



# Parenting Journey I

## OFFICIAL SAMPLE FACILITATOR CURRICULUM

P A R E N T I N G J O U R N E Y ®

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# Contents

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Introduction .....	1-23
Preface .....	1
The Parenting Journey Training Program .....	3
Introduction to the Parenting Journey .....	4
Key to This Guide .....	23
 Session 1: Developing Trust .....	 25
 Session 2: Honoring Yourself .....	 47
 Session 3: Personal Inventory: Who Are We? .....	 65
 Session 4: Picture My Past .....	 75
 Session 5: Relating Parents and Children .....	 89
 Session 6: Letter to Our Parents .....	 101
 Session 7: Secrets and Fears .....	 111
 Session 8: Honoring Your Child's Identity .....	 123
 Session 9: Making Choices .....	 139
 Session 10: Achieving Our Dream: Goals and Steps .....	 151
 Session 11: Endings .....	 169
 Session 12: Graduation .....	 181

## SKILLS LEARNED IN THE PARENTING JOURNEY

While the program attends informally to behaviorally-focused skills, its emphasis is essentially on relationally-based skills. The Parenting Journey explores relationships in a variety of forms. It emphasizes respect, listening with empathy, and recognizing and supporting strengths. The program teaches a capacity to process and solve problems, to make choices and plans, and to be consistent. It helps people recognize and deal with loss, secrets, and fears in a healthy and direct way. Achieving these abilities can prevent adverse effects on children and help parents see how their own experiences are relevant as they parent.

## MODALITIES

The group uses several different modalities:

- **Parent Workbook:** Each parent receives a Parenting Journey Parent Workbook to record their answers to the questions posed in each session.
- **The Meal:** Nurturing through food and basic comfort can help to remove barriers to attendance.
- **Warm-ups:** The Ritual Questions are the usual form of warm-up. Sometimes they are preceded by playful activities, which bring people together and get them ready for the session.
- **Action-oriented and interactive techniques:** We use letter writing, picture making, chart development, games, and work in pairs and small groups as ways of effectively and cognitively experiencing the learning.
- **Guided meditation:** This provides an opportunity to tap into the semiconscious, which may not always be readily available in response to direct questioning. This skill also teaches parents about mind-body connections, relaxation, and thought management.
- **Focused questions:** There are series of questions raised in each session which elicit responses that are self-reflective, interactive, and informative: conversations rather than lectures.
- **Props:** Buttons and objects, handouts, and pictures are used to supplement and stimulate conversations.
- **Journal keeping:** A small notebook is given to participants to help capture thoughts between sessions.
- **Strategic self-disclosure:** Facilitators thoughtfully share pre-planned examples from their own lives for each activity, going first to model the exercise for the group. The proper use of strategic self-disclosure is discussed in detail during the training of new Parenting Journey facilitators.

## CURRICULUM SUMMARY

### **Sessions 1-2: Building Trust**

These sessions start with ice-breakers and other team building activities designed to build comfort and cohesion among parents.

### **Sessions 3-6: Connecting the Past to the Present**

These sessions get to the heart of the Parenting Journey model. Parents are respectfully led through a series of experiential activities that offer them an opportunity to reflect on their past experiences of being parented. This process encourages parents to identify what “did” and “didn’t” work in their own childhood experience. They begin to make connections of unhealthy patterns they might be repeating with their own children. They acknowledge past disappointments and move toward making conscious decisions on how to be successful parents.

### **Sessions 7-8: Special Challenges**

In these sessions, parents explore special challenges such as holding on to “secrets” and “fears” and dealing with the messages we give our children about their “other parent”. These sessions help parents address how these issues can impede their ability to move forward in their lives, especially when parents are separated, fighting, or one parent is unknown.

### **Sessions 9-10: Choices**

Parents explore the importance of making proactive choices. They learn about the process of goal setting. They identify concrete and achievable goals and are supported in developing strategies for reaching them.

### **Sessions 11-12: Closure**

In the final sessions, parents are supported as they confront losses in their lives and reflect on “good” and “bad” endings that they have experienced. The final session is a Graduation Ceremony where parents invite friends and family. Parents take center stage and are praised for their strengths and participation. The significance of the graduation ceremony often stands as a monumental accomplishment.

