard, viewing them as the leaders of the future. Parents in these cultures, as do some in ours, sacrifice many luxuries and necessities to provide their children with decent educations so that their children may lead educated and balanced lives. I agree wholeheartedly with Gail Slocombe from PeakCare that an endless blame game will not protect our kids, but neither will a Labor government that refuses to address the root causes of child abuse.

Whilst it would be incorrect and unfair to make claims that all children suffer under this Labor government—and I make it clear that I am not suggesting that—neglect and maltreatment of children has become rampant in our community, and this government could have done much more. The 2007-08 Child Safety statistics are disturbing. Countless professionals have written papers highlighting the critical importance of early intervention programs and support services. Last week speaking at a conference for grandparents who care for their grandchildren, I listened to social workers and psychologists stress the need for governments to change the way they operate. They must invest heavily in the first five years, but still there is virtually no money for early intervention. They must also reach out to parents afraid to ask for help. Many young people grow up without the basic skills to care for themselves because their parents simply do not have them either. Child protection is everyone's responsibility. Both the community and the government have an obligation to reduce the incidence of child abuse in our state.