

FAMILY SUPPORT AND PARENT EDUCATION

The Need

Parents have always needed support in raising their children. No matter what their socioeconomic position or culture, parents from all walks of life seek information and advice to help them understand and respond to their children.

Historically, parents have had such knowledge and skills passed down to them by their own families. In many cultures and communities, that pattern still exists. But for others, as families have become smaller and separated by distance, the ease of passing on the accumulated child rearing wisdom has decreased.

IN ADDITION, MANY PARENTS WANT AND NEED DIFFERENT WAYS OF REARING THEIR CHILDREN THAN THOSE LEARNED FROM HOW THEY WERE REARED. PARENTS FIND THEMSELVES DISAGREEING WITH CERTAIN WAYS THEY WERE REARED. THEY WONDER, "HOW CAN WE DO IT DIFFERENTLY?" FOR OTHER PARENTS THE OLD WAYS NO LONGER WORK AS CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE CHANGED. WORKING PARENTS WONDER HOW YOUNG THEIR CHILDREN CAN BE AND STILL BE SAFE AT HOME ALONE AFTER SCHOOL. STILL OTHERS REALIZE THE WORLD FOR WHICH THEY ARE PREPARING THEIR CHILDREN WILL BE VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM EVEN HOW IT IS TODAY. THESE PARENTS WONDER, "SHOULD WE PARENT DIFFERENTLY TO PREPARE OUR CHILDREN FOR THE KIND OF WORLD IN WHICH THEY MAY LIVE?". FOR MANY PARENTS, THE WISDOM OF THE PRECEDING GENERATION IS NOT AVAILABLE OR IS NOT ADEQUATE.

Lastly, parents are bombarded with advice beyond what comes to them from their families. There are at least 1500 books on parenting in print. Half of talk shows devote significant time to parent-child relations. Internet access provide even more information. And the messages can be conflicting, inconsistent, and confusing: Pick up the crying baby. Don't pick up the crying baby. Spank. Don't spank. The opinions available on almost every aspect of child rearing are divided.

For all these reasons, parents, who in this paper are anyone who has made a commitment to care for a child from now until the child reaches adulthood, are looking for information and skills to help them better guide their children.

The Role of Parenting Education

Through PARENTING EDUCATION, family support programs meet parents' need for information and skill-building opportunities. SUCH OPPORTUNITIES help PARENTS better guide their children and assist THEM in sorting and choosing from ARRAY the information they encounter.

In 1996, 50,000 programs nationwide offered parenting education (Carter 1996). Programs vary tremendously in what they offer. Some emphasize communication skills. Others focus on parents as

teachers. Some programs train parents for childbirth. Others are for parents with adolescents. Some programs take place in homes; others at churches, social centers, or schools. Some are didactic, illustrating what parents should do based on the program's philosophy. Others help parents articulate their values and integrate them into their parenting. Some programs follow detailed curricula; others have no written content. **THE PARENTING EDUCATION COMPONENT OF FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS HELPS PARENTS FIND THE INFORMATION AND SKILLS THEY NEED.**

The Challenge

The continuing challenge for FAMILY SUPPORT STAFF and parents is to find or create parenting education PROGRAMS that meet the needs of the parents in their CENTERS as their children grow and develop. THE PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM (Family support programs) AS WITH ALL FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS, must support parents' values and goals as well as the development of parents and their children. IT (They) must provide the information and build the skills desired AND NEEDED by parents. IT (They) must be sensitive to the family, cultural, and community traditions and mores while providing parents with the knowledge and skills to teach their children what they will need to live in American society. Programs must offer information in a way that helps those using it to learn.

FROM THE (M)any established curricula available, FAMILY SUPPORT STAFF AND PARENTS (to programs in written and/or audio-visual form. Programs) can choose one or more of these, create their own, or meld a variety of sources. In most cases, even a well-researched and tested curriculum must be adapted by the family support program to respond to community needs and strengths. There are several basic steps to initiating or revising the parenting education component of a family support program: (1) EXPLORE THE NEEDS AND PREFERENCES OF PARENTS FOR INFORMATION AND SUPPORT; (initial parent input and general exploration), (2) locate existing curricula for evaluation, and (3) decide (ING) which curriculum to use or create (ING) an original curriculum.

I. EXPLORE THE NEEDS AND PREFERENCES OF PARENTS FOR INFORMATION AND SUPPORT:(Initial input from parents AND STAFF): Staff AND PARENTS, SEPARATELY AND TOGETHER, can use the FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO GATHER THE NEEDED INFORMATION. Some parents will respond positively to the question-and-answer format, finding it empowering. Others respond better if the ideas are presented as non-interrogative discussion topics. The input can be gathered in writing or in focus groups or DURING one-on-one interviews. Some of the questions are easily answered; others require more reflection and discussion.

