

Partners in Parenting



A DATAR/FIRST CHOICE Treatment Manual

Norma G. Bartholomew, M.A.

Danica K. Knight, Ph.D.

Lois R. Chatham, Ph.D.

D. Dwayne Simpson, Ph.D.

Institute of Behavioral Research
Texas Christian University

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For more information, please contact:

Institute of Behavioral Research
Texas Christian University
TCU Box 298740
Fort Worth, TX 76129
(817) 257-7226
(817) 257-7290 (FAX)
Email: ibr@tcu.edu
Web site: www.ibr.tcu.edu

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Introduction

The *Partners in Parenting* module was designed to address the needs and concerns of parents in substance abuse treatment programs. The manual provides materials and instructions for leading a workshop that focuses on concepts important for parenting effectiveness such as communication skills, guidance techniques, and positive discipline strategies. The emphasis is on building skills, providing support, and helping parents understand the needs and abilities of children during different stages of development.

The manual contains materials for eight structured workshop sessions that can be implemented according to program and participant needs. Each session includes instructions for leading the session, along with handouts, discussion questions, and ideas for presenting information on the topics covered. Homework assignments are included to encourage practice of parenting skills between sessions. Articles of interest, resources for obtaining teaching materials, and a bibliography of additional reading also are included in this manual.

The structured workshop sessions are designed for eight weekly meetings of about two hours each. However, some flexibility is recommended. In practice, discussions of parenting issues have been known to become lively and individual participants have been found to need extra support and processing time when painful memories are triggered. Therefore, longer sessions or extra sessions may be warranted. (See discussion of Extra Meetings in the *Ideas for Using This Manual* section.) The following topics are covered in the workshop:

- **Session One: *Building a Partnership***

The first meeting centers on group building and introducing the philosophy and tone of the workshop. Participants are encouraged to think about current parenting concerns and challenges, their goals and expectations for the workshop, and the strengths and skills they contribute to the group.

- **Session Two: *Child Development***

Effective parenting requires a clear understanding of the developmental limitations and abilities of children at different ages. This session focuses on child development, common parenting issues at different developmental stages, and parental expectations. Guidance strategies for children of different ages are introduced and discussed.

■ **Session Three: *Family Communication: Active Listening***

This session introduces participants to the skill of listening as a foundation for effective family communication. Techniques for conveying acceptance and emotional support through active listening skills are highlighted and participants are invited to explore their current listening style. How effective listening can be used in various parenting situations is discussed.

■ **Session Four: *Family Communication: Building Understanding***

Continuing with the theme of family communication, this session introduces participants to speaking skills that help increase understanding and cooperation. The impact of nonverbal communication is emphasized, and parents are introduced to "I-Messages" as a strategy for communicating clearly about feelings and for setting limits and making requests.

■ **Session Five: *Helping Children Behave***

This session is designed to help participants master strategies for increasing desired behaviors in their children through the use of praise, reinforcement, setting limits, redirection, and modeling. Ineffective methods of handling children's misbehavior are discussed and communication skills that work well for providing child guidance are reinforced.

■ **Session Six: *Sensible Discipline***

Discipline strategies are aimed at decreasing unwanted behaviors in children. This session focuses on techniques for effective and fair discipline, including ignoring, time out, and natural and logical consequences. The reasons for children's misbehavior are explored, along with common discipline problems and recommended solutions.

■ **Session Seven: *Self-Care for Parents***

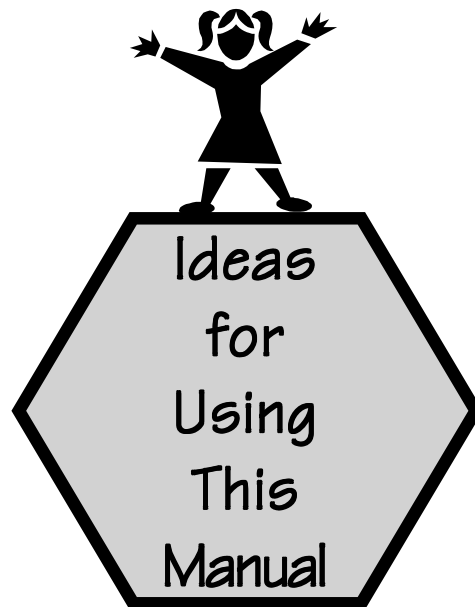
This session acknowledges the stress, insecurity, and low sense of self-esteem experienced by many parents who feel overwhelmed by parenting responsibilities. Participants are encouraged to focus on self-care and to pay attention to the potential negative impacts of not caring for themselves. Assertiveness, affirmations, time management, and strategies for dealing with the stress that results from negative "self-talk" are addressed.

