



## Group Leaders' Hot Coaching Tips for Doing Successful IY Parent Groups Carolyn Webster- Stratton

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*As an Incredible Years group leader you are an essential element in bringing about parents' ability to make change in their parenting interactions and to believe in themselves. It is your collaborative approach and efforts to encourage experiential learning, your positive forecasting of parent's ability to make changes, your warmth and personal understanding of their unique family situations and their children's developmental needs that leads to intimate relationships within parent groups. This accepting group environment strengthens parents' hope, confidence and ability to try new approaches.*

### **Keep Yourself on a Schedule for Each Session – Effective Time Management**

Keeping yourself on a predictable schedule and managing your time well each week will assure that you cover the content adequately and will also be reassuring for parents and help them feel safe in the group. If too much time is spent on exploring in depth an individual's personal problems, other parents lose interest and feel they are being ignored and not as valued. The following is a suggested way to schedule each session.

*Review of Home Activities:* For a 2-hour parent group session, start on time and take the first 30 minutes for a home activities review. First remind the group what the home activity was, for example, "last week we asked you to play with your child for 10 minutes each day." This is followed by asking several parents to comment on their experience doing the reading, or the home play practice activities, or the particular parenting management skills they were learning. (e.g., ignoring, praising, positive limit setting). Explore with parents what they learned from their experiences and problem solve with them how they can overcome any barriers to doing the home practice activities. Help them determine realistic goals for the subsequent week. It is also important to explore with them their impressions of their children's reactions to their parenting interactions with them. If you have a large group you might consider selecting 3-4 different parents each week to discuss their home activities practices. This will allow you to go in more depth with some parents (including doing some spontaneous role plays) and prevent you from taking too much time going around the group to discuss every parents' experiences.

*New Topic:* During the next 30 minutes introduce the new topic and plan on showing 3-4 vignettes for discussion. Take a 10 minute coffee and snack break and resume the group in a timely way to complete another 3-4 vignettes and continued discussion of new content for another 30 minutes.

*Summary and New Home Activities:* In the last 15 minutes, summarize the most important learning principles and take home messages discovered in that session, review key refrigerator notes, and new home activities for the week. Ask the parents to complete their self-monitoring checklist in their folders and make a commitment to what goal they plan to achieve in the upcoming week.

Help parents understand that every week you will give different parents a chance to discuss more issues in depth, or model and practice specific strategies. Emphasize that their learning comes from experiential practice, observing and sharing with each other. Let them know that everyone will have a turn.

### **Plan In Advance the Vignettes to Be Shown at Each Session**

There are recommended core vignettes to be shown for each session. These are marked with an asterisk (\*) on your session protocols. However you may want to choose other vignettes for a particular group that better represent the families and issues the families are coping with. When choosing additional or alternative vignettes consider the following:

- parents' understanding and prior familiarity of the content and principles being taught
- vignettes that represent culture of parents in group or number of children in their family
- vignettes that have children with temperaments and development similar to those of children in the group.

For parents who find the topic material new, unfamiliar or confusing, group leaders will want to show more vignettes to help them understand the key concepts, to see how to use a particular parent management strategy and to appreciate how the children respond to this approach. Or, for parents who are worried about getting their children to bed, or toilet training, or coping with grocery shopping problems, or being able to talk on the phone, or do homework with their children you can show vignettes related to these issues.

**BE SURE TO STUDY ALL THE VIGNETTES IN THE PROGRAM SO YOU CAN MAKE GOOD CHOICES ABOUT THOSE VIGNETTES MOST APPLICABLE TO A PARTICULAR GROUP.**

In general we find that leaders can show 8-10 vignettes per session. Many of the newly updated vignettes are longer and more complex so you will be able to show somewhat fewer vignettes when you use these new ones. It is a good idea to have a combination of the older and newer vignettes. The older vignettes are simpler and focus on one key parenting skill, while the new vignettes cover a more general parenting style and several parenting approaches. For parent groups who find the content unfamiliar and new, try to keep the message simple and clear when showing vignettes. Focus on the key principles that the session topic is focused on rather than being distracted by other issues.

### **Set Limits on Your Review of Home Activities**

It can be tempting to let discussion of home activities last over an hour, especially if you are trying to let every parent report in depth on their weekly activities and events. This can lead to parents' disengagement from the group. It is best if group leaders are very specific about what they want parents to report on regarding home activities. For example, ask several parents to report on one success they had with being child-directed or using praise, or limit setting, or staying calm. It is not necessary for every parent to report in each week or you will have trouble getting to the new content. Remember you also have the weekly telephone calls to check in with them as well. It is important to balance who shares home activities so that over the course of a few sessions, every parent

reports in and has a chance to contribute their ideas or concerns. You want to hear from every parent at least sometime during each session.

