SESSION 1

Parenting Challenges: Let’s Get Started

Objectives

Parents will:

1. establish ground rules to guide the sessions in the curriculum
2. express their attitudes and feelings about parenting in general and specifically about participating in the current training
3. identify their personal and parenting strengths
4. review the topics covered in this curriculum

Materials

- large flip chart with easel
- 5 x 8 note cards (enough for each parent)
- colored markers (enough to put a supply close enough for several parents to share)
- 4 x 6 note cards (enough for each parent to have two cards)
- pens or pencils as needed (some parents may have their own)
- one large brown grocery bag
- poster – “Group Guidelines” (page 1.19)
- smiley faces needed for Activity 3 (pages 1.20 – 1.24)
- 8 ½ x 11 sheets of paper for each parent
- 11 x 17 sheets of paper for each parent
- masking tape
- Handout – “A Brief Summary of Sessions” (a copy for each parent)
- Follow-Through Activity Sheet 1 – “My Personal Parenting Plan” (one for each parent)
- Follow Through Activity Sheet 2 – “Looking at My Parents: Looking at Me” (one for each parent)
Steps To Guide The Session

1. Provide 5 x 8 note cards and colored markers and instruct parents to write their first names only. Parents should fold the note cards in half to form a tent that can be used to place in front of them on the table. Ask parents to bring their name cards back to the meeting each week.

2. Review the session objectives with the parents.

3. Discuss the key points in the introduction.

4. Lead the group in the learning activities that follow the introduction.

Introduction To The Session

Parents do matter. You can make a difference in your child’s life. Parenting is a tough job. For other jobs that we hold, we generally receive training and support to do the job. The job of parenting is no different. Parents need training and support to be the best parents they can be. I commend all of you for being here to participate in this training.

The sessions in this training are designed to guide you. The sessions will help you cope with the challenges of parenting and to help you become actively involved in recognizing and meeting your own needs as a parent.

It’s up to you! What you get out of each session will depend, in part, on the extent of your involvement. People learn best by doing. Experiential learning activities are designed to help you learn by doing and become aware of the “control” you have in situations you face.

Your active participation in the training sessions will make them more meaningful to you. When you apply this information, you can make things happen for you, instead of just letting things happen to you. You are in control of what you get out of these sessions.
Activity 1: Establishing Ground Rules

Post an agenda on a flip chart that has the session title, beginning and ending times, scheduled breaks and the titles for the activities.

To help everyone feel comfortable about expressing thoughts and feelings, we will first establish some guidelines, or rules, to guide our sessions.

Has anyone been in a situation where guidelines or rules were used? If you have, would you be willing to share with the group why they were used? How were guidelines or rules helpful?

I would like to propose these guidelines. We will talk about them, and you may add other things that you think are important.
Post Figure 1 on a large flip chart sheet or poster board that can be displayed at future meetings. (An enlargement can be made from the page at the end of this session.) Read the following guidelines:

1. We will begin and end on time.
2. We will have breaks with refreshments.

(Be sure to include refreshments and provide directions for restrooms at each session.)

3. We will turn off our cell phones or other electronic devices. Let's take a minute now and turn off our cell phones or put them on vibrate.
4. Anyone can ask any question at any time. There is no such thing as a stupid question.
5. Anyone will have the right to pass when they do not want to contribute to the discussion.

Give participants an opportunity to add additional guidelines. Write their ideas on a flip chart. Enlist the consensus and support of the parents in agreeing to abide by the guidelines. Use masking tape to post the ground rules somewhere where every parent will be able to see the rules. Have the guidelines posted at each session as a reminder to the parents.

If the parents do not include the following items, the parent educator should suggest adding them to the list. Confidentiality is something that definitely needs to be added to the list. Most groups will generally add this.

Respect confidentiality. As we move through the sessions, it will be important for everyone to keep confidential any information that is shared by members of our group. This means that what is shared at these sessions is not discussed with anyone outside the sessions.

Respect each others’ opinions. You don’t have to agree with what is said, but you do have to show respect for everyone’s right to have an opinion.
that differs from your own. Showing respect means that you will listen
without interrupting or putting down someone else’s ideas.

Be drug- and alcohol-free. You should come to each session alert and
ready to participate which means free from the influence of drugs
and/or alcohol.

No weapons of any kind will be allowed. We want to keep our
environment safe.

Activity 2: Checking Your Pulse

Give each parent a 4 x 6 note card and pen or pencil as needed. Take the large
brown grocery bag. Open the large brown grocery bag and, after you give the
following instructions, pass the bag around the room.

I know that you have various reasons for participating in this program.
Some of you might have come voluntarily while others might have had
strong encouragement to come.

