

BETWEEN PARENT AND  
CHILD :

A FAMILY COMMUNICATION  
WORKSHOP

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Enclosed is material from a Parent/Child Family Workshop of Three Sessions. Outlines of each session are offered, (pp1-5) followed by group ideas (5-6); some data (7) and then notes from readings which may be helpful (Bach, Ginott, Patterson, Satir) on family styles, communication, dynamics, contracting (pp 8ff:)

FAMILY COMMUNICATION GROUP

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Session One

--Expectations:  
Theirs

- Ours: 1.1 Communication Skills, feelings, awareness  
1.2 Joint project within each family to work on  
(or within individual members)

--Cohesion:

Trust, shared concerns; Lazarus's inner circle

Labeling of self with three positive adjectives on tag. Pick partner

- 2.1 Share why picked those adjectives  
2.2 Partner then paraphrases back to larger group

--Rules/Authority: Molding Exercise (with member of own family)

--Guided dream: Field, mountain; wise man on mountain; ask him a question

--Break into family: pick a leader, and pick one goal that would like  
to work on cooperatively as a family.

- 3.1 Role play the situation for group first: Freedom and responsibility

--Homework:

"Global awareness of the problem area; post sheet listing problem area on  
ice box, or some place visible."

Also note the positive interactions.

Session Two:

--Discussion: How did monitoring go?

Areas: family togetherness; sibling complaints about not being happy;  
"too much fighting among siblings"

--Shared projections: My family is like an (Name of animal); discussion of  
of qualities of the animal: free association.

- Feelings: 1. Art: draw feelings now (today); describe (share picture and  
affect with the group.  
2. Break into dyads with member of another family.  
2.1 Discuss method of criticising: sandwich technique  
2.2 Discuss paraphrasing  
2.3 Share with your partner one positive thing about your  
family; one criticism; and one positive thing  
2.4 Partner paraphrases it back.

GROUP SESSION #2

④ Some Communication Skills

- a. Paraphrasing; listening to the other person  
 Exercise; break into dyads (out of family); talk about some concerns you're having about your own family; other person paraphrases; then switch  
 now choose a member of your own family and repeat the exercise; was it easier or more difficult the second time?

b. Feeling Statements

- ① Let's get in touch with our feelings  
 Exercise; Where You Are Right Now (model); practice in making feeling statements ; also Color How I Feel
- ② Exercise; Making Feeling Statements to Others  
 negative and positive feeling statements  
 sandwiching (how to criticise without starting a war)  
 practice sandwiching  
 I like this about you.....  
 I have this gripe against you.....  
 I like this about you.....  
 how to respond to a feeling statement; urge to a) defend ourselves  
 b) do something to change the situation  
 first, important just to reflect the feeling  
 MODEL

③ Some Ground Rules for Negotiating Rules in a Family

- 1. Set aside specific time for talking things over
- 2. Don'ts; gunnysack (keep grievances bottled up); psychiatric museum; name-calling, attaching labels; hidden agenda; *take too long*
- 3. Do's; Make I statements; keep arguments in here and now; express feelings \*
- 4. Fighting can be healthy if abide by groundrules  
 \* clarify (what do you hear me saying? how are you feeling? what are you saying?)  
 write down specific issues beforehand (don't try to deal with everything at once)
- 5. roles of children during parental fights
- 6. guidelines for parents interacting with children

① Thinking Some More about the Family

Exercise; Write a sentence; My family is like a animal.....  
 Complete blank. Discuss.

Some Questions; How does your family make decisions? How much do you do things together? How do you handle family conflicts?  
 When was your last family quarrel and what was it like?

② Behavior Change

Data Collection and Monitoring (pass out monitoring sheets)  
 (have one person monitor conversation in room?)

Behavioral Contracting; choose specific behavior; list positive consequences  
 stipulate consequences for noncompliance; put everything in writing  
 specify how much for how long; *should be positive*  
*have one family model*

Session Two (con't).

