

PARENTING SKILLS

WORKSHOP SERIES

A Manual for Parent Educators

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**in consultation with
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**Evaluation material
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FOREWORD

The Parenting Skills Workshop Series project began in Ithaca, New York, in 1986 in response to a request by family court judge Betty Friedlander for training in parenting skills for adults appearing before her in cases of child abuse or neglect. Two professional youth workers, Karen Carr and John Bailey, saw in this request an opportunity to provide a program for the parents of the youth with whom they worked, but a review of available parent education programs showed that all required moderate to high levels of literacy and used study and discussion rather than hands-on practice as the primary teaching methods. John and Karen had recently attended a workshop presented by Arnold Goldstein of Syracuse University on using a teaching format called structured learning to work with adolescents. They decided to try to teach basic parenting skills using this format, which is based around role plays by facilitators and participants. The purpose of the program would be to replace impulsive behavior with rational behavior and ineffective or hurtful parenting styles with effective, child-friendly skills.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Involvement

Susan Perkins, then an educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, began working with John in 1987 when Karen returned to her primary work with adolescents. In 1988 Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County was awarded funding through the Tompkins County Department of Social Services and the Tompkins County Youth Bureau to coordinate and expand the Parenting Skills Workshop Series (PSWS). John and Susan devel-

oped and implemented a facilitator training program and PSWS began to grow. Interest arose in other New York counties, and facilitator training programs were offered in response. Sandra Wilkins became program coordinator in 1990, and by 1994 two other Cooperative Extension Associations in New York had contracts to teach the program and others were preparing proposals. The Tompkins County Parenting Skills Workshop Series continues to grow and expand in response to increased funding and continued need. In addition to workshops for parents, Tompkins County now offers a follow-up support group and home visitation by facilitators trained in PSWS.

This manual is designed to provide parent educators with a complete guide to the skills, teaching techniques, and empowerment philosophy used in the Parenting Skills Workshop Series. Chapters 1 through 3 describe the content, format, and philosophical framework for PSWS. Chapters 4 through 6 guide facilitators in implementing the program. Chapters 7 through 9 provide information on how to coordinate an ongoing county or regional program. The Appendix gives results from an evaluation of a Parenting Skills Workshop Series offered in Broome County in 1994. This manual is offered in conjunction with a facilitator training program. Contact your county Cooperative Extension Association for more information.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades a number of excellent parent education programs have found currency among literate adults who are motivated to improve their relationships with their children. Although these programs have had important benefits for thousands of parents, they are not accessible to the significant portion of the American public with limited skill or interest in reading. This portion includes not only those who do not know how to read but also those who do not learn well from text-based teaching strategies. It is of vital importance to reach parents in this group because it contains a subset of parents who neglect or abuse, or are at risk of neglecting or abusing, their children. The Parenting Skills Workshop Series (PSWS) is designed to fill this educational gap by presenting basic skills in a hands-on learning format suitable for any level of literacy.

The eight-week curriculum is based on themes consistent with familiar parent education programs such as Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), Active Parenting Today, and Parent Effectiveness Training (PET). These themes are presented in a format that enables parents to practice five parenting skills in a supportive group environment. Each two-hour workshop becomes a setting for participants to learn new skills in a format that emphasizes action in “real” situations. Teaching strategies include introduction and discussion of a skill, modeling the use of the skill, parents helping each other practice the skill, and encouraging use of the skill at home.

Skill building, like other behavioral interventions, needs to be part of a comprehensive service program that meets the needs of each family. In

Tompkins County, New York, Parenting Skills Workshops are seen as one component of an educational plan for parents that may include other parenting education, support groups, a home visitor, a GED class, family counseling, substance abuse counseling, and job training.

There are three elements to the PSWS method. The first consists of the content of the program—five basic parenting skills. Each skill highlights a key issue in parenting. ENCOURAGEMENT helps parent and child focus on the child’s positive qualities. CAN DO gives parents a constructive behavior management skill. CHOICES teaches parents how to share problem solving and decision making with their children. SELF-CONTROL guides parents in developing techniques for managing their own anger. RESPECTING FEELINGS teaches parents how to hear, respect, and respond to their children’s feelings.

The second element of PSWS is the structured learning format, which is adapted from the work of Arnold Goldstein et al. This format is the key to reaching the target audience because it entails a hands-on teaching strategy.

The third element is the empowerment approach as developed by the Family Matters Project of Cornell University. The goal of this approach is to build the strength and confidence of program participants so they become empowered to practice and use the skills they learn.

Content, format, and philosophical framework, taken together, enable parent educators to reach an audience that is often cautious, skeptical, or even hostile to institutionally sponsored ideas about parenting.

Chapter 1

FIVE BASIC PARENTING SKILLS

ENCOURAGEMENT

1. Notice something you like.
2. Notice how you feel.
3. Say it! (“I feel . . . that you. . .”)
4. Notice how your child responds.

CAN DO

1. Notice what you don’t want your child to do.
2. Think of something your child can do instead.
3. Tell your child what he or she can do.
4. Help your child if necessary.

CHOICES

1. Help your child understand the problem.
2. Your child and you think of two or more reasonable choices.
3. Have your child choose and tell you the choice.
4. Help your child follow through.

SELF-CONTROL

1. Pay attention to body messages telling you that you are about to lose control.
2. Think of ways to control yourself.
3. Choose a way and get control of yourself.
4. Decide how to act with your child.

RESPECTING FEELINGS

1. Watch and listen to your child.
2. Think of a word that describes what your child might be feeling.
3. Think about why your child might be feeling this way.
4. Check your ideas with your child.

The Parenting Skills Workshop Series is designed to teach five basic parenting skills that are useful from the time children begin to talk through the teenage years.

The first skill, ENCOURAGEMENT, fosters self-esteem in children and builds trust between parent and child. ENCOURAGEMENT emphasizes the importance of telling the child when the parent sees him or her doing something the parent likes. The second two skills, CAN DO and CHOICES, are guidance techniques that can be learned using four clear steps. CAN DO teaches parents to teach children acceptable behavior. CHOICES builds on these skills by encouraging parents and children to work together to solve problems and make decisions. SELF-CONTROL is an anger management skill for adults, and RESPECTING FEELINGS is an empathy-building skill.

The ideas presented in the Parenting Skills Workshop Series have been adapted from many sources. Arnold Goldstein and collaborators provided the structured learning approach and the concepts of self-control used here. ENCOURAGEMENT, CAN DO, CHOICES, and RESPECTING FEELINGS owe much to the writings of Rudolf Dreikurs, Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay, Thomas Gordon, Michael Popkin, and Jennifer Birckmayer.

Parenting is a process; parents change and grow to meet the needs of their children. It is important to remember that change is gradual; for parents to learn new ways can be scary, difficult, and even confusing for both children and adults. Parents influence their children’s behavior and children affect parents’ behavior. These workshops help parents change their children’s behavior by teaching the adults how to change their own behavior.

Success is measured in many ways. For some participants acknowledging a new way to parent will be a tremendous accomplishment. Many parents will see how the use of these skills makes a difference in the atmosphere in their homes. When their parents use these tools for guidance and discipline, children may say, “My mom doesn’t yell so much.” These new tools can replace yelling, threatening, and spanking. Parents’ reliance on unhealthy alternatives can be reduced or eliminated.

Most participants will also find these skills helpful in their relationships with partners, neighbors, co-workers, and other adults and family members.

These chapters are intended to give the facilitators and others using this manual an idea of how the authors interpret each skill. The sections “Key Ideas” and the narratives for each skill step are included to assist facilitators in understanding the philosophy behind each skill. As you and your cofacilitator prepare to present a skill, plan to review this information. There may be opportunities to include these ideas in your introduction and discussion or to draw them out of the role plays as appropriate. These key ideas are expansions of the four steps parents receive with each skill. The examples used in this manual are common situations between parents and children.

There may be some confusion between the terms used here and similar terms used in other parenting manuals. At the end of each chapter we mention related references, providing a brief discussion of similarities and differences between the concepts presented here and similar concepts used in other parenting programs.

The underlying goal of these workshops is to teach participants that parents and children are on the same team and that a cooperative, caring relationship is the basis of a strong family and is the best way for parents to guide their children’s behavior. Providing children with clear expectations and reasonable limits gives them the security that enables them to grow and develop in healthy ways.

ENCOURAGEMENT

The First Skill

1. Notice something you like.
2. Notice how you feel.
3. Say it! (I feel . . . that you. . . .)
4. Notice how your child responds.

Outcomes

Children learn to value who they are and what they do.

Parents discover and value their children’s evolving strengths.

Key Ideas

The parent is the child’s first and most significant teacher. Children learn important information about themselves from their parents. Children’s behavior and belief in themselves is strongly influenced by their parents’ reactions. When their parents have confidence in them, children gain self-confidence. Children who feel good about themselves generally feel good about others and are easy to be with. They are interested in learning new skills and are better able to handle the challenges of life.

ENCOURAGEMENT is a socialization skill grounded in respect for self and others.

By using ENCOURAGEMENT parents learn to appreciate their child’s abilities. ENCOURAGEMENT gives parents a way to express their good feelings toward the child. It also helps them recognize their child’s efforts despite mistakes in behavior or learning.

Everyone benefits from the encouragement of others. Parents also gain an awareness of their own strengths and abilities. When parents feel encouraged by others, they feel better about themselves.

When parents feel discouraged about the behavior of their children or the interactions within their families, they may find it difficult to practice

ENCOURAGEMENT. They may name misbehavior as their child's most outstanding attribute.

Facilitators can help parents "reframe" challenging aspects of a child's personality in a more positive light. For example, a rambunctious, highly active child can be viewed as clumsy, insensitive, and loud or appreciated as being lively, curious, and energetic.

Some parents will come to class looking for ways to "control their children better," and they may view ENCOURAGEMENT as a manipulation technique. Rather, this skill is intended to be a means of recognizing a child's abilities and value as a person, building on the conviction that every person is lovable and capable.

Skill Steps

1. Notice something you like.

Children benefit from knowing that their parents approve of them. When children try to do something new or to do something for others, parents can use encouragement to show appreciation. In this first step, parents need to look carefully at their child and observe his or her behavior.

By observing their children and using ENCOURAGEMENT, parents show children the behavior they value. Parents can name specific behaviors with sentences such as "She likes to help pick out her own pants," "He tries to help make his bed," "My child talks to his baby brother in a kind voice."

Sometimes a parent will have to think carefully to separate helpful, positive behavior from frustrating or annoying aspects. For example, when a child tries to help with the dishes but gets water all over the floor, recognize the helpful feeling and appreciate the contribution, then make light of the mess. A parent might say, "I can see how much my child wants to be a part of cleaning up after dinner." Water can be mopped up with a sponge, but hurt feelings cannot!

A perfect time to use ENCOURAGEMENT is when a child begins to do something that a parent would like to see him or her continue to do. Parents get

very excited when their baby first starts to walk. Walking takes a lot of effort and practice, a lot of falling down and getting up. Seeing a child's first steps is thrilling. Parents feel good when this happens.

2. Notice how you feel.

Take a minute to remember how you feel when you see your child trying hard or making progress or making a contribution to the family or doing something he or she enjoys. This can be a challenge. All parents experience a wide range of feelings when raising children. Parents also may have difficulty separating their feelings of excitement or satisfaction from feelings of frustration or anxiety.

Take a minute to think how you are feeling and to find a positive way to tell your child what you see. "I like to see you . . .," "I feel proud, happy, pleased, relieved when. . ." A broad vocabulary of words that express feeling will help you move beyond "I feel good" and "I feel bad," thus helping children identify their own feelings of effort, accomplishment, and success.

3. Say it! (I feel . . . that you. . .)

When we tell children that we notice good things they do, they learn to appreciate their own best behavior. Children who are comfortable with themselves and feel encouraged have high self-esteem.

It is easy for parents to take children's good behavior for granted and miss the chance to teach them to value their special qualities and talents. This step can be uncomfortable for some parents. It is important to be honest, sincere, and specific. Describe what you see and how it makes you feel. For example, "I like seeing you give your brother the book to look at," "I enjoy watching you learn to swing," "It's great to see you practicing jump rope," "I'm glad to see how much you enjoy drawing pictures."

4. Notice how your child responds.

An important part of this step is that parents pay attention to their child's reaction. Some children may be curious, some self-conscious, some suspicious. Most children will be grateful and pleased that their parent was paying attention to them and took the time to say something.

Summary

Remember that no matter what a child's outward behavior may be, a parent's encouraging words help a child feel good inside about something he or she has done or said. By paying attention in this positive way, a parent teaches a child to feel encouraged.

Suggested Reading

There is some confusion in the parent education literature about the difference between ENCOURAGEMENT and praise or "helpful praise." For the purposes of this skill we draw on the writings of Donald Dinkmeyer, Jennifer Birckmayer, Rudolf Dreikurs, and Michael Popkin, as well as the "acceptance" ideas of Thomas Gordon.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 in Donald Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay, *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting: The Parent's Handbook* (Circle Pines, Minn.: American Guidance Service, 1989), are applicable to this skill. In Chapter 1, "Understanding the Child's Behavior and Misbehavior," Dinkmeyer et al. make two related points. One is that encouragement, mutual respect, communication of love, and having fun together are the basic ingredients for a positive relationship between parent and child. The second point is that parents who encourage positive behavior will have children who believe they belong. By contributing, they are responsible for their own behavior, interested in cooperating, and can decide to withdraw from conflict.

Chapter 2 of the same book, "Understanding More about Your Child and about Yourself as a Parent," explains how parents contribute to their children's feelings of adequacy and self-confidence. Discussion of emotions is appropriate for background with ENCOURAGEMENT and later for RESPECTING FEELINGS.

Chapter 3, "Encouragement: Building Your Child's Confidence and Feelings of Worth," emphasizes appreciating your child's assets. Encouragement is defined as "the process of focusing on your children's assets and strengths in order to build their self confidence and feelings of worth." It is this interpretation of the encouragement skill we wish to convey here; encouragement is given for effort or improvement, to build feelings of adequacy. The emphasis is on accepting children as they are and having faith in them so they come to believe in themselves (p. 43).

Chapter 3, "Encouragement," of Rudolf Dreikurs with Vicki Stoltz, *Children: The Challenge* (New York: Plume, 1992), states that understanding this concept is basic to every child's development. Children need encouragement "like a plant needs water" (p. 36). Much of this chapter elaborates on misbehavior as the motivation of a discouraged child. Dreikurs includes specific suggestions for common situations (pp. 36–56). The distinctions between ENCOURAGEMENT and praise as interpreted in Parenting Skills Workshops are also well explained in this chapter (pp. 46–47).

"Instilling Courage and Self Esteem," Chapter 3 in Michael H. Popkin, *Active Parenting Today* (Atlanta: Active Parenting Today Publishers, 1993), defines encouragement as the process by which parents build courage in children or "the confidence to take a known risk for a known purpose" (p. 27). Children who learn to be courageous are better able to meet life's challenges, to be responsible, cooperative, and independent. A discussion of the "success cycle" emphasizes the importance of self-confidence in helping children strive to learn from their experiences and be responsible for their future behavior. Encouragement means "catch 'em being good." Turning discouragement into encouragement is another section of this chapter relevant to Parenting Skills Workshops. The list of "feeling words" on page 129 is useful supplementary information for Steps 2 and 3 of this skill.

Jennifer Birckmayer's *Discipline Is Not a Dirty Word* (Ithaca: Cornell Cooperative Extension, 1987, rev. ed. 1995) emphasizes the important need to build self-confidence and courage in children through Principle Two, "Protect and

preserve children's feelings that they are lovable and capable." People need to feel strongly that **I Am Lovable And Capable (IALAC)** if they are to feel good about their capacity to learn and to function well in the world. This feeling can grow or shrink depending on a person's experiences, particularly with other people (p. 8).

Thomas Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training* (New York: Plume, 1975), Chapter 2, "Parents Are Persons, Not Gods," provides good background on the dynamics between parents and children and the frustration felt by parents who have trouble encouraging their children. Chapter 3, "How to Listen So Kids Will Talk to You: The Language of Acceptance," is consistent with the understanding of ENCOURAGEMENT used elsewhere. This chapter includes an explanation of the IALAC idea used by Jennifer Birckmayer and emphasizes the need for children to feel loved. This chapter explores the many ways parents communicate, or fail to communicate, their love and acceptance of their child.

CAN DO

The Second Skill

1. Notice what you don't want your child to do.
2. Think of something your child can do instead.
3. Tell your child what he or she can do.
4. Help your child if necessary.

Outcomes

Children are able to change unacceptable behaviors to acceptable ones.

Parents gain a constructive limit-setting technique that recognizes their children's need to be creative and explore their world.

Key Ideas

CAN DO teaches parents how to redirect children's behavior. By using friendly, positive messages such as "Try this," "Do this," "Have this," "Here," parents teach children to act in appropriate ways. Changing "Don't leave your clothes on the floor" to "Pick up your clothes and put them in the hamper" gives children the information they need to do what is expected. Young children will respond to similar but safer or more appropriate behavior alternatives with a little guidance from parents. As children grow older, they continue to appreciate being told what they can do as opposed to being told what they cannot do.

CAN DO helps parents set limits on children's behavior in constructive, appropriate ways. Overusing negative words reduces parents' effective influence with their children. "No," "Don't," "Stop," and "Quit," when used too often, when you are annoyed or impatient, or when your children are acting out, will soon lose their impact. Strong words like these are most effective when saved for emergency situations. Find ways to change "No, don't" to "Yes, you can do this instead." CAN DO enables children to be creative and curious without exceeding boundaries of safety and respect for others.

It also helps to create a more positive, supportive family environment. Children are able to cooperate when they know what is expected of them.

Telling children what to do instead of what not to do teaches them to think about alternative ways of behavior, the first step in creative problem solving.

Saying something once may not guarantee compliance. Parents need much patience and must be ready to help children follow through while they grow and learn new routines.

Skill Steps

1. Notice what you don't want your child to do.

When you notice your child doing something annoying or irritating or even hurting something or someone, stop and think for a minute before reacting. Decide what behavior of the child's you want to change. Of course, if a child is in immediate danger, an adult must intervene quickly.

2. Think of something your child can do instead.

Ask yourself what your child could do or have that would be okay with you. Think of things that are safer or more appropriate than the activity you want to stop. If your child is throwing things or jumping on the bed, is there another place where that activity would not bother you? Throwing things indoors increases the chances of people being hurt or objects getting broken. Jumping on beds upsets many parents and can be dangerous if a child falls. Children can play actively outdoors in a safe setting.

Choosing alternative activities that require minimal change is the most successful technique. Children need outlets for emotions and energy; parents can help children learn how to manage these needs in effective and appropriate ways. Changing from jumping wildly to coloring quietly is a huge leap for most kids that they will resist.

If a situation causes frustration and occurs often in your family, ask friends for ideas you could try as CAN DO'S with your children.

3. Tell your child what he or she can do.

Using a firm, friendly voice, tell your child what you want her or him to do. A statement that ends with "okay?" or a question such as "Would you like to color instead of jumping on the bed?" gives the child the choice not to cooperate and creates

confusion. Statements like "Jumping on the bed is not safe. You need to play out in the yard," spoken in a respectful, confident manner are more effective.

