

Engaging Families Who Are Disengaged

Parenting is not usually the primary problem for families. If there is mental health, domestic violence, trauma, addiction, poverty, service overload etc., those problems will prohibit parents from being able to focus on, believe in and follow through with parenting ideas. OUR role goes beyond teaching parenting. Our FIRST role is often identifying, advocating for and empowering parents to address and manage the obstacles they are experiencing. Then and only then have we given parents the “permission to be parents”-- competent and effective parents!

Key Points to Remember:

- Parents may feel very defensive
- Parents may not believe there is a problem
- Parents have probably been told they are bad parents
- Parents often are worried they are bad parents
- Parents may believe they have something to prove
- Parents probably do not have healthy support systems

Key Phrases to Use:

- I know that I have to earn your trust
- I don't expect you to believe what I am telling you
- I do not believe that you are a bad parent
- I believe that you have a lot of good ideas about how to care for children
- The ideas we teach you are not the ONLY way to parent, they are just suggestions/ alternatives
- I don't expect you to use everything we talk about. I hope that you will try each thing at least once. Maybe you will find something that is right for your family.

Key Actions to Be Aware of:

- Parents' arms are crossed
- Parents are leaning back in their chairs
- Parents are rolling their eyes
- Parents are shaking their heads

**** When an instructor sees these actions, it is your job to address them by:**

- Reframing what YOU are saying
- Changing your tone of voice, facial expressions, body language
- Give explanations for your statements
- Do not name the person giving reactions, simply look toward them as you gently confront the actions with statements such as
 - It seems that you do not believe that this will work
 - Does this seem like an idea that you may use
- Make statements to the group ie.
 - I'm not sure if this is making sense to anyone, it's so quiet in here
 - Group, do we agree or disagree?
 - Group, what do you think?

Key Motivators to Increase Participation:

- Be willing to get down on the floor and role play with a parent
- Be willing to be the “guardian angel” in small groups
- Use personal examples of when techniques have or have not worked
- Use Behavior Charts in group:
Each parent receives a binder or folder at the beginning of group that they should remember to bring back each week. Anytime a parent shares their experience with a home activity or participates in a role play- they get a sticker. Who ever has the most stickers at the end of the twelve weeks, receives an extra prize (ie. a \$10 gift card to a grocery store, toy store; video rental etc.)

Catholic Charities of Buffalo, New York

Catholic Charities is a not for profit agency providing a variety of services to families in the eight counties of Western New York. The Parenting Programs work under Children's Services: a unit providing foster care and adoption services to families. The Parenting Programs are operated by several funding sources including the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation and the Peter and Elizabeth Tower Foundation as well as Catholic Charities. The Parenting Programs include four different types of service delivery including waiting room education, home based services, behavioral specialist services and parenting skills groups. Each of these services are focused on meeting the needs of parents and children within their environmental systems.

The Parenting Skills Groups are provided in Erie and Niagara County at several locations. The Incredible Years curriculum is used in these groups. The majority of parents who attend these groups have already had their children placed in foster care or at risk of having their children placed in foster care. The families that we serve do not usually perceive their living situation to be unsafe or at risk. They do not have supportive resources or the knowledge and skill to access appropriate supports independent of a Licensed Department of Social Services. This Parenting Skills Groups service has been in existence at Catholic Charities for over fourteen years, in which time it has developed, evolved and expanded.

The Incredible Years Parent Training is a curriculum that our program supports and believes in. The concepts, approaches and model hold great value here- not only in perspective of those administering it, but also by the parents who have experienced learning it. It has been a successful implementation with great promise for continuation of delivering this evidence based program in the future.

**Aimee L. Neri, LMSW
Tricia Switzer, BSW
Melissa Richel, BSW**

**Catholic Charities of Buffalo, Parenting Programs Supervisor, Group Leader
Catholic Charities of Buffalo, Parenting Programs Social Worker, Group Leader
Catholic Charities of Buffalo, Parenting Programs Social Worker, Group Leader**

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