

Section 5

Parenting Apart: Co-Parenting Sessions for Parents Who Live Apart to Learn New Ways of Working Together to Do What is Best for Their Children

Parenting Apart is a 3-hour curriculum designed for parents of young children who do not live together but want to learn how to better cooperate in their role as parents. During these workshops, parents will learn about the importance of consistent parenting, explore how children develop and practice positive decision-making strategies. These workshops provide many opportunities for parents to actively discuss their children while identifying strategies to improve their everyday parenting.

The Parenting Apart curriculum was designed as three 1-hour sessions, but it can be implemented in any format that suits your agency and the families you serve. Facilitators who wish to complete the three-hour curriculum in one session should know that the format is active and uses a variety of learning strategies that make it possible to maintain the interest of parents. While it is possible to conduct these sessions with only one parent present, it is most effective if both parents attend and can practice the cooperative parenting skills techniques together. Parenting Apart sessions can be successfully implemented with large and small audiences; however, we recommend hosting sessions with up to 10 couples involved.

Choosing a Facilitator

Parenting Apart facilitators should be comfortable implementing a variety of teaching techniques. They should have some knowledge of child development and be committed to the important role fathers can play in the lives of their children. While professionals who are familiar with the parents attending can be effective facilitators, it is important they appear neutral, promoting parenting strategies that support the best interest of the child. Ideally this intervention would be facilitated by a male/female teaching team but it could also be adequately carried out by just one facilitator.

Implementation Tips

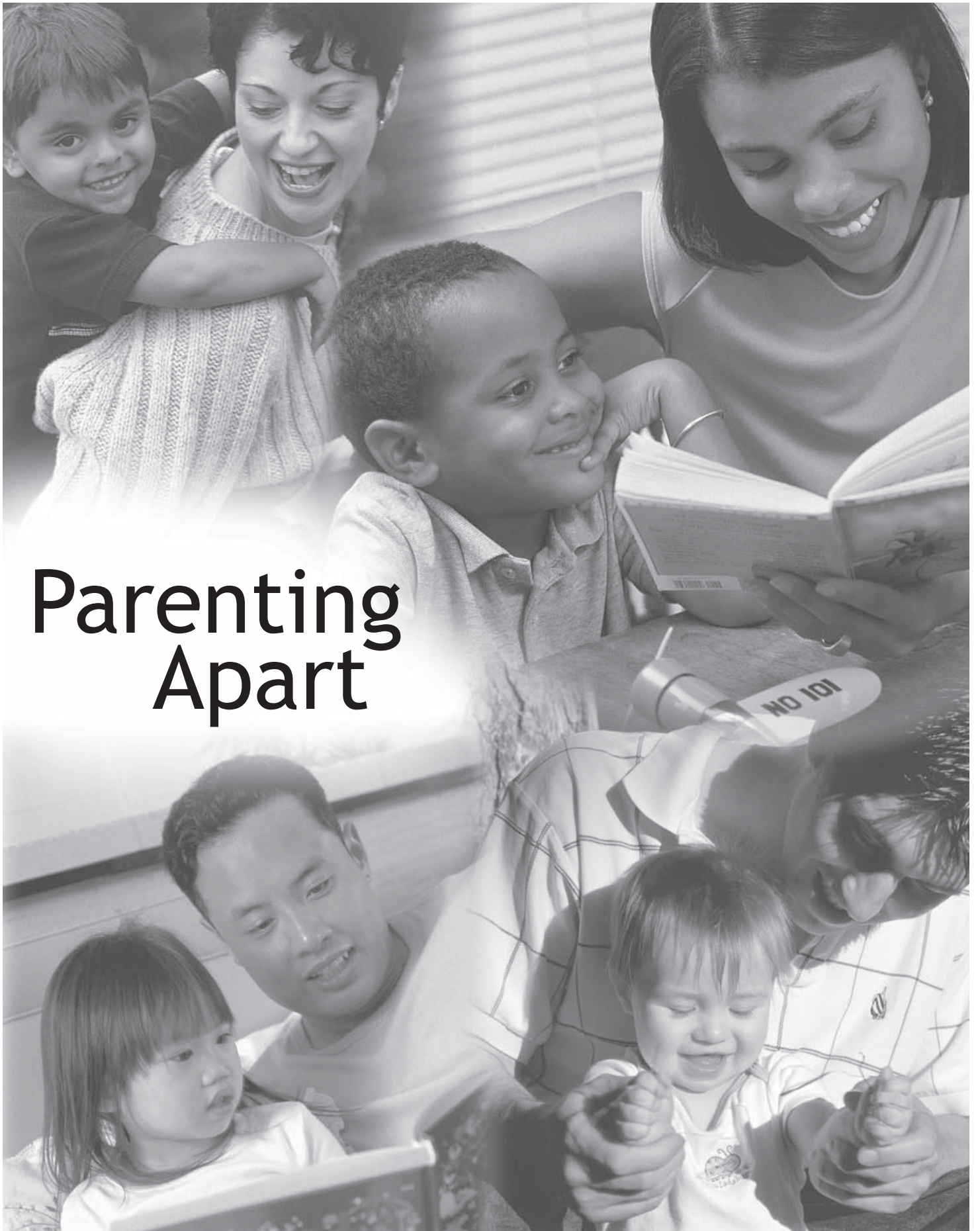
- Choose a location where both moms and dads will be comfortable.
- Schools, libraries and churches have been suitable locations for this type of intervention.
- Consider providing child care for parents that participate.
- If one parent is interested in attending this type of workshop, support them in thinking about how to introduce the concept effectively to the other parent.
- Consider publicizing this intervention to professionals who either work with or interface with parents who do not currently live together, such as family court judges.