Some children will cooperate easily, but if your child is having a hard time making the switch, speak slowly, making eye contact to get your child's attention. Be clear, firm, and calm.

4. Help your child if necessary.

Following through is the key to the success of this skill. Your children will cooperate when they see that you care enough to help them. It may be necessary to show your child what you expect and to give encouragement, coaching, or other support. Sometimes children appreciate your company. "You need to play active games outside. I will put on my coat and join you outdoors." Although it may be inconvenient or an extra effort, time you take now will help your child be more independent in the long run.

Summary

CAN DO is a skill you use when your children are doing something you don't want them to do.

Suggested Reading

The first principle from *Discipline Is Not a Dirty Word* by Jennifer Birckmayer (Ithaca: Cornell Cooperative Extension, 1987, rev. ed. 1995) is "Tell children what they can do instead of what they can't do, or focus on the do's instead of the don'ts." Children react to too many negatives either by deciding that it is "dangerous to [do anything] and become passive and uninterested in learning; or deciding that adults just say no and that the way to deal with them is to touch as many things as you can before they get really mad." Some specific suggestions are included. For example, "Don't drop the egg" becomes "Carry the egg in two hands like this" (p. 6).

Children: The Challenge by Rudolf Dreikurs with Vicki Stoltz (New York: Plume, 1992) "Eliminate Criticism and Minimize Mistakes" (Chapter 11) reinforces the rationale of the CAN DO skill. Dreikurs emphasizes the importance of maximizing "yes" and minimizing "no." He stresses the

value of turning mistakes into learning experiences (pp. 106–15).

Several other chapters in *Children: The Challenge* expand the meaning of limits and the importance of mutual respect. “Be Firm without Dominating” (Chapter 7), “Show Respect for the Child” (Chapter 8), and “Induce Respect for Order” (Chapter 9) include ideas facilitators may find useful in constructing demonstrations of CAN DO.

Thomas Gordon’s *Parent Effectiveness Training* (New York: Plume, 1975), in Chapter 8, “Changing Unacceptable Behavior . . . by Changing the Environment,” shows how altering the surroundings can be a simple and effective way to reduce frustration for a child. The sections, “Substituting one activity for another” and “Planning ahead with older children” (p. 143) provide ideas consistent with CAN DO to direct children’s behavior in a positive way.

Donald Dinkmeyer, Sr., Gary D. McKay, and James S. Dinkmeyer, *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting: Parenting Young Children* (Circle Pines, Minn.: American Guidance Service, 1989), includes “distracting the child” as one method of effective discipline. This is described as calling the child to gain her or his attention, then steering the child in another direction, and “focus[ing] the child’s attention on something that is acceptable. This is done in a friendly, non-threatening manner. . . . Acting without words avoids creating a struggle for attention or power” (p. 107).

CHOICES

The Third Skill

1. Help your child understand the problem.
2. Your child and you think of two or more reasonable choices.
3. Have your child choose and tell you the choice.
4. Help your child follow through.

Outcomes

Children make decisions within reasonable limits provided by adults.

Parents share the decision-making process with their children.

Key Ideas

CHOICES builds on the ENCOURAGEMENT and CAN DO skills to develop cooperation between parent and child. Parents are asked to be open-minded and allow children to become increasingly involved in determining the resolution to a shared problem. This is a skill to use when children can help with a decision or plan the solution. By giving parents a way to share responsibility with children, CHOICES can reduce parents’ anxiety about feeling that they must control every situation. Children gain the opportunity to learn personal responsibility and decision making to increase their independence.

CHOICES is very different from CAN DO, and the distinction should be made clear. Parents may give their children alternative CAN DO’S (“You can do ‘A’ or you can do ‘B.’ Which one do you want to do?”), but that is not the same as CHOICES, in which parents and children find a cooperative resolution. The family works together to reach a decision.

CHOICES is a negotiation skill that respects the rights of both parent and child. Sometimes it is hard to allow children a voice in the process. Some parents find it uncomfortable or difficult to understand how valuable it is to do so. At other times parents undervalue their own responsibility in the decision-making process and let their children have more freedom than is comfortable for the parent or appropriate for the child.

There is an underlying understanding in applying this skill that the parent must be sure the choices are safe and reasonable for all parties involved. This means respecting the parent's own needs as well as recognizing and respecting the child's needs. Parenting is a responsibility, but with this skill decision making is collaborative and family members strengthen their shared commitment.

As family members work to resolve disagreements, they gain respect, trust, and support for each other. Children develop the skills to work out differences with others in a positive way. This skill is one of the foundations of self-discipline. A child who learns how to make choices effectively has acquired the skills for responsible decision making throughout life.

The age and maturity of the child will influence how many options are considered and which ones are appropriate. The younger the child, the more a parent will need to guide the process. Too much responsibility can be overwhelming for a young child, who may become discouraged. Older children, however, need opportunities for increased responsibility and will tend to resist restrictive options. The complexity of the situation, the ages of the children, and the comfort level of the parents all influence the discussion.

Skill Steps

1. Help your child understand the problem.

Often situations that cause conflict between people are seen differently by those involved. One person may be unaware of causing a problem for others. Clearly stating the problem is the first step to a solution. It is important to be specific about the problem, saying something like "Wet clothes will mildew if they are left on the floor" or "It's getting late, time to get dressed for school." Global criticisms like "You never think before you act" have no place in this skill; avoid them. Take time to explain your concern, however briefly, to communicate the expectation that this is a problem you can solve together. The underlying message you give your child is that "we can work this out with mutual respect."

2. Your child and you think of two or more reasonable choices.

This is a brainstorming step. Encourage this process by asking your child, "What do you think we could do?" and by making a list of all the ideas. In this step all ideas are okay. In fact, a crazy idea may trigger a suggestion from one or both of you that could be the best solution. Before you move to the next step, be sure you have found choices that are acceptable to both of you.

It is very important that children contribute ideas. By doing so they begin to feel a part of the planning and, later, of the solution to the problem. Children will quickly develop many ideas. A child who contributes creative ideas becomes a good problem solver, a cooperative playmate, and a resourceful student.

Together you take the list of ideas and sort out which ones are reasonable and acceptable to both of you. Very young children will be overwhelmed by too many alternatives. They will be comfortable with shorter lists and more concrete choices. The parent and the child should both have "no" votes, although the parent has the final responsibility to be sure the choices are safe and reasonable. "Can you live with it?" is a good test. If not, simply say, "That cannot be one of the choices."

Being flexible and open-minded is also a skill. Carefully think about why you are saying "no." Is it reasonable for you to let your sixteen-year-old child go to the movies with a friend without a chaperon? Is it responsible to allow your eight-year-old to choose her own clothes?

If you cannot decide on at least two mutually agreeable choices, get ideas from others, start over, or agree to try one choice for a short time as an experiment. Don't get discouraged; it is a process that gets easier the more it is used.

3. Have your child choose and tell you the choice.

Once you and your child have agreed on choices acceptable to both of you, it should not matter to you which choice your child makes. When children tell their choice they make a verbal commitment and are more likely to follow through. Be sure the decision is clear to both you and your

child. You may want to repeat the decision to be sure you both understand the choice.

4. Help your child follow through.

This skill has an important final step. Making the choice is only part of the solution. Responsibility means doing what you say you will do. “What can I do to help you?” may be a gentle reminder, giving additional information or other support to help your child follow through.

If there is still a problem, you may decide to start again with Step 1 of CHOICES or use another skill. Stay calm and focused on the issue to reduce any anger, annoyance, or frustration you or your child may feel.

Summary

CHOICES is used when parents are willing to let their children make decisions within reasonable limits.

Suggested Reading

Children: The Challenge by Rudolf Dreikurs with Vicki Stoltz (New York: Plume, 1992) has several chapters that relate to the understanding of CHOICES as interpreted in PSWS. Of particular note are “Show Respect for the Child” (Chapter 8), “Win Cooperation” (Chapter 14), “Stimulate Independence” (Chapter 23), and “Follow Through—Be Consistent” (Chapter 29). “Win Cooperation” expands the idea of shared responsibility and the importance of each family member. “Stimulate Independence” encourages parents “never to do for a child what he can do for himself” (p. 193). Dreikurs includes examples for children of all ages.

Michael H. Popkin, *Active Parenting Today* (Atlanta: Active Parenting Today Publishers, 1993), includes a five-step process for solving problems in groups that follows the concept of CHOICES used here. Chapter 6, “Active Parenting in a Democratic Society,” introduces family meetings. Among the ground rules for conducting problem-solving discussions are that “every person has equal voice, everyone may share what she thinks and feels about each issue, decisions are made by consensus, all decisions are in effect

until the next meeting, some decisions are reserved for the parents to make” (pp. 148–49).

Donald Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay, *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting: The Parent’s Handbook* (Circle Pines, Minn.: American Guidance Service, 1989), in Chapter 8, also advocates family meetings. In Chapter 5, “Communication: Exploring Alternatives and Expressing Your Ideas and Feelings to Children,” a six-step plan for “exploring alternatives” is outlined, including a final step, “plan a time for evaluation (‘How long will you do this?’ ‘When shall we discuss this again?’) (pp. 61–62).

SELF-CONTROL

The Fourth Skill

1. Pay attention to body messages telling you that you are about to lose control.
2. Think of ways to control yourself.
3. Choose a way and get control of yourself.
4. Decide how to act with your child.

Outcomes

Children learn by example how to handle their feelings.

Parents learn to manage their response to strong emotions.

Key Ideas

When parents effectively handle their own emotions they teach their children to do the same. The way parents choose to handle themselves in explosive situations models ways for their children to behave when angry or upset. SELF-CONTROL is something all parents need.

SELF-CONTROL is a skill to help parents avoid acting hurtfully toward their children. By gaining self-control before deciding how to act with their children, parents can interact with their children in helpful ways, even during stressful moments.

A person is more likely to lose self-control if life is generally stressful. Family problems, an unhealthy community environment, poverty, and poor health are examples of problems that contribute to underlying stress. Misbehavior on the part of children may simply be the factor that causes the parent to lose self-control.

People give up their ability to exercise self-control when they use alcohol or drugs. Alcohol and drug abuse are issues that must be addressed directly, separate from parenting skills. A person abusing alcohol or drugs will not be able to use SELF-CONTROL or any other parenting skill effectively.

Using SELF-CONTROL will help parents stop before acting impulsively. As adults become more aware of the early signs of frustration, they begin to slow down their first response and think about alternatives to unconstrained behavior while

planning a more rational response. The SELF-CONTROL skill is intended to help parents understand the effect emotions have on the body and become aware of their personal signs of increasing agitation.

Anger is a basic emotion everyone can understand. People can learn how to act on their anger without hurting themselves or others. Uncontrolled anger cannot be used as a justification for blaming others or for saying or doing things that hurt other people. Anger has many purposes; one is to promote action. Anger that incites destructive action is never right; anger or frustration that creates a new attitude, new action, or new paradigm has accomplished something valuable.

Accepting feelings as natural and human is important. Accepting responsibility for our actions is important.

Skill Steps

1. Pay attention to body messages telling you that you are about to lose control.

Intense emotions change body chemistry. Bodies can be like volcanoes in which pressure builds and then explodes. Without self-control an explosion may occur before you know it. When a participant says, "I know I've lost it when my fist hits the wall!" facilitators can help him or her identify signals that preceded the explosive behavior. Parents may notice that their jaws tighten or they grit their teeth. Some may feel stomach muscles tense or notice changes in their voices. Some may wring their hands or make a fist.

Certain situations are pressure cookers—someone yelling at you, your children being uncooperative late at night, or being late for an appointment. These difficult times may trigger explosive reactions. Everyone has some personal signals. It is important to learn your own and pay attention to them. The better you become at recognizing these body messages early, the easier it is to respond effectively in tough situations.

2. Think of ways to control yourself.

When your body messages send you a warning, having a plan helps you calm down and regain control. Planning ahead can relieve feelings of

being trapped and lessen feelings of frustration or helplessness.

Ideas for SELF-CONTROL fall in two categories—ways to control yourself without leaving the situation and ways to control yourself when you can leave. For example, when you cannot leave, you can count to ten, take several deep breaths, talk to yourself, and remind yourself that you are okay. When you can get away, you might choose to talk the problem out with a trusted friend, find a quiet place, listen to music, or go for a walk.

3. Choose a way and get control of yourself.

Different circumstances dictate different choices. The importance of this step is to take time to choose and not to react before thinking. It may take a while to calm down. You may decide to take a break and say, “I am too upset to handle this right now. I will come back when I feel calm.” Then when you are calm, come back and begin Step 4.

4. Decide how to act with your child.

Once you are ready, you can think about the other skills you have learned and how they could apply to the situation. For example, you might use CHOICES, talk about the problem, think about why you get upset or what you would like to see happen, or listen to your child explain her ideas. This process may help resolve a situation that seems hard to handle on your own or one that requires your child’s cooperation to solve.

Sometimes listening to the other person and understanding how he or she feels can help you understand that person’s behavior and thus lessen your feelings of anger.

Summary

SELF-CONTROL is the skill you use when you notice body messages that tell you you could lose control.

Suggested Reading

The third chapter of Michael Popkin’s *Active Parenting Today* (Atlanta: Active Parenting Today Publishers, 1993), “Understanding Your Child,” discusses the questions, “How can we use

our anger the right way?” and “How can we act on anger?” Action before losing control is recommended, and three simple ideas are suggested—try to change what is happening and tell your child what you expect in a quiet but firm way; think about what made you angry and decide if it is really that important; change what you want by talking together and discussing other choices. This chapter also examines the reasons for children’s behavior and includes ideas on helping children use their anger that are useful for parents who wish to adapt this skill for use by their children.

Donald Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay, *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting: The Parent’s Handbook* (Circle Pines, Minn.: American Guidance Service, 1989), Chapter 2, “Understanding More about Your Child and about Yourself as a Parent,” and Chapter 9, “Developing Confidence and Using Your Potential,” are relevant to this skill. “Parents often become annoyed and angry with children because the children will not do what the parents want them to. Once parents decide they do not need to be controlling (that they can set limits and let the children decide and learn from the consequences), then there is no purpose for becoming annoyed and angry. Children learn to use their emotions . . . [although they] are often not aware of their purposes. Once parents recognize how children can use emotions to manipulate adults, they are in a position to influence their children by refraining from reacting when children try to use emotions to manipulate them . . . becoming responsible for one’s own emotions is a necessary part of growing up” (pp. 21–22).

Chapter 9 of the same book provides constructive alternatives to self-defeating beliefs that may prevent parents from feeling comfortable sharing decision making or setting appropriate boundaries for their children. Examples of constructive alternatives include “I’ll try to change the things I can control and accept the things I have no control over”; “I will do [what] makes me more self-confident and my children more responsible”; “I am more interested in improving my relationships [with my children] than I am in perfection” (p. 121).

The primary source for the SELF-CONTROL skill in Parenting Skills Workshops is Arnold P. Goldstein, Harold Keller, and Diane Ern , *Changing the Abusive Parent* (Champaign, Ill.: Research Press, 1985). Goldstein cites research on child abuse or neglect showing that children’s behavior is a trigger for parental anger and vice versa. One study showed that with “a reduction of total parental aversive behavior and an increase in parental prosocial behaviors (e.g., attention to child and approval), the abused children also showed an increase in prosocial and a decrease in aversive behavior” (pp. 32–33).

RESPECTING FEELINGS

The Fifth Skill

1. Watch and listen to your child.
2. Think of a word that describes what your child might be feeling.
3. Think about why your child might be feeling this way.
4. Check your ideas with your child.

Outcomes

Children accept and understand their own feelings.

Parents understand and accept that children have a wide variety of feelings.

Parents show that they respect their children’s feelings.

Key Ideas

RESPECTING FEELINGS is an empathy-building skill. It helps people acknowledge that everyone has feelings, usually a wide range of them. Sometimes these feelings are so strong they become confusing or overwhelming. Usually it helps to talk about these emotions with another person who will listen respectfully. RESPECTING FEELINGS is a skill to practice giving attention to another person and listening for feelings.

A parent can help a child learn to understand the importance of her or his feelings by using this skill. Taking time to listen to a child does not require that you agree with him. It does require that you accept the child’s right to have feelings, even when they are different from yours. Because there is a connection between how children feel and how they behave, it is important to watch them interacting with others and acting on their own.

Some parents have difficulty separating the way they themselves feel from what their children are telling them. The challenge in this skill is for parents to put aside their own feelings and listen carefully to hear how the child is feeling.

RESPECTING FEELINGS is a “reflecting” skill. Think of yourself as a mirror, helping your child understand himself and his emotions more clearly.

RESPECTING FEELINGS gives children the chance to think out loud. It teaches children to respect themselves and to respect the feelings of others. It acknowledges the importance of their feelings, their right to these feelings, and their value as human beings.

Parents may also find that this skill helps them become more comfortable with and responsible for their own emotions.

Steps

1. Watch and listen to your child.

Pay attention to the child, his or her actions and words and body language. Notice the child’s face and listen to the sound of the voice. Actions may tell you more than words about how your child feels. Look for clues that tell you about feelings. If your child finds excuses not to go to school, has morning stomachaches, or will not talk about the school day but complains about the teacher, something is wrong.

2. Think of a word that describes what your child might be feeling.

A child who says, “I’m never going back to school again,” may be angry, scared, or embarrassed. RESPECTING FEELINGS is learning to name the feeling, recognizing the emotion (shame, unhappiness, or loneliness) hidden behind the anger or frustration. One child who is feeling discouraged or scared may bully other children while another discouraged or scared child may act shy and quiet.

3. Think about why your child might be feeling this way.

Figuring out why children have particular feelings requires detective work. Follow your hunches. Think how you would feel if the teacher seemed to be picking on you. Think how you felt when something similar happened to you. Think of the way your child handles similar situations.

Try to remember how it felt to be the age of your child. Every age has its special challenges, and

each child deals with growing up in his or her own special way.

4. Check your ideas with your child.

You can use words to show understanding (“I see how angry you are right now”) or seek agreement (“Sounds like you are really disappointed because you wanted Billy to come over after school. Is that right?”).

Don’t expect to guess the right feeling every time. Sometimes a child will be so upset that nothing you say will be helpful or right. At those times just being there to listen is all that is needed. Sitting with a child or giving a hug or a pat on the back communicates caring concern. This quiet support is an important step in the process of building a relationship, understanding a problem, or figuring out what to do next.

RESPECTING FEELINGS is not intended to be a problem-solving skill. Giving children the opportunity to talk about strong emotions clears the air before making a plan to handle the distress.

Summary

RESPECTING FEELINGS is a skill you use when you notice your child has strong emotions.

Suggested Readings

Donald Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay, *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting: The Parent’s Handbook* (Circle Pines, Minn.: American Guidance Service, 1989), Chapter 2, “Understanding More about Your Child and about Yourself as a Parent,” is a good review of the importance of the power of emotions. Chapter 4, “Communication: How to Listen to Your Child,” is a thorough discussion of the roles parents play and includes some tips for using reflective listening. This chapter includes a list of words for “reflecting ‘upset’ feelings” and for “reflecting ‘happy’ feelings” (p. 52).

