

What is 'Supporting Positive Parenting'?

The trouble with being a parent is that by the time you are experienced, you are unemployed.

Anon

I am not quite unemployed yet as, being a grandparent of seven, I am still called upon to help with homework, deal with moody teenagers, or occasionally do the school run. And even though I now have many years of parenting and grand-parenting behind me, I still make mistakes. I hear myself saying things that my parents said to me and which I always vowed I would never say to my children.

This manual offers a course for parents or carers who want to learn more effective ways of raising children. It was developed to meet the needs of local families who were requesting support. Today, many families have lost a sense of community. Moreover, displaced families seeking refuge or work often find themselves without their extended family, trusted friends and neighbours around to provide additional support. Many parents (and children) feel very isolated and sometimes quite desperate trying to cope with the pressures of the modern world.

The programme in this manual goes some way to provide that **support**. It gives parents the opportunity to share their concerns, to befriend others who are in a similar position, and it provides a positive methodology in raising their children.

The course is based upon creatively exploring ways to use '**positive parenting**' methods that include:

- C** reating a loving, safe and secure environment
- R** esponding sensitively to the child's needs
- E** ncouraging desirable behaviour
- A** sserting discipline by calmly setting firm limits
- T** ransmitting values
- I** nitiated appropriate learning environments
- V** erbalising reasonable expectations
- E** ncouraging parents to take care of themselves

Parenting programmes based upon encouragement, support and positive discipline:

- Are the most powerful ways of bringing about change.
- The most cost-effective intervention to improve family life.
- Are at the centre of any intervention intended to improve the developmental outcomes for our children.

Why does it matter?

When I first started to run parent groups ten years ago, I was encountering parents from differing religious and ethnic backgrounds and from different social classes with varying degrees of literacy and language skills, and most had a very real need to know how to parent their children effectively. Those of us who have been lucky enough to have a stable and happy family life will have learnt how to parent by the example set by our own parents. The parents I was seeing didn't just want to be better parents, they actually needed to know what to do to raise their children in a responsible way because many did not have such happy experiences.

Effective parenting is not a natural skill. Parenting is about more than providing the basic needs of food, warmth and shelter. We have to learn how to create a stimulating environment in which a child will reach his full potential. The skills of communicating, effective listening, empathy and firm, fair discipline are all learned skills. Furthermore, whatever the circumstances in which parents find themselves, for example: in unsuitable accommodation; under Court Orders; alone in their role as parent; the children still need to develop in a loving, encouraging and disciplined environment.

The role of parenting seems far more challenging today, particularly with the added pressure from politicians, and the expectations of schools. It seems to me that parents have become the scapegoats for most of the problems in society.

In recent years, the growth in books, television programmes and government papers about parenting has made even the most effective parents feel insecure in their role. Hence the demand is growing for courses such as this.

So for all these reasons there is a need to encourage and support positive parenting.

How can this manual help?

The programmes that are shown to work with parents have the following factors in common:

- They use evidence-based content with a manual.
- They target accurately.
- They engage a substantial proportion of the population.
- They sustain attendance for at least 8-10 sessions.
- They ensure quality through training and supervision.
- They evaluate, review and change practice.

(Scott, 2006)

The tried and tested course on which this manual is based has met all of these criteria by:

- Providing a course based upon proven parenting practices.

- Providing accessible materials for parents.
- Having flexibility to meet the needs of specific groups of parents.
- Giving local support for approximately two hundred parents each year, many returning for further courses.
- Accomplishing sustained attendance through 6-10 sessions.
- Providing trained and supervised practitioners.
- Responding to regular evaluations and reviews in consultation with parents and practitioners.

Wendy Goddard

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Introduction

This manual provides the guidance and materials that a facilitator will need to run a course on supporting positive parenting.

The course is designed to give parents the confidence in their own strengths and abilities to enable them to help their children to also develop these important attributes.