Whatever your reasons for being here, GOOD or not so GOOD, positive or
negative, write those reasons on these note cards … OR, write how you
feel about being a part of this group. I am going to pass around this bag.
Put your note cards with your reasons for being here in the bag. You don't
have to put your name on the card. We are NOT going to talk about what
you put in the bag. Instead, I’m going to close the bag up and ask you to
put aside any negative feelings that you have and agree to be open-
minded about the possible things that you might learn from being here. At
the very last session, I’m going to give you an opportunity to reflect on
how you felt at the beginning and compare that to how you feel once
you have completed all the sessions.

Pass the bag around and let parents put their note cards in the bag.
Activity 3: Taking Your Stand

Place sheets with smiley faces, as shown in Figure 2, on one wall in the room. (Copies can be made from the pages at the end of this session.) Spread the smiley faces some distance apart so that several people would have room to stand under each one.

![Figure 2: Opinions about Parenting](image)

Disagree Strongly  Disagree Somewhat  Neutral  Agree Somewhat  Agree Strongly

Tell parents:

Now, with an open mind, I want everyone to stand up. Note the five smiley faces on the wall. Under each face is a phrase – disagree strongly, disagree somewhat, neutral, agree somewhat and agree strongly.

I am going to read five statements about parenting to you. After I read the statement to you, I want you to move and stand under the smiley face that best shows how you feel. This activity is about how YOU feel.

Read the following statements one at a time. After each statement, give parents a few moments to stand under the appropriate face. The face represents how they feel.

Statement 1: People are born knowing how to be good parents.

Allow parents time to move to the appropriate smiley face. Ask for volunteers to share their reasons for standing at a particular place. Allow time for parents’ comments then add the following comments.
A lot of people think that we automatically have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that we need to be parents. But we are not born knowing how to be effective parents – we must learn how! Most people learn how to parent based on what they observed their parents doing. What other ways do people learn how to be parents?

Wait briefly for parents to answer.

People get information about parenting from family, friends, books, magazines, other parents, videos and professionals such as doctors, counselors and others. Because parenting behaviors are learned we can change our behaviors and learn new ways to parent.

Statement 2: There is little that parents can do to help their children feel good about themselves.

Allow parents time to move to the appropriate smiley face. Ask for volunteers to share their reasons for standing at a particular place. Allow time for parents' comments then add the following comments.

Many parents are not aware that there are several ways to help their children feel proud of themselves. Children have a lot of things that influence how they grow and develop. Their families influence them first and foremost. You have a great impact on your child’s development. You can do a lot to help your children to feel good about themselves.

When children feel good about themselves they have good self-esteem. Can you think of some things that you can do as a parent to help your child to have good self-esteem?

Allow parents time to move to the appropriate smiley face. Ask for volunteers to share their reasons for standing at a particular place. Allow time for parents' comments then add the following comments.

When you help your children feel nurtured and loved, you help them to feel good about themselves. What does nurturing involve? Nurturing involves things like showing your love; providing for your child’s basic needs; listening to and talking to your child; helping your child to be connected with family; giving praise and attention to your child. All of these things help your child feel secure.
Statement 3: As children grow older, parenting gets easier.

Allow parents time to move to the appropriate smiley face. Ask for volunteers to share their reasons for standing at a particular place. Allow time for parents' comments then add the following comments.

Parenting doesn’t necessarily get easier or harder. As children grow and mature, their needs change. For example, infants communicate their needs by crying. Parents have to interpret the meaning of their infant’s cries and respond appropriately: Is the baby crying because he is hungry, tired, has a soiled diaper? Older children can communicate using language to express their needs. In both situations, parents have to make adjustments in their own behavior based on the needs of their child.

Statement 4: Parents must be very strict in order for their children to behave.

Allow parents time to move to the appropriate smiley face. Ask for volunteers to share their reasons for standing at a particular place. Allow time for parents' comments then add the following comments.

Parents don’t need to be strict and expect absolute obedience from their children. In fact, what we know is that, in general, parents who are strict with their children and who expect them to “do what I say” or parents who threaten and give orders have children who are often rebellious, don’t know how to behave and are dependent on others to make decisions for them. Different ways of parenting, or parenting styles, have different effects on children and how they behave with others. In session six, we will talk more about parenting styles.

Statement 5: I worry about being a good parent.

Allow parents time to move to the appropriate smiley face. Ask for volunteers to share their reasons for standing at a particular place. Allow time for parents' comments then add the following comments.

Most parents worry at some time or another whether or not they are doing a good job. What about parenting makes a parent feel good?

Wait for parents to answer.
What about parenting makes a parent feel bad?

Wait for parents to answer.