### **Focus on Parents Who Resist Doing Weekly Home Assignments**

Each week group leaders explore parent's ability to achieve their goals for the week. They ask about their success reading the chapters and doing the home practice exercises. Parents who have done their home assignments receive praise and recognition for this work and perhaps a special reward for a big achievement. Those who have not done their home assignment are asked to think about what the barriers are for them to being able to do this activity at home. The group is encouraged to think about possible ways to overcome these barriers. Next these parents can be asked to set new goals for themselves for the following week and leaders ask what would motivate them to achieve this goal. Group leaders may offer special snacks or small gifts if they can achieve their goal during the subsequent week.

### **Praise Parents Often**

Sometimes when new group leaders start leading groups, they are so preoccupied with the videos, new content schedule and group process methods that they forget to praise parents for their input and ideas. It is important to listen carefully to what parents have tried to do at home with their children and praise their small steps towards behavior change. Challenge yourself to give out a certain number of praises in every session. Ask your co-leader to help praising parents' ideas, principles and insights. Give out stickers, small candies and awards to those who completed home activities, read chapters or tried something new. Be excited about their learning process and successes! Remember that you are modeling the praise and encouragement you want parents to use with their children.

### **Do Short Buddy Buzzes**

Buzzes are when you ask parents to "buzz" with another parent to share and write down their ideas for a particular topic (e.g., establishing a bedtime routine, recording "positive opposite" behaviors of negative behaviors, rewriting negative thoughts, or negative commands, or sharing calming strategies). The benefit of doing a paired buzz instead of a group brainstorm is that every parent is immediately engaged in a task and involved in coming up with solutions. In large group brainstorms, perhaps only half the group contributes ideas and the other half is disengaged, or quiet, or distracted. After the buzz (3-5 minutes) is completed, each buddy can report on their buddy's ideas and these can be recorded by the co-leader on the flip chart. These are fun for everyone –try them out! Be sure to use the buzz handouts for these exercises.

When setting up these buzzes, plan ahead of time which parents you will pair up with each other and put a unique sticker on their name tag which matches with their buddies' sticker. Parents can change chairs during the session to have these buzz discussions. Give them a warning or ring a bell to warn them when the buzz time is coming to an end.

### **Use Thought Cards**

During the buzzes, particularly for those that involve cognitive work related to self-praise, calming thoughts, setting goals for behaviors to be ignored, managing stress, or identifying their positive opposite behaviors, give parents either a buzz handout or thought card (which can be downloaded from the web site) to use to write down their agreed upon ideas. The more you can get parents to commit to 1-2 clearly defined behaviors or specific word or thought statements to practice at home the better the learning. For example, if parents are very self-critical and have difficulty with positive coping self-talk, after group brainstorming ask parents to write down the specific self-statement that is their favorite thought that they will try to rehearse that week. By practicing one thought statement over and over again it is more likely to become an established pattern of thought. It is not necessary for parents to learn 10 ways to use positive self-talk statements because this complexity might overwhelm them. Also you might consider laminating some of the key statements or thoughts on these thought cards and laminate them so parents can keep them and place them in some visual place in their home as reminders.

### **Highlight Parents' "Principles" and Show How Principles Relate to Parents' Goals**

When parents report on their insights or rationale for how to respond to a problem situation presented, try to listen for the critical theme or behavior management principle underlying what they are saying. Then record the principle on your flip chart and name the principle with their name. For example a parent named Trilby may be talking about the fun she has had with her child playing in a child-directed way. The leader may give her the "Trilby's Fun Principle" and ask about its value for their relationship. Then as the principle is explained and understood the co-leader may write it down on the flip chart, "the fun principle leads to stronger bonds and attachment with our children." In this way parents are given credit for their ideas and empowered for their contribution to the discussion and learning. Before each session, review the key concept ideas and principles to be looked for in the vignettes and also review the refrigerator note you will be using in the group. Both of those lists will give you an idea of some of the principles that you should be listening for.