Many people lack confidence in their ability as parents, especially when others, complaining about the behaviour of the younger generation in general, are quick to point the finger at them. It is no wonder that parents begin to question how well they are parenting their own children. The act of 'parenting' itself can make us doubt ourselves, especially during that difficult period as our children grow up into teenagers. Parents often find life difficult and feel unable to give their children the loving, stable and encouraging home life that they deserve.

Young parents are often the least confident, which may be because they are still teenagers themselves and thus still unsure of their own identities, or because they come to parenthood unwittingly and unwillingly. Once parents have gained their own self-respect and self-confidence they can, in turn, use these to create a positive attitude to life within their own family environment.

UK parenting programmes

The *Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder Evaluation* (2008) undertaken by Lindsay, Davies et al. at the University of Warwick and King's College, London analysed the trial roll-out across 18 UK local Authorities of three parenting programmes originally developed in the United States and Australia.

The findings included:

- *Facilitator satisfaction with materials was generally high, although there were criticisms of American English, predominance of Australian culture shown, wordiness and complexity of language and high literacy demands.*
- *The average cost of running a parenting group was about £18,000 with cost of each parent completing the courses being just under £3,000.*

Among the specific recommendations were:

- *'Local Authorities should also consider the cost effectiveness of the programmes' as this is 'within their control'*
- *'Given the multiple differences between the three programmes yet the same outcomes, it follows that other home grown courses might be equally effective, and priority should be given to the search for and evaluation of alternatives.'*

This course manual on *Supporting Positive Parenting* is particularly relevant in this context.

About this course

The subtitle for this manual, *A proven programme based upon mutual respect designed for local community initiatives*, was chosen because:

- The course is easy to follow for both facilitator and parent.
- It has been used successfully with over 1,500 parents.
- The parents are valued contributors to the course.
- The course is affordable by both small voluntary agencies and larger organisations.

In addition:

- The course can be used with groups of up to 15 people as well as with individuals.
- There is no requirement for the facilitator to attend an expensive course in order to gain access to the material.
- The programme does not require audio-visual aids.
- The facilitator's notes give sufficient guidance for running the complete course.
- There is enough material to allow for between 12 and 20 hours of contact time.
- The handouts and notes are flexible enough to allow the duration of the sessions to be varied to suit the needs of any particular facilitator and parent group.
- The manual takes full account of the *National Occupational Standards for Work with Parents*.

When I first started to offer parenting courses I encountered diverse groups that were made up of people from differing religious and ethnic backgrounds, from different social classes and with varying degrees of literacy and language skills. Some of the parents I work with now are displaced from their homes, families and communities, whilst others may even have suffered child abuse. However, what most of them have in common is that they lack confidence in themselves, and therefore it is always important to me to find ways of engaging with their strengths as quickly as possible because there may well be restricted time or funding.

In addition, it must be remembered that they have had the courage to make the commitment to attend the course, and it is essential that facilitators support and encourage every effort they make.

I hope that this manual will encourage facilitators to work in partnership with parents to provide them with new insights into how to break the cycle of discouragement for themselves and their children.

Wendy Goddard

If you need advice on running this course or feel that you need further support please contact me on wendyann.goddard@ntlworld.com

A brief guide to the principles underlying this work with parents

The principles underlying the course are based upon Individual (Adlerian) Psychology developed by Alfred Adler. Humanistic or Client-Centred Psychology underpins the relationship between the facilitator and the parents.