■ **Session Eight: *Tomorrow and Beyond***

The final structured session emphasizes problem-solving, planning, and encouraging resilience in children. Parents are introduced to a problem-solving model

for working through future parenting challenges. The session also provides closure for the workshop by asking participants to review their parenting goals from the first session, to assess progress, and to set goals for the future. Time is allowed for a recognition activity (e. g., distributing completion certificates or awards).

In conclusion, the *Partners in Parenting* workshop has been designed to guide and support parents as they improve their communication, problem solving, and guidance skills with their children. It is hoped that by offering a forum where recovering parents with similar concerns can discuss options and solutions for better parenting, the result will be stronger, happier, and more supportive families.



The ***Partners in Parenting*** manual contains materials for eight structured workshop sessions. This section has been included to help counselors prepare for leading workshop sessions. It includes tips, techniques, and ideas to refresh and strengthen group leadership skills.

Preparation

Workshop leaders will benefit from allowing adequate preparation time for review and self-study. The *Resources* and *References* sections of this manual contain listings for books, articles, web sites, and videos that may be helpful. The following selections provide a good overview of parenting approaches discussed in the workshop:

Crary, E. (1993). *Without Spanking or Spoiling*. Seattle: Parenting Press.

Crary, E. (1990). *Pick Up Your Socks and Other Skills Growing Children Need*. Seattle: Parenting Press.

Gordon, T. (1991). *Discipline That Works: Promoting Self-Discipline in Children*. New York: Plume Books.

Gordon, T. (1970). *P.E.T.: Parenting Effectiveness Training*. New York: Peter H. Wyden.

Nelsen, J. (1996). *Positive Discipline*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Logistics

Each structured session of *Partners in Parenting* covers about two hours of material. Consider the following logistics issues in your planning and preparation:

- **Group selection** – The groups are designed for women and men who are actively involved in parenting children. Potential members should be emotionally stable, possess adequate social skills for group interaction, and not be in serious crisis. In addition, exercises, activities, and handouts used in the workshop require basic literacy in English.
- **Group size** – The ideal group size is likely to vary by treatment setting. In residential programs where clients live in close quarters and daily issues find their way into group discussions, smaller groups may work better. We found that a core group of 6 – 8 participants worked well in a small, residential women’s program, whereas groups with 10 – 12 participants were suitable for outpatient programs. An active, highly participatory group may benefit from having the session material split and presented over two meetings (see section on Extra Meetings).
- **Meeting room** – Tables or desks should be part of the seating arrangements, since many of the workshop exercises and activities include writing on worksheets. Other activities call for participants to move around the room or to work in pairs/small groups, so the meeting area should be large enough to hold everyone comfortably. In addition, the room should offer participants a sense of privacy.
- **Equipment** – Group leaders will need a flip chart or an eraser board for writing down key points during discussions and brainstorming activities.
- **Breaks/refreshments** – Offer participants a short break (10 minutes) at a logical stopping place mid-session. Coffee and other refreshments can add a nice touch and are generally appreciated by group members.
- **Child care** – Make child care available for participants during the meetings if at all possible. In this way, parents can attend without

the stress of arranging for a sitter and will be better able to concentrate on the workshop material. The child care room should be separate from the workshop room to help avoid distractions.

Extra Meetings

In addition to the eight structured sessions contained in the manual, extra sessions may be added to extend discussion and processing or to practice specific parenting skills. For example, we have found that clients often desire to discuss and process family-of-origin issues that arise quite spontaneously as a result of the topics addressed in the workshop. In the women's residential program where this workshop was piloted, counselors found it productive to help participants process these issues when they arose. In order to allow the time needed, the structured workshop material in each session was divided and presented over two meetings. In this program, the *Partners in Parenting* materials were spread out over 15 meetings.