Resources/Tools

The tools listed below are shown on the following pages and included on the CD attached to the inside front cover of the Fathers for Life Technical Assistance Manual.

Sign-In Sheet

- Sample Poster
- Post Session Evaluation



Parenting Apart



Acknowledgements

Parenting Apart

Developed for the state of Missouri by Parents as Teachers National Center

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Partnering to Parent



Group Meeting Plan

Partnering to Parent

Goal

- Parents will recognize the characteristics of resilient children.
- Parents who are parenting apart will recognize the importance of effective communication with each other and with their children.
- Parents who are parenting apart will learn parenting strategies that produce resilient children who are developing in healthy ways.

Key Points

- The importance of consistent parenting
- Developing consistent rules and routines

Materials

Educator Resources

- *Helping Parents with Discipline and Guidance*

Parent Handouts

- *Playing on the Same Team: Communicating With Your Child's Other Parent*
- *Working Together for Our Child*

Supplies for Presentation

- Chart paper, large dry erase board, or chalk board
- Appropriate writing instruments (markers, chalk, etc.)

Supplies for Activity

- Chart paper, large dry erase board, or chalk board
- Appropriate writing instruments (markers, chalk, etc.)
- Activity Handout, *That's Nice to Hear* (for icebreaker)
- Activity Handout, *Gifts for Life Card Deck*



Procedure

Welcome/Icebreaker

- Introductions and announcements
- Before the meeting, reproduce the Activity Handout, *That's Nice to Hear*, and cut out the affirmations along the dotted lines. As participants enter for the meeting, give each person an affirmation.
- To begin the icebreaker, have everyone read their affirmation silently and think how it applies to them. Note, all the affirmations say what a person *can be* or *do*, and so all are relevant to each individual.
- Next, ask participants turn to someone who is not their parenting partner and take turns reading affirmations. Tell the group to respond, "Thank you" when they receive an affirmation, or give an example of how it is true for them. Often people respond with denial or excuses, and we want the parents to practice receiving affirmations, as well as giving them.
- Discuss with the group how it felt to receive an affirmation and how they felt like responding.

Discussion Points. Incorporate throughout the meeting.

The importance of consistent parenting. Use handout, *Playing on the Same Team: Communicating With Your Child's Other Parent*, as appropriate.

Conversation starters:

- Think of a time when you heard different or conflicting messages. (Examples: getting different instructions from two supervisors; listening to opposing sides in a political campaign.) How did that feel?
- Have you observed a time when your child received two different messages about their behavior? (Example: At grandma's house kids are allowed cookies before meals, but not at your house.) How did that affect your children's behavior?

Discussion:

- Children are constantly learning about their world. A big part of that knowledge concerns how to behave in a way that is appropriate for the circumstances and that meets their parents' expectations and limits.
- To do this, children must experience the same routines and rules in all the places they spend time.



- Parents have the best opportunity to positively guide their child when they can be consistent about routines and discipline between their two homes.
- Children will be able to behave better, and there will be less stress for both parents and children, when they experience consistent rules and practices.
- Parents who are living apart do the best thing for themselves and their child when they parent consistently.
- Consistent parenting not only means having the same rules and enforcing them in the same way, but also keeping the child's routines for sleeping, eating, attending school, etc., the same.

Developing consistent rules and routines.

Conversation starters:

- Pass out the Parent Handout, *Working Together for Our Child*. Ask each parent to answer the questions without communicating with the other parent. Emphasize that a parent may not know the answer to every question, especially if they are the non-custodial parent, and that's ok. However a parent knows their child is important to their relationship.
- After parents have completed the questions on the handout, have them turn to their parenting partner and share the information. Encourage them to discuss how they can set the same rules or have the same routine for their child in each of the areas mentioned.
- Invite parents to share their experience with this activity.

Discussion:

- Children will experience differences between their parents' homes. Communicating about rules and routines will minimize those differences.
- Parents can help children behave better and enjoy their time together better when there are consistent rules and routines between homes.
- Even if parents have difficulty communicating about other topics, they can work hard to communicate effectively about their child.
- Encourage parents to remember the times they communicated well with each other in regard to their children. Encourage parents to make a commitment to work on those areas or topics where communication is more difficult.



- Use the Parent Handout, *Playing on the Same Team: Communicating With Your Child's Other Parent*, to discuss how to be consistent as parents who live apart.

Practical Application

Rationale:

- When parents keep in mind their goals for their child's development, they can be more intentional about consistency.
- Helping parents share their vision for their child's future provides an experience for successful communication.

Activity:

- Before the meeting, copy and cut apart the cards from the Activity Handout, *Gifts for Life Card Deck*. Make enough copies so that each participant can have six cards. Cards will be repeated in any one deck.
- Divide the group into small groups of two or three parenting partners (four to six people.) Give them a deck of 24 to 36 cards.
- Have each group choose a dealer who will shuffle the cards and deal each parent four cards.
- Tell parents that this is the "hand" that is dealt their child. Many of the characteristics on the cards are those they can help their child develop and possess as an adult.
- Ask if everyone likes the hand their child has been dealt. Tell them they can discard up to two cards. The dealer then deals them as many new cards as they discard. Remind the parent that there's a chance they won't like the new attributes any better than the ones they are discarding.
- Ask parents to choose one card they consider "trump"; the one characteristic they consider most important or that they want to make sure their child develops when he is an adult. Have them show the others in their group what they have chosen and give them time to explain to their group why they chose that characteristic.
- Ask the groups to break into parenting partners and ask each partner to share ways they can work together to help their child develop the "trump" characteristics each has chosen.



