

HELP & SHELTER

TRAINING & CAPACITY BUILDING TO ENHANCE SERVICE DELIVERY PROJECT **(FUNDED BY THE USAID GOVERNANCE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT BY AGREEMENT** **WITH PROJECT IMPLEMENTER TETRA TECH ARD)**

ARD Activity Report - Training Workshop on Parenting - Days 1 & 2 (20 & 21 July 2011)

1. Introduction/Background

This workshop was not on the original list of capacity building workshop for this project. Based on feedback from Help & Shelter personnel and other partner NGOs, a request was however made to the project funders to replace the previously scheduled third counseling workshop and with a parenting workshop targeting community-based workers and CBOs. The consensus was that community-based workers had already benefited from the previous 2 counselling workshops but lacked knowledge on parenting, which was recognized as a key to reducing child abuse and exploitation and improving the lives of children and their families in Guyana. Participants were drawn from Help & Shelter and partner NGOs.

2. Methodology

The methodologies used were a combination of power point slide presentation, group discussions and small group activities. Workshop sessions over the 2 days were participatory and interactive.

3. Topics and Participant Feedback

The main focus areas of days 1 & 2 were:

- Reflections on Self and Childhood Experiences using Four Petal-Seven Shaper Model
- Parenting: A Relationship Model
- The Emotional Bank Account
- Parenting Styles
- Evaluation

Day 1

Reflections on Self- Life Lines

In introducing this topic the facilitator underscored the importance of reflection and exploration of self in examining the issue of parenting. Early childhood experiences were seen as a key aspect which shapes the growth and development of a child. Participants were asked to trace their lifeline from 0 to 18 years pinpointing high and low points along the way and asked to reflect on forms of abuse they experienced, how they felt and who were the significant person/s in their life. The facilitator encouraged participants to use a similar exercise when working with parents and as a way of getting them to open up they could start by sharing some of their own personal childhood experiences. Feedback from the lifelines started with the facilitator sharing her own personal experiences. The sharing of lifelines included experiences of having to deal with a mother's nervous breakdown and subsequent mental health problems from the age of 6 years; being sexually assaulted and raped by the brother of a school friend at the age of 13; having to leave school due to pregnancy; death of a mother at age 18; being a child of a pregnant out of school teenager and subsequently becoming pregnant herself at the age of 15 ; not knowing she was adopted until the age of 9; being moved from family to family; feeling unloved and unwanted by their birth mother; death of a mother at age 2 and sent to live with an aunt where she had to do all the housework and did not get the opportunity to attend school like her cousins; verbal, emotional and physical abuse at the hands of a stepmother from the age of 5 to 16 when he left home and went on his own; being discriminated by her father because she was dark and taken out of school at a young age; sexually harassed by a cousin; physically abused by fathers, cousins, mothers etc.

Four Petal Seven Shaper Model of Development

The Four Petal Seven Shaper Model identifies key facets which help to form the physical, emotional, social and intellectual make up of a person. In examining these different aspects i.e. biology, self

moving ability, thinking, feelings, environment, past and future we can begin to see how these have helped to shape who we are and how we respond to life in general. Participants were placed into groups and reported on aspect of the model.