1. What basic information are parents looking for?

Do they want to know how to prepare their young children for school? OR (D) do they need information on living with and guiding adolescents, communicating with their children, or methods of discipline?

2. How soon do parents want the program?

Parents with very young children may have the need over the next few years for reading preparation activities. In contrast, parents may want to respond immediately to an increase in LOCAL drug dealing by helping families learn how to protect their children.

3. How much can parents or the family support program afford?

The costs of starting parenting education vary. Some curricula are free or require a nominal materials fee; some cost several hundred dollars. In addition, many curricula require trained leadership, and charge for training.

4. How much time can parents commit?

Even parents who are very interested and committed may not have time. Parents working outside of the home often are reluctant to extend their separation from their families.

The following questions are more difficult to answer. Lengthy discussions on these subjects may be necessary before the program can move ahead.

5. What are parents' values and long-term goals for their children?

What kind of adult do(es) the PARENTS (family) want their child to grow into? What attributes will children need TO LIVE IN THE WORLD OF TOMORROW (as the world changes around us)? FOR EXAMPLE, (O)ne goal (among) parents may HAVE IS (be) for their children to grow INTO HEALTHY adults. TO BE HEALTHY PEOPLE MUST BE AWARE OF THEIR BODIES. (who are healthy and respect their bodies). In this case, the PARENTING EDUCATION program ON INFANT FEEDING should SUPPORT INFANTS' INDICATIONS THAT THEY ARE FULL AND TEACH toilet training methods THAT focusES on the toddler's ability to know when HE OR SHE needs to go to the toilet. Another goal MIGHT (ay) be for their children to make wise decisions about using drugs or driving cars. In this case, they will want programs that help them teach their pre- AND ELEMENTARY schoolers decision-making skills.

6. What do parents believe their children need to grow and develop well?

THIS QUESTION MAY BE THE MOST DIFFICULT TO EXPLORE BECAUSE BELIEFS RELATE TO SO MANY ASPECTS OF PARENTING, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY THEM ALL AND VERY DIFFICULT TO REALIZE WHEN A BELIEF MAY BE INVOLVED IN A SITUATION. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE ARE BELIEFS ABOUT CRYING. BABIES' CRYING IS GOOD FOR THEIR LUNGS, IS ONE BELIEF. BABIES' CRYING IS THEIR WAY OF SAYING SOMETHING IS WRONG, IS ANOTHER STILL ANOTHER INDICATES THE INFANT IS SPOILED.

PARENTS REJECT PROGRAMS THAT CONFLICT WITH THEIR PHILOSOPHY AND/OR CULTURE. EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE TO SELECT A PROGRAM THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH FAMILIES' BELIEF SYSTEMS AND TO HELP FAMILIES ADAPT TO ACHIEVE THE RESULTS THEY WANT. FOR EXAMPLE, PARENTS WHO BELIEVE IN PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT WILL NOT ACCEPT ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF DISCIPLINE UNTIL THEY SEE THAT THE ALTERNATIVE METHODS WORK AND/OR THERE ARE REASONS FOR USING ALTERNATIVE METHODS. PARENTS FREQUENTLY LOOK FOR OTHER MEANS OF DISCIPLINE WHEN THEY REALIZE THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO SPANK A SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD WHO TOWERS OVER THEM.

7. What methods of presentation will be most effective and comfortable for parents?

Some common methods include lectures, group discussions, audio-visual materials, and role playing. Educational philosophy recommends experiential learning and group discussion versus lectures. However, in some cultures, personal issues simply are not discussed outside the family. In response, some programs start with home visiting and then progress toward groups, and use lectures instead of group sharing. Personal preferences vary, too. Some parents are very uncomfortable with role-playing exercises. Others find them fun and effective.

Parenting education tends to rely on oral modes of learning, but learning styles vary from person to person. Videotapes and computers are making visual learning a more viable option. Charts and listing observations and comments are other ways of supporting visual learners.

In addition to the above, also consider:

- Location (home, religious or educational setting, family resource center, etc.)
- Number of people participating (from a one-on-one to groups of thousands)
- Parents and children together versus separate, or parents-only

8. What kind of leader will be most effective?

There are many choices. The leader could be a formally trained person who knows about all aspects of child development and child rearing, or a parent from the group or neighborhood who is experienced and regarded as wise—and is supported with needed training from the program. Leaders could be chosen because of their sensitivity to individuals' feelings or their skill in group dynamics. The decision will be made partly on the basis of who is available and how many financial resources there are. However, as much as possible, the program should choose based what kind of a leader will be most effective for the specific group.

