



PARENTING JOURNEY

We help build stronger families.

Parenting Journey II

OFFICIAL SAMPLE FACILITATOR CURRICULUM

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Introduction to Parenting Journey II

ONE MOTHER'S JOURNEY

Donna didn't have a lot of support growing up in her family. She was an only child and a lonely child. Her parents were reserved and critical. They disapproved of her choices in men and her physical appearance. She learned that there was little that comforted her other than food, and the more she felt isolated, unloved, and different, the more she ate.

When she entered her teen years, she was a good student and was able to satisfy some of her emotional needs through schoolwork. But by the time she had left college, the only real relationship she had was with a male pen pal in prison. She pursued the relationship and actually married this man when he was released and had a child. That was when her troubles truly began. The abuse and disrespect in her marriage made her long for the lonely days as a child in her quiet but neglectful home. She and her infant daughter eventually escaped this abusive nightmare. As a single parent, she felt depressed, isolated, and hopeless about her future. She sought the services of a family therapist to help her with these feelings.

Donna's therapist referred her to a Parenting Journey group to learn to be a better parent. She began to examine the unresolved feelings from her own childhood and the destructive choices she had made as an adult. Her pen-pal relationship with her ex-husband was indicative of her inability to form a healthy, intimate connection. Learning from the care and nurturing she received in the group that she was not worthless, as her parents had suggested, made it possible for her to begin to form healthier relationships. She learned to make friends, to accept support, and to recognize signs of abuse. Earlier power struggles with her daughter diminished as Donna learned to listen with empathy to her child. She learned to respond with love, nurturing, and curiosity in spite of the neglectful experiences she had had with her own parents.

At the end of Parenting Journey I, Donna decided that her next step was to rebuild her life. She was then prepared to enter Parenting Journey II. Donna was ready to focus on her future. She wanted to learn how to enjoy and play with her child—something she had not yet been able to do.

In Parenting Journey II, Donna found that what she most wanted was to be healthy enough to run around the playground with her daughter, reach the top of the stairs without being out of breath, and feel vibrant and alive. She overcame her fears and joined a health club, made good choices about nutrition, took care of some pressing medical issues that she had been avoiding, and set up a play schedule of fun times for herself and her daughter.

In Parenting Journey II, Donna learned to recognize that there is no one right way. She needed to make choices that felt right for *her*. She risked dreaming of a future that included self-care, fulfilling relationships, and opportunities to build healthy connections. Most of all, Donna learned with her group that all of us struggle to overcome barriers that are no longer useful—barriers originally created to protect ourselves. She rolled up her sleeves, dove into the sandbox, and built sandcastles with her daughter. Parenting Journey II does that for you.

PHILOSOPHY GUIDING OUR DESIGN

Overview

This curriculum came about after several years of working with families who were under severe stress. Residing in poor inner-city neighborhoods, people often faced a combination of few jobs, poor schools, inadequate housing and health care, violence, and drug addiction in their environment and sometimes in their homes. Too often they were overwhelmed and became hopelessly depressed and unable to function. These are conditions under which it is virtually impossible to be a good and effective parent. These parents tended to feel that they had no choices and had limited views of a better future.

The Parenting Journey takes a developmental approach, conveying by its name that effective parenting does not happen only once. Rather, parenting is a lifetime process with constantly changing nuances and requirements that starts with our own childhood. Just as we experienced some good parenting and some bad, sometimes we are more capable as parents and sometimes less. It is not a steady process. Like any job, we do some parts better than others either because we possess special skills or because we have had good models in our own past.

The Parenting Journey does not and cannot deal with all of the environmental, social, economic, and racial burdens that affect parenting. However, it does recognize their importance and builds a supportive network to more effectively confront them. And it provides access to resources for families to use on their own. The Parenting Journey does not, and cannot, deal with all the internalized problems that torment family members and affect their well-being. Instead, it recognizes and names some of these issues, begins the process of confronting and supporting, and helps families identify appropriate next steps for ongoing work. The Parenting Journey does not leave people to do the work alone. It makes sure that they are connected to an ongoing supportive network or service.

The Parenting Journey's approach is one that focuses more on experiencing awareness and insight than on learning behavioral skills and child development. The reason for this is that a parent may learn correct behaviors with respect to their children, but unless they understand *why* the behaviors are correct, they will be inconsistent and unpredictable. Behavior learned by rote is behavior that is generally not followed through on. Nurturing attachments do not develop when a parent has no experience with or insight into intimate relationships. If parents have an awareness of their unique relationship with their child, real limits and appropriate behavioral intervention can occur.

ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE PARENTING JOURNEY PHILOSOPHY

Listed below are the guiding assumptions that form the underpinning of the Parenting Journey Curricula.