Thomas Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training* (New York: Plume, 1985), includes two extensive chapters on active listening skills. Chapter 3, “How to Talk So Kids Will Talk to You: The Language of Acceptance,” underscores the importance a simple act like listening attentively can

have on another person. The value of nonverbal communication is stressed. Examples of common barriers to communication are explained. RESPECTING FEELINGS is much like the “door openers” described here as “invitations to talk.” Chapter 4, “Putting Your Active Listening Skill to Work,” includes dialogue demonstrating this more elaborate parenting technique.

“Winning Cooperation,” Chapter 6 of *Active Parenting Today* by Michael H. Popkin (Atlanta: Active Parenting Today Publishers, 1993), incorporates similar information on communication techniques, giving special consideration to “communication blocks” that inhibit respectful communication. This chapter also reminds readers that the way we say something can be as important as what we say. A mixed message can be confusing to a child (p. 123). “Active Communication” is defined with five steps and some helpful tips, which can apply to RESPECTING FEELINGS—keep your own talk to a minimum; give full attention to the child; acknowledge what you are hearing; and listen with empathy (“the art of sharing another person’s feelings”) (p. 125).

Rudolf Dreikurs with Vicki Stoltz, *Children: The Challenge* (New York: Plume, 1992), contains two short chapters relevant to the RESPECTING FEELINGS skill. Chapter 31, “Listen!” reinforces the idea that “children are very adept at sizing up situations. They do have intelligent solutions to offer. They even have a different perspective which we could use to our advantage” (p. 263). Chapter 32, “Watch Your Tone of Voice,” reiterates the importance of paying attention to how you convey your message.

Chapter 2

STRUCTURED LEARNING

The teaching method used in the Parenting Skills Workshop Series is based on the structured learning approach presented by Arnold Goldstein in his books and workshops. In *Changing the Abusive Parent* by Goldstein, Harold Keller, and Diane Erne (Champaign, Ill.: Research Press, 1985), the authors argue that abusive parents have a learning deficit because as children they had inadequate modeling of effective child management skills. Structured learning aims to replace impulsive behavior with structured behavior so as to develop healthy social habits. The structured learning strategy for participants who respond best to applied teaching methods, combined with the simplicity of presentation for facilitators, are core qualities of the program. Once facilitators are familiar with the teaching method, they can use planning time to prepare and practice modeling displays and develop the cofacilitator skills needed to build rapport with the group.

As used in the Parenting Skills Workshop Series, structured learning consists of five components: presenting the skill, modeling the skill, practicing the skill, performance feedback, and transfer training. These five components delineate a “hands-on” teaching strategy that is used intuitively by people in everyday situations. Two facilitators lead each workshop in a series and together teach each skill using the following format.

Presenting the Skill

Facilitators introduce each skill by naming it, noting when it might be used, and describing the results of its use for parents and children. Group discussion is encouraged to clarify understanding

of the skill, when and why to use it, and what benefits to expect. Each workshop participant thinks of a situation in his or her own experience in which the skill can be used. Facilitators record these situations on newsprint for use later in the meeting. A facilitator then presents the poster describing the skill and explains each step for using the skill.

Modeling the Skill (Modeling Display)

The modeling display, presented by facilitators after they have introduced a skill, is a brief role play demonstrating the use of the skill by depicting the behavioral steps. The steps are portrayed in the correct order in each vignette. The outcome of modeling displays is always positive for both parent and child. The most powerful influence facilitators can have is to show how use of a skill can develop a cooperative relationship between parents and children. Careful planning and practice prepare facilitators to present a modeling display in which the content is relevant to participants, clearly demonstrates the skill, and offers an outcome parents can believe in.

Practicing the Skill (Role Play)

Practice is the key strategy in teaching parents to use the new skill. Participants work with their own real-life situation and, with the help of other group members, experience success by role playing a positive resolution for that situation. Facilitators assist as needed to help participants overcome reluctance to role playing. Practicing in the group gives each participant a positive, concrete experience with each skill.

Performance Feedback (Friendly Coaching)

Feedback for performers after role plays is given by program participants as well as by facilitators. Each participant is assigned to observe specific steps of the skill. After the role play a facilitator asks the co-actor (the person playing the role of the child) how it felt when the actor (the person playing the role of the parent) used the skill. Then observers are asked to describe how the actor carried out each step. Next the actor is asked how it felt to use the skill. Facilitators offer their comments and suggestions only after all group members have spoken.

Friendly coaching should be specific and constructive. Descriptions of what behavior is observed and what is effective will be most helpful to the actor. The friendly coaches are respectful of the players, sincere about helping to improve the role play, and tactfully honest. Friendly coaching is an empowering process because it gives the group responsibility for helping its members achieve success. Appropriate, successful use of the skill is reinforced for all participants during the coaching process.

Transfer Training (Homework)

Skill transfer is the process by which a parent begins to use the newly learned skill in real-life situations. Homework assignments are the key strategy by which facilitators can encourage group participants to try the skills outside of class. Facilitators set clear expectations and do everything possible to encourage and motivate parents to use the skills at home. At the beginning of the next meeting each participant describes his or her efforts to use the skills learned the previous week, and class members and facilitators offer friendly coaching.

Chapter 3

EMPOWERMENT

Our understanding of empowerment is informed by the Family Matters Project of Cornell University, our experiences working with parents and facilitators in Parenting Skills Workshops, and our efforts to define a mutual understanding of empowerment with colleagues who work with families. Empowerment is summarized in the following quotation from *Communication for Empowerment* (Family Matters Project, Cornell University):

“The empowerment process begins with creating positive change in individuals’ perceptions of themselves. For this change to occur, individuals must recognize that they have gained knowledge from their own life experiences, must develop skills to act on their own behalf, and must acquire knowledge about themselves and their environment. This combination of a positive self-image and the skills and knowledge to deal more effectively with one’s environment increases a person’s sense of control over the environment and thus her or his ability to effect change within it. The emphasis is on encouraging cooperative action rather than increasing the personal power of individuals at the expense of others.”

At the core of our approach to families are the following beliefs:

All families have strengths.

Parents should be recognized as experts on their children.

Parenting education can have positive outcomes.

A variety of family forms can promote the development of healthy children and healthy adults.

Cultural differences are valid and valuable.

The Parenting Skills Workshop Series is designed to establish an environment in which participants feel valued and encouraged. Providing parents with skills and knowledge and creating opportunity for them to develop more positive perceptions of themselves will help them take responsibility for the choices they make as parents.

Chapter 4

A GUIDE TO FACILITATING WORKSHOPS

This chapter is designed to provide an introduction to the general techniques for leading Parenting Skills Workshops. Facilitators may find these workshops different from other methods of teaching or human service work. The structured learning model or the empowerment approach may be new. Or this may be the first time you have been asked to teach participants who are angry about interventions in their lives and are resistant to anything that looks like a traditional classroom setting. In this chapter we will provide some tips on how to engage participants in the learning process. These tips are based on the assumption that all parents struggle with questions of how to raise their children and most are open to new ideas on the subject if these ideas are presented as possibilities rather than requirements. The five skills provide answers to some important dilemmas in parenting. The first challenge is to get participants to voice questions that are important to them. If facilitators can get participants to do this, the skills will help provide answers.

The Facilitator Team

The Parenting Skills Workshop Series is designed to be led by two facilitators. Two people are needed for modeling displays, to work with subgroups of participants, and to provide individual attention when necessary. During role

plays, one facilitator can work with the actors and the other can work with the observers. Facilitators are role models for group members, sharing responsibility and providing mutual support. As you plan and present the workshops, use the skills and attitudes that you are trying to teach with your cofacilitator.

The outlines for the workshop sessions do not specify how to divide responsibilities between the two facilitators. Plan ahead so that presentations are divided more or less equally between the two of you. Discover your strong points and let each of you do the work that you do best. For example, some facilitators are good at presenting ideas clearly and concisely while others may have a knack for tuning in to the feelings and needs of participants. Some participants may look primarily to one or the other facilitator as a guide or role model. Thus it is helpful, though not necessary, for one facilitator to be female and the other male.

The outlines also do not specify time limits for each segment. Classes are typically two hours long, and the break should come near the middle. Part of learning to work together as cofacilitators is managing the timing of the segments. This is made easier because the structure of the sessions follows a general pattern. Allow as much time for practicing the skills as possible.

Tips for Facilitators

Keep lists of the situations participants present. You may refer back to these later in the series, and they will help you better understand the problems and needs of the parents you are working with. They will also provide material for future modeling displays.

To establish a working relationship with participants you will need to present yourself as a real person—a parent (or partner or friend) who struggles with relationships just as the participants do. Balancing the roles of teacher, role model, and fellow struggler can be difficult. If you bring your own real-life situations into your role plays, choose situations and issues that you have resolved to a reasonable degree. This protects you from getting hurt, but it also allows participants to feel hopeful that problems can be solved. It also keeps the focus on the issues of group members rather than on your own issues.

Each week you will ask participants to practice the skills at home, and you will promise to practice too so your family will participate to some degree in your teaching of the class. Talk this over with family members. Hopefully it will be an enjoyable learning experience for all of you.

When modeling displays are fictional it is best to use made-up names rather than your own or your children's names, although some facilitators don't mind using real names if the situation is closely based on a real incident.

Plan to enjoy yourself. Parents are interesting people with much to say. Many of the situations they present are amusing, and laughter is fine as long as it is not at anyone's expense.

Working with the Group

An underlying assumption of the Parenting Skills Workshop Series is that the group communication process is as important as the content of the classes. Facilitators are also learners, bringing information and skills while drawing on the experience of participants with their children. Parents are motivated when they are listened to and respected. Participants consistently describe how much they value encouragement from

facilitators and how much they learn from other parents. Because some parents will have made serious mistakes with their children, it may be hard at first to discover their hidden strengths. All parents do have strengths, and most would like to be effective, loving parents. As the class progresses and parents begin to talk to you and to each other it becomes easier to recognize and encourage their strengths.

Facilitators of effective PSWS groups maintain a delicate balance between two functions—establishing supportive relationships among all members and teaching the skills. Participants bring their personal values, perspectives, and biases to the group and need time to build trust with each other and the facilitators. If ideas conflict, guidance will be needed to reach a solution everyone can support. Tasks to be completed must be clearly defined, and all members must reach a common understanding and acceptance of their purpose. But if excessive time is spent on group issues, participants will not have adequate time to observe and practice the five skills.

Tips for Working with the Group

Avoid taking the role of expert. When participants bring up questions or problems, allow other group members to present ideas and solutions.

Present yourself as a person who, like the participants, is trying to find the best way to relate to your children. If you are not a parent, you can still present yourself as someone who is trying to find the best way to relate to children and people in general. Parents will benefit from hearing that you have challenges and use the five skills to meet them, but you must keep the focus on the issues presented by group members.

Focus on what parents are doing right rather than what they are doing wrong. This means using the ENCOURAGEMENT skill, and it is a fundamental tool for working with the group.

Involve all group members in discussions. Find respectful ways to draw out more reserved participants and enable the most talkative ones to hold back and listen to what others have to say.

Use closing circles at the end of each session as a tool for building group solidarity.

At the end of each session, participants respond to a statement, for example, “how I want my child to think of me.” A facilitator speaks first, then asks the person on his or her right (or left) to speak. Each participant speaks in turn, proceeding around the circle and including the second facilitator. Closing circles allow participants to identify and acknowledge their own and others’ strengths.

Read all written material aloud. These workshops are intended to include parents who do not read. When a skill is presented, a poster is shown detailing the four steps that make up the skill. Say and point to the name of the skill and read the steps aloud. This gives the information to participants who do not read and will help all participants memorize the skill by combining oral and visual presentation. Always read skill steps exactly as they are written. You may, of course, explain or amplify them after you have read them, but read straight through each skill as often as possible during the course of the workshop.

Whenever you write something down, let participants see what you are writing. Use newsprint to record statements by participants. Do not take private notes during the session. Many participants have reason to be suspicious of others, and they will worry about what you are writing.

Use the parenting skills CAN DO, CHOICES, and RESPECTING FEELINGS with participants, as well as ENCOURAGEMENT. They will gain trust and confidence and will learn to take risks.

Study other resources on group facilitation skills. In this manual we focus primarily on the techniques needed to teach using the structured learning model. *Communication for Empowerment* by Virginia Vanderslice with Florence Cherry, Moncrieff Cochran, and Christiann Dean (Ithaca: Cornell Cooperative Extension, n.d.) is an excellent resource.

Giving Instructions

For structured learning to be successful, class participants need clear instructions. They need to know what behavior is expected of them and they need to know the framework for each activity. Instructions should be presented in such a way that people are invited rather than ordered to participate in an activity, yet at the same time facilitators should maintain the expectation that everyone will participate.

Tips for Giving Instructions

Before giving instructions be sure that you understand the goal and the process of the activity. Describe the goal of the activity before giving the specific instructions on how to do it.

Give only one or two instructions at a time. After they have been followed, give the next.

It can be helpful to give a general time frame for each activity, as, for example: “We’ll take fifteen minutes to talk about how you used CAN DO during the past week, then we’ll introduce a new skill called CHOICES.”

The Modeling Display

Good modeling displays are a key to successful training. They must illustrate the skill in a clear way, and they must always end successfully. Although some facilitators like the spontaneity of improvised modeling displays, we strongly recommend that you take time before each session to prepare your modeling display. If your modeling display doesn’t work perfectly the first time, however, you can always regroup and do it again. You’re not perfect, and it can help parents to see that they don’t have to be perfect either.

Tips for Modeling Displays

Keep your initial presentation simple and clear. Avoid confusing the participants with background information and finer points. These will be addressed during the role plays and the questions that follow. The formula, “[Skill name] is a skill you use when . . .” is the best way to introduce the skill. Give some examples, then ask the group for situations in which to use the skill.

Many good modeling displays come from the facilitators' experience. If you are not a parent you may need to borrow situations or make them up. We recommend saving lists of situations contributed by group members to provide you with material for future modeling displays. If you use a real-life situation, you may need to change it to make it simpler or more clear-cut. Of course, you should change names and other details to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Briefly describe the child before starting the modeling display. Include the child's age (and gender if not clear from the name), as well as some physical description and personality traits. For example, "Lewis is big for his age. He is very self-conscious and doesn't usually show his feelings."

Take time before starting the action to describe the setting. Help participants visualize the dining room table or the location of the kitchen sink. Choose a setting they can relate to. If most parents in the group live in trailer parks, don't set your role play in a large suburban home.

Be sure to act out the "thinking steps." Many of the skill steps require thinking about something rather than actually doing something. When you are acting out a thinking step, turn to the group and tell them your thoughts. "Hmm . . . I notice that Jamal is really good at being nice to his little sister. I feel happy about that." (Turn to your co-actor.) "Jamal, you really tried to help Keesha feel better when she bumped her nose." (Turn back to the group.) "He seems surprised that I complimented him."

A good modeling display balances realism and simplicity. The facilitator playing the child should not make it too easy for the facilitator who is playing the parent, but don't continue difficult behavior for so long that the structure of the role play becomes muddled. The outcome must be clearly positive: that is, the child should become happily engaged in the alternative behavior.

Leading Participants in Role Plays

Role playing is the key strategy for teaching parents to use new skills. Acting out a situation helps parents prepare to respond to similar

situations in real life. Role plays are empowering because they encourage participants to draw directly on their own experiences and to devise resolutions to their own dilemmas.

Many first-time facilitators worry that participants will resist role playing. Some parents are shy about doing it, but others are relieved that they can play-act instead of sitting and listening to you lecture. If you are successful in building rapport among group members, the eager ones will help the others become role players.

The first step in conducting role plays is to select role players. At first some members will be reluctant. Make a guess as to which participant is most ready and ask him or her to choose a partner and enact the situation he or she presented during the first part of the session. When telling the group which role play you wish to start with, talk about the situation rather than the person. "Dale, I liked the story about Billy agreeing to let his younger brother have the coat that was too small for him. Do you see someone here who could play the part of Billy?"

Role plays are preparation for real life. Ask participants to imagine using the skills with their own children in their own home. Take time before role plays to have the actor describe the setting and the personalities. Let the actor and co-actor work together to create a convincing portrayal of the child.

Participants usually have difficulty acting out the thinking steps. They will tend to skip to the action steps. Although there is some benefit to this because the role play feels and seems more realistic, it is important for participants to learn to include the thinking steps. Allow the players to finish and go through the performance feedback process as outlined later in this chapter. Performance feedback, called "friendly coaching" in PSWS, is given by participants who act as observers (friendly coaches) during the role play. Usually the observers will point out steps that are missing. If not, facilitators should do so and ask the players to repeat the role play. The actor will usually find it easier to do the thinking steps if he or she turns to the friendly coach who is assigned to watch for the particular step and says the words directly to him or her. This also allows the

friendly coach to offer moral support in the form of eye contact.

Tips for Conducting Successful Role Plays

Clearly state the purpose. Role plays are a way to learn and practice new skills, not a talent showcase.

Acknowledge that people may feel silly and awkward doing role playing. Get the group to agree that no one will criticize.

Allow time and provide assistance in preparing the role plays. It can be helpful if one facilitator takes players outside or to one side of the room. Help the actor describe the situation and the child for the co-actor. Establish the mood and help the actor decide how to do each step. While this is going on the other facilitator can assign skill steps to the remaining parents so they can do friendly coaching and the facilitator can lead a continuing discussion of the skill.

Getting to choose a role-playing partner is one of the rewards of agreeing to be the primary actor. You can suggest that the role player choose someone who has a personality or a physical trait reminiscent of the child. Men are allowed to play girls and women are allowed to play boys.

Many parents find it much easier to play the role of a child than that of a parent. Many people slip easily into childish behaviors and can produce astoundingly good imitations of children. Also, some parents find it easier to stand in for another parent than to play themselves because there is more pressure and stress when dealing with a real situation of their own.

If a parent is extremely shy but has gained trust in a facilitator or another participant, have the two people go to a corner or another room, do the role play, and report back to the group.

As an intermediate step, ask participants to coach a “stand-in,” someone who will play their role for them. This allows them to be involved without being on stage. Parents may be willing to act out the role play from their seats if they are too shy to stand in front of the group.

Observe group dynamics and take advantage of opportunities that arise from discussions and interactions among participants.

Help participants choose situations that are not complicated. Sometimes they may be able to break a complicated situation into parts and focus on one particular incident or aspect. The best situations are ones that parents deal with on a daily basis such as getting children ready for school.

Some parents may have trouble thinking of anything their children do well. Acknowledge their discouragement (the RESPECTING FEELINGS skill) but help them come up with one small positive attribute or behavior. Sometimes other participants will provide encouragement or suggestions.

Keep track of how many times each participant plays the role of parent. Set a goal of having all participants take the role of parent at least twice during the course of the group, but be flexible. Try to strike a balance between having a few participants dominate the role playing and forcing others to act before they are ready.

Keep role plays on track and expect parents to take their efforts seriously but be lighthearted too. Allow humor to develop around the absurd dilemmas parents face but never permit laughter at a participant’s serious efforts to do a role play or use a skill.

The role plays will be as strong as the group. Not every group can be great, but your efforts to build trust, solidarity, and friendship within the group will pay off in better role plays. The best support and the best coaching often come from fellow participants rather than facilitators.