Debrief

- Bring the large group back together and ask them to report on the game they played in their small group.
- What were their reactions to the hands that were dealt their child?
- Invite several people to share the “trump” characteristic they chose and tell why they choose it.
- Ask if any parenting partners want to share their experience communicating about their child’s future.
- Thank the parents for their willingness to participate. Encourage them to continue to work on communicating effectively to shape their child’s future.

Summary

Summarize the goal and key points of the parent meeting.



Educator Resource

Helping Parents with Discipline and Guidance

One of the greatest challenges that parents face in rearing their children is guiding them toward positive, productive behaviors. Discipline is the structure and system that parents can put in place to teach their child positive ways of behaving so the child can meet her goals and develop to the best of her potential. Parents often see discipline as the same as punishment, but effective discipline is very different. While punishment and consequences for breaking rules is sometimes necessary, it's not the place where discipline should begin.

Discipline begins with a good relationship. In order for discipline to be effective, the parent and child need to have a positive, loving relationship. Discipline really begins with building that relationship through meeting the needs of the child, and enjoying each other's company. No one does something for someone they do not care about, and children are no exception. Adults can exert their bigger size and greater experience to force their child to obey, but that obedience will not produce a child who has internal resources to control her own behavior. Encourage parents to really get to know and accept their child. Parents will certainly not approve of everything their child does, but the foundation for discipline is appreciating and enjoying the child for the person she is.

Limits provide security and stability. Children need limits on what they can do to feel safe and to teach them how to behave in different situations. Limits that are appropriate for the child's age and experience help children feel secure and give them guidance about what they can do. Parents who develop a good relationship with their child will know the child's abilities and will set limits that are appropriate for their child's age and experience. Setting and keeping limits is a hard job. All parents need support to think about the things they want to teach their child and the limits they will make to do that. This may be particularly challenging for parents who are living apart. Working together to decide on family rules that apply regardless of which household the child is in at the time will go a long way to reducing confusion and conflict.

Consistency is the key to guiding behavior. When all adults who care for a child teach the same rules and apply them consistently, the child is much more likely to comply with their parents' wishes. When limits are not consistently enforced, a child can become confused and fail to figure out just what is expected of her. Children are very practical; if they think they can behave one way with mom, but not have to follow the



same rule with dad, they will behave to fit the situation. One of the main complaints of custodial parents is that their child misbehaves or acts “off the wall” when she returns home. Having the same limits and enforcing them consistently from one household to the other makes it easier on the child, *and* easier on the parents. This is an important point; parents will have an easier time parenting and will enjoy their child more if they consistently apply limits. Parents need to effectively communicate to keep limits current and appropriate for their growing child.

Parents can be firm and fair. One of the most effective things parents can do to enforce limits is to control their anger. When children see adults out of control they feel insecure and they receive a negative model for their own behavior. The focus becomes on the parent’s anger, not the child’s behavior. Parents can deal with disobedience in a calm but firm manner. Let the consequence, not the parent’s emotion, be the deterrent for the child’s misbehavior in the future. The long term goal of discipline is to help the child develop self-control and responsibility for her own behavior, not just the ability to respond to anger, punishment, or someone else’s emotion.

Helpful tips. The goal of parental guidance is helping children develop their own sense of morality and personal responsibility. Here are some tips for parents as they go about this important job.

- Concentrate on the positive. State what you want your child to do, not what they should not do.
- Catch your child being good. Notice good behavior more than you do misbehavior. Children will learn what to do, and can avoid what not to do.
- Decide together as parents on limits and family rules. If a limit is made “on the spot” in one parent’s household, inform the other parent as soon as possible so enforcement can be consistent.
- If children are old enough, involve them in establishing family rules, too.
- Explain limits and rules in advance. Give the reason for the rule.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat! Reinforce limits verbally for your child.
- Teach by example. Your controlled, considerate behavior will teach more than your words.
- Acknowledge your child’s feelings. It’s ok not to like a limit, and even to say so. It isn’t ok to not follow the rule.



- Accentuate the positive. Expect your child to do well, not to misbehave.
- Offer your child the choice between alternatives you approve of. Beware of offering a choice you don't want your child to make.
- Provide the opportunity for your child to apologize or make amends, but don't force an insincere apology.
- If punishment is necessary, don't do it when you are angry. Put the child in a safe place and calm down. Yelling and physical punishment are destructive to your child.
- After punishment, reconnect with your child. Help her realize it was her behavior you disapproved of, not her. Tell her you love her and hug her if she feels like it.



Parent Handout

Playing on the Same Team: Communicating with Your Child's Other Parent

As parents, you can form a partnership even when you don't live in the same household. Playing on the same parenting team provides consistent, quality care for your child. Everyone who cares for your child can be part of a winning team to nurture him intellectually, emotionally, and physically.

Once you've identified everyone involved with caring for your child, you are ready to plan how to communicate effectively with your team. Good communication is:

- **Respectful.** Respect your parenting partner because he or she is important in your child's life. No matter what the topic, you will find it easier to address when you begin by respecting the other person.
- **A two-way street.** You should be able to talk to each other about any issue. Parents and caregivers need to have an open mind to receive what the other parenting partner is saying.
- **Honest.** Create trust by always being honest. Expect complete honesty in return, but know that you have to be receptive to the truth.
- **Timely.** Give ample notice of events in your child's life, or changes in your situation that have implications for the other parent or caregiver.
- **Written.** Consider passing along a written log or notes when your child stays with his other parent or other caregiver. Jot down observations about your child's development, updates on health, schedule changes, or anything else you need the other parent to know. Sometimes it's easier to communicate in writing than speaking face-to-face. Written records of emergency numbers, immunization records, and instructions for care can be lifesavers in an emergency.
- **Personal.** Written communication is important, but be sure to touch base verbally and in person often. You are setting examples for your child.