Biology

It was agreed that biology determines much about our physical body, height, size, ethnicity, gender etc. However even though many people are uncomfortable with their physical appearance but it is important to accept that there is not too much that can be done about a person's biology so it is important to love oneself the way you are and to get parents we are interacting with to do likewise. Having a poor body image and concept will impact negatively on the self esteem of the individual. It was stressed that in counselling or working with parents, care givers or siblings it is important to get them to understand that teasing, name calling, insults or verbal abuse will impact negatively on the self esteem and self concept of their children. On gender the group reported that on the positive side women are generally better care givers, and tend to be more emotional whereas men tend to not deal with emotions very well. On the negative side the male child is socialized to not show emotion from an early age as if they do they are often teased and called names; girls are seen as liabilities in some cultures and boys as assets and in some families boys are given priority over girls and are more appreciated. Some parents also treat their children differently depending on their gender and allow boy children more freedom than girl children as in the saying, loose the bull and tie the heifer. In discussing how brain development is affected by biology it was pointed out that some children are pre-disposed to certain characteristics which are hereditary which lead to learning disabilities, while others can be affected by poor or inadequate nutrition during pregnancy leading to brain damage in the child, effects of alcohol and drug abuse can also have a detrimental effect on the fetus and child. The importance of educating parents and pointing them in the right direction when they observe problems with their children which may be due to a learning disability was stressed. Discouraging parents of the view that the child has a spirit or is being bad was agreed upon. The effect of biology on physical ability was linked to overall development of the child starting with conception. Many things can happen in the 9 months before delivery which can affect the motor development and outlook of the child. Lack of physical space to develop motor development could be a factor in slow or late physical development. One participant shared an experience of a mother was making all the decisions for her 16 year old daughter at a training session and when this was objected to it was found out that the daughter suffered from a mental condition due to the mother's repeated attempts to abort her daughter and as a result was very forgetful, would wander off for weeks and has to be medicated. The fetus or child being exposed to second hand smoke and the negative effects this can have on the biology of the child was an example given of how the 5 senses can be affected; eating too much, too little food or poor quality food lacking in nutrients can affect the full development of the fetus or child and can lead to chronic problems late in life. It was recognized that babies and children in the womb feel the emotions around them so it is important to create a calm and loving environment for the baby and child to grow in. The immune system of the child will also be negatively affected by a lack of adequate and proper nutrition or exposure to harmful substances. This can be passed on to the child in the womb, through breast feeding or directly to the child, HIV positive mothers can pass on the virus to their unborn child in the womb or through breast feeding, children's whose immune system is compromised through certain conditions such as sickle cell anemia can experience stigma, labeling etc, any chronic ailments are a shaper for a child.

Self Moving Ability

It was agreed that self moving ability is affected by age babies can't walk or move independently so they are dependent on their care givers to move them about this can make them very vulnerable to all forms of neglect and abuse. Young children not being able to talk are also totally dependent on their care givers to fulfill their physical and emotional needs. It is difficult even children when they are older to report abuse or neglect due to their lack of self moving ability. Some parents may want a certain sex for their child as a result some children will try all their life to live up to the expectations of the parent, daddy wanting a boy can shape a girl child and parents can limit their children depending on their gender bias. Children or adults who have a disability are hindered in their self moving ability. Sometimes the disability can be minor like shortsightedness but can still affect the child especially if it is not identified early. Mental retardation and other forms of mental disabilities can severely affect

one's ability to be independent and make decision, this also makes persons vulnerable to neglect in all its forms, stigma and abuse. A person's state of health can also have dire consequences especially if not detected. Often it is not possible to diagnose the problem because there are no striking symptoms so it is advisable to pay attention to health and get health check ups on a regular basis. Knowing the health history of family members on both sides can also help to be prepared for the onset of diseases or other health conditions affecting children or adults early or late in life. Ethnicity can also be a shaper and can result in segregation, discrimination and racism, low self esteem and self hatred. Examples were given of applying for jobs and on showing up there is a lukewarm response based on one's ethnic make up. Families can also discriminate against other family members based on appearance like the darkness or lightness of skin colour. Children from interracial couples can also be affected by stigma racism and discrimination which can affect them very negatively. In determining how culture and religion plays a part in shaping personality it was pointed out that Hindu and Muslim males play a dominant gender role in the family and society. Muslims according to their beliefs are not supposed to socialize with people from other non-Muslim backgrounds and boys and girls are not supposed to socialize together after a certain age. Muslim women are also not supposed to use contraceptives and only legal marriages are allowed in the Muslim Faith. Women traditionally could not ask for a divorce and according to Islam practice if a man says 3 times I want to divorce you then the divorce goes through. However things are changing and some of these practices are no longer frequent.

Thinking & Feelings

Thinking affects and shapes feelings and thinking and feelings shape behaviour. In other words what we put in we get out. Our thinking and feelings are also affected by all those things that make up our biology and all those things which affect our self moving ability.

Environment

The child is shaped by his or her environment and the first environment is the womb so everything the mother consumes or partakes of affects the child. her health also affects the child as does her state of mind. The home is the other main environment for the child so parents need to know and evaluate what is taking place in the home, who lives there and what activities are taking place. Children are like sponges and will pick up on everything that is happening in the home. The school is another place where children spend a lot of their time in so parents also needs to know what is happening with their child not only academically but socially and emotionally.