### **Help Parents Understand the Rationale for Principle**

It is important that parents understand the underlying social learning theory for behavior management principles that are discovered. For example the "modeling theory" and "attention principle" and "shaping principle" are key learning principles for parents to understand. It is important that they understand that children learn about social skills and problem solving by watching the behaviors that their parents exhibit or model or give attention to. It is also important that they understand that the child behavior that receives their attention is the behavior that is reinforced by them. Once they understand the theory underlying this and how it works to manage behavior or teach new behaviors it will be easier for them to ignore misbehavior and to praise the positive behaviors they want to see more of.

### **Use the Tool Metaphor for Building Parenting Tools**

When helping parents understand the key principles it can be useful for parents to see these as “tools” they are learning to use from their parenting tool kit. When a new principle is being taught you can put its name on a picture of a particular tool and place this picture on the Incredible Years tool kit poster. Over the sessions you will help parents learn how to use over 25 different tools. You can expand on this building metaphor by explaining to parents that every problem doesn’t have to have a hammer to make it work, rather it may be better to use capacity building or foundational tools such as attention, praise, support, relationship building, scaffolding, shaping, support, calm down strategies, modeling, repeated practice and so forth. See web site for a list of some of these tools. This fun approach helps parents realize all the different parenting tools they are learning and how they are using these tools to build positive relationships . Additionally they are learning to determine which tools are better for achieving particular goals.

### **Mediate the Longer Vignettes and Narrations**

For the longer newer vignettes always pause the vignettes 2-3 times to ask parents what they have noticed, to pull out key principles, and to see if they can predict what models on the vignettes will do next. Then when the vignette is continued parents are watching for the things that were discussed and are more reflective and aware of the strengths in the parent-child interactions being modeled. Be sure to show the whole vignette for this provides more modeling of a parenting style and relationship building than skills per se.

Also be sure to show the introductory narrations preceding the vignettes. These narrations summarize key points and help focus parents who are inattentive and may be distracted by some of the conversations. Also pause the introductory narration before showing the vignette to see if parents have questions and determine if they understand the key learning topic. For example, in the introductory narration to the first session, it is important to discuss each of the three developmental tasks for this age group and how they will learn to support their children in this learning.

### **Do Numerous Role Plays/Practices**

Sometimes it is useful to pause a vignette and ask parents to role play what they would do next in that situation. Afterwards, the group can watch the rest of the vignette and discuss any differences in the responses. Anytime that parents feel a vignette is not effective, it is helpful to have parents replay the vignette in a live role play using a more effective response. Spontaneous role plays and practices are also set up during the home activities review discussion, particularly when a child doesn’t seem to be responding to their parenting strategy. During this time parents can be asked to play the role of their child so that other group members can demonstrate how they might respond to this behavior and so the parent raising the issue can understand her child’s perspective and feelings. Role plays or practices that are set up to demonstrate parents’ successes at home or to help them resolve difficulties that emerge during home practice activities are very effective because they bring the skills they are learning to their real-life experiences at home.

## **Role Plays or Practices in Group**

Setting up numerous role plays or practices for parents is critical to parents' learning processes. You may think from discussion that parents understand the principle or topic but when you see them practice "in action" you will have a better idea of their ability to put their ideas into real-life behaviors. There can be a discrepancy between how parents cognitively would ideally like to behave and how they actually behave. It can be very difficult to think of the right words to use with children, manage angry thoughts and stressful feelings when children argue or disagree, or to follow through with consistent responses. Role plays practices help parents to rehearse their behavior strategies, practice staying calm and using positive self-talk, and to get feedback from group leaders and other parents about their skills. Here are some tips for successful role plays.

First, remember you are the "director" of the role play and get to choose the actors, set the stage, and determine the script and roles for the things you want practiced. Always make sure that you have covered the content prior to doing the role play. Then start with a simple role play that will illustrate the concept. Rather than ask for volunteers, select a parent you think understands the behavioral concept and can successfully play the role of the parent. Invite the parent to help you, e.g., "John, would you come up and help me by being the parent in this next role play." Then choose a parent to be child. Set up the role play by letting participants know the age of the child, developmental level and temperament of child, and what the child and parent will do. Ask the group for ideas for how the parent should respond to the particular situation being set up. Using their suggestions, walk the parent through her/his part in the role play before the role play starts. Give instructions to the child, letting him/her know whether they should be cooperative or noncompliant. If they will be noncompliant, let them know if there are any limits (e.g., you should fuss and whine, but please don't throw things or hit). This is very important because you don't want the role play to require management techniques that haven't been taught yet. As the role play proceeds freeze the scene at any time to give the parent feedback for her effective skills or to redirect, or to clarify something you didn't explain well. Provide the parent who is role playing in the parent role with plenty of scaffolding so s/he can be successful. Group members can also be asked to suggest ideas if the actor participant is stuck. Debrief with the person playing child and playing parent afterwards to find out how they felt during the practice. Ask the group to give the person in role as "parent" some feedback on their strategies. When applicable rerun the role play with a different response using the ideas of another parent. Sometimes you may want the person playing "child" to try the scene being in role as "parent" so they can experience practice with this different approach.

