



A Guide to Facilitating Discipline is Not a Dirty Word

Getting Ready for Your Parent Workshops

You will want to review and think about the curriculum material. Preparation time is essential if you are to be an effective leader. The specific activities offered are not intended to curb your creativity but to give you a strong lead.

Keep in mind that as a parent education facilitator, you are:

- Recognized as a leader by your group and therefore, must be careful about how you share information lest it be deemed as a judgment of right and wrong behavior.
- Able to act as a reference or resource person who has access to the specific, well-substantiated information presented here and who also possesses sources of other information.
- Able to help the members of your group discuss their feelings and observations.
- Expected to be willing to learn with your group.

You are *NOT*:

- Expected to be an expert, a child psychologist, or even a family counselor.
- Responsible for answering every question about children and families.

A difficult situation can occur in workshops when a participant describes a specific child-rearing technique and asks "Is this the right thing to do?" To prepare for this, we suggest that during the first meeting the leader establish a framework or set of criteria that will enable participants to answer the question for themselves, perhaps with discussion and support from other members of the group. This will make it possible for the leader to remain in the facilitator role and to refrain from making judgments or having to be an "expert."

If a participant describes a practice that is clearly abusive or neglectful, the leader must first make it clear that it is unacceptable and against the law, and second, that the leader may be required by law to report the parent's action to the appropriate authorities. This can be an uncomfortable and difficult situation, perhaps best dealt with by saying to the parent, "I'd like to discuss this in private with you. Could we spend a few minutes together after the workshop and move our discussion along other topics right now?"

Suggested Program Outlines

The curriculum provides sufficient material for six hours of training. The number of sessions presented is flexible; below are recommendations for presenting the material in one, three, or six sessions. It is strongly recommended that if only one two-hour session can be provided, the leader or speaker present one or two of the principles in depth rather than attempting an overview of all seven principles.

One Session Content (2 hours)

- What is discipline?
- Overview of ages and stages—brainstorming activity related to challenging behaviors
- Principle 1 – Tell children what they CAN do
- Principle 4 – Change the environment

Three Session Content (6 hours)

- *Session One*
 - What is discipline?
 - Overview of ages and stages
 - Principle 1 – Tell children what they CAN do
 - Principle 2 – Preserve your child’s self-concept
- *Session Two*
 - Principle 3 – Offer your child choices
 - Principle 4 – Change the environment
 - Principle 5 – Work with your child
- *Session Three*
 - Principle 6 – Let children experience gentle consequences
 - Principle 7 – Set a good example
 - Wrap-up

Six Session Content (6 hours)

- *Session One*
 - What is discipline?
 - Ages and stages
- *Session Two*
 - Principle 1 – Tell children what they CAN do
 - Principle 2 – Preserve your child’s self-concept
- *Session Three*
 - Principle 3 – Offer your child choices
- *Session Four*
 - Principle 4 – Change the environment
 - Principle 5 – Work with your child
- *Session Five*
 - Principle 6 – Let children experience gentle consequences
- *Session Six*
 - Principle 7 – Set a good example
 - Wrap-up

Tips for Facilitators

Following are tips for successfully facilitating parent workshops. Use the tips to refine your skills as you work with parents and groups. The following material is excerpted from the Parenting Skills Workshop Series curriculum manual written by John Bailey, Susan Perkins, and Sandra Wilkins.

Keep lists of 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.

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 principles 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.

Involve all group members in discussions. Find respectful ways to draw our 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. 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 principle is presented, a poster is shown detailing the principle. Say and point to the principle and read the explanation aloud. This gives the information to participants who do not read and will help all participants memorize the principles by combining oral and visual presentation. Always read principle explanations exactly as they are written, you may, or course, explain or elaborate on 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.

Study other resources on group facilitation skills. *Communication for Empowerment* by Virginia Vanderslice with Florence Cherry, Moncrieff Cochran and Christiann Dean (Cornell Cooperative Extension) is an excellent resource.

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 set of instructions.

It can be helpful to give a general time frame for each activity, as, for example, “We will take fifteen minutes to talk about how you used Principle One: CAN DO statements throughout the week, then we introduce a new principle called IALAC.”

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 you take the actors outside or in another room to prepare. Establish the mood and help the actors decide how to act out each step of the scenario.

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 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 roles 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 a 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.

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 summarize each principle as it was 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. There 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 skills at the next meeting.

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 that 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.

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