
PowerPoint Presentation notes for GROWING UP IN A NEW CULTURE

Adapted with permission from Linda Plenert, Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC)

Essential Skill focus: *Continuous Learning - Guest speaker on positive Parenting from Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC).*

Introduction

Effective communication is a theme that runs throughout this presentation. Parents have shared that they appreciate knowing they can still be effective parents while allowing their children to express their feelings and opinions.

As facilitators/teachers we need to understand that the goals of parenting in a collective culture are not necessarily the same as the goals of parenting in an individualistic culture. In a collective culture, a "good" parent raises children who obey the rules of the culture, thereby becoming responsible members of the group. Respect is shown through unquestioning obedience. Consulting children or asking for their opinion often feels like giving up parental control - especially for immigrant fathers who are traditionally seen as the "head of the household" and the decision-maker for the family.

It can be a real challenge for parents not only to learn and practise new skills, for example – listening, but to comprehend a new way of relating to their families. It is the responsibility of the facilitator/teacher to understand and empathize with the difficulty of making such a change, while encouraging it for the benefits gained by the family as they adapt to life in Canada.

Rather than endorsing a particular parenting method or curriculum, the focus is on discussing issues related to the challenges of raising children in a new culture. However, parents are usually very interested in the information about the three styles of parenting (as per Barbara Colorosso). Parents also engage in comparing how these parenting styles relate to the goals of parenting in their own culture with the goals of parenting in Canadian culture. It helps to discuss the complexity of the world in which their children are growing up and that their children/teens need to learn how to think – not just what to think. However, youth also need limits and rules to follow. Parents need to be reminded that they play an important role in setting these family guidelines. And while children in Canadian families may have the opportunity to express their opinions, it is the parents who are responsible for making final decisions.

Canada's Child Protection laws

Immigrant/refugee parents worry that Canadian law gives children all the power in the family and that they no longer have any rights as parents. They believe their children can phone "911" any time they disagree with their parents' discipline methods. It is important to give parents accurate information about child protection laws and why they exist. Parents also need information about their rights and responsibilities, as parents.

- See handout: *Laws in Canada* [http://www.serc.mb.ca/Our Families Can Talk About Anything Project Handouts in English](http://www.serc.mb.ca/Our_Families_Can_Talk_About_Anything_Project_Handouts_in_English)

These laws do not exist to restrict immigrant/refugee parents, alone. Child protection laws came into existence to confront the issue of child abuse. This has been a fairly recent change in Canadian culture and some Canadians also believe these laws hinder effective parenting. However, everyone living in Canada is required to obey them. Discussing the positive context of child protection (an example of when a child is not safe in their own home) can help counter misinformation. As well, child protection is a worldwide concern and laws regarding the discipline of children have changed in many countries (i.e. it is not just a Canadian concept). For further information refer to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/treaties/child.asp

Incorporating the dynamic of ‘power’ in relationships expands the discussion about parenting styles. The ‘power over’ dynamic (authoritarian/brick wall parenting style) filters down through all members of the family – each person vigilant in guarding their authority over the next person in line. We can look at how this relates to the husband/wife relationship, as well as the father/mother/child relationship. The parent who shares the ‘power with’ a partner is often the parent who is more willing to consider the feelings and thoughts of their children, as well. This family shares the power with each other to solve problems and avoid or resolve a crises (authoritative/backbone parenting style). They ultimately become a stronger family and are better able to support each other through the adaptation process.

It is also important to reinforce the positives of the collective culture – family connection and support. The concept of the family meeting is something that was suggested by immigrant and refugee families who used family meetings as a way of dealing with family issues and staying connected. To support this, SERC developed a handout to familiarize other parents with the concept.

Allowing the group to process the information about power, parenting styles, and communication in a discussion format seems to help people grasp the larger concept of why it is important to accept that some change will be necessary. Repeated emphasize is placed on the concept of ‘finding a balance’ between their own cultural beliefs and practices and those of Canadian culture. The goal is to provide an opportunity for parents to reflect on how they can use prior knowledge and parenting experiences in a new cultural context.

PARENTING STYLES

How parents choose to raise their children affects how they communicate with them. Through discussion, participants will be aware of their own parenting style and have an opportunity to reflect on its effectiveness in raising children in a new country.

In North America, three styles of parenting have been identified. These are: Authoritarian, Permissive and Authoritative. In her book “Kids are Worth It!” Barbara Colorosso re-names these parenting styles “Brick Wall”, “Jelly Fish” and “Backbone”.

- See handout: *Parenting Styles* [http://www.serc.mb.ca/ Our Families Can Talk About Anything Project Handouts in English](http://www.serc.mb.ca/Our_Families_Can_Talk_About_Anything_Project_Handouts_in_English) Discuss the basic characteristics of each style as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Key Points:

- Point out to learners that these are only models of parenting. While authoritarian and permissive are on the extreme ends of the continuum, the authoritative style presents a balance between the two.
- The authoritative style of parenting is seen as the preferred approach in guiding our children to be responsible adults in North America. When parents use this style they help their children learn “*how to think*” not necessarily “*what to think*”.
- You may need to address stereotypes of Canadian parents. Immigrants commonly perceive Canadian parents as permissive and too liberal. They get this perception primarily from TV or from seeing kids ‘hanging around’ at convenience stores without parental supervision.
- Point out to learners that, as in any community, parents in mainstream society will also vary in their approaches to raising children depending on a variety of factors. Two such factors are past experiences and learning.
- In reality, most parents use all three parenting styles at different times depending on the situation.
- One style will usually dominate. For example, immigrant parents who come from a culture that stresses the importance of obedience and compliance with authority will be more likely to use the authoritarian style of parenting; especially if they have no information about other options.
- The issue of a parent’s right to discipline their children using physical punishment will usually come up during the discussion. Help learners differentiate between discipline and punishment. Examine the goals of discipline – i.e. guide children toward responsible adulthood; teach them “*how to think*” not “*what to think*”. Be aware of the fact that this philosophy is still culturally biased and may, in fact, not be the goal of discipline in some cultures. Take this opportunity to provide factual information about Canadian child-protection laws and the reason they exist.