1. Individual psychology

Some of the core concepts of this theory are:

- All behaviour is *goal directed*, which means that we behave in a certain way to meet specific goals.
- We are *social* beings, therefore our main goal is to belong.
- In order to understand behaviour we have to understand the effect of that behaviour on others; especially important is the parent-child relationship. Thus *co-operation* is one of the corner stones of the philosophy.
- People, including children, behave according to their own subjective view of reality, and so to understand others we need *empathy*, the ability to see things from their point of view.
- The subjective view of reality is termed the *private logic*, which is the unique conviction we have about life, self, and others and is influenced by genetic, cultural, and family factors.
- The *life-style* is formed through childhood experiences and involves the affective, cognitive and behavioural strategies we employ to reach our goal.
- Mutual respect is essential between people in a democracy and in a democratic family.
- *Discipline* is an essential part of parenting and self-development.
- There is an emphasis on *cognitive-behavioural* approaches to change because if we choose our behaviour to meet certain goals we can change that behaviour if it no longer suits us.

The philosophy, therefore, is a very optimistic one.

Parenting skills based upon these concepts are mostly regarded as 'Positive Parenting' or 'Co-operative Discipline' and are often described as an 'authoritative approach' (as opposed to autocratic and permissive). They include such methods as using logical consequences; recognising goals of behaviour; introducing family meetings; teaching problem solving skills; emphasising encouragement; and much more. These are discussed further in the Facilitator's Notes with each session.

Positive Parenting also includes communication skills such as active listening, empathy for others, recognising and owning feelings. These communication skills are essential in the development of emotional intelligence.

2. Humanistic or person-centred therapy

The relationship between the facilitator and the parents in this course requires the 'core conditions' for facilitative practice – congruence (realness), acceptance and empathy. This is based upon Carl Rogers' Humanistic Theory. In practice, facilitators using this approach, emphasise the relationship between themselves and the group participants. It is based upon co-operation, support and empathy.

Congruence

Perhaps the most basic of these essential attitudes is realness or genuineness. As facilitators we need to be genuine, entering into a relationship with the parents without presenting a front or a façade, we are then much more likely to be effective. We are aware of the feelings that we are experiencing, we are able to live these feelings, and we are able to communicate them if appropriate. We are able to be honest with the group. When necessary and appropriate we can disclose aspects about ourselves to enable greater understanding and empathy.

Acceptance

This attitude of acceptance stands out in those who are successful in facilitating learning. It is about valuing the parent, valuing their feelings and their opinions. It is a caring for the individual, but a non-possessive caring. It is an acceptance of this other person as having worth in their own right. It is also having a belief that this parent is somehow fundamentally trustworthy and capable of finding their own solutions.

Empathic understanding

When the facilitator has the ability to understand the parent's reactions from the inside, is sensitive to how the learning process is received by the parent, the likelihood of significant learning is increased. Parents feel appreciative when they are simply *understood* – not evaluated, not judged, simply understood from their *own* point of view and not from the facilitator's.

Who is this manual for?

This course in this manual is designed primarily for use by facilitators who are working with *parents* and *carers* but it can also be used with *foster carers*, *grandparents* and *parents to be*. (Within the manual the term 'parents' covers anyone undertaking the parenting role).

More and more professionals find themselves required to run parenting courses. They are often drawn from the caring professions: nursing, teaching, counselling, social work and youth services. Many of them already have the attributes that will enable them to become very effective facilitators for parenting skills groups. The qualities of concern, compassion, and empathy, are essential characteristics of their professions and will enable them to effectively support parents and their families. They might also have knowledge of child development and psychology.

An **experienced facilitator** should find the sessions laid out in Part Two very straightforward to use as each session has a *Session Plan* (including timings), a set of *Facilitator's Notes*, handouts for the exercises and an evaluation sheet.

In addition, for those **less experienced facilitators**, the manual has a section in Part One on *Facilitating Groups* which gives general guidance on facilitating groups of people on parenting courses.

There are other people who might want to run parenting groups: namely **parents**. This might be particularly relevant for those parents who may have been through similar courses and who have the appropriate confidence and skills to work with other groups of parents. This manual provides them with the materials and guidance to enable them to feel confident in helping to support other parents in their communities. Who better to know what their peers are going through?