Conducting Performance Feedback (Friendly Coaching)

Friendly coaching is the tool used in Parenting Skills Workshops to help participants evaluate their ability to use the skills. Before a role play begins, a facilitator asks each observer to become a friendly coach by noticing exactly how the actor performs a particular skill step. Thus if there are seven observers, two might be assigned to Step 1, two to Step 2, two to Step 3, and one to Step 4. All

observers should be included in the coaching process. Friendly coaching is an empowering process through which participants gain mastery and competence by helping each other use the skills successfully in role plays. When introducing friendly coaching, emphasize the helping aspect. Often role plays generate a discussion about which skill is most appropriate in a given situation, and participants improve their ability to use the skills effectively when they are able to teach others.

A facilitator begins the coaching process with the co-actor. “How did it feel when Dale used the ENCOURAGEMENT skill?” If the actor used the skill well, chances are the co-actor had some positive feelings. This information helps “sell” the skill to the actor and the rest of the group. If the actor did not use the skill well and the co-actor did not experience a positive feeling, further coaching will help the actor repeat the role play with a more successful result.

Next, the facilitator turns to the first observer. “How did Dale do Step 1?” Ask the observer what words Dale used. If the observer has difficulty, allow other members to help but encourage them to talk with the observer rather than directly to you. This way the observer can get credit for the ideas. The actor may skip directly to an action step. If so, the observer will have nothing to report and the problem will become evident. Continue this process until all the observers have spoken. Then ask the actor to self-evaluate. Did he or she think about all the steps? How does he or she feel about the outcome?

Friendly coaching from the facilitators should be last and least. Your role is primarily to direct and moderate the coaching process to make sure that it is helpful rather than discouraging for the actor. If the role play was not successful, it may be helpful to ask the actor to do it again. Provide suggestions and assistance if needed. Don’t force a confused, frustrated participant to go on.

Friendly coaching is intended to be constructive and specific. Descriptions of what is observed and what is most effective will be most helpful. Facilitators must be sure that each role play clearly demonstrates the steps for each skill. One or more participants are asked to observe for each step

and note *if* the step was performed, *how* it was performed, and *what* happened when it was performed. Friendly coaching will be constructive if coaches are respectful of the actors, sincere about helping improve the role play, and tactfully honest.

Skill Transfer (Homework)

The most important and the most challenging task in leading a Parenting Skills Workshop Series is getting the parents to practice at home. For this to happen, parents must learn the skills well enough to remember them when they need them, and they must have a clear idea of when it is appropriate to use them. The first goal is accomplished by the structured learning format, which breaks the skills down into steps that are easy to remember. The second goal is accomplished by having parents spend time in class talking about situations in which they can use the skills. Nothing will happen, however, unless parents are excited by the skills and have developed some confidence in their ability to be successful with their children. This is accomplished by having facilitators use the ENCOURAGEMENT skill with participants.

Tips for Helping Parents Practice

Review the steps to the skills as often as you can during the course of the sessions. Point to the poster and have participants read (or recollect if they are not readers) along with you.

Be sure participants have the skill steps on display in their homes. At the end of each session distribute “refrigerator sheets,” which are small posters that give the name and the four steps for the skill that has been presented. When you give out these sheets, repeat the skill steps several times to help participants (especially nonreaders) memorize them. You can suggest that participants make a mark on the refrigerator sheet each time they use a skill.

Have participants talk with their children about the skills. They may want to get their children actively involved in helping them practice the skills. Note that parenting skills are used “with” children, not “on” children. They are not tricks designed to get children to do what you want. They

are ways to help parent and child live together comfortably so it is natural for parents and children to practice them together. It is a real bonus if children learn to use them too!

Facilitators should also agree to practice the skills and tell about a time when they used each skill at the next meeting.

Give positive reinforcement for all efforts to use the skill even when the efforts are unsuccessful. If parents did not attempt to use the skill during the week, find out why and work with them to overcome the barriers. This may require individual discussion after the class. If parents refuse to try to practice the skills at home or are truly unable to do so, they will not get the full benefit of the class so you may want to give them a choice as to whether to continue.

Some Barriers to Practicing

They lost the skill sheet or forgot to put it on the refrigerator.

Their children are in foster care.

They tried but it didn't work.

Their partner doesn't want them to.

Their kids don't want them to.

Changing something as basic as parenting style is difficult for any of us, especially when life is stressful. Participants will need all the patience and encouragement you can give them. Notice any effort they have made and comment on it. Emphasize that they are working on changing themselves, not their children, so they should not worry if their children don't respond positively to their use of the skill. Invite group members to follow your example by offering encouragement and assistance to those who are having difficulty.

Leading Discussions

Although the teaching and practice of the five skills is the purpose of the group, sometimes participants will need to discuss related issues and concerns. Be aware, though, that there is some force, like gravity, that pulls groups into tangential discussions. Resist this force! Keep discussions brief and on the topic.

Tips for Effective Discussions

When asking questions, make them open-ended (beginning with the words "what" and "how") to encourage people to talk about their thoughts and feelings. Ask one question at a time and especially avoid following an open-ended question with a closed question: "How would you feel if. . . Do you remember feeling like that?"

Encourage everyone to participate. Give each person a chance during each meeting. Link comments that relate what one person has said to a point another person has made or to a skill being taught.

Honor people for the risk they take in speaking before a group. Thank them for sharing their thoughts.

Sometimes participants bring up issues that are not relevant to the task at hand. It can be helpful at the beginning of each session to hang a sheet of newsprint and label it "The Bin." In this "bin" you can place questions and topics that you wish to return to at a later time.

Working with Individuals in a Group Context

Participants assume various roles in a group and often maintain these roles throughout its life. Many roles are helpful, aiding in teaching the skills and improving relationships among group members. But members may adopt roles that hinder group effectiveness. Understanding and anticipating participants' self-appointed roles and related behavior will help facilitators ensure that members make a positive contribution.

Difficult behavior on the part of a participant usually becomes apparent right away, but it is important to be aware of participants' strengths. Some may contribute ideas and suggestions or may readily volunteer for role plays. Others may take the risk of sharing their most difficult personal challenges.

The effectiveness of the group is threatened when members assume unhelpful roles. Some parents may monopolize discussion by talking at every opportunity, using valuable time and preventing others from expressing themselves. Other parents

have answers for everything, give advice freely, and claim already to be using each skill when it is introduced. Others object to any new idea. They may claim that they have tried the skills and know they won't work with their children. Angry parents may express their feelings, often as an aside or under their breath, or they may be completely unresponsive, positioning themselves away from the group. And from time to time parents come to Parenting Skills Workshops who are overwhelmed by personal problems that interfere with their ability to benefit from the series.

The best tools for working with difficult parents are the five parenting skills. Build trust with participants by using ENCOURAGEMENT. Use CAN DO to teach them your expectations about how behavior in class. Use CHOICES to make them active partners in the teaching process and to help them learn how to benefit from the class. Use RESPECTING FEELINGS to strengthen your relationship with each participant and to help them understand their feelings and frustrations. You will need SELF-CONTROL.

Allowing parents to express their needs and feelings can be helpful but can also take up a lot of group time. Sometimes it is necessary to spend time with a parent individually before, after, or during class (while your cofacilitator leads the group).

Substance abuse is in a different category from the problems mentioned above. It is often an underlying factor in cases of child abuse and neglect, and you must recognize the possibility that a parent may come to class under the influence of alcohol or another drug. Handling participants who are drunk or high requires special skill. It may help to talk with social workers in your community who work with substance abusers. These problems are easier to handle if you have had time to develop a relationship with the participant. Participants who are drunk or high should not be allowed to attend workshop sessions.

Putting It All Together

We hope that you will find the tips in this chapter helpful, but of course you will not become a master facilitator simply by reading this book. As you lead more sessions you will develop your own style, learning as you go along. You will be successful if you consider yourself a part of the working group rather than above or outside it. Your participants and your cofacilitator will help you. They will forgive you and laugh with you rather than at you when you make mistakes. They will share in your growth as you share in theirs.

Chapter 5

WHEN IS HELP NEEDED?

The Parenting Skills Workshop Series is an educational program, and most facilitators are not trained as therapists. As a Parenting Skills Workshop Series facilitator you will hear from parents about their children's emotional and behavior problems. Some of these problems will benefit from, or even require, the attention of a mental health professional. This chapter provides some guidelines for advising parents on when to seek professional assistance from a family counselor, child psychologist or psychiatrist, or qualified social worker.

Persistent Behavior Patterns

A persistent pattern of behavior in one or more of the following areas may indicate a need for professional help.

1. Bullying behavior (either as aggressor or as victim). Example: children consistently refuse invitations from Eddy to come over to play. A parent finally explains to Eddy's mother that his son is afraid of Eddy because he wants to fight instead of play and friends usually get hurt. If his parents can work out ways for Eddy to play in more socially acceptable ways, outside help will not be needed. If they cannot, a professional may be helpful in repairing what must be a very unhappy situation for Eddy.
2. Destructive behavior (repeatedly destroying their own or other children's toys and possessions).
3. Inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality after age six.
4. Persistent lying.
5. Setting fires.

6. Hurting animals with deliberate intent (children under age five may not understand that they are inflicting pain).

7. Stealing.

8. Loneliness (a child who finds it impossible to make friends).

8. Prolonged sadness, depression, or anger (all children have these feelings sometimes. It is cause for concern when they are dominant all the time.)

It is important to remember that many children exhibit one or more of these behaviors at some point; when problem behaviors become a pattern that is repeated, help may be needed. For example, it is not unusual for a preschool child to take a desirable item from a store once or even twice. Usually, if an adult says, firmly and kindly, "You cannot take things from a store without paying for them. Now we will have to return what you have taken and tell the store manager how sorry we are that this happened," children will understand that stealing is not allowed and they will not do it again. If, however, the child continues to steal in spite of these efforts, a chat with a professional may be helpful. Similarly, a seven-year-old may find some matches and accidentally start a fire. Although the consequences of such an act may be serious, if a parent's explanation and reprimand prevent the child from playing with matches again, counseling should not be necessary. If, however, the child persists in attempting to start fires, the parents should seek consultation. As a third example, many children go through brief periods of time when they do not have friends, or bully a younger child, or are bullied by another. These children can usually be helped by sensitive, imaginative parents who are

willing to devote time and effort to helping the child. If, however, parents feel that they have done everything they can think of and the child's problem persists, professional advice may be very helpful.

Deviation from a Child's Usual Behavior

Behavior that is markedly different from the child's usual behavior may indicate a need for help. When a usually fearless child develops fears that persist over time, a usually happy child becomes sad or depressed for a period of time, or a child behaves in ways that are markedly different from normal, parents need to pay attention. Sometimes a single event or misadventure caused the change, and extra attention, explanations, and help in developing coping skills will be all that is needed. But if the behavioral or mood change persists for a period of weeks, a professional may be able to provide helpful insights or suggestions. It is difficult to know how long to wait before looking for help. Perhaps the image of a toothache is useful—a few twinges for several days can be treated with over-the-counter medication and a wait and see attitude. If the tooth aches so persistently that the suffering person can think of nothing else, it is past time to go to the dentist. So it is with behavioral blips. Every child exhibits signs of worrisome behavior at one time or another. It is the persistence, intensity, and duration of the behavior that indicates the need for help.

Disruptive Behavior

Behavior that disrupts, worries, or significantly interferes with the lives of other family members may be a reason for consulting a child psychologist or social worker who has training in work with children. For example, the Evans family is unable to enjoy a meal together at a restaurant because eight-year-old Nina will not stay with them at the table. She runs around, often screaming and disturbing other patrons. If this behavior happens once, it may not be cause for concern, but if it persists and the parents are unable to stop it, it is a problem.

Behavior that interferes with a child's ability to sleep, eat, or interact with others such as the following might require professional attention.

1. At the end of the first six weeks of school Lisa is still so afraid of fire drills in her kindergarten that she does not go to sleep before midnight but lies awake crying and asking anxiously if her parents think there might be a fire drill tomorrow.
2. Tommy (age six) has become so afraid of dogs that he refuses to play outside. If Tommy's fear lasts for a week it can be described as a developmental blip. If, however, it lasts for a month, outside intervention may be needed.

These guidelines are intended as suggestions only. Behavior that seems problematic in one family may not cause a problem in another. Families also differ in their abilities to deal with and tolerate difficult behavior by children. Competent professionals understand these differences among families and will be sympathetic in listening to problems and thinking through solutions. A behavior that is difficult for one family may not be an issue for another. As a parent educator, your role is to teach parenting skills, not to give advice about children's emotional problems. You can, however, advise parents to seek help and assist them in doing so.

Chapter 6

THE WORKSHOPS

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP

This chapter gives a detailed description of how to conduct the eight workshops of the Parenting Skills Series. The first week is an introduction to the series. The following six weeks concentrate on the five skills; SELF-CONTROL is considered so important that two workshops are devoted to it. The final meeting is a reunion for the group to be held several weeks after the classes have ended.

Workshop Outline

- Preparation
- Welcome
- Opening circle
- How parenting skills are useful
- What we will cover
- Expectations
- Confidentiality
- How would you teach someone?
- Thinking about how children grow
- Our parenting roots
- Homework (“Talking with your child”)
- Closing circle
- After the class

Preparation

Chairs should be set in a circle with a gap where role plays can be enacted. At first, facilitators should sit together to one side of the gap but within the circle. Later on it is helpful for facilitators to separate, mingling with participants. You will need a large writing surface. We recommend using newsprint and markers instead of a chalkboard because you can save what is written down. Save valuable class time by taping several pieces of newsprint to an easel (or the wall if that is permitted) before the class begins. If possible, the room should be made homey by adding a small carpet or other amenities. We suggest offering coffee, tea, juice, and light refreshments. You will also need refreshments for the children. In subsequent workshops you will need to have enough refrigerator sheets (a sheet for each skill listing its steps) copied to hand out at the end of the session. They will be attractive and easy to distinguish if you copy each skill on a different color of paper.

Welcome

Greet each participant individually. Help participants settle their children with the child care provider. Give out name tags and have participants sign the attendance sheet, checking to be sure they include addresses and phone numbers. Help each participant find a seat in the circle. Encourage people to help themselves to refreshments.

INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP

Opening Circle

Before starting, let people know where to find bathrooms, water fountains, and exits and inform them of your smoking policy. Have participants go around the circle, sharing their own first name, first names and ages of their children, and something they hope to learn about being a parent. Facilitators should start this process by introducing themselves, being sure to include something you hope to learn. On one sheet of newsprint write the first name and age of each child for future reference. On a second sheet write what each participant hopes to learn.

How Parenting Skills Are Useful

The usefulness of parenting skills is illustrated by the “Toolbox” story. There are two purposes to this story. One is to let parents know that you are not planning to take anything away from them but rather to give them new options in addition to those they are already familiar with. The other is to illustrate that it is important to have a variety of skills because parents encounter a variety of problems.

“Imagine that you live in an apartment and your landlord is supposed to take care of all the repairs. He usually doesn’t keep things very well repaired, though, so you buy a toolbox with a hammer and some nails. Later that week the stairstep on the front porch gets loose so you get your hammer and nails and nail it back on, which makes you feel pretty good. The next week one of your kitchen chairs comes apart. You probably should screw it back together, but you don’t have a screwdriver so you nail it back together and it holds, at least for the time being. Later that week, though, you have a real problem. The water pipe in the bathroom springs a leak. You go down into the basement to shut off the water but you discover that you need a wrench to turn the valve. By the time your landlord arrives, your bathroom and bedroom are flooded.”

Ask participants if they have had any experiences like this. Explain that parenting skills are like tools. Different skills are needed in different situations.

What We Will Cover

“We will teach five parenting skills: ENCOURAGEMENT, CAN DO, CHOICES, SELF-CONTROL, and RESPECTING FEELINGS. These skills are easy to learn. Their main purpose is to help you get your child to cooperate with you so as to grow up in a way you feel good about. For your child to act differently, you must act differently. These skills help you act in a positive way so your child can also act in a positive way.

“Starting next week we will teach one skill each week, except that we will take two weeks for SELF-CONTROL, which takes lots of practice. Our final class will be a reunion that will take place three weeks after the seventh class.”

Expectations

Facilitators can start to build trust with participants by explaining that although we will expect certain things from them they can also expect certain things from us. For each expectation of participants there is also an expectation for facilitators.

“Our main ground rule is that each of us should be considerate and supportive of others in the group. It will be easier to try new ideas and learn new skills if we support each other, and it will be more fun too!

“Everyone will participate in discussions and role plays. We will make it as easy as possible. It’s okay to make mistakes. We will learn by helping each other improve as we go along.

“It is our job as facilitators to make sure everyone gets a fair chance to participate and to make sure that all the information gets presented. We may need to cut discussions short at times.

INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP

“We will start on time and end on time.

Arrive prepared to learn and do your best.”
Explain that it is important to come early if you need to get your children settled in child care.

“We will take a ten-minute break.” Participants may excuse themselves to go to the bathroom, check on their children, or smoke.

“Attendance is important, and certificates will be given to all those who attend five or more sessions. Please come prepared to learn and do your best work.

“Each week we will give you a skill to practice. We will help you be ready to practice, it and you will be expected to practice with your children, your partner, or a friend.”

Many participants have difficulties practicing the skills, for example, if their children are in foster care. Explain that it is acceptable to use the skills with a partner or friend and that these are “people skills” that can be just as useful with adults as with children. If participants have ongoing concerns about practicing, speak with them individually after the session.

Confidentiality

“Since we will be talking together about families and problems, we agree to keep these discussions within this room. You will not discuss personal information about others in the group, and we won’t either. There is one exception. If a child is in danger we will call the Child Protection hotline. We will do this only if there is a danger to someone at the immediate time. We would not report a past incident. If you would like us to report your attendance or talk with a caseworker about your progress in the group we will be happy to do so with your written permission.”

Even though parents in the class may feel resentful toward hotline reports, it is important to mention them. Otherwise parents might rightly

complain that you encouraged them to admit their problems, then betrayed their trust by reporting them.

After presenting your expectations and confidentiality policy, be sure that all participants understand and accept your statements.

How Would You Teach Someone?

The purpose of this activity is to engage the group in a role play that shows how learning can take place through demonstration and practice. “The Cash Register” is presented as follows:

Ask if anyone has ever made sales using a cash register. Describe a situation in which the person who uses a cash register is working in a store and is asked by the manager to teach a new employee how to handle a sale. Choose a participant to be the new employee and have the two of them act out the learning experience. Ask the participant who is taking the role of the instructor, “How would you teach [name of person]? What would you do first?” Usually the “instructor” will spontaneously include most or all of the five elements of structured learning—presenting the skill, modeling, role playing, performance feedback, and transfer training. For example, a participant might say, “Well, first I would show them how to do it and explain how a cash register works, then I would let them try it with me. If they screwed up I would tell them what they did wrong, then I would let them try it with a customer.”

In this idealized scenario the participant includes all five elements of structured learning. This won’t happen every time, but by asking questions or by getting suggestions from the group you will be able to illuminate all the elements. More important, participants will already have begun to engage in the role playing and feedback that will be vital to the success of the group later on. This role play allows parents to get used to the process without having to worry about learning a skill.

INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP

Thinking about How Children Grow

Turn to the names of children listed on newsprint and start with children under age three. Ask the group, “What are some important things to know about children under three? What are some of the things children under three can do, can understand, are like?” Continue this discussion, moving up through age groups. Allow parents to talk about the difficulties of parenting children in different stages of development. Help parents discover what expectations are realistic for children of different ages. Draw a line down the middle of the newsprint. As parents talk, write their observations on the left side of the paper. Use the right side for your own comments. This enables you to show parents how their children’s specific behaviors relate to patterns of growth and development and allows you to interpret negative comments in a positive light. For example, next to “3 yrs old—gets into everything” you might write “curious.”

Our Parenting Roots

This open-ended discussion allows parents to think about where and how they learned how to parent. It can be an opportunity to recognize that the world has changed and thus they need to change too. It can also be an opportunity for parents to acknowledge that they are not happy with the way their parents treated them as children and thus set the stage for an effort to learn parenting skills that are more effective than the ones that were modeled to them. Keep the discussion focused on change by asking:

“Think of one way your parents parented you that you do differently. What is it and what or who caused you to change?”

This discussion can bring up strong emotions. Encourage all to participate but don’t push. Participants may need to process their feelings with you after the class. Allow them to build on their parents’ strengths as well as rejecting their

flaws and acknowledge the extent to which they may already be improving on their parents’ example.

Homework

“Starting next week you will be asked to practice the skill you have learned. At the beginning of each class we will ask participants to tell about a time when they used a skill. Since we did not teach a skill this week, your homework will be to talk with your children about something that is interesting to them. [Get examples from the group.] You don’t have to have a long conversation, but be prepared to tell us about it next week.”

Closing Circle

“Each class ends by having members share in response to a topic or question. The topic for this first week is ‘Something my child needs from me.’”

Start the closing circle by having one facilitator respond, then go from one group member to the next, including the second facilitator.

After the Class

Say good-bye to participants individually and let them know you are looking forward to seeing them next week. Respond to their questions and concerns. Be sure you know how to contact all participants and take care of any other business such as gas vouchers or bus tokens. Tell participants how and when to contact you or the program coordinator during the week if they have questions or concerns. Encourage participants to help neaten and rearrange the room before they leave.

Workshop Outline

- Greeting
- Review (“Talking with your child”)
- Introduce ENCOURAGEMENT
- Situations
- Present ENCOURAGEMENT
- Present the modeling display
- Selecting role players
- Preparing the role play
- Acting out the role play
- Friendly coaching
- Additional role plays
- Homework (practice ENCOURAGEMENT)
- Closing circle

Greeting

Have the sign-in list handy and be sure participants sign it each week so you have an accurate attendance record. We recommend that you not permit people to join the sessions after the first week unless they discuss the information in the orientation session with a facilitator or with the program coordinator. New members can upset the delicate fabric of cohesiveness you worked so hard to establish in the first session so we advise caution in admitting them even if they go through an individual orientation. Both facilitators should participate in any decision to admit new participants. No new participants should be accepted after the second week.

Chances are there will be at least one new person, and in any case it may be helpful to review expectations and confidentiality guidelines.

Review

Remind participants of their homework and ask them to talk about a conversation with their child about something the child is interested in. Hear from as many participants as time permits.

Introduce ENCOURAGEMENT

Share the excitement! It is time to start work on the first skill. Each week prepare to introduce the skill by reviewing the section on it in this manual before the class begins.

“ENCOURAGEMENT is a skill you use when you notice something about your child that you feel good about. It could be something the child doesn’t usually do such as clearing his plate from the table after breakfast, or it could be something she is naturally good at, for example, skateboarding. It could be something the child is trying but not very good at such as putting shoes on but getting them on the wrong feet.”

Situations

Have each group member recall one time when her or his child did something the parent liked. Write the situations on newsprint preceded by the first name of the person who gave them. These situations will provide subject matter for the role plays later on. Facilitators should participate in this activity by providing situations of their own. One of the facilitators’ situations should be used for the modeling display.

Present ENCOURAGEMENT

“The purpose of ENCOURAGEMENT is to help your children feel good about who they are and what they do. It also helps you discover and value your children’s strengths.”

ENCOURAGEMENT

1. Notice something you like.
2. Notice how you feel.
3. Say it! (I feel . . . that you. . .)
4. Notice how your child responds.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Display the ENCOURAGEMENT poster and read the steps to the skill. First, read them exactly as they are on the poster, then read through them a second time checking for understanding and providing clarification as needed. Be aware that some participants may not be able to read. They will need you to point to the steps and read through them repeatedly throughout the session and in following sessions. This way all participants will recognize and remember the steps when they practice at home.

Present the Modeling Display

Demonstrate successful use of the ENCOURAGEMENT skill using a situation that one of the facilitators described earlier. We recommend that cofacilitators prepare and practice the modeling display to make sure each step is presented clearly.

After the modeling display, check with the participants to see if they can identify the steps and if they understand the skill.

Break

Give participants a chance to have coffee and refreshments and check on their children if necessary. Don't allow break time to drag on past ten minutes. You will need a full hour for role playing.

Selecting Role Players

This is the participants' first opportunity to role play a skill, and some will be reluctant. Make a guess as to which participant is most ready and ask him or her to choose a partner and enact a situation.

Preparing the Role Play

Have the actor (the person playing the role of the parent) describe his or her child to the co-actor (the person playing the child), just as was done for the modeling display. Encourage the co-actor to ask questions to get enough information to do a good job. Then have the actor describe the setting as was done for the modeling display. The observers listen to these descriptions, too, so they can follow the role play.

Refer to the poster and repeat the steps to the skill. As you do so, check to be sure the actor knows how to do each step.

Assign friendly coaches to help with each step. ("Jo Ann, watch to see if Dale notices what Billy is good at.") If there are more observers than steps, assign several friendly coaches to each step.

Acting Out the Role Play

When the role play is about to begin, one facilitator takes one of the seats vacated by the actor and co-actor and the other stands to the side to assist the role players if necessary.

Don't expect great role plays at this stage, and remember that learning the skill is what is important, not the quality of the acting.

The role of the co-actor is very important. Co-actors should try to imagine themselves as the child responding to the parent. Most co-actors will naturally try to help the actor by responding positively to efforts to use the skill. This is fine because you are trying to establish a norm of mutual help in the group.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Friendly Coaching

Begin friendly coaching with the co-actor, then proceed to the group members, focusing on each skill step in order. Next, ask the participant to self-evaluate. Comments from the facilitators come last. Friendly coaching works best when the participants rather than the facilitators give most of the input.

Additional Role Plays

Participants learn best by doing so try to keep open-ended discussion to a minimum and do as many role plays as possible. Set a goal of doing at least three role plays in each session.

Homework

Pass out sheets listing the steps in the ENCOURAGEMENT skill. Tell participants to tape these sheets to their refrigerators as a reminder to practice every day. Explain that next week you will ask all participants to describe a time when they used the skill.

Review once more the steps to the skill, reading them exactly as they are written, pointing to the poster as you read. Discuss with participants when they will use the skill and the positive qualities they expect to notice in their children.

“ENCOURAGEMENT is a way to build a strong and positive bond with your child. This bond will help both of you when difficulties or conflicts arise.”

Closing Circle

Go around the circle, having each participant tell “something my child is good at.” Wish the participants success and tell them you are looking forward to hearing about their experiences.

Workshop Outline

- Review ENCOURAGEMENT
- Introduce CAN DO
- Situations
- Present CAN DO
- Present the modeling display
- Role playing
- Friendly coaching
- Homework (practice CAN DO)
- Closing circle

Review ENCOURAGEMENT

Review the steps to ENCOURAGEMENT. Point to the poster and have participants read the steps (or recollect them if they are not readers) along with you. Then ask each participant to talk about an attempt to use the skill. Offer assistance when a participant has a problem using the skill, but be sure to use ENCOURAGEMENT to validate each attempt, even if it was unsuccessful or incorrect.

Introduce CAN DO

“CAN DO is a skill you can use when you notice your child doing something you don’t want her or him to do.”

Situations

Ask all participants to mention a time when their children were doing something the parents didn’t want them to do. Help them choose a specific incident as opposed to a general behavior. For example, if a parent says, “He picks on his little brother,” have the parent recall a particular time when that happened.

Present CAN DO

“The purpose of CAN DO is to help your child change from a behavior that is not acceptable to a behavior that is acceptable. CAN DO helps you guide your children instead of frustrating them because children need to be creative and explore their world. Use CAN DO instead of just saying ‘Don’t.’”

CAN DO

1. Notice what you don’t want your child to do.
2. Think of something your child can do instead.
3. Tell your child what he or she can do.
4. Help your child if necessary.

Present the Modeling Display

CAN DO is popular with parents because it helps them help their children control their behavior. In choosing examples for the modeling display pick ones that show the parent getting relief because the child’s behavior improves.

Break

Role Playing

Keep track of which participants have been primary actors and focus on those who have not yet done so.

Friendly Coaching

Emphasize that participants have an important job to do, namely helping each other learn to use the skills successfully.

Homework

Give parents refrigerator sheets listing the steps for CAN DO, read through them with the class, and make sure that parents are putting them on their refrigerators.

“CAN DO is a way to teach your child how to behave appropriately. Often

CAN DO

children want to behave well but don't know how, so in their frustration they behave badly.”

When using CAN DO it can be helpful to give more than one option. For example, “You need either to go outdoors or find something quiet to do in your room.” This is different from the CHOICES skill, in which the child actively participates in the decision-making process.

Closing Circle

Ask each participant to tell about “something I am trying to do better.”

Workshop Outline

- Review CAN DO
- Introduce CHOICES
- Situations
- Present CHOICES
- Present the modeling display
- Role playing and friendly coaching
- Homework (practice CHOICES)
- Closing circle

Review CAN DO

Read through the steps to the skill and ask participants to talk about a time when they used CAN DO with their children. Help them focus on their own efforts to use the skill rather than their children's resulting behavior. Check to see if they are going through the thinking steps as well as the action steps.

Introduce CHOICES

“CHOICES is a skill you can use to help your child make a decision or to help you and your child make a decision together. For example, your child might need to figure out how to deal with a girl in school who is picking on her. Sometimes CHOICES can be used instead of CAN DO when your child is thinking of doing something you don't want her to do.”

Situations

Have all participants describe a situation in which their children need to make a decision about how to act.

Present CHOICES

“The purpose of CHOICES is to help your children learn to make decisions that affect their lives. Another purpose is to have parents share decision making with their children. When using CAN DO, the parent makes the decision; when using CHOICES the child makes the decision within limits that are decided by the parent. CHOICES is an important skill because children need to learn to make good decisions and your life is easier

when you don't have to make all the decisions for your child.”

CHOICES

1. Help your child understand the problem.
2. Your child and you think of two or more reasonable choices.
3. Have your child choose and tell you the choice.
4. Help your child follow through.

Present the Modeling Display

The benefits of CHOICES come when children are able to make good decisions without the intervention of their parents so the modeling displays should include examples of children coming up with options. Parents sometimes misunderstand CHOICES as simply a pair of CAN DO'S, missing the point that children need to learn to brainstorm good options on their own. The statement, “You can finish your dinner and have some cake or you can decide that you are done eating,” is a variation on the CAN DO skill because it does not engage the child in the decision-making process. A good phrase for the parent to use in Step 2 is, “What do you think you could do?” Only after the child has presented options should the parent do so.

“Although you will need to come up with at least two choices that are reasonable, you can allow your child to put forth ideas that are not so reasonable (‘Buy me a computer game and then I won't be so bored.’).

CHOICES

This can clear the air and help you get on with the business of practical decision making. But CHOICES works best when you really consider all of your child's ideas. Often children will come up with solutions you would not have thought of. Sometimes discussion of your child's 'unreasonable' ideas can lead to a compromise solution you both feel good about."

Remember to process each modeling display. Ask the participants to describe how each step was done. Check to be sure they understand.

Break

Role Playing and Friendly Coaching

This skill is more difficult and time-consuming than ENCOURAGEMENT or CAN DO. Role plays will take more time and require more repetition. In a successful role play the actor (parent) and co-actor (child) will collaborate to solve the problem stated in Step 1. Observers may suggest ideas if the role players get stuck. When participants have achieved a spirit of collaboration, point out that this is precisely the spirit that we hope parents and children can reach together using the CHOICES skill.

Homework

Review the steps to CHOICES. Remind the group to place the skill sheets on their refrigerators, use the skill at least once each day, and be prepared to tell about using it at the next session.

"CHOICES is a way to share decision making with your child. When your child makes a good decision on his own, that's one less problem for you to solve. More than that, it's something you can take pride in. Your child has taken a step forward on the road to self-reliance."

Closing Circle

Ask each person to describe "one way I am a good parent."

Workshop Outline

- Review CHOICES
- Introduce SELF-CONTROL
- Situations
- Brainstorm (“body messages”)
- Present SELF-CONTROL
- Present the first modeling display
- Brainstorm
- Present the second modeling display
- Homework
- Closing circle

Review CHOICES

Review the steps to CHOICES and ask the participants to tell about a time when they used the skill.

Introduce SELF-CONTROL

“Now that you have some new skills that you can use with your children, we are going to introduce a skill that you use with yourself. This skill is called SELF-CONTROL, and it is very important because many times you will need to use it before you can use any of the other skills. SELF-CONTROL is a skill you use when your body starts to send messages that you are about to lose control of yourself.

“We are going to spend two weeks on SELF-CONTROL. Before practicing it we will spend time talking about the steps because each person needs to have a plan for keeping self-control.”

Situations

Facilitators should set the tone by giving a situation such as, “It’s raining and my eight-year-old son and my six-year-old daughter have been inside all day. My infant son won’t stop crying. My oldest son pushes my daughter so that she hits her head on the corner of the dresser and starts screaming.”

Brainstorm

Have participants talk about the “body messages” (physical sensations) that warn them that they are about to lose control. List these body messages on newsprint. As participants talk, have them consider the

early messages that come before the big messages. A participant in one group said, “I know I’m losing control when I reach for a pot to throw.” The facilitators helped her think about the signals her body was sending up to the moment when she reached for the pot.

Present SELF-CONTROL

“The purpose of SELF-CONTROL is to help you act the way you want to act instead of acting in a way you feel bad about later. For example, many people don’t want to hit their children, but when things get too stressful they lose self-control. Later, they regret the consequences, which might be losing a measure of their child’s trust or being subject to a child abuse report. Another purpose of SELF-CONTROL is to teach your children by example how to handle their feelings.”

SELF-CONTROL

1. Pay attention to body messages telling you that you are about to lose control.
2. Think of ways to control yourself.
3. Choose a way and get control of yourself.
4. Decide how to act with your child.

In Step 4 you may want to decide to use another parenting skill, such as CAN DO or CHOICES.

SELF-CONTROL 1

Present the First Modeling Display

The modeling displays for SELF-CONTROL are more difficult than previous ones because you are portraying an emotional situation. You are a role model in the full sense of the word, setting an example showing that a person on the edge of losing control can decide not to do so. Here are some tips for SELF-CONTROL modeling displays:

If you choose a real situation from your own life, be sure it is one that you handled well and feel good about. Don't place yourself in the position of having to reevaluate your life in the middle of a class.

Choose a situation that everyone agrees is stressful.

Take time to create the mood by describing the setting and the characters of the children. It may help to give some background telling why the day has already been stressful for you.

Allow yourself to empathize with the character you are creating. Chances are you will be able to feel the body messages that person might feel.

Break

SELF-CONTROL Brainstorm

"Before we start practicing the skill, let's take some time to plan for Step 2 (Think of ways to control yourself). It is helpful to have decided on some ways beforehand so you have them ready when you need them. Let's take time now to share ideas of ways to control ourselves." (Call the list "Ways to Control Yourself" and write it on newsprint.)

Techniques for SELF-CONTROL fall into two categories, those that involve getting away from the situation for a while, such as taking a walk or calling a friend, and those that can be used at the moment such as counting to ten or reciting the Serenity Prayer. Have participants think of both kinds or responses for the list because sometimes it will be better to escape the situation temporarily and sometimes it will be impossible to do so.

When the list is complete, have a discussion in which participants share ideas about which ways they believe they can use to control themselves. These are tools they can carry and have ready when needed.

Present the Second Modeling Display

Do a second modeling display at this point to reinforce the value of the skill and help participants see how it is used. Be sure to describe the steps used in thinking to the group. Inserting a thinking step between a "trigger" (an event that causes a stress response) and an impulsive response is a way to slow the response and thus interrupt the impulsive behavior. This slowing down should be modeled for the group. One way to illustrate the idea of stopping to think before acting is to hold up a sign that says "Stop!" (you can make it look like a traffic sign) between Steps 1 and 2.

If you decide in Step 4 to use another parenting skill, it is sufficient to say, "I think I'll use CHOICES. I guess my daughter does need a little more say in her own life." It is not necessary to role play the other skill and could confuse the participants.

Since you do three modeling displays for this skill (two the first week and one this week), it can be helpful to vary the situations. For example, one situation might be with a young child, one with a teenager, and one with an adult partner.

Homework

"Since you have not yet had a chance to practice the SELF-CONTROL skill, use the first three skills as much as possible during the coming week. Plan to use each of them at least once and come prepared to talk about your experiences next week."

Review the steps for ENCOURAGEMENT, CAN DO, and CHOICES.

Closing Circle

Ask each member to describe "something I am trying to do better."

Workshop Outline

- Review
- SELF-CONTROL (continued)
- Situations (continued)
- Modeling display
- Role playing and friendly coaching
- Plan reunion
- Homework
- Closing circle

Review

Allow extra time for review because you will be discussing three skills. You will probably find that some participants do not understand the skills and have difficulty remembering the steps. Although the skill steps may be simple, life is complicated and using these skills may require a fundamental adjustment in how parents think of themselves and their children.

SELF-CONTROL (continued)

Post the list “Ways to Control Yourself” compiled last week and read it aloud to the group. Have a discussion in which participants identify one or two ways that they believe will work for them. These ideas will serve as tools for the role plays and for subsequent real-life situations.

Situations (continued)

Post the list of situations participants mentioned last week and read it aloud. Ask if they would like to add any new situations to the list.

Modeling Display

This modeling display is a review and opens the door to role playing by participants. Try to avoid discussion and move directly to the role-playing segment of the workshop.

Role Playing and Friendly Coaching

Have as many participants as possible do SELF-CONTROL role plays. Take a short break at the end of the first hour of class and continue role playing until half an hour before the end of the class.

Participants sometimes become agitated during SELF-CONTROL role plays because they are reliving stressful situations. Be prepared to intervene if anyone appears to be losing self-control.

Plan Reunion

You are now six weeks into the Parenting Skills Workshop Series and you and your participants have bonded as a group. You have established a norm of participants encouraging each other and offering ideas and assistance. Participants have worked together as actor and co-actor to create successful role plays. They have shared their problems and their ideas. They have stood in for one another when someone got stuck in a role play or was too shy to go “on stage.” It is time to plan the celebration that will take place during Session 8, the reunion session.

First, confirm the date and location. We suggest that the reunion occur three or four weeks after the seventh class so the participants will have had a period of time to use the skills at home. The location may be your usual meeting place or another, more congenial location such as a park. Organize a dish-to-pass dinner, with

SELF-CONTROL 2

participants bringing different foods. A class member may take charge of reminding people. The reunion is a celebration of what you have learned together so participants whose children are in foster care may wish to make arrangements to bring them. The program coordinator may be able to assist in these arrangements. Partners who have not attended the series are also invited.