Discussion: What did it feel like to talk to an outsider about family.

Bring group back together, and discuss concerns.

Break down into family groups, and gain pick an area of change. This time more specific. Hand out monitoring forms.

Session Three:

Discussion: Areas of monitoring.

Decision making process in the family.

Guidelines for contracting: Slide presentation and hand out

Work on specific areas of self-change. Daily question: What are you feeling; a silence and free association to feelings.

Session Four:

Continue discussion of self-change project and feedback.

I-statements reviewed as method of expressing feelings.

Suggestions for continued problem solving skills offered.

Not included:

Trust experience

List: one good thing about being a child; a parent

List: one thing important to you: e.g., privacy, time for self; to wear what you want without being criticized, etc.

Questions:

Age range of youth; youngest workable age?

Personal problems of member within group vs. family concerns:  
where is the central focus; how to deal with the personal problems in group setting.

## The Family:

) Like a drama with many different character actors. In addition to feelings about one's self and one's own ~~own~~ life and about each individual in the family, each member of the cast also has reactions to the group as a whole.

some questions:

how does your family make decisions;/ how are you affected by these decisions/  
do you participate in these decisions/ how much do you do things together/  
how do you handle family conflicts/ when was your last family quarrel and what was it like/

how do you think of the family situation: as a source of fun; a fight arena; a place to eat and sleep/ a prison/ a department store where you get goodies/  
how does your family life differ from your school life, your club life/ your work?

COMMENT BELOW:



GROUP IDEAS

self-change project for each family

intro; work on ways of improving communication between members of a family

what are your expectations?

①

introductory exercise; break into dyads, tell name, one good thing, one bad thing

avoid staying in family

back together as large group → +

milling, choose partners, write ~~five~~ descriptive adjectives about self

cautionary note; Lazarus' Circle *listening exercise*

molding exercise; first, with parents as leaders, and children as followers; then reverse

discussion about power

Responsibility sentence; I take responsibility for (w/ relation to another family member)

then spend a few minutes discussing within family

then share with larger group differences in expectations

areas of concern

\* communication

\* negotiation

~~\* discipline~~ rules

② valuing exercise

Data Enclosed:

1. Monitoring Areas

1.1 Fear of father's anger

1.2 When each member of family shows caring for another.

1.3 Nice things that happen

1.4 Family togetherness--specific behaviors

2. Art Work

3. "The girls are opening up and talking to each other about festering things from years back ...Mother

"The group has helped put things in perspective; ...has brought the family closer together....Father

"I understand everyone else better...although I'm still not sure I understand all my own feelings....Younger daughter

"My sister and I are fighting less; my dad is angry less at us...things are going pretty well.....Older sister.

SOME READINGS:

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(4)

Roles CHILDREN are sometimes thrust into during marital fights (pp. 279-280)

1. targets: parents shift the brunt of their adult battles from spouse to child (scapegoating)
2. mediators: e.g. tell mommy to be nice to daddy (father speaking)
3. spies: e.g. go and find out what mood daddy is in (mother speaking)
4. messengers
5. ~~translators~~ translators: e.g. child says: daddy didn't mean that, what he meant was...
6. monitors: the child says: mommy didn't say that, what she said was...
7. referees: the child says why don't you let mommy explain a little more; let her talk
8. cupids: husband uses the child as a way to the wife's heart
9. audiences at adult fights

role number nine, Bach says is the most important and desirable of all (280)  
roles one to five are almost invariably destructive roles.  
Bach says that parents should be candid with their youngsters who are three and one half years old or older. At the age of six "we do not hesitate to have a youngster attend a conference with his parents so we can talk with the child, not about him." (283)