So, the *facilitators* who undertake this parenting group work might be:

- **Practitioners** working with parents including:
 - counsellors
 - nurses
 - teachers
 - youth workers
 - social workers
 - Family and Children's Centre staff
- **Parents** themselves

The background to the manuals

About the author

Wendy Goddard was a psychiatric nurse and then spent over 20 years as a secondary school teacher eventually retiring as Deputy Head. On retirement, she founded a small local charity, *The Listening Ear*, providing counselling and training to young people and their families. Wendy has remained very much involved, developing materials for their training, supervising the counsellors, as well as providing training for parents and professionals working with young people.

The Listening Ear

The Listening Ear delivers training locally (Bournemouth, Dorset, Poole) where the work includes supporting refugee families, teenage parents, and those in recovery. It also delivers training to professionals in other parts of the country.

All of the trainers are qualified in counselling and have either teaching or health qualifications. They are all qualified trainers or working towards a City and Guilds qualification with Adult Education.

The trainers and counsellors sit on the management committee of *The Listening Ear*, where there is also representation from young people, parents and other organisations.

The Listening Ear is a non-profit-making organisation that strives to develop courses with parents and families that are:

- Empowering.
- Achievable.
- Non-judgemental.
- Non-discriminatory.
- Able to be replicated at the local level.
- Without expensive obligatory introductory training.

The parenting courses

Materials were originally created by the author for a team of facilitators who were being trained to deliver parenting courses. These facilitators were already qualified therapists and learned how to facilitate the courses by shadowing the author.

They found, while running their own groups, that the course material would be even more useful if there were notes and guidance to go with the handouts. Many of their ideas,

suggestions and amendments – along with those of the participating parents – have now been incorporated into three core manuals dealing with '**Positive Approaches to Parenting**':

- *Supporting Positive Parenting*
- *Self-esteem – A Family Affair*
- *Life Changes: Managing Parents' and Children's Emotions*

Each can be used as a **stand alone resource** providing all the materials necessary to run a 6–10 week course, **or they can be combined** in any order to form a more comprehensive programme.

Acknowledgements

This is not the kind of book that can be written without contributions from others.

The manual represents many years of facilitating diverse parent groups in different contexts including schools, community education and social care. Many professionals – counsellors, teachers, social workers and mental health workers – have contributed ideas by making suggestions, participating in and evaluating every exercise.

Most importantly, however, all the exercises have been tried and tested by parents who tell me that they work. I am very appreciative of all their comments.

In keeping with the spirit of deep regard and respect for their families, the illustrations for the manual have been provided by the children of Winton Primary School, Bournemouth, and grateful thanks go to them and to their teachers who have encouraged the children to contribute.

My thanks to the team of *The Listening Ear* who have facilitated the sessions so many times and continue to do so, for all the suggestions they have made.

A very special thanks to my friend and colleague, Marilyn McGowan, for her encouragement and support.

No manual such as this can ever be written without due reference to all authors who have already written on the subject. Much of it is based upon the ideas developed by Alfred Adler and Rudolph Dreikurs.

Thanks to Geoffrey Mann and the team at Russell House for their encouragement and positive contributions.

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Notes on using this manual

How this manual is organised

Part One: Guidance for Facilitators

This part provides information that will enhance your knowledge and skills and enable you to feel more confident about your ability to deliver the course. These few notes are not intended to be exhaustive and anyone looking for more in-depth guidance will find the books included in the *Further Reading* section a good place to start.

Part Two: The Sessions

Each session is laid out with a session plan, facilitators notes, handouts and extension exercises.

This gives the facilitator the flexibility to use the materials in whatever way suits them and the group members best:

- Photocopy all the copiable materials and make up complete packs for the parents.
- Photocopy only the ones that would be used in a particular session.

These handouts are also available electronically so that the facilitator can print out the handouts from a computer (see *Electronic supply of the copiable materials* on page xvii).

Timings and timetable

The *Session Plan* gives suggested timings for the activities in that particular session.

Each of the six weekly sessions should last about two hours: any longer than this and attention starts lapsing.