## STRUCTURE

In each of the 12 Parenting Journey sessions, parents experience structure, practice routines, and display respectful behavior within the group. Facilitators discuss how these elements establish consistency which creates a supportive holding environment where a sense of safety and trust can be nurtured. Parents are encouraged to model these behaviors at home to create a structure that can support the growth and development of their children. Parents also discuss how modeling rituals and routines at home can help children develop self-regulation and can lead to improvements in their child’s behavior.

## WEEKLY SESSION FORMAT

### The Meal

The meal is a critical aspect of the group, providing actual as well as symbolic nurturing to the members. The group facilitator offers the food—nutritious, simple, and inexpensive—which then serves as a model for members who wish to emulate this “family meal.” A nicely set table sends a message to our members that they are valued, respected, and worth caring for. Sharing a meal together sets a positive tone and changes the nature of the event from a remedial improvement effort to a supportive and fun occasion.

### The Agenda

The agenda provides a preview of what will take place in the session.

### The Ritual Questions

There are four Ritual Questions asked at the beginning of each session which review parents’ self-care practices, positive interactions, and well-handled situations or poorly-handled situations. Parents become aware that personal and parenting effectiveness is an ongoing choice and that the group will be paying careful attention. The result elicits positive changes in parental behaviors. The weekly ritual questions along with the experiential format of each session invites open dialogue from parents and allows the group facilitator greater control over the discussion which could otherwise become overwhelming. It also provides an opportunity for the group facilitator to track the ongoing progress of each individual parent.

**1. “Describe one thing you did to take care of yourself this week and how it affected your parenting.”**

This question directs the parent’s attention to the fact that we all need nurturing and that as adults we can and should do this for ourselves. Our choice to practice self-care, or not, impacts our parenting.

**2. “Describe one positive interaction you had with someone this week.”**

This question asks people to consider themselves in relationship to others. It asks them specifically to recognize their strengths, and focuses attention on the importance of relationships.

**3. “Describe one situation this week that you handled well and are proud of.”**

This question again speaks to recognizing strengths, and points out skills that people are often unaware they possess. Parents can be reminded of these successful efforts and encouraged to repeat them.

**4. “Describe one situation this week that you might have handled better.”**

This question provides the opportunity for parents to raise specific issues with which they are struggling. People describe their situation and then can ask for feedback. (Members should not give feedback unless asked.) Sometimes this is an occasion for learning certain child rearing skills, or for problem solving some situation. Or it can be an opportunity for the speaker to vent what went wrong and how it could have been handled better. Participants may learn something new by getting constructive feedback from the group.

The consistent format of the four Ritual Questions and the meal gives a “meta” message to the group members that consistency of expectations is reassuring and provides a safe environment. ***It is worth emphasizing this every so often and making the connection to the need for consistency in parenting.***

### **The Notebook**

Every group member is given a small notebook at the first session. This tool provides a place where parents can jot down their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and insights, as well as thoughts on the weekly ritual questions. It is an informal diary of their experience. It is also a place to record strengths and skills as they recognize them. The act of writing thoughts down creates its own reality, and makes both positive and negative things more difficult to forget or deny. The notebook is meant to provide a “tool” that some parents will find helpful. Parents should not be penalized if they choose not to use it.

### **The Session “Main Activity”**

Each week there is a “main activity” designed to increase participant insight and awareness of the origins of their current parenting practices while promoting attitudes and behaviors that promote effective parenting: loving, nurturing, teaching, and protecting their children.

### **The Session Closing Ritual**

Each group ends with a structured ritual closing that also offers participants an opportunity to speak about what they learned during the session.

### **The Graduation**

The last ritual of the group is a graduation celebration to which important guests are invited. These are frequently family members but can also be caseworkers or friends who are resources to the members and proud of their accomplishments. This is a way of marking positive change, recognizing strengths, and celebrating new possibilities. Graduation provides an opportunity for participants to make their learning visible to themselves and to those present by answering key reflective questions. In this way the celebration affirms their strengths.