II. Locate (ing) existing curricula for CONSIDERATION (evaluation):

INNUMERABLE (C) curricula are available in many different forms. Resources for finding curricula include: THE PROBLEM IS TO LOCATE THEM. AT PRESENT THERE IS NO COMPREHENSIVE REFERENCE LIST OR CENTRAL LOCATION WHERE ALL CURRICULA ARE HOUSED. THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE LIST IS TO BE FOUND IN THE PUBLICATIONS BY PARENTLINK WHICH ARE REVIEWED IN THE REFERENCES.

THE INTERNET PROVIDES ANOTHER AVENUE. A WEB SITE SUCH AS THE NATIONAL PARENTING EDUCATION NETWORK'S ([URL:HTTP://NPN.CRC.UIUC.EDU](http://npn.crc.uiuc.edu)) PROVIDES A PLACE WHERE PARENT EDUCATORS CAN EXCHANGE IDEAS. LIST THE SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS AS IDENTIFIED BY USING THE ABOVE QUESTIONS. OTHER PARENT EDUCATORS WILL LIST THEIR SUGGESTIONS.WORKING WITH SIMILAR GROUPS OR KNOWING OF EFFECTIVE CURRICULA WILL PASS ALONG THE INFORMATION TO YOU.

III. Decide (ing) which curriculum to use, or create (ing) an original curriculum: The following questions help identify the strengths of any existing or new curriculum. The answers to

these questions should be compared to parents' answers during phase I, above, to make sure their values, cultures, and styles match those of the curriculum that is chosen.

1. What is the basic objective of the curriculum?

For example, is its aim to improve communication, build self-esteem, or help parents MAINTAIN A WARM, LOVING RELATIONSHIP THROUGH ADOLESCENCE?

2. How easy is it to obtain the program?

Is it in written form and available from a publisher?

3. What are the costs?

4. How long does it take for parents to complete the program?

Time commitments can vary from one hour in total to a 14-week series of twice-weekly sessions.

5. What are the program's values and goals for children?

The promotional literature for the curriculum usually describes the basic outcomes expected of children whose parents have been completed the program.

6. What are the curriculum's basic assumptions about what children need to grow and develop?

Programs seldom state directly what their assumptions are. HOWEVER, STAFF AND PARENTS CAN IDENTIFY POSSIBLE ASSUMPTIONS BY ASKING WHAT THEY ASSUMPTIONS MIGHT BE BASED ON A SPECIFIC PIECE OF ADVICE.

Curriculum Recommendation	Assumption
PICK UP THE CRYING INFANT	INFANTS' CRYING IS AN EXPRESSION OF A NEED. INFANTS' NEEDS SHOULD BE MET QUICKLY. THAT IS HOW THEY LEARN TO TRUST.
DON'T PICK UP THE CRYING INFANT	PICKING UP SPOILS THE INFANT. CRYING IS GOOD FOR THEIR LUNGS CHILD WILL REFLECT ON MISBEHAVIOR AND AVOID IT NEXT TIME.
INNUMERABLE SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW TO HELP SIBLINGS HAVE FUN TOGETHER.	IF SIBLINGS ARE TO BE FRIENDS, THEY NEED HELP LEARNING HOW TO PLAY TOGETHER.
Time-out when child misbehaves	Children will learn correct behavior if they are denied social contact.

	CHILDREN NEED TIME TO COOL DOWN. PARENTS NEED TIME TO COOL DOWN
Explain to children why they are expected to do certain things	Children will behave well if they understand what is expected of them

7. What methods does the program use to present its content?

Does the curriculum use lectures, group discussions, videos, role plays, charts, etc.? Are charts included? What materials must be purchased, and what can the program create itself?

8. What kind of leadership is recommended?

Requirements for leadership vary widely. HOWEVER, WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE BECAUSE A PARTICULAR PROGRAM INCLUDES HIGHLY TRAINED LEADERS AND THE PARTICIPANTS WILL FEEL MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE WITH A PEER, CREATIVE SOLUTIONS CAN BE FOUND SUCH AS TRAINING THE PEER LEADER OR PROVIDING THE PEER WITH A KNOWLEDGEABLE SUPPORT SYSTEM.

FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS PROVIDE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES TO INFORM PARENTS ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT, THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND PARENTING ISSUES. FOR FAMILY SUPPORT STAFF THE CHALLENGE IS TO FIND WITH PARENTS EFFECTIVE RESOURCES FOR A SPECIFIC SETTING. IT CAN BE DONE BY MATCHING THE INTERESTS AND NEEDS OF THE PARENTS TO BE SERVED WITH THE STRENGTH AND COMPETENCIES EMPHASIZED IN THE PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM.