Ideally, extra meetings should continue or expand the topics covered in the structured sessions. Beyond allowing time for processing issues and personal experiences, some other ideas for extra meetings might include:

- Use the meeting to show “trigger” films (short vignettes about parenting situations and responses) and discuss them vis-à-vis parenting skills and issues raised in the workshop material. Popular TV programs or sit-coms can provide excellent springboards for such discussions. In addition, parenting or mental health agencies in your area may have educational videos for loan or rent. To purchase parenting videos, check the Resources section of this manual for available catalogs.
- Extra meetings can be used to provide “hands-on” directions for specific parenting tips and techniques. This may include using the meeting to give parents time to actually construct incentive charts or other homemade “games” for encouraging children's positive behaviors. For example, leaders can provide poster board, paints, and other materials and show parents how to make an

incentive chart, a grid with behaviors like “brushing teeth” or “taking out the trash” listed in a column, with spaces next to each behavior where stars or checks can be placed each time the behavior is done. Parents can brainstorm how many stars are needed for a small reward, as well as what types of personal, inexpensive rewards might be appropriate for their child. For example, a week’s worth of brushing teeth equals staying up an extra hour on Friday night. Likewise, group leaders can teach parents how to use these types of games and activities to encourage and reinforce children’s cooperation.

- Use extra meetings to teach parents how to organize and hold family meetings. Once family meetings have been initiated in their families, parents can use the time to discuss progress and get pointers from other parents. Role play can be used to help parents practice problem solving and communication skills.
- Dedicate the extra meetings to allowing parents to discuss their experiences in actually using the parenting skills and techniques suggested in the structured sessions. Group leaders can provide further guidance in choosing and using appropriate reward and discipline strategies and participants can offer each other support and encouragement.

Modeling and Role Play

The *Partners in Parenting* material encourages group leaders to model (demonstrate) appropriate communication skills (listening, I-Messages, nonverbal congruence) and guidance techniques (time out, setting limits, redirection, enforcing consequences). As part of the preparation process, leaders may find it helpful to practice with peers and get feedback on the most useful ways of modeling the recommended strategies.

Role play is used extensively in the structured sessions to help participants practice new skills and become comfortable using them. Here are some things to keep in mind when leading role plays. You may find it helpful to use some of this information to prepare your opening discussion of role play with group members:

- Role play is not drama. Encourage participants to be natural and focus on helping each other create realistic situations for practicing parenting and communication skills.
- Stop and start the role play, as needed. It is sometimes helpful to role play just a few lines and responses, stop and process the interaction, then allow role players to repeat the scenario incorporating the feedback generated during the processing discussion.
- When processing a role play, encourage participants to talk about their feelings as well as the skills being practiced.
- Teach participants how to give each other helpful and constructive feedback. For example, “I think your child might listen better if you lowered your voice a little,” is more constructive feedback than “You’re yelling! No wonder your child ignores you!”
- Don’t force anyone to participate in role playing. Some people may be too uncomfortable. Remember that some people learn more from observing than from participating.
- Stop the role play if you sense that a participant is becoming distressed or uncomfortable. Let participants know they can stop or “bow out” of a role play at any time.
- When appropriate, you may want to take part in a role play activity, either by modeling effective communication or parenting techniques or by modeling a “difficult” child so that a member can practice.
- Encourage the group to discuss both verbal and nonverbal communication in the role play scenario. Help stress the importance appropriate nonverbal communication for effective parenting.
- If the parenting or communication techniques used by a member during role play are ineffective or inappropriate, ask the participant or other group members for alternatives. For example, “Based on what we discussed today in the group, can you think of another way to discipline the child that might work better?” Once an effective suggestion is generated, use role play to rehearse how it would look and sound.

- Thank members for participating in the role plays. Find opportunities to offer praise and compliment their willingness to try.

Evaluation

- There is an individual evaluation form for each session of *Partners in Parenting* (located at the end of the session). This simple evaluation is designed to give group leaders' some general feedback about the clients' reactions to the material, what they found most useful, and a global rating of the session.
- Programs interested in a more formal evaluation of the material can use the *Partners in Parenting Pre & Post Questionnaire* (pp. 193-195). In addition to measuring increases in knowledge based on the workshop content, the instrument is designed to capture changes in attitudes about parenting strategies, as well as changes in parents' sense of self-efficacy.
- To administer the pretest and posttest questionnaires, time should be allowed before the first session and following the last session. In some cases, group leaders may want to schedule a special meeting before the workshop starts (and again after the workshop is over) to administer the questionnaires. The same questionnaire is used for both pre and post administration. In the "gray box" area of the form, the person who administers it can circle whether it's being given as "Pre" or "Post." The gray box also features an area for collecting client identification, dates, and other information to help match pretests with posttests.