Homework

“The homework for this week is to stay tuned to your body messages and use the SELF-CONTROL skill whenever those body messages tell you that you might lose your self-control. You each now have several ways to gain control of yourself so put these in your toolbox and use them during the week.”

Let participants know that you will also be using the SELF-CONTROL skill and plan to have a story to share next week.

“Learning to use SELF-CONTROL is hard, but it is worth it. You will discover great pride when you are able to handle situations that would previously have caused you to become angry, tearful, or paralyzed.”

Closing Circle

Ask each person to tell “how I want my child to remember me.”

Workshop Outline

- Review
- Introduce RESPECTING FEELINGS
- Brainstorm
- Situations
- Present RESPECTING FEELINGS
- Present the modeling display
- Role playing and friendly coaching
- Homework
- Closing circle

Review

At this point in the workshop you are asking people, including yourselves, to share personal information. All information should be treated with respect, and it may be helpful to remind participants of the confidentiality guidelines they have agreed to.

Introduce RESPECTING FEELINGS

“RESPECTING FEELINGS is a skill you use when your child has strong feelings about something. Children don’t have a right to misbehave, but all of us, including our children, have a right to our feelings. RESPECTING FEELINGS is a way for us to help children deal with their feelings. It is important to use it when children have negative feelings such as anger, but it is also useful when children are excited or happy.”

Brainstorm

Have the group generate a list of words that express feelings and write them on newsprint. Participants may not have much experience identifying feelings or using language to describe them. This is a barrier to using the skill so it is important to help participants learn to use such words.

Situations

Ask participants to “tell about a situation when your child had a strong feeling.”

Present RESPECTING FEELINGS

“The purpose of RESPECTING FEELINGS is to help your child understand and accept his or her feelings and to show that you respect those feelings. To do this you sometimes have to put aside your own feelings. Another purpose is to learn more about how your child feels about things that happen in his or her life.

RESPECTING FEELINGS

1. Watch and listen to your child.
2. Think of a word that describes what your child might be feeling.
3. Think about why your child might be feeling that way.
4. Check your ideas with your child.

Present the Modeling Display

People often experience a sense of anticlimax when they hear you use this skill. They wonder why you haven’t helped the child resolve whatever problem was causing uncomfortable feelings. You may need to explain that the purpose of respecting feelings is not to solve practical problems but to show your child that you care and you understand how he or she is feeling. Working on the problem that caused the feelings can be a next step, but sometimes the opportunity for self-expression is all that is necessary.

It is helpful for the facilitator who is playing the child to acknowledge the use of the skill by affirming the

RESPECTING FEELINGS

statement that was made in Step 4, for example, if the facilitator who is playing the parent says, “I guess you’re pretty upset that you got suspended,” the facilitator who is playing the child can say, “I’m mad that I got suspended! It was the other kid’s fault.” Although it is important to keep the modeling display simple, let participants know that they can use RESPECTING FEELINGS over and over if their child needs to get a big feeling off his chest.

Break

Role Playing and Friendly Coaching

These role plays are often very interesting and can provide an opportunity for growth on the part of participants. Actors have a tendency to jump back into their own parental agendas (“You know I told you to stay away from that kid!”), but when they use the skill successfully, co-actors often experience a visible release from the feeling they are portraying.

Some parents who come to the class may have difficulty separating their children’s feelings from their own. This skill can be a tool in helping them understand their child’s separateness.

Homework

“You have now learned the five parenting skills. Use each of them as much as possible between now and our reunion meeting. Keep the refrigerator sheets on your refrigerators as reminders. When we meet again we will talk about our experiences. We look forward to hearing about your successes, but we hope you will let us know when you had a hard time, too, because we want to help you succeed at all of the skills.

“As you think about using the skills, pay special attention to RESPECTING FEELINGS. Your children (or your partner) are more likely to

respect your feelings if you respect theirs. This can make family life happier and less stressful.”

Make sure participants know the date of the reunion and ensure that all plans are in place for the party.

Closing Circle

Ask participants to say “something I like about the person to my left.” When done, it is not uncommon for participants to ask if they can repeat the exercise going around the circle the other way.

Workshop Outline

- Preparation
- Greeting
- Review
- Evaluation
- Certificates
- Special food

Preparation

Seating should be divided so participants can work in two groups. Extra child care providers will be needed if parents have permission to bring children who are in foster care.

Greeting

Allow extra time for the welcome and getting everyone signed in and settled. Participants may bring partners who have not attended the series.

Review

Ask participants to name and recall the steps for each skill. As each is mentioned, put the poster up and ask them to recall a time when they used that skill. Ask if anyone can think of a time when more than one skill was used to resolve a situation.

Divide into two groups and give each group several scenarios to work with. Assisted by a facilitator, each group will discuss which skills are appropriate for the scenarios and prepare one or two role plays to present to the whole group. Be sure each of the skills is portrayed. Encourage the use of more than one skill to resolve the issue in the scenario if appropriate.

Evaluation

Participants are asked to complete the evaluation forms, and one-to-one assistance is given if needed. The forms are collected by the program coordinator or a facilitator.

The facilitator or program coordinator leads a semistructured group interview with the participants to gain more information about their general satisfaction with the series. How do they feel about the child care, the time the series was held, the site and the room, and the skills of the facilitators? How they learned about the class, what other skills they would like to learn, and whether they would recommend the series to a friend are examples of topics that can be included in the discussion. Participants are given the opportunity to talk among themselves, without the presence of the facilitators, about their feelings concerning the class, its curriculum, and its structure.

Certificates

This is the time to celebrate. Children are invited to join the group to watch while their parents are awarded certificates. Certificates are given to all who attended five or more sessions. Participants who attended all sessions should receive a certificate with a special seal or some other indication of perfect attendance. The certificates should be framed if possible. Encourage applause after each presentation.

Special Food

Everyone enjoys the food or meal that was planned by the group. Ask the child care providers to join the group to enjoy the food and offer to help watch the children if needed.

Chapter 7

THE ROLE OF THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The Community-Based Program

Good planning, good organization, and strong agency support are important building blocks of a community-based Parenting Skills Workshop Series program. The coordinator's best allies in establishing such a program are family court judges and lawyers, advocates for children, and Department of Social Service planners and supervisors. All community groups working to prevent child abuse and neglect should be invited to participate in planning. A coordinated plan is needed to gain funding and agency support to ensure referral of potential participants. Activities will include developing the program; preparing proposals; developing and managing budgets; educating supervisors, caseworkers, and other human service personnel to make appropriate referrals; and providing statistical, qualitative, and financial reports as needed. Program implementation includes recruiting and training facilitators, setting dates and locating sites, hiring child care providers, recruiting and registering parents, arranging for transportation for participants, reporting to all stakeholders, and evaluating the program.

In some regions Cornell Cooperative Extension provides a comprehensive program, managed by a coordinator, offering several series annually under contract to the county Department of Social Services. These workshops are part of the service plan for many families receiving children's services. The workshop series also appeals to special

audiences such as parents of toddlers and young children, parents of preteens and teens, parents of children with disabilities, or parents who are recovering from substance abuse. Despite the differences in family characteristics, parents learn much from each other and discover that they have many common concerns.

Facilitators

Facilitator teams are the core of the program. It is important to select facilitators who believe that

- all families have strengths.
- parents should be recognized as experts on their children.
- parenting education can have positive outcomes.
- cultural differences are valid and valuable.

The workshop is always led by two facilitators. The team concept is seen as critical for success in supporting the active, structured learning approach and presenting the skills. Also there may be times when one facilitator is called upon to handle a personal situation with one or two participants and the other facilitator needs to be available to maintain the group.

It is ideal if a male/female facilitator team can be used. Male/female teams are appropriate and effective for several reasons. Modeling appropriate interpersonal skill building between men and women is extremely valuable. Frequently couples

who are parenting together attend a series. They may be biological parents of all the children, members of a blended family, or in a family in which one partner has no biological relationship to the children. Men also attend the group as single parents, either custodial or noncustodial.

Facilitators bring information and skills but are also learners, acknowledging the competence and experience of the participants. Skillful facilitators understand that modeling the skills is a powerful teaching strategy; that parents are motivated by being listened to and respected; and that repetition is essential for learning.

In Tompkins County facilitators are hired as independent contractors for each series. They are thought of as “paid volunteers” because they volunteer to participate. The program coordinator recruits and trains facilitators and provides technical support for each series. Parenting Skills Workshop Series facilitators come from many backgrounds (education, social work, business), though most are human service professionals. Some co-lead several series annually; others may lead one series each year. A newly trained facilitator is always paired with an experienced one.

Facilitators are trained in a two-day program designed for twenty to twenty-five participants. We recommend broad publicity aimed at people who are interested in becoming facilitators specifically for the PSWS program, as well as professionals who will use the curriculum in their own work with families. Following the training, the coordinator interviews and selects individuals who exhibit the desired qualities to become facilitators in the series.

Maintaining a corps of dedicated educators to facilitate workshops is important. The program coordinator should hold informal meetings with facilitators several times a year (provide a simple breakfast or lunch as a lure) and share ideas and concerns. Hold planning and debriefing meetings before and after each series with facilitator teams. Call facilitators frequently during a series to let them know you are available to troubleshoot, to provide resources, or to discuss concerns. Send workshop participants’ evaluation summaries along with thank you notes to facilitators at the conclusion of each series.

Select sites for PSWS that are handicapped accessible, easy to find, have a comfortable room for parents to meet and a suitable child care room, provide a nonthreatening atmosphere for parents, and are safe for everyone. Locations to consider are schools, churches, Head Start facilities, Cornell Cooperative Extension education centers, child care centers, and community centers. Attention to high-quality child care, assistance with transportation, and provision of nutritious refreshments are details that demonstrate respect for the participants by letting them know their attendance is important. Early evening hours, between, 6 and 9 P.M., and Saturday morning have proved to be popular times.

Other Opportunities to Use Parenting Skills Workshops

Parenting Skills Workshops may be taught to parents in a variety of programs and situations. However the program is used, facilitators must be trained to ensure that the structured learning format is followed and the integrity of the skills is maintained. Parent and case aides, family workers, public health nurses, and others who work with families in their homes may become trained to teach and reinforce the skills with parents during home visits. They can provide valuable encouragement to parents who are trying the new skills they are learning.

PSWS can be offered to parents whose children are served in specialized agency programs or schools. In these cases the series may be facilitated by agency staff who have completed PSWS facilitator training. The Parenting Skills Workshop Series has been used in programs for prison inmates, for parents of children at an agency for children with special identified needs, and for parents recovering from substance abuse.

PSWS as Part of a Comprehensive Parent Education Program

Although PSWS is one of a very limited number of programs available for parents whose social, emotional, and material resources have not been sufficient to provide for the growth and developmental needs of their children, it cannot address all the issues that confront these families. Skill

building, like other behavioral intervention strategies, needs to be part of a comprehensive service program that meets the complex needs of each family. Services should be available in a sequence that treats the most pressing underlying problems first, reducing or eliminating some of the barriers and stressful situations that make it so difficult for parents to focus on their children's needs. It may be that a parent needs to deal with a substance abuse problem, a domestic situation, or job skill training before attempting to learn and use new parenting skills. Some families may have urgent needs for housing or medical care which must be addressed before parents can benefit from the PSWS program.

An individual who is ready for parenting education should begin with the most appropriate class available. For example, a young parent who has been isolated in a rural area may feel overwhelmed in a group setting. It may be best for that person to begin to learn parenting skills from a home visitor in a one-to-one situation and become part of a PSWS group as the next step. Experienced facilitators often feel the work of parenting education has just begun with the series and they describe feeling that they abandon or desert parents just as they are beginning to feel hopeful. They suggest that parents need to be encouraged to join another group such as a parent support group, repeat the Parenting Skills workshop, or take an advanced parent education class. For parents who are comfortable with more traditional learning methods, mastery of the five skills using the structured learning approach builds a strong foundation to profit from other parent education classes and materials. Parenting Skills Workshops should be seen as part of a continuum along which parents recognize their parenting style, choose and learn new effective skills, and seek continued support to reinforce their efforts.

Chapter 8

TRAINING FACILITATORS

People undertake training as facilitators for many reasons but most indicate they welcome the addition of structured learning and basic skills to their parent education “toolbox” and look forward to facilitating a group. They find the two-day training very intensive as they struggle to understand the delivery method (structured learning) and the educational content (the five skills). The workshop team is challenged to bring these two components together so each participant is prepared to be an effective facilitator. In most workshops participants also need time to get to know one another and to share information about their work with parents. Use of the Parenting Skills Workshop Series will vary from participant to participant, agency to agency, and community to community. The agenda should provide time for informal networking among attendees and structured time for discussions about using PSWS in their community.

As you prepare for facilitator training, the following tips from “The Terrific Trainer,” Chapter 13 in *Training Child Care Staff to Work with 9- to 14-Year-Olds* by Sally Jo Crosiar and Polly Spedding (Ithaca: Cornell Cooperative Extension, 1994) may be helpful:

Share the goals of the training with participants and, as activities are introduced, connect them to the goals.

Understand that modeling what is being taught is a powerful training strategy.

Remember that participants in facilitator training have needs not unlike those of parents in workshops. They need the psychological safety of ground rules and of being listened to and respected. Attention must be given to physical

needs such as room temperature, lighting, breaks, and being able to see and hear the leaders.

Participants will have a variety of learning styles so material should be presented visually, orally, and by practicing.

Be attentive to time; watch the clock.

Be flexible to adjust the agenda to participants’ needs.

Sample Training Agenda

Goals for Participants

1. To master the five components of structured learning
2. To apply the structured learning approach to cofacilitating a Parenting Skills Workshop Series in which five basic skills will be taught

Day 1

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 9:00 A.M. | Registration; Agenda and Overview of the Manual |
| | Group Introductions |
| | Introduction to Parenting Skills Workshop Series |
| | The Five Basic Skills |
| | Exercise 1: Overview of Session One 1. ¹ |
| 11:00 | Break |

1. Some participants role play members of the class of parents.

- 11:15 Overview of Structured Learning
Introduce and Demonstrate ENCOURAGEMENT
Overview of Sessions 2 through 7
- 12:15 P.M. Lunch
- 1:00 Introduce and Demonstrate CAN DO, CHOICES, SELF-CONTROL, and RESPECTING FEELINGS
Exercise 2: Teach the Skill² Working in Small Groups
Discussion on the Importance of Modeling and the Modeling Display
- 2:45 Homework Assignment; Questions; Evaluation
Closing Circle
- 3:30 Adjourn

Day 2

- 9:00 A.M. Questions, Homework
Discussion: How to Help with Practicing the Skills (role playing)
Exercise 3: Practice the Skills³ Guide the Role Plays
Working in small groups
- 11:00 Break
- 11:15 Exercises 4 and 5: Group Dynamics, Some Typical Challenges, Establishing Respect
- 12:15 P.M. Lunch
- 1:00 Overview of Session 8
Where and How the Parenting Skills Workshop Series Can Be Used
- 2:45 Evaluation, Questions
Closing Circle
- 3:30 Adjourn

2. Some participants role play facilitators in the class for parents.

3. Participants will take the parts of both parents and facilitators.

Background for Agenda Items

Day 1

Introductions

Presenters and participants want to get to know one another and quickly learn the first names of all participants. Participants will want to know what experience and credentials presenters bring to the workshop, as well as learning enough about each other to capitalize on networking opportunities. Presenters can customize the workshop if they know something about the experience and interest in parenting education of those attending.

An assessment form, sent before the workshop or available at registration, provides information about participants' needs and interests that is used to fine-tune the agenda. Networking is stimulated by taping several sheets of newsprint to the wall near the registration table. As people arrive, ask them to write their name, agency, and activities in parenting education on the sheets in large letters. Participants are encouraged to use the sheets to identify people with whom they would like to talk.

Once the session begins, each person introduces him or herself and facilitators focus on learning the names of the participants. Both name tags and name tents (trifolded paper, name in large letters, on the table in front of the individual) are helpful to speed the process.

Introduction to Parenting Skills Workshop Series

Base your discussion on Chapters 2 and 3 of this manual.

Five Basic Skills

Base your discussion on Chapter 1 of this manual.

Exercise 1: Overview of Session 1

Say to participants: "You have just heard what the content material is for PSWS—ENCOURAGEMENT, CAN DO, CHOICES, SELF-CONTROL, and RESPECTING FEELINGS. We will spend most of the workshop on how those skills are taught to parents in the structured learning format. We

want to give parents new skills and the knowledge that they can choose to change the way they act with their children. We want to give parents ways to increase the positive interaction between themselves and their children.

“For parts of this training each of you will role play a parent in a parenting skills class. You may choose what parent you wish to be—the one you are in real life or one that may represent a parent or composite of parents you work with in the families you see. In other parts of the training you will role play a facilitator in a parenting skills class so you can practice teaching the structured learning components.

“We are going to present the two-hour introductory class in about half an hour so participation will be limited. For example, we will ask only two or three people to participate in any activity, and we ask you to reserve discussion and questions until the end of the demonstration.”

Overview of Session 1

Conduct Session 1 in about 30 minutes using a “fishbowl” technique. Ask selected participants to join the facilitators in a circle of chairs placed so they can be seen by the other participants, who observe the demonstration. (Fishbowl participants can be randomly chosen or preselected based on knowledge of the attendees.) Ask participants to stay in the character of the parent they have chosen to be throughout the exercise and remind the audience not to interrupt. Follow the outline for Session 1 and move quickly through each component. End the fishbowl, have players return to their seats, and ask for feedback using the following questions as a guide.

How did facilitators encourage group participation?

How were difficult comments, situations, or interactions handled?

How did they establish respect with participants?

How did the facilitators model good interpersonal skills?

How did fishbowl parents feel?

How did the demonstration help us to understand

what will take place in class?

Are there other questions or comments about Session 1?

Overview of Structured Learning

Base your discussion on Chapter 2, “Structured Learning,” listing and describing each of the five components (presenting the skill, modeling the skill, practicing the skill, performance feedback, transfer training) on newsprint.

Introduce and Demonstrate ENCOURAGEMENT

Introduce and present a modeling display for ENCOURAGEMENT demonstrating three structured learning components—presenting the skill (includes asking for sample situations from participants and recording them on newsprint), modeling the skill, and performance feedback. Ask for feedback using the following questions as a guide:

How was the skill introduced?

How clearly was each step modeled?

Did observers identify each step?

How frequently were the steps reviewed?

Did the outcome seem satisfactory for parent and child?

How were participants involved?

Overview of Sessions 2 through 7

Emphasize that the agendas for Sessions 2 through 7 are very similar. Using the series format and the weekly outlines as a guide, note each component on newsprint, discussing any that occur in only one session or are not covered in depth in the training agenda.

Introduce and Demonstrate CAN DO, CHOICES, SELF-CONTROL, and RESPECTING FEELINGS

Follow the format that was used to introduce and demonstrate ENCOURAGEMENT.

Exercise 2: Teach the Skill

In preparation for this exercise have the group form pairs (having participants work with the person seated next to them is efficient). Also identify six-person groups by combining three pairs for the second part of the exercise.