- **Almost all parents want to be good parents.**

When parents are not performing as good parents, we say that something has gone wrong for them and needs to be investigated and collaboratively addressed. We know that they must be disappointed, discouraged, embarrassed, or feeling hopeless about

their success at parenting, and we understand that any resistance is part of their despair. Of course they want to do it better, but something is getting in the way. We know that it is our job to provide hope and conviction, so the parent will risk another attempt at help, knowing the danger of another failure.

- **The best way to raise hope is to start by identifying a parent's strengths and building from there.**

Once a person becomes convinced that he/she can do certain things, it's easier to add to that list. If we start at the other end, with all the things the parent has trouble doing, the easiest option for the parent is to give up.

- **Any individual affects, and is affected by, other family members. We do not live in isolation.**

The family is the most intimate place where people interact and influence one another's moods, actions, and even belief systems. When the family functions well, it is the nest that supports and nurtures the growth of its members. (When we talk about "family," we mean those people bonded together through blood, friendship, or caring ties, and who interact with each other through physical or emotional contact.) This program focuses on people in relationship to each other.

- **People need an experience of feeling taken care of before they can take care of their children.**

We also assume that being a parent requires learning a set of skills. For some parents who were never adequately nurtured themselves, the learning and meaning of nurturing skills has small value. They often do not know how to apply what they have learned because they cannot imagine the feelings that being nurtured elicits. There is no experiential reference point. The Parenting Journey attempts to provide a re-parenting experience and a nurturing reference point.

- **It is important to incorporate thinking as a step between feeling and actions to promote appropriate responses.**

Effective parenting requires skills in distinguishing feeling, thinking, and doing. Many parents react to stressful situations in their own lives, and with their children, with actions based on their feelings in the moment. Often when they are later questioned regarding their actions they reply, "I did it because I didn't have a choice." It is important to help parents realize that they can have strong feelings and thoughts about a situation, but when it comes to their actions, they always have a choice about how to react.

- **Effective learning comes first through feelings and then through thinking.**

This means that people have to experience or feel something before they can take it in intellectually. This does not apply to the realm of pure ideas, but it does apply where there are behavioral and emotional aspects to the subject matter—especially where relationships are concerned. In the Parenting Journey, there are many experiential exercises that help to pin down affective reality.

- **Effective parenting is influenced by one's own past, by the whole family, and by the cultural, social, and economic circumstances in which families find themselves.**

This indicates that we must cast a wide net when we think about what goes into parenting. We cannot be content with behavioral instructions or interventions, though they have their place. We must look at the parent's history, family and cultural customs, and realities of current living conditions, and then help parents find the way that will work best for them. It is essential to recognize that there is no one "right" way, and that there are many routes to good and effective parenting.

GOALS OF PARENTING JOURNEY I

There are seven basic goals for parents participating in Parenting Journey groups:

1. Parents will be more hopeful and optimistic about their future.

When parents have hope and a vision of possibility in their lives, they can become motivated to learn new patterns and new behaviors.

2. Parents will have more insight about the connections between their parents' behavior and their own behavior as parents.

By developing an understanding of the ways in which patterns of behavior were established when they were parented, parents can gain control and choice over changing the patterns that were dysfunctional. They can replace those patterns with new habits.

3. Parents will be more confident about achieving their own personal goals.

Fostering a new sense of self-worth and accomplishment on the parent's part establishes a stronger basis for parent-child interaction.

4. Parents will demonstrate an increase in their capacity for empathy and forgiveness.

When parents cease to blame themselves and others for their past failures and disappointments, and accept themselves as they are, they will be less likely to blame and punish their children for their shortcomings.

5. Parents will increase their ability to nurture themselves and their children.

Before learning specific techniques for child rearing, parents need their own experience of feeling cared for and being nurtured. New behavioral patterns of nurturance can only be established through practice and gradual change.

6. Parents will increase their understanding about what it means to be a good parent.

Parents come to identify parenting as loving, nurturing, protecting, and teaching their children. By creating a model of these behaviors in the Parenting Journey, parents identify these skills as a job description for being a parent.

7. Parents will show an improved capacity to find and utilize community services.

OVERVIEW OF PARENTING JOURNEY II

What is Parenting Journey II?

Parenting Journey II allows parents to examine their current life circumstances and actively make plans for their future. It acknowledges past hurts and missed opportunities, but it encourages parents to create new possibilities for themselves and their children.

Goals of Parenting Journey II

In addition to the seven broad goals of Parenting Journey I, there are five new goals.