After the last statement is read and responses have been given, direct parents back to their seats. Conclude the activity by saying:

Parenting is very personal. It’s important for you to think about your feelings about parenting because your attitudes and feelings affect your behavior. As a parent, you can know your child better than anyone else.

As you can see, we all may have different ideas about parenting. What is important about the activity we just completed is that we can learn new things about what it means to be a parent.

Don’t feel bad if your answers to some of these statements didn’t match others’ in our discussion. That’s not what matters. What does matter is that you are here to learn and to share, because you care about being the best parent that you can be.

Activity 4: What Would You Say?

Write the following statements on a large flip chart and read them aloud.

1. As a parent, I am most proud of ________________________________.
2. Children_______________________________________________________.
3. A parent must be ________________________________________________.
4. The most frustrating thing about being a parent is _________________.
5. The most rewarding thing about being a parent is _________________.

After reading the statements, tell parents:

Each of you should complete these statements in your own words. There are no right or wrong answers.
Allow adequate time for parents to record their responses on the 8 ½ x 11 sheets of paper. Have each parent select one other parent to share their responses. Give parents a few minutes to share their responses in groups of two then ask for a couple of volunteers to share their responses with the entire group.

Experiential Learning Activity

Getting To Know You

A. Experiencing – The Best of Me

Distribute 11 x 17 sheets of paper to each parent.

At the top of the page, write “The Best of Me.”

In the center of the piece of paper draw a picture of yourself. Don’t worry about how well you draw. If you cannot draw well, it doesn’t matter. Your drawing can be a stick figure or the best drawing you can do.

On the left side of your picture write, “As a Person.”

On the right side of your picture write, “As a Parent.”

Write or illustrate five GOOD things about yourself as a person and five GOOD things about yourself as a parent. You may use symbols, stick figures or whatever you can think of that will just help you put your thoughts on paper. Put those things on the appropriate side of the paper.

Before the beginning of this session, parent educators should prepare their own pictures to show as an example.
B. Sharing with Others

Instruct parents to:

Select someone you don’t know or don’t know very well and share your picture “The Best of Me.”

In groups of twos, allow 5-8 minutes for parents to share their pictures. Let the parents know when the second person should begin sharing (halfway through the total time allotted).

Ask parents:

- Would two or three volunteers share your pictures with the rest of the group?

Explain to parents:

Sharing your picture with others helps you to express how you feel about yourself both as a person and as a parent. As you look back over your picture did it cause you to remember something about yourself that you had not thought about in a long time?

Wait for an answer.

C. Processing – Looking Back over Your Self-Portrait

- Was it difficult or easy for you to identify the five positive things that describe you as a person and as a parent? Why?

- As a person, when was the last time you said, or even thought of, something positive about yourself?

- As a parent, when was the last time you said, or thought of, something positive about yourself?
D. Generalizing

Ask parents:

• Through drawing your own “picture” what did you learn about yourself?

E. Applying – Keeping Your “Picture” in Front of You

Ask the parents:

• Can you think of ways that you can build on the positive qualities that you identified?

Pass out 4 x 6 note cards to each parent and tell participants:

Write down at least three of the five positive qualities that you illustrated. Under each quality, list several things that you can do with your child which will give you an opportunity to use those qualities. For example, if you said that you had a big loving heart, identify several things that you can do with your child that would show your child that you have a big, loving heart.

I want you to hold on to what you have written on the note card. Put the note card somewhere, like your mirror, where you can see it daily. Check your progress to remind yourself of what you said you could do, so you can chart your progress in doing those things.

Activity 5: Parenting Matters

Pass out a copy of the “Parenting Matters: Brief Summary of Sessions” handout to each parent. Review the topics for each session.

You will need to attend at least seven of the eight sessions and complete at least seven follow-through activities in order to be recognized as having completed the training.
Follow-Through Activities

At the end of each session, you will have follow-through activities to complete at home before the next session. At the beginning of each session we will talk about what you did in the follow-through activities and how you felt about what you did. The goal is to have you do at least one follow through activity each week. This week you will have a choice of two follow-through activities. You may choose one of the activities or do both of them.

This week you will use the list of your positive qualities to help you start thinking about the things that you feel that you already do well as a parent. Write those things at the top of Follow-Through Activity Sheet 1. In the boxes provided, I want you to list things that you want to do better as a parent and try to do some of those things in the next week. Write down what you did and how you felt about what you did. We will discuss some of the things you did next week.

On Follow-Through Activity Sheet 2, you will examine what your parents did and what you now do with your children.

Read the directions on Follow-Through Activity Sheet 2.