Ask participants working in pairs to select one of the five skills. Direct teams to talk with each other about the skill, discussing what they like about it and how they understand it. Ask them to think of examples of how to use the skill. Instruct each team to develop and practice a modeling display from one of the examples.

Convene the six-member groups and have each team present its modeling display. Refer to the structured learning steps and remind participants to practice three steps: presenting the skill (includes eliciting examples from group members), modeling the skill, and performance feedback. Ask the groups to use the following questions to provide feedback to each team.

How was the skill introduced?

How clearly was each step modeled?

Did observers identify each step?

How frequently were the steps reviewed?

Did the outcome seem satisfactory for parent and child?

How were participants involved?

Discussion: The Importance of Modeling and the Modeling Display

Base your discussion on Chapter 4 of this manual.

Homework Assignment, Questions, Evaluation

Participants are asked consciously to use at least one skill with a child, partner, or colleague before they return to the workshop the next day and to be prepared to describe the experience. Encourage participants to write their reactions to the first day of training on an evaluation form. (You may wish to collect these forms to review before the second day of training. They can be returned for participants to complete at the end of the workshop.) During the closing circle ask participants to tell about success stories from their work with parents.

Day 2

Questions, Homework

Ask participants to describe their experiences using one or more skills since the first day of the workshop. Discuss any questions regarding the material presented on Day 1.

Discussion: How to Help with Practicing the Skills (Role Playing)

Base your discussion on Chapter 4, “A Guide to Facilitating Workshops.”

Exercise 3: Practice the Skills

Participants work in the teams and six-member groups formed for Exercise 2. Each pair becomes a team of facilitators to guide a parent and co-actor through a role play. Two individuals in the group serve as the parent and the co-actor and two as observers. Teams rotate in the group until everyone has had a turn to facilitate. As facilitators, teams can choose any of the five skills for the practice demonstration. Post the list of situations that was generated when each skill was introduced and modeled on Day 1 where it can be seen by all. Instruct the facilitator team to select a skill and a situation, then choose two people to serve as a parent and a co-actor. Instruct the remaining group members to model the behavior of parents with whom they work. One facilitator works with the parent and co-actor to develop the role play and the other facilitator assigns observers to pay attention to the use of the steps and the outcomes of the role play. It is important for each workshop participant to be part of a team to guide a role play. Ask for feedback about practicing the skill using the following questions as a guide.

How did facilitators encourage group participation?

How were difficult comments, situations, or interactions handled?

How did the facilitators establish respect with participants?

How were participants involved?

How did the facilitators model good interpersonal skills?

How were we helped to understand what will take place in class?

What was easy about practicing the skills? What was hard?

Exercise 4: Group Dynamics, Some Typical Challenges, and Establishing Respect

This exercise is done in several small groups (between six and twelve people). Before breaking into small groups, ask all participants to brainstorm a list of behaviors that challenge facilitators working with groups of parents. Assign three or four behaviors to each small group and have them suggest possible ways of managing the behavior. Have small groups report their ideas to the whole group as time allows. Refer to Chapter 4 for a discussion about group dynamics. Lists can be collected, typed, and mailed to participants.

Exercise 5: Establishing Respect

Refer to Chapter 3 on empowerment to prepare for this exercise. Working with the whole group, use newsprint to record responses and brainstorm a list of feelings trainees might have about abusive parents. Acknowledge the feelings—hopelessness, frustration, anger, empathy, and sorrow are some that people mention. List ideas about how we can build on empathy to create an atmosphere in which parents can safely talk about feelings and try new skills. List ways to deal with hopelessness without judging and moralizing. Refer to the empowerment belief statements in Chapter 3.

Focus on each belief statement and ask participants to suggest specific ways that facilitators can demonstrate the beliefs to parents. For example, facilitators can acknowledge that all families have strengths by offering encouragement when parents contribute good ideas to a group discussion. These notes can also be typed and sent to participants.

Overview of Session 8

Base your discussion on Chapter 6 of this manual.

Where and How Can PSWS Be Used

Refer to the Introduction to this manual to prepare for this exercise. Review local current

programs if appropriate for the group. Describe the programs that operate in Tompkins and Broome counties. Describe situations in which the Parenting Skills Workshop Series is used by professionals in their work setting. For example, a class for parents whose children have disabilities offered at the Special Children's Center, a class for parents who are recovering from substance abuse at a residential treatment center, or a class for parents who are incarcerated. Have participants break into small groups of people who work with parents in similar ways. One group may include people who work with parents at home such as home visitors or public health nurses; one may include people who work with parents in groups in a treatment center; and so on. Ask the groups to respond to the following questions:

How could PSWS be valuable in my work setting?

What are the barriers to using it in my work setting?

What are some steps I (we) can take to implement PSWS?

Evaluation and Questions

Ask participants what questions need more discussion. Are they ready to cofacilitate a series? Ask them to complete the evaluation forms. Be sure your mailing list is accurate.

Closing Circle

Go around the room asking each person to say something she or he has gained from the workshop.

Chapter 9

EVALUATION

The Final Session

Evaluation provides program staff and funders with meaningful data for improving the implementation and overall quality of the program. Both qualitative and quantitative data are obtained.

Meaning and understanding must be derived from the varied perspectives of parents and facilitators, keeping in mind that vast sociocultural and individualistic differences may exist among the participants. Client satisfaction surveys and facilitators' reports and debriefing provide contextually based data, and systematic analysis facilitates an understanding of the program's effect.

Evaluation information is collected by the program coordinator or a facilitator during the eighth class. The evaluation is consistent with the philosophy of the program, that is, informative for facilitators and funders but not intimidating to parents. The measurement instruments and their administration are not dependent on participants' reading ability. If necessary, the evaluator provides one-to-one assistance to parents to complete the evaluation.

Participants are asked to complete two simple feedback sheets. The evaluator leads a semistructured group interview with the participants to gain more information about their general satisfaction with the series. Which skills are being used; how parents have changed the way they handle their children; how they feel about the child care, the time of the series, the site, the room, and the skills of the facilitators; how they learned about the class; what other skills they would like to learn; and whether they would recommend the series to a friend are examples of topics that can be included in the discussion.

Participants are given the opportunity to talk among themselves, without the presence of the facilitators, about their feelings concerning the class, curriculum, and structure.

Quantitative data consider the bigger picture and come from registration and attendance sheets, class observation, and record keeping required for service plans and referrals. A well-defined record-keeping process, developed in collaboration with funding and referral agencies, assures that necessary information can be transferred while maintaining clients' confidentiality. This is important information and is essential for preparing funding requests and evaluating whether the program reduces costs by decreasing or limiting the duration of out-of-home placement of children.

Telephone Interview

The telephone survey is a data-collection instrument designed to be used approximately three months following the last PSWS class. Its purpose is twofold: first, to gather data for a richer sense of what works from the perspectives of the parents who participated in the program, and second, to collect qualitative data on how the program might be improved. This guide can be found with the other evaluation materials at the end of this manual.

At the end of the last class, the facilitator should invite the parents to respond to a follow-up telephone interview. Let them know that you will be calling them in about three months to see how they are doing and how well the skills are working for them.

Approximately three months after the last class, begin calling those parents who agreed to be part of the survey. Bear in mind that your role as an “insider” is expected to enhance both the conversational tone of the interviews and the quality of the data you collect. Remember to stress the confidentiality of the telephone interview, as well as the contributions the parents will be making toward improving the overall program by sharing their experiences, opinions, and ideas with you. It is also important to make a statement similar to the following to each parent before beginning the actual interview:

“We believe that your ideas and suggestions will help improve the parenting classes. It is important for you to understand that I will not report the details of anything you share with me and that what you say will in no way influence your future participation in any of the programs or services offered by or through Cornell Cooperative Extension and/or the Department of Social Services (or other agencies as applicable).”

Notes taken during the phone conversation should be sufficient, although it might be helpful to tape-record the interviews to provide a means of verifying quotations and avoiding omissions. Respondents must be told that the interviews are being tape-recorded, and this could threaten the conversational tone you will want to establish. This is a question you will need to answer for yourself.

Immediately following the telephone interview, take time to complete the Interviewer’s Log (found in the PSWS telephone survey guide). Note who facilitated the classes, when they were held, the date of the interview, and the approximate amount of time it took to conduct the interview. Jot down your overall perceptions about the interview and include a brief demographic description of the respondent. Note how truthful or honest the respondent seemed to be. How comfortable did the person seem to be in responding to the questions? Note any underlying themes evidenced during the interview. Finally, in the spirit of reciprocity and strengthening relationships, we suggest that you take time to write a short note to each of the survey respondents, thanking them for participating in the study and

perhaps encouraging them to continue their commitment to being a better parent by taking part in PSWS support groups.

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Appendix

RESULTS OF A TELEPHONE SURVEY

This evaluation of a Parenting Skills Workshop Series was conducted in 1994 by June Mead of Cornell University.

Purpose of the Telephone Survey

The purpose of the telephone interviews was twofold: first, to gather data for a richer sense of what works and how the program might be improved from the perspectives of parents who participated in it and second, to pilot an interview guide for future use by PSWS trainers and facilitators.

The Respondents

Participants ($n = 8$; females = 5, males = 3) from the LIFE (Living Improvement through Family Education) parenting classes sponsored by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County, closely following the PSWS curriculum. The eight LIFE classes were held at the Binghamton Self-Sufficiency Center, 435 W. State Street, Binghamton, May 12, 1994, to June 30, 1994. The classes were conducted from 6:00 to 8:00 P.M. by two experienced facilitators, Art Gladstone and Jill Alford. All of the participants ($n = 12$) who attended this series of classes were court mandated to do so. All participants were invited to be respondents to this telephone survey; only those who agreed to be telephoned were selected as respondents. A brief demographic description of the respondents follows.

Male 1: Age 39, married, employed, two sons (ages 14 and 4), attended classes with his wife [female 5].

Male 2: Age 31, married, unemployed, attended classes with his wife [female 1], prohibited from seeing wife and three daughters (ages 9, 11, and 13) except during supervised visitations.

Male 3: Age 36, single father, employed, one daughter and one son (ages 10 and 8).

Female 1: Age 29, married, employed, three daughters (ages 9, 11, and 13); husband [male 2] prohibited from seeing wife and daughters except during supervised visitations.

Female 2: Age 32, single mother, employed, one son (age 9).

Female 3: Age 21, single, unemployed, lives with father of children, one boy (age 3) and one girl (age 2).

Female 4: Age 23, single at the time of the classes, unemployed, moved and got married shortly after completing the classes, two sons (ages 8 and 4) and one daughter (age 2).

Female 5: Mid-forties, married, unemployed, two sons (ages 14 and 4). Respondent has multiple physical and mental health problems and is on medications. Attended classes with her husband [male 1]. The 14-year-old son is a ward of the state and is currently at a work farm.

Data Log

Interviewer: June P. Mead, 195 S. Washington Street, Binghamton, New York 13903. Phone (607) 772-8036; FAX (607) 772-8243

Conducted: October 3–27, 1994 (approximately three months following the end of the parenting classes).

Data: Field notes taken during telephone interviews, which lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes each.

Interview Data

Before beginning each interview, the interviewer stressed the confidentiality of the study as well as the contributions interviewees were making to strengthen and improve the overall LIFE/PSWS program by sharing their experiences, opinions, and ideas. In addition, the following statement was read to each respondent: “We believe that your ideas and suggestions will help improve the classes. It is important for you to understand that I will not report the details of anything you share with me, and that what you say will in no way influence your future participation in any of the programs or services offered by or through Cornell Cooperative Extension and/or the Department of Social Services.”

Question 1.

Can you tell me a little bit about what got you interested in attending the parenting classes and why you decided to participate in them?

We were having problems with our oldest boy. [male 1]

It’s been a nightmare. I just want to get back with my family. So our caseworker got us into it, I suppose, but I wanted to do it, if it would make a difference. I’ve never laid a hand on any of the girls, but [wife’s name] and I have gone around a few times and that’s why they [DSS] think I have a problem with the girls, but that’s a whole other story. [male 2]

The caseworker say I had to go. The kids were really giving me a time. So maybe this might help is what she said. [male 3]

It was a mandated situation, I guess you could say the Department of Social Services sent us. [female 1]

Because I had heard a lot about them and as part of a way was to see what it was all about. [female 2]

My caseworker at Social Services told me. [female 3]

My caseworker said I should go. [female 4]

Social services told me they were available and to try them for some ideas because we were having so many problems with the 14-year-old. [female 5]

Question 2.

As you think about the classes you attended, what stands out for you? What do you remember most about participating in the classes and the homework assignments?

Nothing really, maybe that it was fun most of the time. [male 1]

My temper is the issue. Self-control is just not possible when it gets to a certain point. [male 2]

How easy it was to say what I needed to say. I found out I wasn’t alone and that it’s bad sometimes but it could be worse, like with [names of other members of the class]. [male 3]

I think that the play acting helps people get involved and helps them understand. It’s important in letting you put it [the skills] into action. [female 1]

That it really works and I get the results [that I want] with my son. [female 2]

Learning about self-control so that before I explode, I can deal better with the kids. [female 3]

That it was more fun than I thought it would be. [female 4]

It was a lot of fun, especially the skits, I thought it was very beneficial. [female 5]

Question 3.

Regarding Skill 1, ENCOURAGEMENT, could you describe a situation when you used this skill successfully and how your child (or children) responded when you tried using this skill?

We only have the one [son] now, the 14-year-old is away, but the little guy is pretty happy most of the time. I tell him all the time how good I think he is doing. [male 1]

I'm not used to saying, "I feel whatever." My girls know, they know how I feel, I love them, they know it. They are great. It's just [the system]. [male 2]

I've been really impressed by how my son is able to read. I really like it how good he is becoming and I tell him that and he really likes to hear it. [male 3]

Actually, just the other night I had a situation where I used this one. My daughter had to have stitches because she cut her head and I wasn't home when it happened, so the older daughter did all the right steps, like staying calm, and calling 911, and I was really pleased and made sure that I told her how good it made me feel that she was able to do that. [female 1]

The thing that I feel is really important is that these skills or whatever makes us more human. I get a big smile, a hug from [name of son], or he hears me say I love you more often now. [female 2]

I used this a lot with my daughter with potty training. I told her that I feel really happy that you are using the toilet. It's hard to not say, "Good girl." It's hard to use the "I feel . . . when you . . ." at first. [female 3]

That was hard at first because I don't, not used to saying how I feel, but I've been trying to use it more, I guess you could say. [female 4]

I use it all the time, especially with the 4-year-old. [female 5]

Question 4.

Regarding Skill 2, CAN DO, could you describe a situation where you used this skill successfully and how your child (or children) responded when you tried using this skill?

It works okay, I think. My wife is the one who takes care of him the most though really because she don't work. [male 1]

I don't get to be with them enough [only gets to see them during supervised visitations]. [male 2]

In New York City we had to cross the street and I told him he could walk alone on the sidewalk, but he would have to hold my hand when we were crossing the street. [male 3]

I really haven't had the opportunity to put that one into practice so much. [female 1]

[My son] responds really well to this one, I think in a real positive way. I used to say, "Well you can do this or that," but say it more negative, like when I would get resistance, I would just say, "Go to your bedroom and you can get into the shower right now!" [female 2]

I do that one all the time. I'll find them [son and daughter] something to do, otherwise they fight all the time. [female 3]

It usually works for a little while, but you need to do it over and over again with little ones, but my kids are pretty good. [female 4]

[Son's name] has a hard time with that one. I use time out. He can't go to preschool because of the preschool battery. He will throw a temper tantrum at being limited, so now he just goes to day care. He just can't handle being around a lot of kids. [female 5]

Question 5.

Regarding Skill 3, CHOICES, could you describe a situation when you used this skill successfully and how your child (or children) responded when you tried using this skill?

My wife gives bad choices so I think that it could get confusing for the little guy. But I'm not always sure what some positive choices would be. They should have like gave us some. [male 1]

I'm not so sure about this one because I don't want them to have certain choices. They are teenagers pretty much. I don't want them getting knocked up so I can't give them choices like you can when your kids are little. [male 2]

One time we went shopping and I let my son choose between the color jeans he was going to get, but he couldn't choose about trying them on. [male 3]

My girls are all older, so I don't really use this one much. [female 1]

I use this all the time, and it really works well. I love when he says I made a really bad choice. It is also good after the fact, like after he made a choice he didn't like, so we can kinda go over it. [female 2]

Same thing as the last one [skill]. [This respondent didn't see a difference between Skills 2 and 3.] [female 3]

Sometimes they try to be fresh and give me choices, fresh mouth me. But I think most of the time they like having choices. [female 4]

You have to limit the choices to no more than three. And then don't change the choices because that is going to set the kid off. Express the fact that you should never contradict the other adult [referring to ongoing problem between the two parents that was evident during the classes]. [Husband's name] is always undermining my authority. [female 5]

Question 6.

Regarding Skill 4, SELF-CONTROL, could you describe a situation when you used this skill successfully and how your child (or children) responded when you tried using this skill?

When we get into it in front of him, that's not good so we've been trying not to but I really don't think we lose it on him, maybe still on each other. [male 1]

This is what it is all about for me. But I just get to a point that there's no going back. Counting don't work and I feel my blood going into my face, and watch out! So I don't use it but I try, I guess. I keep trying cause I love them and I don't want to not be with them. [male 2]

After one really busy time, my son was trying my patience and it was getting loud. I was getting hot and itchy and so I turned him over to my aunt and just got myself out of the situation. [male 3]

Just a couple of months ago, I got to use this one with the oldest one when she wanted to go to Syracuse with her boyfriend. I told her she couldn't go, but she went anyway. She's only 13, just 13. We had to call the state police to find her at the state fair. I went up there and we went to [name of restaurant] and talked. I did a lot of deep breathing on the way up there and so I was able to make her understand what she did was wrong but I didn't lose it on her. [female 1]

I think that I can handle myself better. I don't slam so many doors. I just walk away and breathe. [female 2]

I would say that I use this one about ten times a day [laughter] and with the children's father [the parents are living together but are not married], I use it all the time. [female 3]

This is the most important thing that I needed to learn and I'm pretty great with it like most of the time. [female 4]

We are both pretty good with the older one not around to influence [4-year-old's name]. [female 5]

Question 7.

Regarding Skill 5, RESPECTING FEELINGS, could you describe a situation when you used this skill successfully and how your child (or children) responded when you tried using this skill?

I don't know about this one [skill]. We missed a class. Maybe this was the one. [male 1]

This just isn't me and I can't be something that I'm not. Understand? It would just be phony and my girls would know it. [male 2]

This was a real eye-opener for me. All I can think of is that one time, my son got angry because my daughter seemed to be getting more things, stuff, so we talked about his anger and his jealousy and that when his birthday came, or Christmas, there would be things for him then. [male 3]

When the situation happened with the oldest [referring to the state fair incident], I tried to show her that I understood what she wanted to do and told her it was wrong, and that most of all she had a lot of people scared. [female 1]

We all have our bad days. So this is really a way of dealing with moodiness. When my kid is being nasty, I stop to really think about whether it maybe isn't me. I say to my son, "I understand how you feel." I think that maybe it even works in dealing with the absence of his father. I guess you would say this is a communication skill and that it goes both ways, it's putting on the other person's shoes. [female 2]

Like this one time, when I had to go out and my son is always crying, and I explained to him that I will be back and usually it works, if I can make him understand that I'll be back and he doesn't need to be afraid. [female 3]

I wasn't too clear about what this was all about. Maybe I missed that class. I know that I missed one when I couldn't get a ride. [female 4]

We have been doing a lot more talking about how we are feeling, a lot more. Communication is better and also somewhat mellow. [At this point the husband's voice is heard in the background saying, "Liar!"] [female 5]

Question 8.