There are many role plays or practices suggested in the leader's manual. However, try also to use spontaneous role plays that emerge out of a discussion of a difficulty a particular parent is having at home and is asking for help with. When parents feel you are directing these practices at their own real issues with their children at home they are very grateful for this support and understanding.

When doing these role plays, it is helpful if one leader is sitting next to the parent in role as parent and the other leader next to the child. In this way, the leader can whisper to the parent suggestions for words to use if they need help and the other leader can make sure the parent in role as child is exhibiting behaviors that can be praised or attended to

or safely ignored. Providing this scaffolding for practice sessions will make the practice more successful, useful and supportive.

### **Benefits and Barriers Values Exercises**

The purpose of these exercises is to introduce a new program and find out what parents in the group think about a particular topic. Always start with the benefits list first. Give a brief introduction to the topic by referring to the pyramid and then ask the group to think of as many benefits as possible, for example, “So far we’ve been talking about strengthening your relationship with your child through play. Today we’re going to move up the pyramid to think of ways that you can give your child positive feedback. One of those ways is through praise. Let’s take a few minutes to think of as many benefits to praise as we can.” As they think, you can prompt them to think of benefits to the child and to the parent. Then after the benefits list is complete, say, “We have a great list of positive things about praise, but sometimes there can be things that get in the way of giving praise, or there may be things about praise that make you uncomfortable. Let’s brainstorm a list of barriers to giving praise.” As group members bring up barriers, the group leader’s job is to acknowledge that their idea is a barrier and write it down. This is not the place to try to convince them that their barrier isn’t a good one, or to try to make them see that praise is good. At the end of the list, you can introduce the vignettes by saying, “So, now we’re going to watch some vignettes and I’d like us to make a list of things that make praise effective. We want to think of ways to praise that will lead to all of these benefits over here. We will also talk about how to handle some of the barriers to praise that are experienced by most parents.”

A couple of caveats to the benefits/barriers exercises. In the first topic on play, only do the benefits exercise for the value of play. Save the discussion of barriers to child-directed play for the subsequent session after parents have tried to do the play homework activities. This results in the barriers discussion being the actual difficulties they have experienced playing at home that week. Then you can trouble shoot some possible ways to overcome those barriers in the group. For the praise and limit setting topic you may want to do both the benefits and barriers as you introduce the new topics so that you have an idea of what to focus on when you show the vignettes. Knowing the barriers ahead of time can help you target your questions and possible practice role plays. For the Time Out topic, don’t do the benefits/barriers values until after you have taught parents how Time Out is done and understand its purpose. This is done in the subsequent sessions and will need sufficient time to discuss the pros and cons of Time Out versus physical discipline.

### **Provide Make Ups for Parents who Miss Sessions –Home Visiting Protocol**

Every session is important in terms of learning because one session builds on the learning in the prior session. This means if parents miss one session they may miss a valuable tool involved in building their behavior management plan. Group leaders can help parents make up a missed session by meeting 30 minutes prior to the next session to review the missed material by reviewing key principles and showing 1-2 vignettes. Sometimes, for high risk families, it is advisable to make up a missed session by doing a home visit. There are *home visit coaching protocols for home visiting coaches*, which outline how to cover a topic during a 1-hour home visit. Please see the home visitor

coaching manual. To accompany this home coaching model there is a self-administered manual for parents for each topic.

### **Motivate Parents to do Weekly Buddy Calls**

It is important for group leaders to discuss the reason for buddy calls. At each session, ask about parents' success doing these calls and also discuss barriers if parents are not doing the calls. Group leaders can role play making calls in the group so that parents know how to make these calls and what to talk about. Group leaders should specify the time limit of these calls to no more than 5 minutes and tell parents what to talk about. For example, "*this week you will share with each other your favorite play activity or your favorite calm down activity*". During the session pair buddies up and ask them to set a date and time for their call with their buddy. (See buddy call appointment handouts on web site) If they come to the next session without having done their buddy call, they can check in with their buddy before the session starts. Alternative ways of checking in with buddies are also encouraged so parents may e-mail each other or meet up with a buddy at school instead of making the calls.

