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Characteristics of Family Education

by Rosemary C. Reilly, PhD., CCFE

Family education is an educational approach that helps individuals and families to appreciate and navigate the tasks, issues and concerns linked to the typical transitions throughout our life cycle. Its aim is to strengthen individuals and families, empower them to improve the quality of their personal and family life, and encourage them to nurture their full potential. By learning in small groups using principles of two-way learning, individuals are able to achieve a fuller understanding of themselves and their relationships, cope with life events, and realize personal and family capacities. Participants have the opportunity to learn new skills and lend mutual support to others facing the same issues.

What makes family education unique?

1. Family Education is relevant to individuals and families throughout the life span. Each stage of the life cycle presents us with unique challenges, whether that involves moving from adolescence to adulthood, or learning what it means to be a parent for the first time. Family education provides opportunities for

individuals of all ages to learn about the many aspects of human development and family life from womb to tomb.

2. Family Education should be based on the needs of individuals and families. To maximize relevance and take advantage of “moments of learning readiness,” programs should be geared to the immediate felt needs of individuals who participate in family education groups. This means that participants should become involved in and help to shape the program through an initial needs assessment.

3. Family Education is a multidisciplinary area of study. The practice of family life education draws upon many fields to help us to understand the individual (psychology, education, health promotion, etc) and the family within a social context (sociology, home economics, anthropology, etc). Since the family transcends any one field, the family educator needs to have a broad knowledge about it from many perspectives.

4. Family Education programs are offered in many different settings. Family education can be offered by many different institutions and agencies including churches,



Rosemary C. Reilly is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Human Sciences at Concordia University in Montreal and has been a family life educator since 1989. She has been a Certified Canadian Family Educator (CCFE) since 1995. For this article, she has drawn on an article by M. Arcus, J. Schvaneveldt and J. Moss entitled “The nature of family life education.” It appears as a chapter (pp. 1 – 25) in Handbook of Family Life Education: Foundations of family life education (Vol. 1) by the same authors, published in 1993 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage).

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schools, businesses, government and community centres—anywhere that people who live in families gather.

5. Family Education takes an educational rather than a therapy approach. The focus of family education is on prevention, taking an “equip and educate” approach to life issues rather than an “intervene and repair” therapy approach.

6. Family Education should present and respect differing family values. Values are fundamental to how we conduct our daily life. However, which values are

“best?” Family education endeavours to help participants to explore the links between values, beliefs and behaviour and to develop core ethical principles, while respecting the diversity of cultural and religious values.

7. Qualified educators are crucial to the successful realization of the goals of family education. Competent educators are key for any family education program to be successful. This means education in the core knowledge areas of family education (family interaction, interpersonal interaction, human development, sexuality, parenthood education, family resource manage-

ment, values and ethics, families in society, family law and public policy, family education methodology, group process and leadership, and program planning). Equally necessary are the personal qualities that help to create a positive learning environment (empathy, warmth, caring, openness, positive regard, respect, compassion and communication competency). The letters CCFE, Certified Canadian Family Educator, are an assurance to group participants and to organizations that the people leading their programs have met high standards of knowledge, experience and personal characteristics related to this unique field. □

Certified Canadian Family Educator Program

FRP Canada coordinates a formal, recognized process to certify individuals who are qualified and experienced in leading family life education groups, workshops and courses.

You can get more information about the CCFE designation and download the forms from www.parentsmatter.ca. Click on “For Facilitators” then on “CCFE Certification.” The certification committee meets twice a year to consider applications, in the fall and the spring.

Start preparing your application now!