Guidelines for parents regarding children

1. Parents tend to censor part of themselves and display only what's "best" to their children. This facade keeping tactic may bolster their parental self-esteem but youngsters almost always see through the censorship (285)
2. Youngsters do not like to be teased. Usually they accept it only if they are starved for parental affection. as a general rule "Let's not laugh about experiences that aren't funny to the person experiencing them." (288)
3. Parents should not "tell children that the parents know what the child is thinking and feeling and then interpreting the child's behavior accordingly. This does not allow the child to be a real person with his own thoughts and feelings; rather he becomes a projection of how the parents think he feels.
4. Is what your asking the child to do "truly for the child's own good"
5. Teen-agers are no longer an economic asset to most families of this generation and therefore have no valued place in society; the confirmation of their own identity is crucially dependent on the kind of treatment they receive at home. (299)
6. Avoid giving excessive orders
7. Show your child exactly what you expect and make sure he understands not only what he's to do but how he can do it. Supervise and give follow-through help so a child can fulfill his commitment to do what he was told.

CHILD REARING IS A LEARNED SKILL, NOT AN INSTINCTIVE ONE (323)



A NEW CODE OF COMMUNICATION - Dr. Haim Ginott

\* a new code of communication is necessary:

a) messages must preserve child's as well as parent's sense of self-respect b) statements of understanding must precede statements of advice or instruction

\* when a child is feeling a strong emotion, he cannot listen to anyone; he wants to be understood, without having to fully disclose what he is experiencing

\* a child's feeling must be taken seriously, although the situation itself isn't serious: "I can help her best by showing I understand what pains her."

\* principles of conversation:

1) when a child tells about an event, it is best to reply not to the event but to the relationship implied:

"Johnny got more presents." "You wonder if I love you as much as I love him."

2) when a child tells about an event, respond to the feelings of the child, not to the event itself:

"A boy pushed me." ("Why did he push you?" conveys only curiosity.)  
"You must have been frightened, angry etc." conveys understanding

3) when a child expresses a negative view of himself, don't try to immediately contradict his self-image; this rarely will convince the child: "Dad, I may be stupid, but I'm not so stupid that I'll take your word for it that I'm smart." Instead, show you understand how this conviction of low self-worth must make him feel generally

\* importance of true communication of emotion: teach children to be truthful, not polite, about their feelings

Gerald Patterson, Families, Applications of Social Learning to Family Life, 1971.  
Research Press

Brief Overview: Written in Programmed instruction format so reader is required to take an active part in interacting with the book. The book is clearly written with a minimum of jargon, for it is directed to ~~the~~ parents ~~and~~ and families. Patterson repeatedly emphasizes that families themselves are capable of controlling their own social environment, and that this book is an explication of procedures by which they can begin to change themselves. At the back of the book are a series of graphs and charts (blank) which may be ripped out by the family and used to record and observe specific behaviors. Throughout the text are specific homework assignments. By means of these assignments the parents will begin to understand the basic principles of recording and observing; also they will begin to get some important data about the nature of their familial interaction.

\* \* \* \*

Patterson begins the book by stating that "Pro-social and problem behaviors are learned" (11). The purpose of the book is to provide ways to increase the amount of pro-social behavior and to unlearn the problem behavior.

Setting up a behavior management program:

- \*Choose the specific behavior that you want to be changed
- \*Observe and record the frequency of that behavior for several days  
THIS DATA COLLECTION IS ABSOLUTELY CRUCIAL
- \* Once you have collected the data, there are several ways of approaching intervention strategies:

\*Three ways of weakening existing behavior:  
non-reinforcement (~~punishment~~ ignoring it)

punishment

reinforcing a pro-social behavior to take its place!!!  
(very important)

\*Reinforcement: must be precision. If the child behaves properly, then reinforce him IMMEDIATELY, and be CONSISTENT in your application of reinforcements. (Patterson discusses the sphinx parent who never reinforces, and the gusher parent who indiscriminately reinforces) #32.

Begin where the child's skills are. Shape his behavior by reinforcing him for small steps along the way toward a larger behavior change. Do not punish him for behavior that is not perfect. Punishment weakens the response that it follows.