1. To pay serious attention to dreams and hopes
2. To pin down concrete goals
3. To focus clearly on choices
4. To figure out how to act on these choices
5. To become aware of how the important choices we make for ourselves affect our children and help them to learn to make their own choices

SKILLS LEARNED IN PARENTING JOURNEY II

Parenting Journey II continues to build on relationship skills and awareness. It emphasizes respect and personal responsibility as essential ingredients of a good relationship. It enables parents to recognize their strengths and build on them. It teaches the capacity to:

- process experiences
- make choices
- implement goals
- be consistent
- solve problems
- practice mindfulness, intentionality, and focus

It helps parents see multiple realities that they face daily, and the importance of promises, trustworthiness, and commitments they make to themselves and others in a healthy and direct way. The structure, routines, and repetition of key thoughts and approaches to living enable parents to explore new ways to think about things in the here and now. Finally, it explores how their own experiences are at play as they parent their children. In Parenting Journey I, we begin the process of cultivating these skills. In Parenting Journey II, these skills are deepened and concretized with practice.

MODALITIES

The group uses several different modalities:

- **Parent Workbook:** Each parent receives a Parenting Journey Parent Workbook in which 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, and games. Parents work in pairs and small groups to effectively and cognitively experience 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 questions raised in each session that elicit responses that are self-reflective, interactive, and informative: conversations rather than lectures.
- **Props:** Each parent makes a collage using pre-cut magazine pictures and large poster board as a backdrop; rocks and objects; handouts; and pictures to supplement and stimulate conversations.
- **Journal keeping:** A small notebook is given to participants in which to 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 reinforced in detail during the training of Parenting Journey II facilitators.

CURRICULUM SUMMARY

Every Parenting Journey II session is designed to accomplish the goals of the program. Each session's purpose and objectives are described in the outline overview at the beginning of each session. The sessions build as follows:

- Sessions 1–3: Realistic trust building, perceptions and mixed feelings about their lives, and making promises.
- Sessions 4 & 5: Looking at group members' expectations, beginning to create a future for themselves, and how this impacts their parenting.
- Sessions 6–9: Developing a vision of their desired future, and specific goals and strategies for reaching them.
- Sessions 10–12: Learning the importance of making pro-active choices and the need to sacrifice to effect change. Parents look at barriers to change, practice new behaviors, and identify ways to personally transform their lives. Prepare to say goodbye.

STRUCTURE OF PARENTING JOURNEY PART II

Parenting Journey Part II is a curriculum consisting of 12 two-hour sessions. Every session begins with a meal. During the meal, the facilitator asks a set of ritual questions that remain constant throughout. In addition, an assigned “Challenge of the Week” is discussed.

The Meal

The Meal is a critical aspect of the group, providing actual as well as symbolic nurturing to the members. The facilitator buys and prepares 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 guests that they are valued, respected, and worthy of care. Sharing a meal together sets a positive tone and changes the nature of the event from a remedial improvement effort to a fun occasion. After the first three sessions, the group is closed to new members, thus allowing familiarity and trust to build within the group.

The Agenda

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

Ritual Questions

A series of four ritual questions starts off each session. Each question is designed to elicit a response that will tap into different aspects of a person's daily experience. The questions are somewhat different, going deeper than those in Parenting Journey I.

1. “Describe three things that you did this week to take care of yourself.
Describe how this affected your parenting.”

The first part of this question puts the focus on parents as individuals, not on their roles as parents. It directs their attention to the fact that we all need nurturing and that as adults we can do this for ourselves. The second part of the question links caring for yourself with your ability to parent your child.

2. “Describe a positive interaction in which you trusted yourself or someone else.”

This question asks parents to consider themselves in relationship to others and to themselves. It asks them specifically to recognize when they listen to their own inner guidance system to trust either themselves or another person.

3. “Name one situation that you handled well and are proud of, or something you feel grateful for.”

This question again speaks to recognizing strengths, and points out skills that parents are often unaware they possess. It implicitly encourages repeating these successful efforts and allows the facilitator to use these successes to build on.

4. “Describe a situation where some strong feeling got in the way of you getting something done.” OR, more positively,
“Describe a situation where you were able to manage a strong feeling so that it didn’t get in your way.”

This question provides the opportunity for parents to raise specific issues with which they are struggling. In this format, parents discuss their situation and may ask for feedback. It

is an opportunity for the parents to vent about something that was emotionally troubling or challenging and for gaining insight and support. Parents can learn something new and get constructive feedback from the group.

Challenge of the Week

In this curriculum, we add a piece of “homework” each week, which deepens the experience of the session and prepares for the next one. It also develops a sense of continuity and connection during the time away from the group, a transitional experience that holds members until the next session. After the Ritual Questions, the Challenge of the Week is reported and discussed. You will deal with a challenge twice each session—once to debrief last week and once to give the challenge for the next week.

Do not forget to give the challenge where it appears in your curriculum and to follow up the next week.

The Graduation

Each group has a graduation celebration to which important guests are invited. These are frequently family members but can also be caseworkers or friends who will be resources to the members and proud of their accomplishments. This is a way of marking positive change, recognizing strengths, and celebrating new possibilities. Each parent’s collage of the future is on display and honored within the framework of the letter that is written to each participant as part of the graduation ceremony.