Regardless of other aspects of your relationship, anyone who cares for your child deserves clear and honest communication about that care arrangement. The well-being and optimal development of your child is at stake. Your child is counting on you to be the communication leader of a winning parenting team.



Parent Handout Working Together for Our Child

Things I know about (child's name) _____

One thing I know about my child's bedtime.

One thing I know about what and how my child likes to eat.

One rule I think is really important.

One time we communicated well about our child's care.

One area or topic I think we need to work hard on regarding our child's care.



Activity Handout

That's Nice to Hear

Make enough copies of this page so that everyone in the group can have one affirmation. Cut on dotted lines and give one to each parent as they enter the group.

You are a person who can make a difference in the lives of others.

You are a person who is able to focus on the needs of others.

You are a person who can think about your actions and how they affect others.

You are a person who wants to discover creative ways of living life.

You are a person who knows the importance of setting goals for yourself.

You are a person who can be enthusiastic.

You are a person who can approach new challenges with determination.

You are a person who can speak up for yourself.

You are a person who cares deeply for your child or children.

You are a person who can make the world a better place.

You are a person who can make good choices.




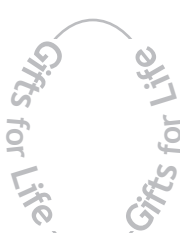



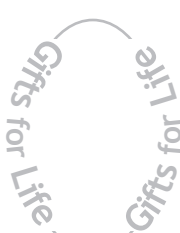



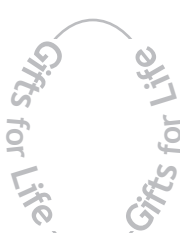



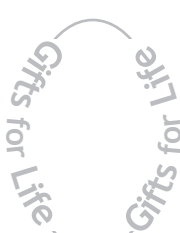


Activity Handout

Gifts for Life Card Deck

<p>Self-control</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>	<p>Self-esteem</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>	<p>Ability to form friendships</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>
<p>Self-control</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>	<p>Self-esteem</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>	<p>Ability to form friendships</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>
<p>Curiosity</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>	<p>Low self-esteem</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>	<p>Not able to keep friends</p> <p>Gifts for Life</p>
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<p>Responsibility</p> 	<p>Honesty</p> 	<p>Ability to take initiative</p> 	<p>Loyalty</p> 
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<p>Ability to form loving relationships</p>	<p>Ability to communicate effectively</p>	<p>Resourcefulness</p>	<p>Commitment</p>
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<p>Civic responsibility</p> 	<p>Confidence</p> 	<p>Respect authority</p> 	<p>Civic responsibility</p>	<p>Consideration for others</p> 	<p>Creativity</p> 	<p>Leadership</p> 	<p>Consideration for others</p>	<p>Creativity</p>	<p>Leadership</p>
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Helping Your Child Grow and Develop Together



Group Meeting Plan

Helping Your Child Grow and Develop Together

Goal

- Parents will gain basic information on how children grow and develop, and learn how important it is to work together to ensure the best possible outcomes for their children.

Key Points

- Birth through 6 years of age is a time of amazing growth and change in both physical development and in brain development.
- Children grow and develop in four areas: physical, language, social-emotional, and intellectual.
- Children need loving, responsive parents and care providers to help them grow and develop to the best of their potential.
- Consistency in caregiving practices between the homes and other care settings is important for healthy development in children.

Materials

Parent Handouts

- *How Our Child Grows and Develops*
- *Did You Know ... Tidbits to Help Our Child Grow and Develop*
- *A Day at My House*

Supplies for Presentation

- Chart paper, large dry erase board, or chalk board
- Appropriate writing instruments (markers, chalk, etc.)

Supplies for Activity

- Activity Handout - *Child Development Lotto*
- Chart paper
- Appropriate writing instruments



Procedure

Welcome/Icebreaker

- Introductions and announcements
- Have parents introduce themselves and state the age of their children.
- Have each parent state their child's best developmental achievement, thus far, in their eyes. Examples can be: says dada, sleeps through the night, walks, goes potty by herself, etc.

Introduce the Topic

Ask parents to share with the group their own definition of development.

- What areas do you think children develop in?
- What helps children develop to the best of their potential?
- How can you help your children develop to the best of their potential?

Discussion Points. Incorporate throughout the meeting.

Birth through 6 years of age is a time of amazing growth and change in both physical development and in brain development.

Conversation starters:

- What were the changes in your child's development that amazed you the most?
- What surprises you most when you hear that much of the human brain develops in the first years of life?

Discussion:

- Conception through 6 years of age is a time of amazing growth and change in the brain.
- At 6 months of age, the brain is 50% of the size it will be in adulthood; at 3 years of age, the brain is 80% of its adult size.
- Neglect of a child's needs for love and stimulation can affect brain development in ways that can lead to lifelong struggle intellectually and socially.
- While many organs in the body change in size after birth, the brain is the only organ that actually changes in structure.



- All children are unique but research has found that human development proceeds in an orderly fashion.
- The sequences are predictable, although the timetables vary depending on individual children.

Children grow and develop in four areas: motor, language, social-emotional, and intellectual. Use handout, *How Our Child Grows and Develops* and *Did You Know ... Tidbits to Help Our Child Grow and Develop*, as appropriate.

Conversation starters:

- What are ways you can help your child develop in each of these four areas?