### **Review Self-Monitoring Checklists**

It is important that each parent has a home activities notebook that they can take home each week with the weekly refrigerator notes and home activities in it as well as other handouts. Parents also need a personal folder that is kept at the school/center/agency by the group leader. In this folder you put the parents' goals and their self-monitoring checklists. Each week parents make a commitment on their self-monitoring checklist regarding their goals for the week in terms of reading, home practice activities and buddy calls. The following week they record on this checklist whether they met their goals and what they will work towards the following week. Parents also place their written homework in these folders so the group leader can review it between sessions. Your job as group leader is to be a kind of "coach" – to praise them for their successes with home activities and problem solve with them their barriers to their achieving their goals and provide support so that they can set up achievable goals each week. Every week review these folders and put in your personal comments, stickers or special articles that reflect their interests and goals. This folder is a personal way for group leaders to provide individual and private feedback to each parent in the group.

### **Call Parents During the Week**

We recommend that all parents be called during the week to ask how they are doing with the home activities and issues they face at home. These calls are generally 5-10 minutes in length. If parents bring up difficulties with topics such as coaching or ignoring their children's misbehavior, the leader can recommend they bring this up in the group so that they will have the support of other parents who experience similar problems. During these discussions group leaders can provide support for their parenting efforts and help trouble shoot some individual problems. If a weekly call is impossible because of group leader work time pressures, call parents on a rotating schedule so that each parent is called every two weeks. Prioritize calls to parents who need more individual support during the week. Always call parents who give a negative or neutral session evaluation to discuss their dissatisfaction and to let them know you want to make



the program relevant for their needs. In addition, always call parents who missed a session as soon as possible to discuss a makeup session and to let them know that they were missed.

### **Work Collaboratively with Your Co-Leader**

It is important that the two leaders work together to plan their group each week. Leaders should decide who is showing particular vignettes, who is looking for “principles” from parent comments, handing out prizes, and writing down key ideas on the flip chart. It is very helpful for parents to see the leaders collaborating and working together to lead the groups. When you break out for small group practices each leader can coach a different dyad or triad and give individual feedback. Leaders should respect each other and praise each other’s ideas. It is generally a good idea for one leader to be the “content leader” and the other the “process leader.” Halfway through the session, after the break, group leaders usually switch roles. The content leader takes responsibility for the new content being presented by leading the home work discussion, showing vignettes, and guiding the discussion. The process leader watches group dynamics and identifies parents who want to speak, praising their ideas, pulling out principles, writing key points on the flip chart, and summarizing new concepts. The process leader can expand on a point that a leader is making but in general is following the lead of the primary leader in terms of content being learned. If a group leader is working with a brand new group leader, then they can decide when the new leader feels ready to try out leading some vignettes. It is not uncommon for new leaders to start by observing groups and helping with writing down key points and supporting the leaders during practice sessions.

### **Be Sure to Videotape Your Sessions and Schedule Peer Review**

Start videotaping your group sessions as soon as possible so that you and the parents get used to this procedure. It is normal to be anxious about this at first. Explain to parents that the purpose of this taping is for you to learn and get feedback on your process of leading this program. Reassure them that no one else will see the tape except your coleader and the IY consultant. To desensitize yourself to the process of being videotaped – just video everything and look at the tape with your coleader alone for some planning and peer feedback. Once you are used to this process, send a video of a session to IY as soon as possible. **Include your self-evaluation with the tape or DVD.** This process of self-reflection on your own work and determining your future goals with your co-leader is a key and supportive learning process. This is the way therapists continue to learn throughout their lives and serves as encouragement for this work. Furthermore the feedback you get from certified IY peer coaches and mentors will help you with improving your group work and give you suggestions for leadership strategies to try. In addition, you will get feedback on the things you are doing very well and this will be reassuring and validating! Watching your group therapy process on video is a powerful way of learning and sharing ideas with colleagues. Once you have learned this process and become certified then you can help support new group leaders by providing feedback on their group work. This creates a climate of mutual support among IY group leaders.

### **Prepare for Certification/ Accreditation**

Be sure to go for certification or accreditation as a group leader. This process validates your skills and competency to deliver this program with high fidelity. Not only that the self-reflection and coaching you receive is empowering and gratifying.