The Past

The past is a shaper for the present and the future and the personalities, characteristics and past experiences of parents and care givers affect and influence the way they interact with their children. If domestic violence and a pattern of abuse is or was present in the lives of parents and care givers then this will also influence a child's development as well as the attitudes and knowledge of parents and family structure.

The Future

The future is determined by all that we say and do for our children. We don't now what the future will be but we can try to anticipate and plan for the best for our children.

Day 2

Parenting - A Relationship Model

The approach to parenting presented by the facilitator was one of the building relationships and it was recommended that the earlier this was done the better. The aims of the relationship model are:

- Vision and increased confidence
- Development of relationship between parent and child
- Teach skills for boosting emotional security and self esteem
- Develop strategies for positive discipline
- Develop skills for handling common behavioral problems

Participants were asked to identify the goals of parenting and identified them as bringing up of a child, providing for a child, helping a child to fulfill their full potential. Other goals presented were to raise

adults who can function in the outside world, can cope with the knocks of life and bounce back, can form good relationships and people you would love to spend time with.

In discussing parenting and the relationship model the facilitator stressed that it was important to keep in mind that each child is unique and there are basically two types of children (prior to the teenage years); the easy child and the difficult child. Parents raising the difficult child can feel inadequate, isolated and depressed. In raising children it is important for them to know how far they can go and as far as children are concerned L- O -V -E is spelt T-I-M-E. A handout was given out with some images and participants were asked to comment on the ones that showed the setting of boundaries and the effects of this. The image where the sheep was given a large enough space to move around in but with a boundary fence showed a happy active sheep with the caption “*freedom within limits*” while the one where the sheep was cramped with no space to move showed an angry and resentful sheep with the caption “do as you are told and don’t argue”.

Developing Emotional Security

The question was asked as to what an emotionally secure person looked like and the following qualities were given:

- Feels loved and valued for what he/she is (not for achievements)
- Values himself/herself
- Can handle emotions well
- Knows how far to go (has boundaries)

Having emotional intelligence was seen as an asset as it was recognized that having the right attitude can take you places where intelligence can’t. In children self esteem can be fragile and is developed over the years. The facilitator posed this question to participants Right now your children are asking themselves some important questions. Who will give the answers?

Emotional Bank Account

The emotional bank account was likened to a bank statement showing how much money was put in and how much money was taken out. Participants were asked to imagine their child as having an emotional bank account or a love tank with deposits or credits and debits. As long as there is enough in the bank the child can cope with a certain amount of difficulties without being emotionally damaged. Examples given of times of debit-problems in the family were being bullied or having relationship problems.

A handout of an emotional bank account was circulated to participants on it there was credit column and a debit column. on the credit side there were a \$ amount for a list of positive activities ranging from Year 1 -18 ending with letting them go and on the debit side there were also \$ amounts for a list of negative behaviours. Another example of emotional bank account debits were absent fathers and the way some mother handle such occurrences. In healing the hurt that this brings to a child, it only makes matters worse if mothers try to poison the mind of the child against the absent father. By doing this you are asking the child to carry the burden of an absent father and the child will not be able to shoulder such a burden. Children sometimes can come to their own conclusions due to experiences they have had with broken promises etc. Counsellors and social workers during the course of the work were asked to not make hasty judgments or come to conclusion about situations without investigating further.

Participants’ Reflections

Reflecting on boundaries one participant remembered the first time her son fell and how traumatized she felt. Speaking of parents letting their children go she recognized the importance in giving children the freedom to develop and move. Another participant disclosed that she was not given much emotional credit in her bank account from her parents and in parenting her daughter was surprised when she telephoned home one day and her daughter was so happy that she had called her honey as she had never used an endearment before that her daughter could remember. Another participant with twins who are opposites in personalities said that the session allowed her to understand that each child is unique. One participant felt that she would now be able to let go of her children and felt better equipped and more knowledgeable from today’s session. According to a participant she was able to let