The length of the complete course covered in this manual is normally twelve hours: six sessions of two hours each. This works well as it fits in nicely with the school half-terms (some parents find it difficult to attend when their children are on holiday).

It would be preferable to run eight to ten sessions as this would provide more opportunities for learning and change. Indeed, all our parent evaluations have requested longer courses.

There is enough additional material in the extension exercises to make this possible if time and funding allow.

Co-facilitators

It is recommended that the course should be run with a co-facilitator, volunteer parent or trainee. Facilitators can run an apprenticeship system whereby a volunteer parent or

professional colleague helps an experienced facilitator run the programme. They should do this on at least two complete courses before leading these activities themselves. This will enable them to become familiar with the material, to do any background reading they think may be necessary and to make notes on the sessions to remind themselves of techniques used.

However, it is not always possible due to lack of finance, time or interested trainees to have a co-facilitator but participant parents can help in other ways:

- Get some of them to do the more practical tasks like setting up the room, taking registers and providing the refreshments.
- It is not uncommon for a group member to need individual attention when dealing with particularly painful issues and, in these circumstances, another group member who has the skills and empathy to support a needy parent could act as an assistant.

Using parents in this way encourages co-operation, enables them to connect and feel capable and often gives them the courage to start on the road to becoming a facilitator.

Group members' needs

Individual learners have individual learning styles. For this reason the course is designed around small group discussions reinforced by experiential exercises undertaken individually, in pairs or in groups.

It is important to use a variety of teaching methods to get parents engaged and talking. The more varied the experience the better. The facilitator may want to deliver the exercises in a different way from the one suggested if they feel that it would enhance the learning experience.

Parents enjoy talking about their experiences and hearing about those of others. However, the storytelling needs to be very focused and the facilitator must not allow this to distract the group from the topic being covered in that particular session.

It is important, as a facilitator, to decide how much you want to disclose about yourself and your family before you start, but some short anecdotes as examples are always helpful.

Exercises need to be completed at the learner's pace and it is better to omit parts of the session than to try to cover everything in a rush. However, the sessions should be brought to a proper conclusion rather than just ending with a sudden stop. Although the sessions have a set programme and suggested timings for each activity, the course should be flexible enough to allow differences of emphasis for different groups.

Much will depend upon the size and ability of the group. For example, a more articulate group will often get through the material quickly but will want to have long discussions. A group with literacy difficulties may need more time on the exercises, but it should be remembered that they will still need an opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings.

Consider in advance whether any special circumstances apply to the group, for example a crèche may be needed for parents with younger children.

Refreshments

Usually coffee, tea, squash and biscuits. Sometimes parents like to have the opportunity to contribute home-baked cakes and biscuits. It is a good idea to establish in advance if any group members have special dietary needs.

Personal issues of group members

Some of the parents on the course may be struggling with all kinds of personal issues, including mental health problems. These may materialise during the sessions and need very sensitive handling as these sessions are not supposed to be treated as 'group therapy'. Here are some useful suggestions:

- At the beginning explain the aims of the programme and that it may not be possible to give time to individual needs.
- If a parent wants to discuss personal issues not directly related to the topic in hand, allow yourself time to talk to them briefly at the end of the session and point them to more appropriate forms of help.
- Compile a list of therapists to whom you can refer them.
- Get to know the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and introduce yourself to the relevant people.

Closed or open group

Negotiate with the group at the first session whether or not you will permit others to join the group once you have started as it can be quite disruptive to allow new members to join later sessions.

There are times when a parent is unable to attend the first session, for whatever reason, but if they have sent apologies then, with the approval of the rest of the group, the facilitator can contact them and invite them to the next session.

Resources

The programme requires only very basic resources as the premises provided for parenting courses are very rarely fitted with high-tech equipment. *Flipcharts, folders, paper and pens* are the minimum requirements and are easy to transport.

Don't forget to include a box of tissues!