IF THE BEHAVIOR DOES NOT CHANGE, IT IS A BAD PROGRAM, NOT A BAD CHILD!!!

\*If the planned program does not work:  
the steps may be too large  
the reinforcers may be too weak  
the parent might be mixing in a good deal of nagging, punishment, and criticism at the same time he is trying to reinforce (e.g., Good, Johnny, you worked twenty minutes straight on your homework. But it sure is sloppy, and I can see at least five problems right off that are wrong...)

Patterson (con't) p. 2

What are reinforcers?

\*One type of reinforcement is called social reinforcement. This includes a smile, a hug, a word of praise, thanks.

\*Another type of reinforcer is what is called natural consequences. For example, a husband comes home from the office every day and, upon entering the house, picks up the newspaper and begins reading it. His wife wants him to talk to her when he gets home from work. It is possible for them to work out a contract so that first the husband talks to his wife, then he can read the paper. The husband is reinforced for talking to his wife by a natural consequence (something which he would normally do anyway -- i.e., read the newspaper.)

Why do problem behavior patterns arise?

\*The children are NOT born bad. In the case of an aggressive (high-hitter) child, he has been trained to be a high hitter by members of his own family. Often this is done by ACCIDENTAL REINFORCING.

For example, hitting, temper tantrums, and other aggressive behavior are reinforced by the victim. If a child screams when the parent asks him to do something, and the parent, to avoid a confrontation, does not make the child do it, the child is reinforced for screaming. When parents nag, scold, punish their child, there is a short-term effect because the nagging and scolding reduce the noise and other painful stimuli. Therefore, the parents are reinforced for nagging and scolding behavior.

Hitting is used because it works to remove the aversive stimuli. Temper tantrums are effective in training parents to stop asking the child to do things he doesn't want to do.

\*The younger brother or sister is the member of the family most likely to trigger aggressive behavior. Therefore, in setting up a behavior management ~~xxx~~ program, the aggressive child's brothers and sisters should be included in the program. Further, because "the family is a social system in that what one person does influences what other members do," both parents should participate in the program.

TO PARENTS: YOU ARE IN CONTROL OF YOUR SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT. IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, YOU CAN CHANGE IT.

What are Time-Outs?

\*Time outs are a means of removing the child (or yourself, the adult) from an environment which is reinforcing problem behavior. The time out place should be a very dull place where there are few, if any reinforcers (no people, no TV, no books). For example, the bathroom. Time outs can be introduced early when the children are just beginning to get wound up and the teasing and fighting have not yet begun. The time outs should be short, not more than three to five minutes. "This arrangement has proven to be a most effective means of producing rapid decreases in the occurrence of problem behaviors."

Some tips:

\*Communication is crucial. Parents should carefully explain to the children what specific behaviors are bothering them. They should emphasize the "game-like" qualities of the contract that they are attempting to

negotiate WITH the children. For example, "Eric, you have not been keeping your room clean. We are going to try to help you keep it clean, and this should even be sort of fun. Every time you make your bed, put your toys away, pick up your clothes and hang them neatly in the closet, you will get three points. One point for each thing per day. That means you can earn twenty-one points per week. What would you like to do if you could earn that many points?" Offer suggestions such as spending the afternoon with your father at the park, visit a friend overnight, etc.

- \*The important thing is that the child be told clearly and specifically what is expected of him.
- \*The contract should be put in writing so that there are no doubts as to the terms.
- \*It is important to try to involve the whole family (as reinforcers, not as spies)
- \*Be consistent with what you have agreed upon. If Eric doesn't keep his room clean and earn enough points, it is important not to give him the agreed-upon back-up reinforcer. Otherwise, you are reinforcing him for the problem behavior.
- \*Once the contract has been agreed upon, try to reinforce the pro-social behavior whenever it occurs. Try to ignore the problem behavior.
- \*Do not argue or debate, lecture or nag if the problem behavior persists. Merely continue to record it (until you feel it an appropriate time to negotiate another intervention strategy)
- \*If you feel you must punish the child (and this is not recommended because "an attack increases the likelihood that at some time in the future the victim will retaliate") do so calmly.