go of her older children and she is proud of them today as they are building a life for themselves. She also said that their father had died when they were very young and she had to parent them through everything. Another participant reflected on a successful intervention she did with her son in getting him away from just doing housework for his father and back in school to sit his CXC examinations. Due to the session a mother said she now knows that what she is doing as a parent is right and this makes her feel validated as she was always trying to prevent what happened to her as a child recurring to her daughter. Not having information about parenting previously made one participant parent her first children the same way she was parented by her mother, when she was educated about parenting she put into practice what she learnt and now she has both biological and adopted children in her home. The session on the emotional bank account really made an impact on one participant and there were many other things that she could relate to in the discussion especially the part about supporting children in what they want to as she has seen how this can raise their self esteem and confidence. For another participant the discussion on boundaries and letting go struck a chord as she has 4 sons and use to think she was the perfect parent but her older sons are still living with her and she is now thinking that maybe she has been doing something wrong. One of the young participants who does not have any children as yet said the need to allow a certain amount of freedom but also set boundaries impacted on her especially as she remembers asking a lot of questions as a child and being told to shut up. As she got older she would try to tell her parents that this was wrong to do but they still refuse to accept this. The discussion and presentation on emotional deposits stood out for this participant. She felt her parents did a very good job in parenting her and she is re-learning things about parenting with her adult daughter. She feels she has to go back and exam where she went wrong. She has observed that her daughter tends to be selfish and gets jealous if she buy things for the grandchildren her daughter's own children. The session was very interesting for another mother of 4 children who was the disciplinarian and provider with her first child and realized that her husband was playing the part of emotional provider. She has now learnt to have a more balanced approach to parenting. Another participant felt it was important to teach children about forgiveness and to check in on how children are feeling. Work also needs to be done on persons who may have committed a wrong. The facilitator in commenting said that if children don't want to let go it can indicate a problem with parenting. The parents may be fearful and this can be communicated to the children. Children's ability to maintain a healthy relationship is an indication of good parenting if not there may be a problem with commitment and building trust. An emotionally stable child will be able to go into a relationship and maintain this relationship.

Small Group Exercise

Participants were placed into groups representing the ages of their children presently living at home. The task of the groups was to identify –How a parent can help to make their child more emotionally secure. Feedback from the groups indicated that they connected with the hamster story and felt that it was important to use words and language in guiding children even at an early age. They recognized that one of the main reasons children throw tantrums is because they are not getting enough attention from the parent or caregiver. They also recognized that children need to feel appreciated and need to be taught manners. Praising children for their accomplishments even if these are small was also important in building emotional security. Encouragement for the child was also seen as a key aspect towards building emotional security as even when things are not going well or they are not doing well at school they need to know that they are still loved and valued. Insulting or concentrating on the negative can be counter productive and make matters worse. In terms of respect it was recognized that if you want respect you have to give respect. Parents need to allow their children to express their feelings and opinions and not see this as backchat. Setting of boundaries was accepted as an important task of parenting for children of all ages and parents need to be able to say sorry when they have made a mistake and take responsibility. This can be an important teaching tool for children. Even parents of grown children who are in adult relationships or married still have a role to play as parents. In these situations it was agreed that it was best to allow the adult children to approach their parent(s) for help instead of barging in unasked. Parents of adult children however still need to set boundaries to ensure their independence from each other. Respecting these boundaries was important for maintaining a successful relationship. If there is trouble or conflict parents can encourage their adult children to operate in a different way and to accept responsibility when things are not going well. Participants however recognized that it is not advisable to attempt to counsel your own children if they are

experiencing major problems. For parents of teenagers it was important to recognize that they are going through a lot of changes including hormonal changes and to try and understand the mood swings and personality changes and their need for independence. Respecting the teenager's need for privacy was underscored but this was to be done within boundaries of safety and responsibilities. Showing appreciation and encouragement was seen as very important during the teen years as teenagers are trying to find themselves and it is a time when they can be experiencing feeling of inadequacy and self-consciousness and knowing their parents are on their side can be of great help in building emotional security. Giving approval to teenagers when they achieve something was also very important. The need for parents to establish good communication channels with their teens was seen as key to understanding what is going on in their lives. The responsibility for this rests with parents since many teenagers tend to not want to confide in their parents at this age but confide in their friends. Getting to know the friends of your teenagers was important for parents as peer pressure is especially high during these years. Setting of new boundaries in consultation with your teenagers was another important task for parents which can help with the safety and security of your child. Always letting your teen know you are there for them no matter what was seen as essential for the emotional security of your child.