Discussion:

- When we talk about development in children, we need to consider the whole child. All areas of development overlap in a child.
- Most activities that children engage in can enhance all areas of their development.
- Children grow and develop in all areas while they are engaged in developmentally appropriate play activities.
- Separation and divorce present a series of major stressors in a child's life and may cause a child to regress developmentally temporarily.

Children need loving, responsive parents and care providers to help them grow and develop to the best of their potential.

Conversation starters:

- What is your role in helping your child develop to their best ability?
- How does being a loving and responsive adult help children grow and develop?

Discussion:

- Children enter this world dependent on the adults in their lives to meet their basic needs.
- Parents and care providers, responding sensitively to children's needs, build strong, nurturing relationships, resulting in secure attachments.



- Positive relationships between parents and children tell children much about how to view the world. They also lay the foundation for self-concept, self-regulation, and connections to other people throughout life.
- Warm and responsive caregiving extends protection to children in otherwise adverse situations such as may happen when they are having to go between two parents homes and situations.
- To develop a healthy attachment to both parents, infants, in particular, should not be away from either parent for more than a few days.

Consistency in caregiving practices between the homes and other care settings is important for healthy development in children. Use the handout, *A Day At My House*, as appropriate.

Conversation starters:

- What are some caregiving practices that are consistent between your two homes?
- Why do you think it matters in your child's development if you and your child's other parent are consistent in your caregiving practices?

Discussion:

- The beliefs that each parent holds about children and childhood influence their own childrearing approaches and routines.
- Research has shown that discrepancies in caregiving practices can lead to feelings of disorientation, confusion, and insecurity in children.
- Consistent rules and values in both households create a sense of security for children of any age.
- Children benefit when parents follow reasonably similar routines for mealtime, bedtime and homework time.
- Communication between parents about the children is essential for good child development. One way to establish similar routines in each home is to create a communication log to be shared between the parents that describes the child's daily experience.
- Children benefit when parents communicate about rules and discipline in order to handle them in similar ways.



Practical Application

Rationale:

- Having an understanding of how children grow and develop can influence parent's interactions.

Activity:

- Give each parent a *Child Development Lotto* sheet and writing instrument.
- Read each of the 16 statements (listed below), one at a time. Ask parents to write the **bolded word** from the statement in any box they wish. Facilitator will need to repeat the **bolded word** to the parents. Write each bolded word on the flip chart paper. This will ease any parents who have low-literacy skills.
- After facilitator finishes reading the 16 statements, each parent should have every square on their sheet filled in with a word.
- Next, the facilitator will read just the **bolded words** in any order. As each word is called out, instruct the parents to put an "X" on that word on their lotto sheet. mark an "X" on each word on the chart paper as you call the word.
- When a parent has four "X's" in a row, they win. The winner can then have a moment to brag about their child or their child's accomplishments.

Statements:

Attachment is the emotional connection between you and your child.

Your child and you each have a personal style for dealing with the world. This is called your **temperament**.

All children develop in **predictable patterns**, although the timetables vary depending on individual children.

Babbling is the early talking of babies and it sounds the same in babies all over the world.

Without words, babies **communicate** in many ways: they cry, coo, squeal, and smile.

Small muscle development comes later than large motor development. That's why children learn to walk long before they're able to control the muscles in their hands and fingers enough to write or cut with scissors.



When first learning to talk, children **understand** more than they can say.

Sometime between 18-36 months, children seek more **independence**. This is a common stage in child development and can be frustrating for parents.

Separation anxiety happens when a child's primary caregiver leaves him/her. This is a common milestone but can be frustrating for parents. Children develop their **large muscles** by moving around while playing.

Conception through 6 years of age is a time of amazing growth and change in the **brain**.

Play is the primary task of childhood and the most important way children learn and develop.

Infants spend about 14 to 16 hours per day **sleeping**.

By the age of 2, **eating habits** have already begun to be established. That's why children need to have exposure to plenty of healthy foods.

Singing, reading and playing rhyming games with your child helps him/her learn the sounds of speech and the rhythms of **language**.

Consistent routines between the child's two homes are important for healthy child development.

Debrief

- Ask the parents to reflect on the group meeting and report one piece of the information they found helpful or interesting.

Summary

Summarize the goal and key points of the parent meeting.



Parent Handout

How Our Child Grows and Develops

Take a minute to think about your child's development. If you don't have the answer, ask your child's other caregivers.

I notice our child doing the following in each area of development:

Language

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Motor

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Intellectual

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Social Emotional

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Things I want share with others about my child's development:

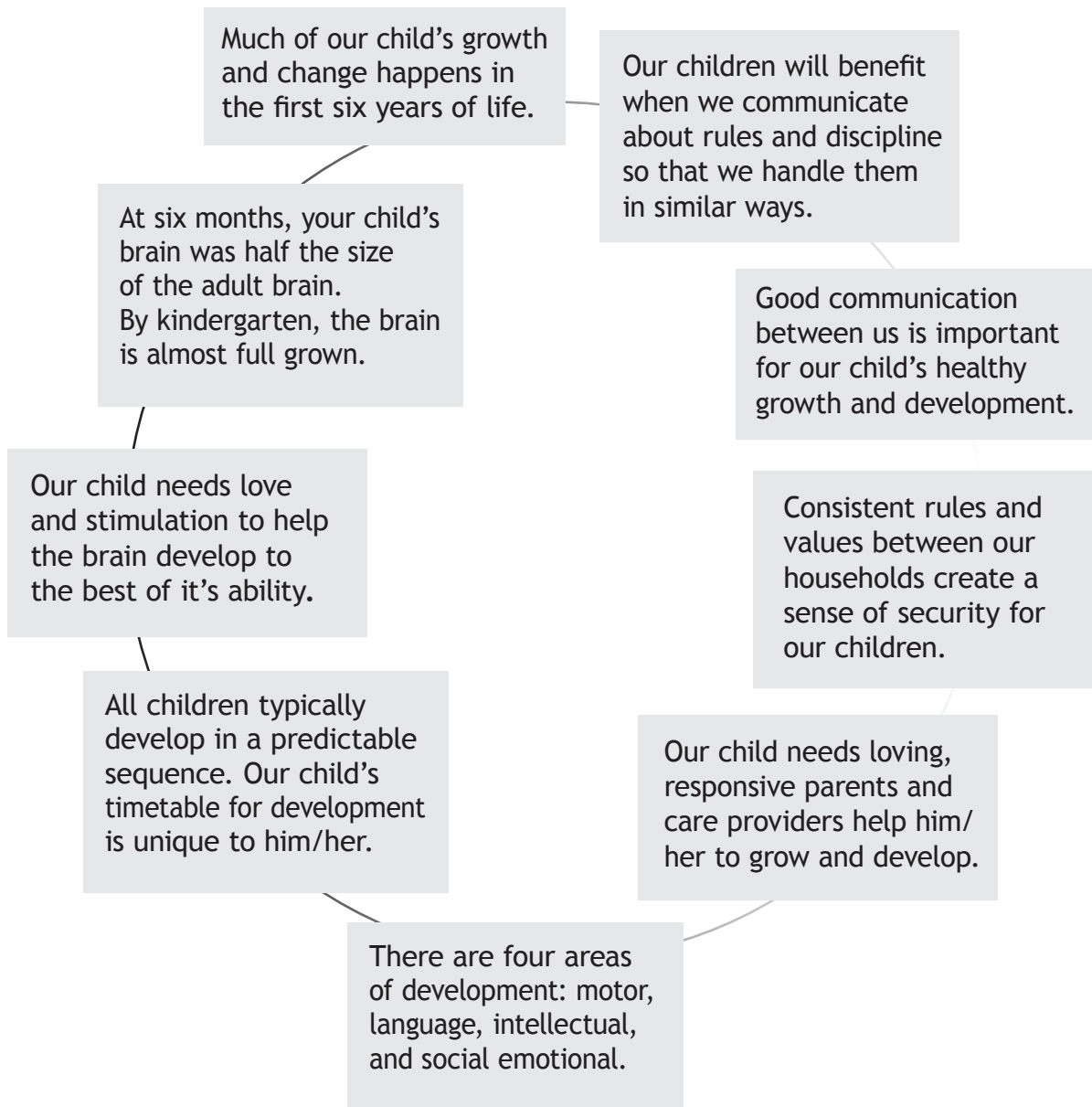
- 1) _____

- 2) _____



Parent Handout

Did You Know? ... Tidbits to Help Our Child Grow and Develop



Created by Parents as Teachers National Center Inc., February 2006.

To find a Parents as Teachers program near you, call 1.866.728.4968 or www.ParentsasTeachers.org



Parent Handout A Day at My House

This is our child's routine at my house:

- *
- *
- *
- *
- *
- *
- *

Important things to share:

Our child goes to bed at _____. She/He likes to be comforted by_____.

His/Her favorite thing to play is_____

_____. One thing he/she would miss if I forgot is

_____. He/She gets real upset when_____

_____. Our child transitions from one activity to another best

when _____.

Two rules that are important to me are _____

and _____.



People who will come in contact with our child when she/he is with me are

_____ , _____ ,

_____ , _____ and _____ .

My favorite thing about our child is _____

_____ .



Activity Handout

Child Development Lotto

Created by Parents as Teachers National Center Inc., February 2006.

To find a Parents as Teachers program near you, call **1.866.728.4968** or www.ParentsasTeachers.org



Choices for
the Road
Ahead



Group Meeting Plan

Choices for the Road Ahead

Goal

- Parents will become aware of important areas of choice relating to the care and parenting of their child.
- Parents will become aware of what constitutes a positive choice that will help them reach their goals.

Key Points

- What makes a good choice?
- Choices for work life
- Choices for family life

Materials

Parent Handouts

- *Begin With Your Destination in Mind*
- *Billboard! Picture Our Ideal Family!*

Supplies for Presentation

- Chart paper, large dry erase board, or chalk board
- Appropriate writing instruments (markers, chalk, etc.)
- Hershey Miniatures candy bars or other assortment of snack-sized candy bars (Icebreaker)
- *Does Your Child Have a Legal Father?* Missouri Family Support Division, brochure
- *What's This About Child Support?* Missouri Family Support Division, brochure

Supplies for Activity

- Chart paper, dry erase board, or chalk board
- Appropriate writing instruments (markers, chalk, etc.)



- Scissors (optional)
- A marker or pen for each parent
- Copies of the Activity Handout, *Putting the Puzzle Together*, so that each parent has three puzzle pieces

Procedure

Welcome/Icebreaker

- Introductions and announcements
- Pass around a container with the assortment of miniature candy bars. Ask parents to think carefully and choose their favorite but not eat it right away.
- Ask parents to think of three reasons they choose the particular bar they did. Give a few minutes for parents to consider. Ask them to turn to someone else and take turns reporting the reasons for their choices.
- Ask for some volunteers to give examples of reasons they chose the candy they did.
- Summarize for the group by pointing out that there are a lot of different reasons for the choices people make. Some are based on experience (I've tried all sorts of candy and I like dark chocolate best.), memories (I remember eating Hershey bars on my grandma's front porch.), personal satisfaction or preference (I love the way Krackle crunches.), consideration of others (I wanted to leave the Mr. Goodbar for her because I know it's her favorite.) Include any other rationale for decision making that is illustrated by parents' comments.
- Invite parents to eat their candy.
- Explain to parents the topic for this meeting is understanding how choices they make affect their children and their parenting goals for their children.