#### CONFLICT

- \*Exchanges between the marriage partners: how married people can meet to talk out their grievances with each other.
- \*Conflict occurs when one person demands immediate changes in the other's behavior and the other doesn't comply.
- \*When this occurs:
  - \*set a time and a quiet place to discuss ONE problem
  - \*keep the first discussions short
  - \*during these discussions notate in a logbook when you feel the other person is nagging, scolding, punishing you. Try to avoid using combative, aversive statements. Rather, try to pinpoint the specific behavior changes you would like to see in your partner.
  - \*stay in the present
  - \*exchange pinpointed items that each would like to see changed in the other
  - \*make a contract with each other and stipulate the consequences for noncompliance
  - \*record all lists and exchanges

listening skills paraphrase - clarify  
reflect emotions - making clear emotional statements  
discrepancy between verbal & nonverbal  
role & roleplay

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### COMMUNICATION THEORY - Virginia Satir

- \* a functional receiver does not immediately agree or disagree but asks sender to clarify and qualify
  - \* mutual clarification and qualification enable one person to check out his reality against another person's reality; it cuts down on the tendency to project one's own wishes, perceptions etc. onto others; and it cuts down on the efforts of one person to speak for another
  - \* a dysfunctional person overgeneralizes; he sends incomplete messages; he operates from the assumption that in fact he can communicate perfectly well
  - \* metacommunication - communication on a nonverbal level  
metacommunication conveys the sender's attitude toward the message, toward himself, and toward the receiver
  - \* whenever a person communicates, he is not only making a statement, he is making a request: this is the "command aspect" of the message; all messages contain the request "validate me;" a functional receiver must be cognizant of and respond to this message
  - \* congruent communication - where two or more messages are sent via different levels, but aren't contradictory
  - \* incongruent communication - different level messages which seriously contradict each other; such messages catch the receiver in a double bind, because he can't obey one level without disobeying on another level
  - \* importance of clear communication: check out the meaning given with the meaning received
  - \* good clarifying questions:  
1) what did you say? 2) what did you hear me say? 3) what did you see or hear that led you to make that conclusion? 4) what message did you intend to get across? 5) you look calm, but how do you feel?
  - \* importance of accurately expressing emotions
  - \* importance of making covert questions, expectations etc. explicit
- 3 positive char. - paraphrase why chosen*  
*exercises - tell what did today (statements)*  
*subverting - making feelings statements toward other*  
*tell what felt today (emotions)*  
*draw feelings*  
*discussion: what are good ways of clarifying*  
*verbal & nonverbal dyads*  
*use of I statements*

An example of how to make a contract (Written for teacher and student, but could be used between parent and child)

## CONTRACTING

### Conditions:

1. Identify the problem area: the maladaptive behavior that you would like to see changed.
2. Identify conditions which seem to elicit that behavior (antecedents)
3. Identify conditions which maintain the behavior (consequences)
4. Identify important other people in the environment
5. Collect through monitoring how often this occurs and when it occurs (Baseline Data)
6. Identify the desired behavior
7. Identify the conditions which might be reinforcing for the desired behavior. This is very important. This can be found out by observing the students and/or asking the students (i.e., finding alternative ways for him to get attention).
8. Commitment to the contract by all parties. Some suggested guidelines and rules.
  - a. Contract should be stated in terms of and rewards small proximations, like the cartoon saying that everything is not going to change over night.
  - b. The contract should reward a specific performance, not obedience in general
  - c. The contract should be fair
  - d. The contract should be clear
  - e. The contract should be honest
  - f. The contract should be positive
  - g. There must be consistency in the contract.