The Teen Zone

The aim here was to look at some key areas in parenting teens such as:

- What it feels like for us
- What it feels like for them
- Some ways we can boost them up
- Common problems
- Identifying parents' feelings
- Understanding the teen world
- Working on relationship
- Styles of handling conflict

Many parents complain about the changes in behaviour of their children when they reach the teen years. However parents need to understand that a lot of peer pressure is placed on teenagers to do well at school, to be popular, to fit in, in addition they are exposed to smoking, alcohol and drugs, experience feelings of sexual attraction, body changes and have to cope with parental expectation etc. Home should be a place where teenagers can relax, feels safe, accepted, appreciated and loved. All teenagers will resist parental authority this is their way of saying I want to be independent. Teenagers will also place more importance in their peers than in their parents at this age. They are coping with hormonal urges and a changing body. if they are sexually active they are also fearful of getting an STI. They are also experiencing relationship hassles and problems. The availability of pornography on the internet, in movies and DVDs are widespread. They are under pressure about exams and about jobs and careers. Working on the relationship with your teenager is key to establishing a close bond and a successful parent/teen relationship, if this is not done teenagers will give up on their parents. Parents have to undergo a shift in their thinking they have to allow their teen to be responsible and assume responsibilities.

Parenting Styles & Handling Conflict

Styles of handling conflict were shared:

- Authoritarian-"Get that thing out your mouth right now!"
- Passive-"I didn't notice anyone smoking'(but you did)
- Passive/Aggressive-"""What's the matter mum?"-nothing
- "Up Front"/Assertive What are we aiming for.

The authoritarian style is heavy handed, insistent and forceful. This does not work well with teenagers as bossing them around will not work. Telling young people what to do all the time is not helpful it is better to let them feel the consequences of their actions sometimes. The passive/aggressive style is silent, withdrawn and creates an atmosphere but nothing gets resolved. Being assertive does not mean being rude and criticism is not wrong. Assertive parents choose their battles they aim to understand and resolve problems. Being assertive is saying how you feel and why and what you would like to see

happen. It is advisable to negotiate with teenagers depending on the circumstances. Successful parenting can use a combination of all styles to achieve balance and positive results.

Evaluation

In evaluation the workshop participants said they learnt that parenting was like building a relationship and the four petal seven shaper model was about the importance of self reflection and looking back to our past to understand the present and plan for the future. The emotional bank account tool and strategy resonated well with participants who said they learnt about building up credit in their children's emotional bank account so as to help them to become better adults and understood that what they put in to their child's emotional bank account will affect who and what they become. Participants also said they learnt about the effects of childhood experiences on adulthood, about the setting of boundaries and the importance of emotional security in the development of a confident child. Participants also said they learnt strategies to improve parent child communication, to accept their child for who he/she is and give attention, respect and appreciate the uniqueness of each child. Participants said they came away with the understanding that regardless of age parenting does not stop when their children become adults and communicating and sharing information with them will always be important part of their parenting responsibility.

Participants said they found the effects of parenting styles most useful and the ways of modifying parenting methods to suit the age and stage in a child's development. Most useful was also the techniques shared in parenting adolescents and teenagers. The life line and sharing of early childhood experiences was also found to be very useful for participants. The information given on different parenting styles and the need to recognize that freedom is best enjoyed within limits was also found to be very useful as were the setting of boundaries and allowing children to express themselves. Participants liked the way the session was conducted allowing each person to express their thought, feelings and experiences.

Participants said they would use what they learnt for their personal development and in the youth development sessions they teach. Having a better understanding of why teenagers and children do the things they do would help to improve parenting their children. Other participants said they would pass on the information on parenting to the teenage mothers at the organization they work with so as to help them cope better with their children. One participant said the information will help her to make better parenting decisions and another said that she will put to use the information she received in her family life and share the information with her husband, community and Church. Participants also said they would integrate what they have learnt into their counselling sessions with parents who may be lacking in parenting skills and techniques. The information was also seen as helping participants to interact better with their grandchildren and young people. Sharing the parenting information gained from the workshop would also be used with families participants interact with in communities and in workshops for parents.

4. Follow-up Sessions

There is to be another 1 day session to complete this parenting workshop.

5. Qualitative Reporting Techniques

Qualitative information was gathered through the use of group evaluation reports. Qualitative information was also gathered during the course of the workshop from feedback sessions, small group reports, role plays and discussions involving participants.

6. Quantitative Reporting Techniques/Methodologies

Quantitative information was gathered through the use of tools such as ARD-required attendance sheets and registration forms.

Participants were given registration forms in their file folders to fill out and return by the end of the workshop. As participants arrived they were directed to fill out required information on the attendance sheet.