

## Strengthening Parenting Through Groups From Infancy to Adolescence

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### Types of Groups

Educational

Supportive

Self-help

Therapeutic

## Why Parents Join Groups

- Feeling overwhelmed or inadequate
- Needs help sorting out contradictory information
- Individual child rearing concerns
- Place to sort out feelings of anger and guilt
- Seeking ways to transmit their values and morals to their children
- Involuntary / court-ordered

## Adult Learning Principles

- Adults are motivated to learn as they develop needs and interests generated by real life tasks or problems
- Learning is life or work centered
- Experience is the richest resource for adult learning
- Adults have a deep need to be self-directing
- Individual differences increase with age and experience

## Group for New Parents

Debbie Regan, RNC, IBCLC

- **Support Group**
  - Mostly mothers and babies
  - Occasional dad or couple attend
  - Ongoing group – time limited by aging out (birth to 6 months)
- **Informal setting w/ mats & toys**
- **Topics discussed are group driven**
- **Informational / Educational Component**



**Motivation to Attend a New Parent Group**

## What New Parent Groups Offer

### FOR THE PARENT:

- Isolation seeks socialization
- Helps parents create a new normal
- Spin off friendships / playgroups
- Observes others' parenting skills
- Builds confidence as a parent

## What New Parent Groups Offer

### FOR THE BABY:

- New environment / outing
- Adaptation to new people & places
- Physical movement / activity
- Socialization



## Group Leader Skills and Spills New Parent Group

### ➤ SKILLS

- Allow the group to guide the discussion
- Ask group to respond to individual questions and concerns before leader responds
- Responding to inaccurate information with evidenced based research
- Qualify information you give as either “my opinion/experience” or research
- Encourage mothers to recognize what they are doing right = empowerment
- Referral

## Skills and Spills



### ➤ SPILLS

- Resist giving immediate answers & solutions
- There is usually more than one solution
- Resist being the expert on EVERYTHING!
- Resist citing research on EVERYTHING!
- Allow parents to find *their own* comfort zone with parenting

## Group for Parents of Older Infants

Lisa Phillips, MSW, GSW

- Parents (mostly mothers) attend w/ babies
- Informal: Sit on floor w/ babies & toys
- Time-limited (5 sessions)
- Specific topic each week



## Motivation for Parents to Attend

- Positive experience in support group
- Socialization of parent & child
- Confusion of conflicting information
- Uncertainty of making decisions as a first-time parent

## What a Group Offers for Parents of Older Infants

- Information and support from both leader and group members
- Age-appropriate play experiences



## Framework for Making Childrearing Decisions

### Three-step process for parents

(Lerner and Dombro, 2005)

1. Develop self-awareness
2. Tune in to your child by learning to read cues
3. Make sensitive and effective decisions

## Group Leader Skills and Spills

Older Infants Parent Group

- **SKILLS**
  - Help parents make connections with one another
  - Make sure members get their individual concerns addressed
  - Comment on the positive things you see between parent and child

## Skills and Spills



- **SPILLS**
  - Don't let more self-assured members dominate
  - Use empathy and sensitivity when offering advice

## Group for Parents of Toddlers & Preschoolers

Lisa Phillips, MSW, GSW

- Educational Component
- Discussion topics selected by both the instructor and parents



## Motivation for Parents to Attend

- Adapting to new developmental stage
- Desire to learn non-punitive discipline strategies
- Concern over what is “normal” preschool behavior
- Stress in family related to child’s behavior
- Court-mandated attendance

## What a Group Offers for Parents of Toddlers & Preschoolers

- Normalization of typical preschool behaviors
- Specific strategies that can be adapted for different children
- Developmentally appropriate solutions to discipline issues
- Opportunity for “meta-parenting”  
(Holden & Hawk, 2003)

## Help parents see themselves in the following roles to facilitate their child’s development

- Teacher
- Nurturer
- Playmate
- Limit Setter

(Landy, 2002)

## Group Leader Skills and Spills

Toddler & Preschooler Parent Group

### ➤ SKILLS

- Vary methods to present material
- Listen carefully & ask clarifying questions
- Focus on a parents' strengths
- Use parents' comments to point out certain themes
- When necessary, shift focus from the individual to the group
- Use specific examples to demonstrate concepts

## Skills and Spills



### ➤ SPILLS

- Don't rush to fill the silence
- Use self-disclosure strategically
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I'll try to find out"
- Don't ignore your own mistakes

## Group for Parents of School Age to Teen Children

Fern Halford, MSW, LCSW, CMI

- Educational
- Discussion
- Supportive



Teens or Toddlers? Hard to tell...

## Motivation for Parents to Attend

- Manage developmental changes
- Communicate better with child
- Parent to Parent Support
- To keep child safe
- Manage a specific problem
- Maintain status quo
- Learn better discipline skills



## What a Group Offers for Parents of School Age to Teens

- Support from other parents
- New parenting skills
- Self-confidence due to “I’m not alone”
- Realization that every family struggles
- Better awareness of self

## Group Leader Skills and Spills

School Age to Teen Parent Group

### ➤ SKILLS

- Creating an open and supportive climate
- Know when to be supportive or when to refer out for therapy
- Introduce appropriate information for discussion
- Encourage participation by all members
- Help create a feeling of group trust
- Summarize major points in a discussion
- Encourage parents with praise

## Skills and Spills



### ➤ SPILLS

- Unprepared for parents who press your buttons
- Judgmental
- Providing quick answers
- Non-inclusive, unsafe environment

## Negative Behaviors in Groups

### ➤ Monopolizing



### ➤ Attention-Seeking Behavior



### ➤ Withholding





### References & Suggested Reading

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