

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DELIVERING PARENTING JOURNEY GROUPS ONLINE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DELIVERY

Parenting Journey is making substantial changes to our delivery model in order to pilot virtual delivery with our families in the face of COVID-19. Most notably, PJ is shortening delivery of PJ1 to seven weeks and modifying all sessions to be ninety-minutes instead of two hours. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to modifying the curriculum because each organization was in a different phase of delivery when social-distancing took effect.

Below is PJ's process for modifying our delivery model, along with important considerations that should guide your organization's delivery plan. PJ master trainers and facilitators are available to work with you on an as-needed basis.

For assistance in NY, contact Katie Wilson, NY Program Director: kwilson@parentingjourney.org and in MA, contact Lydia Carbone MA Program Director: lcarbone@parentingjourney.org.

MODIFICATIONS FOR VIRTUAL DELIVERY

CONSIDERATIONS

Parenting Journey made special considerations based on its timeline of delivery. Some of this may not be applicable to every organization.

- PJ had completed intakes, but in-person groups had not started.
- The parent participants do not know each other, nor (for the most part) have any previous connection to the group facilitators.
- Participants represent a mix of having their children at home and children in the care of others.
- Some participants have technology access and familiarity with online connections and others did not.
 - PJ sent tablets to families who needed them and provided them support in setting up the tablets for use.
- PJ is always mindful of the literacy levels of participants and considered this in modifying sessions. One way to mitigate this is sending low risk questions as “homework” in preparation for the following week and helping participants answer questions prior to the session for those who need extra support. This guidance will be provided via weekly calls in-between the actual sessions.
- PJ surveyed parents to determine if online engagement was possible and what time of day would work for the greatest number of parents.

LOGISTICS/FORMAT/NUTS & BOLTS

- PJ was determined to have participants complete groups by the original dates set for graduation to ensure participants were able to meet deadlines in their treatment plans.
- Groups are being condensed to seven sessions for Parenting Journey I and Parenting in America.
- Each session is 90 minutes.
- Each group has a maximum of eight participants.
- Each group has one facilitator and an additional staff member who provides tech support; tech support will introduce self, be seen on-screen, but most likely not participate in the activities.
- New group participants are not allowed to join after the second week.
- Graduation certificates provided at the end of seven weeks will say “Graduated from Abridged PJ Parenting Group” and parents must participate in at least five sessions to receive a “graduated” certificate. All other participants will receive a certificate of participation.
- Facilitators reached out to participants over the past several weeks to develop or maintain connection.
- For at least the first several weeks, facilitators will NOT put participants in pairs or smaller groups online, as the facilitator loses the ability to monitor the group dynamic and key interactions. PJ will continue to assess levels of comfort and respect within each group and each facilitator will decide if this option will be incorporated into their group.

CONTENT

- PJ has eliminated certain activities that based on experience are known to evoke strong emotions, as facilitators are not in a place to provide in-person support. One example that has been eliminated is the letter to parents in Session 6.
- Facilitators ARE doing ritual questions each week and may be tweaking the questions to be relevant to the COVID-19 crisis. Being flexible as we progress is critical because of the great stress facing all of us. Each session will include a grounding, meditation, or relaxation exercise.
- EVERY exercise is linked back to “how does this show up in your parenting.” For example, for the name game facilitators can ask: “how did how you were named influence the process for naming your children?”

Note: Due to time constraints participants may not answer the question for each exercise, but it can be used as a wrap up point or question to internally reflect upon. This will set the tone for building awareness about how the way we were parented influences how we parent, as well as for making conscious choices.

MEASURING IMPACT – TRACKING INNOVATION

Parenting Journey recognizes that learning and feedback are critically important as we launch new programming and for reporting to stakeholders like funders. PJ’s recommendation at this time is to focus on capturing data about modifications that are made and feasibility/accessibility of delivery.



Instead of using Parenting Journey's Pre/Post Survey to measure impact, PJ is prioritizing the following to track this innovative format:

- Weekly structured journaling to be completed by each facilitator to track how modifications are implemented, challenges that arise in delivery and note any opportunities for change or improvement.
- Weekly group facilitator meeting virtually to debrief about modified curriculum from the previous week and prepare for the next week. All facilitators will meet virtually to share successes and receive support for things that didn't work well.
- **Brief surveys to parents** about their experience of the group. PJ does not recommend using traditional pre/post tools because the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to affect baselines and post-results. Additionally, the virtual delivery may impact outcomes.

Note: Organizations may adapt tools already in use or launch a qualitative pre/post survey that is relevant to your organization's goals.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GUIDING VIRTUAL PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

As stated above, this is not a "one-size fits all" response. It is important that adjustments to content, as well as structure, honor the emotional and logistical capacity of your individual group members and the collective capacity of your group. The success of PJ is deeply rooted in the strength of a positive group process.

BUILDING TRUST

The core of the group process is trust among group members. A foundation of trust is key to each participant's ability to share vulnerably, ask for support and keep coming to group.

YOUR GROUP PARTICIPANTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER

It is important to assess the level of trust among group members to promote group cohesion. Answering these questions before launching virtual delivery will shape how you modify exercises/activities.

- How well do participants know each other?
- If your organization has already started the group in person, how many group sessions were held before switching to virtual delivery?
- What is participants' level of safety and familiarity with each other?
- Do members of this group know each other outside of the group experience? For example, do they all live in the same neighborhood or work together?
- Are they complete strangers?

PARTICIPANT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH FACILITATOR

Part of building trust requires assessing the participant's previous or existing relationship with the group facilitator(s).

- Are participants "clients" of the facilitator? Does the participant get support from the facilitator on a consistent basis through other services? For example, is the facilitator their case manager, therapist, or parent advocate?
- Does the facilitator otherwise relate to the participant in another professional capacity, as the child's teacher or health care worker?



PARTICIPANT'S ENVIRONMENT

Smooth implementation requires understanding what supports and/or challenges participants may have when they are participating from home. This knowledge will influence how you structure activities/exercises, issues that should be addressed in the contract and in some instances whether a parent/caregiver is able to participate in a virtual group.

- Does the participant have a private space in which to participate in an online format?
- Does moving to an online connection pose a safety risk for any participants? Is there bullying in their environment or intimate partner violence? Are you able to engage with participants who need help in devising a safety plan?
- Is there someone to supervise the participant's children while they participate in a virtual group?
- Does the "usual" time you have group work when participants are at home? For example, PJ runs groups at dinner time because we provide dinner in-person, but this doesn't necessarily work when participants are home and trying to manage family meals.
- Do participants have the technology needed to engage in an online format? Does your organization have the capacity to provide support in accessing the necessary technology?
- Do parents have materials needed for any given activity, like paper, pens, etc.?

PARTICIPANT PERSONAL SUPPORT AND NEEDS

Facilitators need to be prepared to respond to a wider range of unmet needs. Understanding the additional stressors your participants are experiencing, as well as what other supports they have or do not have access to, should shape the content and structure of your virtual groups.

- In this incredibly stressful time, how can facilitators use online sessions to help participants expand their toolboxes for dealing with stress in healthy ways and bring that to their parenting?
- Are your participants now home with their children 24/7? Do participants have children in placement for whom visits are no longer possible?
- Is a two-hour time slot still feasible? PJ surveyed our parents and 90 minutes was the **maximum** they wanted to be online.
- What is the literacy level of your participants? If you are using session posters etc. for discussion, how will you ensure that all participants are included?
- Do participants have a support, outside of the group, for processing emotional reactions that come up during group? Will facilitators provide that or does your organization have resources to connect parents to?