Session Ending

The topics in this eight-session training can help you learn ways to cope with the joys and frustrations that come with parenting. Some of the sessions will be on a very personal level to help you better understand yourself. The sessions on communication and discipline will help you improve your relationship with your child. The sessions on managing stress and building a support system will help you learn strategies for coping with parenting challenges.

Closing Go-Around

At the end of each session, we will go around the room and give each of you an opportunity to say something. Remember that you are allowed to pass, or not say anything.
Give each parent an opportunity to respond to the following statements:

What I liked most about today’s session was ___________________________.

What I liked least about today’s session was ___________________________.

If I had to change one thing about today’s session, it would be ________.

Take notes (on a large flip chart) about how parents completed the sentences. Use this information as part of your evaluation.

End this session by saying:

Are there any questions or final comments about information discussed today?

Address any questions or concerns.

Thank you for coming. I look forward to our next meeting.

References


Ellis, P. (1983). Getting the community into the act: 72 participatory activities for field workers and trainers. West Indies: University of the West Indies, Barbados, Women and Development Unit.

A Brief Summary of Sessions

**Session 1**
**Parenting Challenges: Let’s Get Started**
This session lays a basic foundation for the sessions that follow. Ground rules for participation are established. Parents: (1) examine their attitudes and beliefs about parenting, and (2) identify and learn how to build on their strengths.

**Session 2**
**You’re A Role Model: Be All You Can Be**
Parents learn what competent parenting involves and define their ideas of what they need to do to become effective parents. Activities in this session help parents learn how they can be positive influences in the lives of their children. This session includes learning activities about the effects of violence on children, particularly the effects of domestic violence in front of children. The session also includes a discussion about the differences between wants and needs that parents have both as parents and as people.

**Session 3**
**Taking Care of Yourself: To Better Take Care of Your Child**
This session helps parents learn about the kind of self-care that can help them better withstand the challenges of parenting. Parents who take care of themselves are in a better position to provide the care needed for raising children. Parents will identify activities they enjoy doing and what motivates them to participate in them.

**Session 4**
**What Is Appropriate: Understanding Your Child’s Behavior**
This session helps parents to learn about normal, age-appropriate behaviors and realistic expectations they can have of their child based on the child’s age. Parents learn how to observe and listen to their children so that they can understand the importance of what children do and say.
Session 5
Effective Communication:
A Key To Building a Healthy Parent-Child Relationship
This session is designed to teach parents the importance of communicating clearly to their children and effective communication skills. Parents will review verbal and non-verbal communication and practice using "I" messages.

Session 6
Guiding Your Child’s Behavior: Avoiding Power Struggles:
This session helps parents learn the difference between discipline and punishment. Parents learn appropriate discipline techniques and how to avoid parent-child power struggles.

Session 7
Parenting Stress: When Children Try Your Patience
This session helps parents identify the symptoms and effects of stress and anger. Parents learn techniques to manage anger, stress and/or conflict so they can remain calm and in control.

Session 8
Tapping Into Your Support System: Keeping It Together
This session helps parents identify their network of family, friends and others who can serve as a source of support to them. Parents learn problem-solving skills and community resources available to help them.
My Personal Parenting Plan

First Name_____________________________________ Date _________________________

Things I already do well:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things I want to do better</th>
<th>Things I tried (include date)</th>
<th>How I felt about the things I tried to do</th>
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**Looking at My Parents: Looking at Me**

**Directions:** Think about how your parents handled the job of parenting and what you now do as a parent yourself. In the first column, write down what your parents did to teach you certain things. In the second column, write down what you are doing to teach your children those same things. Notice the similarities and the differences between what you do as a parent compared to what your parents did. Ask yourself: Am I being the parent that I want to be? List ways you want your children’s childhood to be either the same or different from yours.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What My Parents Did…</th>
<th>What I Do…</th>
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<td>to teach me about responsibility:</td>
<td>to teach my children about responsibility:</td>
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<tr>
<td>to teach me about relating to or treating others (such as my parents, brothers, sisters, friends, etc.):</td>
<td>to teach my children about relating to or treating others (such as their parents, brothers, sisters, friends, etc.):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to teach me about money:</td>
<td>to teach my children about money:</td>
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<tr>
<td>to teach me about dealing with my feelings of anger, sadness, fear, love, etc.:</td>
<td>to teach my children about dealing with their feelings of anger, sadness, fear, love, etc.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to teach me about facing problems or dealing with difficult situations:</td>
<td>to teach my children about facing problems or dealing with difficult situations:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to teach me about…(list something that is important to you):</td>
<td>to teach my children about…(list something that is important to you):</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Ways I want my children’s childhood to be either the same or different from mine:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Disagree Strongly
Disagree Somewhat
Agree Somewhat
Agree Strongly