Overall, what impact do you feel the program has had on you? On your child (children)?

The effect was that we have the papers, because we got two sets of everything, all over the place, so it's part of our day. I really think that it helps the little guy not having the oldest one around and he went to the work farm right after the classes was over so it's hard to say which helped him the most [the classes or the removal of the older sibling]. [male 1]

Sometimes I get thinking that I'll never be back with them, like what's the point, why not just move to another state where we can all be together without all the hassles? But we keep trying and knowing, or at least feeling that [facilitator's name] is on our side helps. As far as the kids goes, I think they were happy we went cause they want us to be together too. [male 2]

I still do think like I did, but when I remember I try to use the skills. Sometimes I can do it. With the kids, well, I would have to say that especially when we use the skills they are a lot more mellow, I think. [male 3]

We [both parents participated in the classes] took a lot of it to heart. Self-control really benefited [husband's name], helped him out a lot. We are still visiting with the [facilitator's name]. A lot of the other people in the classes didn't take it as seriously, I really feel. They were just playing along, a lot of them, a lot of the time because they were mandated. But it helped to talk to other people. It was a big joke to some of the people. [At this point, the respondent shared that during cigarette breaks several of the participants in the classes talked about "making stuff up that they want to hear."] [female 1]

It really pointed out a lot of areas, it pointed out weaknesses in parenting and I wasn't a bad parent but I think that the skills have helped me to respect my kid's feelings, especially the self-control has made me realize that the problems start in your own backyard. You set an example for the child. [female 2]

Overall I would say that they listen more, and now I have more self-control. [female 3]

I would say I'm more calmer. As for the kids, I think we get along pretty good, mostly anyhow now that I'm, well, I just got married, and it helps to have someone else around, you know. [female 4]

I would say it has had an effect on the way we are parenting. It has helped. [female 5]

Question 9.

Do you feel the parenting classes improved the relationship between you and your child (children)?

Yes. [male 1]

Yes. [male 2]

Yes. [male 3]

Yes. [female 1]

Absolutely, they helped me work on my temper, helped me to lighten up and say, like look at the real issues here. [female 2]

Yes. [female 3]

Well, they listen when I give them the choices or like when I tell them, "You really made me happy when you are good." That's a change I think. [female 4]

Yes. [female 5]

Question 10.

Have you had an opportunity to participate in any parent support group meetings?

I'd be interested, maybe, but I don't know, we have a lot going on already. [male 1]

If it would help get us back together but I don't know, no one seems to be listening to us or giving us a break. [male 2]

Transportation is a problem because the buses don't run at night except on Thursdays. [male 3]

No, but we would if it would make a difference [referring to reuniting her family; husband is allowed only supervised visitations]. [female 1]

No, but I still feel like I need more [classes]. [female 2]

I wanted to but I haven't heard anything about when and stuff. [female 3]

Yeah, I think I would be interested but it might be hard now that I'm out in Endicott and the buses don't run most nights. [female 4]

Mondays just are not good for us, so I would say, change to Thursdays. [female 5]

Question 11.

What do you think should or could be done to improve the parenting classes?

Can't think of anything. [male 1]

Make them [the classes] have some power to get Social Services off their butts and get off mine. [male 2]

Maybe the classes should go longer, maybe have us bring the kids to a class. There should be a way to try out the skills right there, to see if we are doing them right. The role plays can get goofy, you know what I mean, I mean they just aren't that real. [male 3]

I really don't know, I'm not an expert. [female 1]

I think that you need people to teach the classes who are believable. They need to be really flexible, honest, and stay at the right level. I think that maybe they [the classes] need to be longer, you really need more time with these things. [female 2]

Maybe it would be good to meet more often, like two times a week. One time to learn stuff and the next time to like try the stuff out. I was too tired after the first part of the class to really get into trying the stuff. [female 4]

[There should be] more participating, and attendance should be stressed. [female 5]

For example, what could be done to make the role plays more effective? More comfortable for you?

I was okay with it but sometimes I didn't get it [understand the material]. [male 1]

Sometimes they were just too close to home, if you know what I mean. We took the classes seriously but some of the people there were goofin' on the instructors and just givin' 'em what they wanted to hear. We took it serious. [male 2]

Like I said, have the kids right there. [male 3]

The role plays are really important and you need to involve everyone in them. It's hard for me to deal with other parents who believe in spanking. I don't, at all. You have to find a way to involve the people who really need it, like them [the people in the classes who spoke openly about spanking their children], I think. Maybe there should be a like a preclass. Maybe there should be different levels of classes for parents with different age kids, like I said, I'm not an expert. [female 1]

Well, I think it depends on the person. You need a lot of time to get into it, maybe like more hints about how to get started. [female 2]

Well they kind of made me feel stupid, but it depends, sometimes it was almost fun. [female 3]

Like I said, maybe two nights would work better. [female 4]

I just got into them and they are fun. [female 5]

How would you rate the instructors? What could they do to make you feel more at ease with the group?

Pretty good, they were easy to get along with. [male 1]

Real good, especially [facilitator's name]. They did a great job and they have stayed available to us, and that I think is important. [male 2]

Great. [male 3]

Very good. [female 1]

I thought that they did a great job. [female 2]

Great, both of them. [female 3]

Okay, I think they were both great. [female 4]

Very good, very good. [female 5]

How convenient was the time and scheduling of the classes for you?

Perfect. [male 1]

Okay, except for one night when we went to the school to see our youngest daughter get an award. I didn't want to miss and it would have been nice if we could have changed nights or had a make-up class, or something. Maybe it would be good to

have a chance to make up classes, cause I think it was on self-control [the night he missed] and that's what is the most important for me so I didn't want to miss it but you can't be in two places at the same time, I've tried it and it don't work. [male 2]

Good most of the time. [male 3]

They were okay. [female 1]

Like I said, maybe they could go longer, more weeks, more time. [female 2]

Okay. [female 3]

Fine. [female 4]

Good! [female 5]

How useful was it to have child care available?

That was really great, the both of them liked it. [male 1]

Didn't need it. [male 2]

I didn't need it because my ex- had the kids. [male 3]

We didn't need them. [female 1]

Didn't need to use it. [female 2]

I didn't use it and really didn't need it. [female 3]

Didn't use. [female 4]

It was good, it helped. [4-year-old's name] *loved* it!

What could improve the transportation arrangements offered for the classes?

Didn't need it. [male 1]

It helps a little but we live out so that \$3 hardly makes it. [male 2]

Nothing, it was fine. [male 3]

It was good. [female 1]

Okay, no complaints. [female 2]

The tokens were a great idea and \$3 for gas was good. [female 3]

No, that was fine, but it could have been closer to where I used to live. [female 4]

We didn't need it. [female 5]

How useful was it to have copies of the skills to hang on the refrigerator?

Like I said, we have them all over the place. [male 1]

It would be more useful to have a refrigerator. Right now I'm pretty much room to room staying with different people until I can afford to live some place. [male 2]

I think it was a good idea. [male 3]

I think it was a good idea. [female 1]

I look at them all the time. [female 2]

No, I have them posted on the living room wall. If I need it, it's right there, because I can see the living room from almost any other room in the apartment. [female 3]

Definitely. I look at them all the time. I even remembered to bring them with me when we moved. [female 4]

We still got them there. [female 5]

What do you think could be done to help you practice the skills at home?

Maybe they could call and see how you are doing. [male 1]

To be at home, with my family. [male 2]

I think you have to really commit to them, you have to say, "I'm going to follow through on them," and then do it. [male 3]

As far as I am concerned, I didn't think they really did it [referring to other people in the classes as they discussed how they had done the weekly homework assignments]. I think they made it up. This is what I heard during the breaks, just give them [the facilitators] what they want to hear. [female 1]

I think they [the facilitators] should tell you to post them [the skills] in the bathroom or bedroom. I know that I lose things once they go on the refrigerator. But knowing that the teachers were going to ask about the homework generally made me remember to try to do it. [female 2]

Nothing really. [female 3]

Maybe [the facilitators] could like call up during the week to remind you because like I could sometimes forget. [female 4]

They [the facilitators] should remind you more somehow. [female 5]

Question 12.

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the parenting classes?

No. [male 1]

It would be nice to have somebody say, you need to do this, this, and this and then you can get back with your family. But instead, they say, we'll see, and it just seems like it will never end. The classes themselves, they were good. [male 2]

I wish we had more time to talk to one another, to hear what the other people had to say. I would be interested in maybe an all-male [support] group, as a single father with two kids. [male 3]

I think that they should take the ages of the children into consideration and having classes for parents with younger children together and then having teenager parents [parents with teenagers] together might be one way to go. [female 1]

No, I always say, don't fix what's not broke. [female 2]

I would have to say that they could have more of them. Make them longer each night. I think that sometimes we had to rush. I think that making them 3 to 4 hours per night would give you time to discuss stuff and get individual help. Because in the end you can only be patient for so long. [female 3]

I'm just glad I went. I feel better about taking care of my kids. [female 4]

Move them to Thursday or maybe have them Thursday and Friday. [female 5]

Parenting Skills Workshop Series (PSWS)

EVALUATION: FACILITATOR TRAINING

To be filled out by participants at the end of the two-day facilitator training.

Thank you for participating in this workshop. It has been fun for us to talk about the Parenting Skills Workshop Series and to share our experiences with you. We are constantly looking for ideas to make it better and would appreciate your comments.

What was most useful?

Something that is still unclear?

Suggestions for change?

Some ways you plan to use this material?

Parenting Skills Workshop Series (PSWS)

EVALUATION: FACILITATOR FEEDBACK

To be filled out by facilitators at the conclusion of each Parenting Skills Workshop Series.

Administration

When: At the conclusion of a series of classes

How: Each facilitator is asked to complete and return this form to the program coordinator with the completed expense and class sign-in sheets.

Purposes

- To gain facilitators' insight regarding the impact of the program on the participants
- To improve program implementation

Questions

1. What do you think was the most successful aspect of this series? Please explain why.

1a. What was the least successful aspect? Please explain why.

2. What part of the workshop was easiest to facilitate? Please explain why.

2a. What was the hardest to facilitate? Please explain why.

FACILITATOR FEEDBACK

3. In what ways did you and your cofacilitator work well together?

3a. What problems did you have working together?

4. Would you say most parents were seriously engaged in participating? If so, why? If not, what might be the reason?

5. What positive impacts did you observe or hear described?

6. Overall, what impact do you think the program had on the parents?

7. What additional support or supplies could we provide that would be helpful?

Thank you for taking the time and effort to complete this form. Your ideas and suggestions are important to us as we continue to look for ways to improve the Parenting Skills Workshop Series. Please call at any time if you have specific concerns you would like to talk with us about.

Facilitator: (name) _____

For series held: (dates) _____

Parenting Skills Workshop Series (PSWS)

EVALUATION: PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

To be administered to participants during Week 8 of the Parenting Skills Workshop Series.

Administration

When: At the conclusion of a series, during the last meeting

Where: At the PSWS class site

How: The program coordinator verbally asks for participants' feedback

Purposes

- To encourage participants to expand on their written feedback
- To gather information on what works from the perspectives of the parents who have just participated in the program
- To collect information on how the implementation of the program might be improved while it is fresh in the participants' minds

We suggest that the coordinators use the following questions to guide a discussion allowing the series participants to expand on or clarify their comments on the Parents' Feedback Form:

1. Tell me what you liked best about the classes.

2. What did you find was the most helpful to you?

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

2a. Which of the skills do you use most often?

Probe: With what results?

2b. Which of the skills don't you use very often?

Probe: Can you tell me why you don't use the skills?

Probe: What could be done to make this skill easier for you to use?

3. Tell us how the classes have helped you with your child or children?

Probe: Give us an example of how you are parenting differently.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

4. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about the classes?

Probe: How could the classes be improved?

Probe: How have the classes benefited you?

Thank you for participating in the PSWS. Your contribution to the classes was very important. We hope that you will continue to learn all you can about becoming the best parent you can be.

Program Coordinator's Log

Filling in the following information about the participants will help you to document the impact of the PSWS. It can be completed from referral or enrollment data.

This discussion was conducted: (date) _____

Conducted by: (name) _____

For PSWS classes held: (dates) _____

Write the number of participants in each category below.

Participants

_____ Males

_____ Females

Participants' children

_____ 0–2 years

_____ 3–5 years

_____ 6–11 years

_____ 12 and over

Ethnicity

_____ Caucasian

_____ African American

_____ Native American

_____ Hispanic

_____ Asian

_____ Other (specify)

PARENT FEEDBACK

Place an "X" in the circle that matches how included you felt in the group.

In a few words explain why you felt this way.

A circular scale consisting of five concentric circles. The innermost circle is labeled "VERY INCLUDED 1". The space between the first and second circles is labeled "2". The space between the second and third circles is labeled "3". The space between the third and fourth circles is labeled "4". The space between the fourth and fifth circles is labeled "5 NOT INCLUDED".

Your comments

Sources: *A Leader's Guide to Exploring Parenting* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), adapted by Christiann Dean in *Cooperative Communication between Home and School: An In-Service Education Program for Elementary School Teachers* (Ithaca: Cornell Cooperative Extension, n.d.).

Parenting Skills Workshop Series (PSWS)

EVALUATION: TELEPHONE SURVEY

Looking at the Program from Parents' Perspectives

To be administered by a program facilitator or program coordinator three months after the conclusion of the Parenting Skills Workshop Series.

Purpose of the interview guide: The purpose of this guide is twofold: first, to provide trainers and facilitators with an instrument for gathering information relevant to program improvement; and second, to enhance their sense of what works from the perspectives of parents who participate in PSWS.

Interview Guide

Introduction (*Interviewers should feel free to adapt the following introduction to their own personal style, remembering that it is important not to intimidate the interviewees. Points to stress: the confidentiality of the study and the contributions interviewees are making to strengthening/improving the overall program by sharing their opinions and ideas.*)

Hello, my name is _____. I work for Cornell Cooperative Extension in _____ (insert county) _____. I am involved with the Parenting Skills Workshop Series that you participated in _____ (insert when the classes were held) _____. We are in the process of conducting an evaluation of the parenting classes to see what can be done to improve them. We are also interested in knowing whether you feel your participation in the program benefited you and your family. I'd very much like to ask you a few questions about the classes. It will only take a few minutes of your time. [Pause.] Is this something you would like to participate in? [Give the respondent an opportunity to decline.]

Your participation in this evaluation study is completely voluntary. What you have to share with me will remain confidential. If you wish to say something off the record, just tell me and it will not be included. You may choose not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. Nevertheless, what you have to say is extremely important. We believe that your ideas and suggestions will help improve the classes. It is important for you to understand that I will not report the details of anything you share with me and that what you say will in no way influence your future participation in any of the programs or services offered by or through Cooperative Extension (Department of Social Services, and/or other agencies, as applicable). Are there any questions before we begin? [Pause.]

TELEPHONE SURVEY

Question 1. Can you tell me a little bit about how you got interested in attending the parenting classes and why you decided to participate in them?

Question 2. As you think about the classes you attended, what stands out in your mind? What do you remember most about participating in the classes?

Transition: Next I would like to ask you more specifically about the parenting skills we learned about in class.

(Format for Questions 3 through 7: Briefly review (paraphrase) each skill, giving the parent time to reflect on his or her experience using the skill. For example, you might share your own experience using this skill. Then ask the skill-related question.)

Skill 1: ENCOURAGEMENT

1. Notice something you like.
2. Notice how you feel.
3. Say it: “I feel . . . that. . . .”
4. Notice how your child responds.

Question 3. Could you describe a situation when you used Skill 1, ENCOURAGEMENT, successfully?

TELEPHONE SURVEY

Probe: How has your child (or children) responded when you have tried using this skill?

Skill 2: CAN DO

1. Notice what you don't want your child to do.
2. Think of something your child can do instead.
3. Tell your child what he or she can do.
4. Help your child if necessary.

Question 4. Could you describe a situation when you used Skill 2, CAN DO successfully?

Probe: How has your child (or children) responded when you have tried using this skill?

TELEPHONE SURVEY

Skill 3: CHOICES

1. Help your child understand the problem.
2. Your child and you think of two or more reasonable choices.
3. Have your child choose and tell you the choice.
4. Help your child follow through.

Question 5. Could you describe a situation when you used Skill 3, CHOICES, successfully?

Probe: How has your child (or children) responded when you have tried using this skill?

Skill 4: SELF-CONTROL

1. Pay attention to body messages that tell you that you are about to lose control.
2. Think of ways to control yourself.
3. Choose a way and get control of yourself.
4. Decide how to act with your child.

TELEPHONE SURVEY

Question 6. Could you describe a situation when you used Skill 4, SELF-CONTROL, successfully?

Probe: How has your child (or children) responded when you have tried using this skill?

Skill 5: RESPECTING FEELINGS

1. Watch and listen to your child.
2. Think of a word that describes what your child might be feeling.
3. Think about why your child might be feeling this way.
4. Check your ideas with your child.

Question 7. Could you describe a situation when you used Skill 5, RESPECTING FEELINGS, successfully?

TELEPHONE SURVEY

Probe: How has your child (or children) responded when you have tried using this skill?

Question 8. Overall, what impact do you feel the program has had on you?

Probe: What impact do you feel the program has had on your child (children)?

Question 9. In what ways do you feel the parenting classes improved the relationship between you and your child (children)?

Question 10. Have you had an opportunity to participate in any parent support group meetings?

_____ No _____ Yes

TELEPHONE SURVEY

(If yes) Could you tell a little about your participation? What do you get out of the meetings? How are they useful to you?

(If no) Would you be interested in participating in a parent support group at some future time?

Question 11. What do you think should or could be done to improve the parenting classes?

Probes:

For example, what could be done to make the role plays more effective? More comfortable for you?

TELEPHONE SURVEY

What could we do to make you feel more at ease with the group?

How convenient was the time and scheduling of the classes for you?

How useful was it to have child care available?

How could the transportation arrangements offered for the classes be improved?

How useful was it to have copies of the skills to hang on the refrigerator?

TELEPHONE SURVEY

What do you think could be done to help you practice the skills at home?

Question 12. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the parenting classes?

Closure and next steps: *(To be adapted to the interviewer's personal style.)*

Thank you for speaking with me. I've enjoyed talking to you very much. Your ideas are very important to us as we strive to make the PSWS the best it can be. Your ideas and suggestions will be incorporated into a set of program improvement recommendations. Thank you once again for your time. I hope to see you at the next PSWS support group meeting.

Interviewer's Log: *(To be completed immediately after the telephone interview.)*

Facilitator: _____

For classes held: _____

Date of interview: _____

Length of time: _____

TELEPHONE SURVEY

Overall perceptions: *(Include a brief demographic description of the respondent.)*

Data quality: *(How truthful was the respondent? How comfortable did the person seem to be in responding to the questions?)*

Analytic comments: *(Did this respondent voice any underlying or recurrent themes?)*