Some parents may be finding that the style of parenting they are familiar with no longer works well with their children. However, their own ethnocentrism may be preventing them from looking for a solution. They may believe their way of parenting is better. From what immigrant parents observe of Canadian culture, they may believe that Canadian parents don’t care about their children. It is common for immigrant parents to blame Canadian culture for changes in their children and any resulting family problems. It also is human nature to resist change. And it can also feel overwhelming to take on yet another stress by changing the way they parent. Be sure to acknowledge the difficulty of making the changes that adaptation to Canadian culture requires.

Help learners understand that because their children are growing up in a new country, they are exposed to values that are likely different from those of their own childhood. Canadian society promotes democratic values such as mutual respect, honesty, and equality. Schools encourage children to express their opinions, listen to others and expect to be listened to. Parents may need to adapt their parenting approach to deal with the challenges of parenting in this new culture. Once again, ‘finding the balance’ between the two cultures is a key factor in dealing with this challenge constructively.

Discussion Questions:

Challenge the learners to examine and reflect upon the parenting style they are familiar with. Guide the discussion by asking:

- What parenting style is most used in your own culture?
- What parenting style are you using?
- What style of parenting do you think will be most beneficial to your family now that your children are growing up in Canada?
- Are there any differences between your parenting style in Canada and the one that you would have practised in your country of origin?

- What factors affect your parenting style?
- Would you like to change your parenting style? If so, why?

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION - LISTENING

Key Points:

Effective communication is an important part of having a positive parent-child relationship; it is the basis on which mutual respect and loving, caring relationships are built. When there is positive parent-child relationship, children will feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. This will help families deal with conflict in a more positive way.

Conflicts between children and parents often arise when there are value differences or clashing cultural expectations. When these conflicts are left unresolved, there can be a range of negative consequences. The parent-child relationship will deteriorate; often the children start lying to their parents and can end up involved in harmful activities like drug and/or alcohol abuse, unsafe sexual activity and gang involvement. Effective communication, although only part of the solution, can lead to effective problem solving.

Listening is a very important part of effective communication. When we listen to our children, we need to hear what they are telling us. We need to listen for the meaning behind the questions they ask. If we do not understand what their concerns or questions are, we need to ask for clarification. When we listen effectively, we are demonstrating our love and concern for our children.

- See handout: Effective Listening <http://www.serc.mb.ca/> **Our Families Can Talk About Anything Project Handouts in English**
- Read the handout aloud so learners can ask themselves these questions.

Homework: Learners are encouraged to practice listening skills with their children. They can refer to the handout during the week. Let them know if you are planning to discuss their challenges and successes with this exercise the following week. You can use the following questions:

- What do you find most difficult about listening effectively to your children?
- How do you think your children feel when you really listen to them?
- What are your children's reactions when you listen to them?
- What effect do you think listening has on your children's self-esteem? (Make sure everyone understands the concept of self-esteem.)
- What do you learn from your children when you listen?
- What effect do you think listening has on your relationship with your children?

Point out to participants that:

- 1) Effective listening is not only an important skill in building positive parent-child relationships, it also applies to any kind of relationship e.g. with a spouse, friends, coworkers etc., and
- 2) Listening is a skill. The more we practise, the better we get at being a good listener.

Roadblocks to communication

Questions:

1. When do *you* feel heard by people around you?
 2. Why do you think your children need to feel heard?
- See handout: Roadblocks to communication <http://www.serc.mb.ca/> **Our Families Can Talk About Anything Project Handouts in English**
 - Clarify terms such as ‘roadblocks’ and ‘one-way’ or ‘two-way’ communication.
 - Two-way communication allows our children to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings; the communication is back and forth. Children’s ideas may be different than ours and we may not agree with them. We still need to set limits for our children, but we can also take their feelings into consideration.
 - “NOT LISTENING” is one of the most common roadblocks. People (of all ages) feel “heard” when their feelings are acknowledged by the person they are talking to. Often people react to each other at a level that doesn’t acknowledge the feelings. When people feel “heard” they are usually more willing to work at resolving the conflict.
 - LECTURING/THREATENING – both forms of one-way communication.
 - Many immigrant parents find it difficult to keep an open mind when their values and beliefs are being challenged by their children. Parents need to remind themselves that closing their minds to new ideas and criticizing everything their children think and do will block any possibility of communicating with their children and resolving the conflict.
 - Nonverbal gestures and tone of voice affect how words are received. Our words and tone of voice or gestures need to match. ** There are cultural differences that need to be acknowledged. For example, some cultures are very “loud” by Canadian standards, but it does not necessarily mean that a parent is angry with their child and the child will not perceive it that way. Participants may have examples of cultural differences they have noticed since arriving in Canada.

Note: It is important to emphasize that this is an IDEAL to strive toward. Some people are naturally good at communicating in this way – others have learned how to be effective communicators. It takes time to learn a new skill and many “mistakes” will be made along the way. Parents need to have patience with themselves especially if this is a new concept. Change happens one small step at a time. Fortunately, family life gives us many opportunities to practise.