Discussion Points. Incorporate throughout the meeting.

What makes a good choice?

Conversation starters:

- Think of both a good choice and a bad choice you have made in the past. What made one good and one bad? Divide the chart paper down the middle and label one side "Good Choices" and the other side "Bad Choices." Record parents' comments under the appropriate heading. Summarize after all the contributions have been made. Ask, "What made these choices good?" Chart this new list.



Discussion:

- Choices we make in life can be good or bad, and everyone experiences both. Some choices make a big difference in our lives; some don't.
- Good choices produce positive change. They can help us reach personal goals, take care of our families and others, express our personal values and follow moral and ethical principles.
- Looking into the future to try and anticipate the outcomes and consequences of our decisions can guide us in making good choices in the present.
- Look at the list of what makes a choice good. Take a few minutes to consider a choice you have made recently. Which of these characteristics are shown in your choice? Are there any characteristics from the other list that apply to your recent choice? (Allow three to five minutes for reflection. You might ask participants to write these things down. You can suggest they share their reflection with their parenting partner at a later time, if they want to.)
- Reflection, such as we have just done, is an important part of evaluating the choices you have made and learning lessons for the future. Take frequent opportunities to reflect to yourself or to talk about decisions with someone you trust.

Choices for work life.

Conversation starters:

- What's the best work situation you've ever had? What made it your favorite?
- What's one dream you have for yourself with regard to work or a profession? How long have you had this dream?

Discussion: Use handout, *Begin With Your Destination in Mind*, as appropriate.

- Setting goals for your future is essential to making wise choices for your work life.
- Take a few minutes to at least start filling out the handout, *Begin With Your Destination in Mind*. (Give participants 10 to 15 minutes. Ask them to share their thoughts with their parenting partner if appropriate.)
- What kinds of things did you consider when you thought about your dream job?



- What do you think will be your strongest source of motivation for setting career goals and making progress toward them? Write that in big letters on the top of your handout. When you feel like you are not making progress, refer back to that motivation.

Choices for family life.

Conversation starters:

- Before the group meeting, make a copy of the handout, *Billboard! Picture Our Family!* for each participant.
- If you could advertise your family life on a billboard just as you want it, what would it look like? Ask parents to create a billboard for their vision of what their family life would look like on the handout. Give them time to show their image to their parenting partner and discuss it if they want to.

Discussion: Use handouts, *What's This About Child Support?; Does Your Child Have a Legal Father?*, from the Missouri Family Support Division for discussion content.

- There are many choices to make when it comes to family life, too.
- One thing that parents need to do for their children is satisfy the legal guidelines for establishing paternity, custody, and visitation.
- If you have not discussed these things with your children's other parent, make plans to do so. If your agreement needs to be updated or you feel your rights as a parent are being violated, consult your probation officer, Department of Social Service worker, or court mediator.

Practical Application

Rationale: Tell parents why this activity is important.

- Figuring out the right choice to make can seem like a jig saw puzzle. When parents see how their goals for their family fit together, they can discover the right choice to make.

Activity: Puzzling It Out

- Before the meeting reproduce the puzzle for the Activity Handout, *Putting the Puzzle Together*, pieces on card stock. You can cut them out before the meeting or provide scissors for parents to cut them during the meeting.



- Give each parent three puzzle pieces. Ask them to write one goal or choice for their work or family life on each piece.
- Have parenting partners put their pieces together to complete the puzzle. Encourage them to discuss why each made the choices they did.
- Ask parents to work together to write two or three “next steps” they can take on each of their six puzzle pieces.

Debrief

- Ask parents to share their experience in deciding on the important goals or choices for themselves and their family. How did it feel to put that puzzle together? Were you successful in developing next steps?

Summary

Summarize the goal and key points of the parent meeting.



Parent Handout

Begin With Your Destination in Mind

Finding the right job for you is a journey that can take many roads. Making good choices about your career allows you to support your family and find personal fulfillment through your work. But the ideal job “destination” rarely appears out of nowhere. Finding your place in the world of work takes planning and persistence. Use the questions below to help you chart a course to realize your goals. When you begin with your destination in mind, you can chart a trip down the road to success.

Choose a destination:

What is my dream job? _____

What values do I hold that I want to express through my work? _____

Starting the trip:

What’s my job right now? _____

Do I want to be doing the same thing in one year? _____ In five years? _____

Do I want a change, either in the type of job, my educational level, or my salary? _____

If the answer is yes, you’ve got the green light to go!

Checking the oil:

What am I good at? What have I enjoyed doing my whole life? _____

What am I interested in? _____

What education or training have I had? _____

Mapping out the trip:

What jobs, careers, or educational plans have I thought of in the past? _____

If I had to pick one destination it would be: _____



What questions do I need to find answers to about this job or career? _____

Where can I go for answers? _____

What resources do I need? _____

Who can help me figure things out? _____

Anticipating the bumps in the road:

What are the challenges to achieving my goal? _____

What are some ways to overcome these difficulties? _____

Are we there yet?

What are some milestones that will measure your progress toward your destination?

When do you want to be at your destination? Name a date, even if you need to revise it later. _____

What next?

