

Parent and Family Education 2012 Summer Retreat

Parent Learning and Development

(Friday AM Circle)

What kinds of challenges do parents face for which they are unprepared because of larger social/economic/etc. change?

What kinds of parent learning opportunities are needed and how should they be provided?

Heather's group

- Refreshing to hear about stories of learning and development
- Hard to work through challenges from our own experience as a child and consider how that influences our parenting
- Challenges to parents: shame, fear of inadequacy
- Parents need space & opportunities to be accepted for who they are
- Motivation & openness are necessary for learning to take place--PE should provide that space
- Our society defines who we are. Right now our society values more, bigger, quicker.... How do we deal with this as a parent when we disagree with those values?
- Wish there was a parent education opportunity as children grew beyond age five.
- One doesn't see the real struggles families go through with a Special Needs family member, and it is the "other thing" that we need to be around, to become more comfortable as a society, more accepting and aware of what that family is really going through. This applies to racial differences, also.
- Importance of meeting families where they're at (disability, low income, affluence) and letting them teach themselves--accepting them where they're at while laying down ground rules
- 3 Cs--comfort, courtesy, confidentiality (& cell phones)
- To have the opportunity to get to meet, socialize with other parents of other cultures, and to develop tolerance to learn how other "different" families function, how they deal with everyday issues, how they function as a family.
- Observation - ECFE might want to look into the "struggles" of the Native American families, bring classes to them.
- There is a conflict that Parent Education reaches only a "few". Barriers need to be broken through, with the help of others. End the "inequalities" that still exist. There have been many advances, but we have so far to go.
- "This Emotional Life" - PBS documentary (8 hours).
- About personal stories, attachment or lack of it, and that sometimes "resiliency" develops when there is no other way, but to have a change happen, take advantage of those opportunities.
- We don't know the story of those we see/observe and where they are coming from (parents & children).
- They have to be in a place where they are ready to hear/accept information.
- Everyone needs a support group
- We can all learn from each other no matter what

- The parent educator has a lot of power in determining the level of inclusion. Same with all educators.
- Inclusion is a societal issue.
- Familiarity is critical
- Defensiveness never builds communication and connection

Lynn's group

- Recurrent theme of relationships with many different people and ourselves.
- Realized how painful the experience of parenting can be; especially hard with strong-willed child who pushes you away.
- Parenting is not about us as parents, but of course it is.
- Living through your child's emotional pain is painful for parents as well.
- Parents may feel pressure to control child; aim for acceptance. Lowering expectations can help achieve a better relationship with the child. How to think and talk about it? Re-conceptualize lower expectations so it doesn't sound like a negative thing. Research on happiness shows those with lower expectations were happier.
- Families create supportive, protective environments to scaffold child's learning and growth; parents and adults also need that supportive environment.
- Losing hope can happen when the problem seems too big to solve alone; relationships with people who can help you hold on to hope are needed.
- Important to provide experiences for families that increase support and hope; looking to community for hope.
- Acceptance was a common theme.
- What is that vision, goal that we want for our family? Happy, healthy, responsible, citizens. It's difficult to allow our children (or ourselves) to be unhappy.
- Realizing the difference between what I am responsible *for* and what I am responsible *to* was liberating; it removed pressure to be perfect, and guilt for not being perfect. I'm accepting of my child's limitations, but told him that I "loved him too much to let him "act that way." Our kids know they are able to come to us for whatever. And we know not to ask too many questions.
- Meeting the families where they are was a theme. Focus on what is valuable and look at goals to create wonderful rich environment.
- Poem [Welcome to Holland](#) (when you were expecting Spain), helps one look for child's strengths, allow time for change, then, determine if what you are doing is working. Book on lessons of the skinned knee: allows child to learn from difficulties.
- Aware of how work in family life education can be such a huge blessing yet it can also be a curse. Blessing: As a Parent Educator I get to think about my family every day. Curse: As we learn new things about parenting the guilt can set in about not doing it perfectly.
- Idea that we are supposed to know what we are doing and have it all together in parenting because of what we do with our jobs, and it does not work that way. Looking for balance between recognizing all of the information and the pressure for using it in our own family.

- My kids are on to me trying out new approaches in my family.
- Coming back to the idea of expectations - realistic expectations comes to mind. Who's to say what the "correct" expectations are for the child?
- Change is emotional. Some of the biggest change in life has been centered on very emotional stuff. It is not easy for parents to do things differently and can be centered on a lot of struggle. Value the struggle.
- *Dealing with Disappointment* book ~ chapter 1 is about the fact that we are not responsible for our kids' happiness. We don't want to shield kids from disappointment, because we are not doing them any favors in that. Helping them learn how to cope with it is real life.
- Thought from teaching PE classes this year related to emotion coaching: What we are striving for is to be empathetic with guidance. We can do both.
- Being able to step back and see the bigger picture
- Remove yourself from the intensity of the situation
- Dropping the rope and focusing on the relationship
- Lowering expectations –"if I set the bar low they pleasantly surprise me"
- Expectations- pressure on ourselves because we do this for a living. Educator's own fear about becoming a parent with all this knowledge base. She still needs all the resources! Husband looking to her for answers, but she wants collaborative-parenting with her partner.
- Expectations, judgment, and individualistic society don't always work for families and parents.
- Even if parents are not talking about an issue in group, they may still be going through really tough stuff. Being able to be that supportive and non-judgmental place. Judgment free zone in the PE group.
- Introverted personality, but choosing an extroverted profession, balancing both. Can be judgmental of society as a whole.
- Intentionality--we can do things that work for us and our kids. Good part of individualistic society.
- How do we create ECFE or group events where judgment is suspended?
- Educator was present when mother slapped child in public at dance competition. Intense, uncomfortable situation; educator had to leave room; was not sure about what to do. Wondered how she "should have" handled the situation. Used the experience to talk to her own children about expectations for her parenting and encouraged children to communicate how they were feeling.
- Best times with children have been just being together. Over scheduling can lead to conflict and hurt relationship. Allow times just to "be" with children.