

“Training Parents to Parent:” A Five-Way Win for Schools

By

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Schools today are required to provide more services than ever before. For example, many schools across the nation offer a free hot breakfast and lunch to students. Some schools serve as a community mental health center and some even supply medical services to the neighborhood.

One service I believe schools can and should provide is parenting training. Most parents struggle with disciplining and managing their children. Parents, unfortunately, have no training or guidance in one of the most important things an adult can do—raise an independent, responsible child. Schools are perfectly positioned to offer this information.

I propose the following:

1. The parent-teacher association (PTA/O) conducts a group parenting seminar to be held at the school for four (or more) consecutive weeknights—four Tuesdays, for example, during the school year. All parents of students in the school (and District?) and all certified staff should be invited. (CE’s could be provided to staff who complete the program.)
2. A nominal fee is charged to parents, to include a copy of a selected text, with a discount for couples, to encourage dads to participate. Checks are written to the PTA so it is deductible. (The District may choose to pay for the event or find a sponsor to fund it, but it is usually best to have parents “invest” in the program.)
3. The presenter could be a member of the District staff, such as a school psychologist, counselor, special educator, teacher, or administrator. Using an outside consultant is also a possibility. The school/District would negotiate compensation for the presenter. If a consultant is used, staff could be trained to offer subsequent programs.
4. The program should be lecture-discussion oriented—not just an opportunity for parents to talk about their parenting issues with other parents. The program should be behaviorally-oriented, teaching parents what to do, with homework assigned between every session.

Session 1 should include a review of basic principles of child management/discipline and the identification of an observable, measureable, positive target behavior. The homework assigned for session 2 would be to do assigned reading in the text and baseline that target behavior. Session 2 should focus on reinforcement theory and increasing the amount of appropriate behavior the child exhibits. The homework would be to do additional reading of the text, identify reinforcements, and begin to reinforce the identified target behavior.

Session 3 should concern decreasing the amount of inappropriate behavior the child displays and discuss extinction theory, with logical and natural consequences. The homework would be more reading of the text and begin applying extinction and logical/natural consequences to undesirable behavior. Session 4 should pertain to punishment theory and conclude with a wrap-up. The homework should be to finish the text, begin implementing proper methods of punishment, and compare the current level of the target behavior relative to the initial baseline level.

5. Follow-up sessions can be held to discuss progress and plateaus. School staff could lead those sessions.

By offering a solid, evidenced-based, parenting program in the school, at least every other year, several benefits will be realized:

1. Parents learn to effectively manage and discipline their children, allowing the home to become more harmonious and peaceful.
2. Children learn to become more responsible and independent with home tasks and their school work.
3. Children learn to behave more appropriately in the classroom, reducing the time teachers spends managing misbehavior and increasing teaching time, thereby facilitating learning.
4. Teachers and parents can more effectively collaborate on improving a child's behavior and school performance.
5. With the fees from the program the PTA can support other school projects.

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