List three things you can do in the next week to begin moving toward your goal.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



Activity Handout

Billboard! Picture Our Ideal Family!

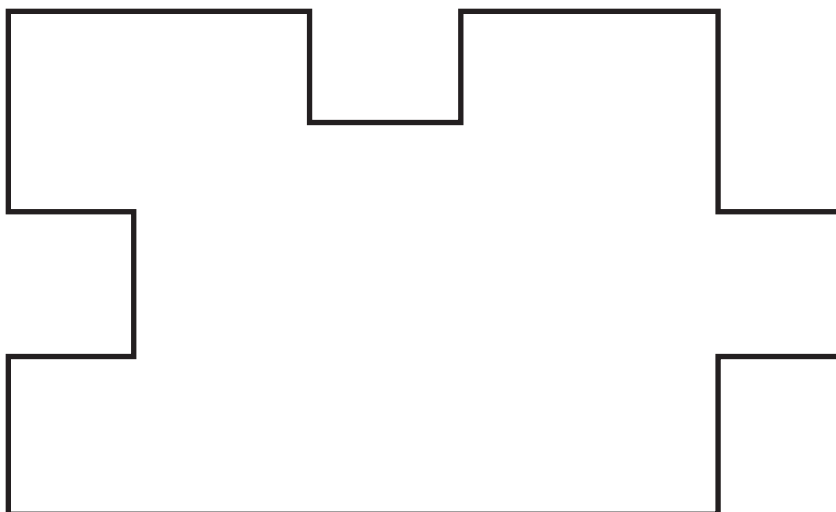
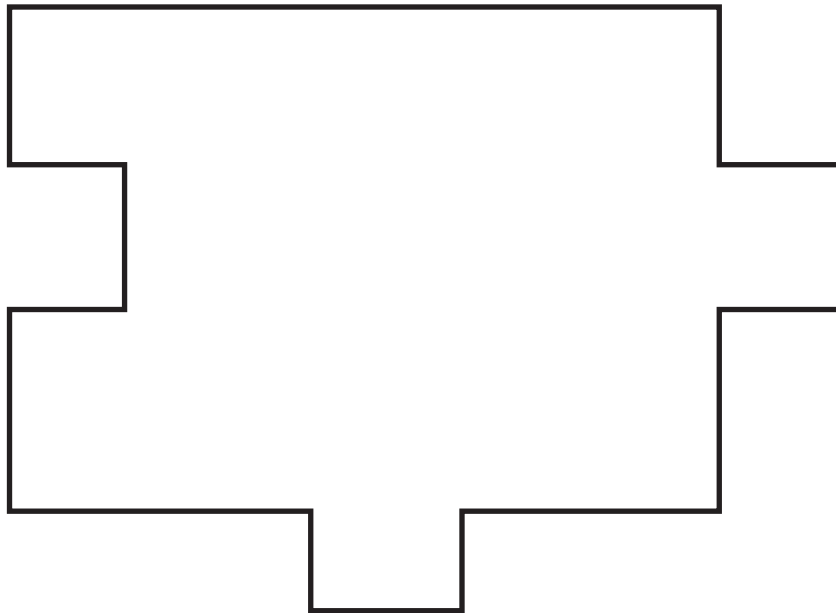
On the road to a better life, many things are advertised. Use the billboard below to create what you would like your family to be like. You can draw, write words or phrases, or do anything else that communicates how you would like your family to be.

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners and a double-line border, intended for drawing or writing.



Activity Handout

Putting the Puzzle Together



Parenting Apart: Partnering to Parent

1. How much did you like these things about the class? *(Check one best answer for each item.)*

a. The leader(s):

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

b. What the class was about:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

c. Handouts, videos, materials:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

d. When the class was held:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

2. How much did this class help you and your child?

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

3. How often will you use what you learned in this class?

Never Not Very Often Often All the Time

Please tell how much you agree with the following statements.

4. I know key features of a resilient child.

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

5. I know some ways to work with my child's mother to help build my child's resilience.

Not at All Not Very Much Somewhat A Lot

6. How would you change the class?

7. What other things about being a father would you like to learn?

8. Other comments:

Thank you for sharing your ideas about this class.

Parenting Apart: Helping Your Child Grow and Develop Together

1. How much did you like these things about the class? (*Check one best answer for each item.*)

a. The leader(s):

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

b. What the class was about:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

c. Handouts, videos, materials:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

d. When the class was held:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

2. How much did this class help you and your child?

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

3. How often will you use what you learned in this class?

Never Not Very Often Often All the Time

Please tell how much you agree with the following statements.

4. I know some features of my child's development in these four areas: language, motor, intellectual, and social emotional.

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

5. I know some ways to work with my child's mother to foster my child's development in these four areas.

Not at All Not Very Much Somewhat A Lot

6. How would you change the class?

7. What other things about being a father would you like to learn?

8. Other comments:

Thank you for sharing your ideas about this class.

Parenting Apart: Choices for the Road Ahead

1. How much did you like these things about the class? (*Check one best answer for each item.*)

a. The leader(s):

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

b. What the class was about:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

c. Handouts, videos, materials:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

d. When the class was held:

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

2. How much did this class help you and your child?

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

3. How often will you use what you learned in this class?

Never Not Very Often Often All the Time

Please tell how much you agree with the following statements.

4. I know how to evaluate the choices I make as a father.

Not at All Not Very Much Quite a Bit A Lot

5. I know some ways to make choices that will have a positive effect on my child.

Not at All Not Very Much Somewhat A Lot

6. How would you change the class?

7. What other things about being a father would you like to learn?

8. Other comments:

Thank you for sharing your ideas about this class.