References

Carter, N. (1996) *See how we grow: A report on the status of parenting education in the U.S.* Philadelphia, Penna.: The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Simpson, R. (1997). *The role of the mass media in parenting education.* Boston: Center for Health Communication. Boston: Harvard School of Public Health.

Written by members of the National Parenting Education Network (N-PEN): Karen Debord, Ph. D.; Harriet Heath, Ph.D.; Dana Murphy, Ph.D.; and Randi Wolfe, Ph.D., with input from the N-PEN management team. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT HARRIET HEATH, 610649 7037, Harriet_Heath@hotmail.com.

LIST OF RESOURCES (some members of NPEN team are still working on the following)

Books

Parenting education in the family support movement

Guidelines for Family Support Practice (1996) Family Resource Coalition. 20 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606.

Clearly states the premises of the family support movement and the role of parenting education within that movement.

How Are We Doing: A Program Self-Assessment Toolkit for the Family Support Field, by Nilofer Ahsan and Lina Cramer (1999)

Discusses many of the issues involved in setting up parenting education programs such as how to choose a leader, what content and format to use.

Working with parents in groups

Braun, L., Coplon, J., & Sonnenschein, P. (1984). *Helping parents in groups: A leader's handbook*. Boston, MA: Resource Communications, Inc.

A good basic manual for any leader of parenting groups.

Clarke, J. (1998) *Who me lead a group?* Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

Though not written specifically for leading parent groups, the book covers simply and succinctly the basic issues of leading a group.

Finding and choosing curricula

Heath, Harriet. "[Choosing Parenting Curricula Based on the Interests, Needs, and Preferences of the Parents Who Will Use It](#)"

<http://parenthood.library.wisc.edu/pub/parent/Parenthood.html>

Paper provides a theoretical basis for the kinds of information and skills parents need.

ParentLink, (1992). Guide for Choosing Parenting Curricula I, (1992).

Reviews were provided by a multi-disciplinary committee of professionals. The 72 page guide does not duplicate the contents of the culturally-specific curricula guides. Included in this general curriculum guide are:

- Easy-to read quick-reference pages and narratives for 41 curricula.
- Reviewer's notes.
- Special section on "How to Select Parent Education Programs".

____ (1999). Grandparenting Raising Grandchildren:

____ (1994). The Guide for Choosing African American Parenting Curricula.

____ (1994). The Guide for Choosing Hispanic/Latino American Parenting Curricula

____ (1994). The Guide for Choosing Native American parenting Curricula.

Parenting curricula were reviewed by multi-disciplinary committees of professionals from, or experience with the culturally specific group whether ethnic or generational. Each specific guide includes:

- Easy to read content and quick-reference pages.
- Curriculum descriptions.
- Reviewers' notes.
- Parenting education information for working with culturally specific audiences.

Contact Information

ParentLink, 212 Whitten Hall , University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, MO
65211.

WarmLine 800 552 8522, 573 882 3796, fax 573 884 4225.

National Parenting Education Network

This new organization has on its agenda a plan to identify and put into a data base for easy referral parenting curricula and programs. However, this information is not currently available.

URL: <http://npen.crc.uiuc.edu/>

Tips for Family Support Programs

- **Provide parenting education based on families' needs.** What questions do parents have? What strengths, needs, interests, and preferences do you observe in families? What current sources of information are there for parents?
- **Choose material that reflects an awareness of cultural traditions and mores in the community.** Use the questions provided in this fact sheet to determine which materials, styles, and curricula parents will respond well to.
- **Obtain staff training.** Some staff should be knowledgeable about human development, the needs of children and of parents, and current research findings. Someone should know the current issues in parenting education and the kinds of programs, curricula, books, and videos that are available.
- **Set up an information center for parents.** Publications and audio-visual materials should be placed in an area with comfortable chairs and beverages.
- **Provide an information packet that parents can take home.** It could include short articles, tips, and suggestions for further reading (possibly a list of local library holdings) on issues important to parents.
- **Offer parent education/support groups.** Information and support can be provided in many different forms to meet the interests and needs of parents.
- **Link with other agencies and organizations.** Working with libraries, cooperative extension, schools, and childcare programs can expand the resources available to parents in your program, and can enable you to reach more families. Internet connections can be another source of information.
- **Be aware of other parenting programs in the community.** Some programs are available in almost every community. Staff should know what programs are available and what their objectives are, and should share this information with parents.
- **Know your boundaries and make referrals.** Some families have issues that require specialized help, such as a serious illness or a delay in learning. Work with local programs in establishing mutual referral guidelines.

Fact sheet