



bulletin

for Parent Educators



Strengthening Parent Education
Across Canada

JUNE 2004

Tips and Tools for Parent Educators!

Over the last two years, the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada) and Family Service Canada—with project funding from Health Canada—have been working together on a number of initiatives to support parent educators:

- a Handbook for Parent Educators to be published in June 2004
- five one-day symposiums for parent educators held in 2002–2003
- a catalogue of resources that will be published with the Handbook
- a series of four Bulletins for Parent Educators

This is the third Bulletin for Parent Educators. Feel free to copy and share it with your colleagues. It can also be downloaded from the Web sites of Family Service Canada and FRP Canada (www.familyservicecanada.org and www.frp.ca). A limited number of copies are also available from the two organizations.

The third and fourth Bulletins focus on the characteristics of adult learners. More ideas about enhancing the learning experience for parents who participate in our parent education programs will be included in the Handbook to be published in June.

FRP Canada and Family Service Canada were encouraged to undertake this project because parent educators often feel lonely and isolated in their work. Some are employed—in a wide range of organizations, often combining their work as parent educators with other roles—but many parent educators work on a freelance and part-time basis.

As well, parent education is not a clearly identified profession or recognized calling. During a symposium for parent educators held last year in Charlottetown, participants were asked how many parent educators there were in their region. Responses ranged from seven to the whole population of the region. Even parent educators themselves have very different ideas about the role of a parent educator.

No wonder many of us feel like we—perhaps with a small group of immediate colleagues—are on our own. Through these current initiatives, FRP Canada and Family Service Canada will provide some practical tools and resources and, we hope, continue building a sense of professionalism and belonging among parent educators across Canada.

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Enhancing the Learning Experience Characteristics of Adult Learners

- Adults bring ideas, questions and concerns that arise from their own values, cultural traditions, personal experience and knowledge.
- Adults in a group will be resources for one another.
- Adults decide what they will do with the material presented by the group leader or by the other members of the group.
- Adults are stimulated by things they can use right away.

These observations have some obvious implications. The literature and, more importantly, the shared experience of parent educators offer lots of tips and ideas for enhancing the learning experience of participants in parent education programs. You soon realize that you don't control what people actually learn or what insights they glean but you can encourage people to articulate and focus on their own insights, for their own benefit and the benefit of others in the group.

Adults bring ideas, questions and concerns that arise from their own values, cultural traditions, personal experience and knowledge. Beginning with your welcome and introduction at the first parent education session with any group, be sure to frame your questions so participants can contribute from their own experience and previous knowledge.

For example, regarding participants' expectations and goals, questions like "What parenting situations during the last few weeks did you feel good about?" and "What situations did you find difficult?" focus on parents' actual experience. Questions like "What do you want to learn?" serve less well.

Record discussion on flip charts using some of the participants' own words to honour participants'

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experience and contribution to the group. The flip chart is a low-cost, low-tech and immediate tool for acknowledging their participation. (Some of us can hardly think without a flip chart and a handful of non-toxic markers nearby!)

With all eyes on the flip chart record, you can talk about the ideas and comments themselves and avoid personalizing the issues. This is one technique for dealing constructively with conflict or confrontation between participants with different opinions.

Adults in a group will be resources for one another. Participants should talk a lot more than the group leader or facilitator – a very helpful measure of the success of a group. However, you as the facilitator are also a member of the group. Your professional knowledge and experience are very relevant to the parents in the group. Don't hold back. Deliver information and advice clearly and strongly through brief lecturettes. Then, after the presentation, ask stimulating questions about the participants' own experiences to enrich their learning. It pays off to work hard during the early sessions in a series to ensure that participants know they will not be judged or criticized.

Adults decide what to do with the material presented by the facilitator and other members of the group. You are not expected to have all the expertise nor to answer every question posed by participants. You need not comment on every contribution. It is liberating (and educational) to step back and let members of the group talk about what's working well and what isn't in their own families.

If you are keeping a flip chart record of the discussion, participants know that their contribution has been acknowledged even when there has been no comment (or implied judgment). You can anticipate that they will change their minds about lots of things on their own as they hear from you and especially from other parents.

Adults are stimulated by what they can use right away. Set aside a regular "sharing time" during each session so participants can think ahead of time about what situations they would like to bring to the group. They may choose to talk about successful new behaviours or things they continue to find difficult as parents. As participants report on changes in their behaviour and feelings, you get useful feedback to help you evaluate your program.

Outcomes evaluation does not need to be mysterious and intimidating. Just listening to the discussion will give you ideas and suggestions for enhancing the learning through different activities or additional content.

Being systematic about gathering this information is what evaluation is all about. Think about using the characteristics of adult learners as a framework for developing an evaluation tool.

The fourth issue of the Bulletin for Parent Educators and the Handbook will also focus on the characteristics of adult learners and the implications for parenting education programs.

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Certified Canadian Family Educator Program

In 1993, Family Service Canada introduced a certification program for family and parent educators which confers the designation Certified Canadian Family Educator (CCFE). As part of the certification process, applicants undergo a peer review and assessment of documentation regarding their:

- work experience as a family or parent educator
- demonstrated strengths across a spectrum of skills and knowledge
- academic qualifications
- commitment to continuous professional development

Benefits for Family Educators

- Certification as an experienced, qualified and effective professional working in the field of family education in Canada
- Recognition through an objective and thorough process managed by Family Service Canada, a respected Canadian organization
- Acknowledgement of professional ethics, values and commitment to continuous learning
- Use of the CCFE designation after your name
- Membership in a Canadian network of family educators
- Opportunities to share ideas, expertise and resource materials with members of the network
- Access to professional development initiatives

Obtain more information and an application package from:

Family Service Canada
(613) 722-9006 or (613) 722-8610 (fax)
info@familyservicecanada.org
www.familyservicecanada.org

Parents who take a course or program led by a Certified Canadian Family Educator have assurance that the leader is skilled and knowledgeable and committed to maintaining high educational standards for effective group learning.