

## **Cross-cultural Collaboration to Deliver The Incredible Years Parent Program**

**Carolyn Webster-Stratton, Ph.D.**

One of the advantages of the Incredible Years (IY) Parent Training Program is that it can be tailored to meet the needs of parents from varying cultural backgrounds and to address the individual goals and values for each family and child. In numerous randomized control group studies, the IY Parent Program has been shown to effectively promote positive and nurturing parenting interactions, to reduce critical and harsh parenting and to reduce behavior problems in high risk children (Webster-Stratton and Reid 2003). The program has also been shown to be effective with parents of different racial and cultural backgrounds (Reid, Webster-Stratton et al. 2001). In particular, the program has been shown to promote positive parenting in African American, Chinese American, Asian American, and Hispanic parents ((Reid, Webster-Stratton et al. 2001; Webster-Stratton, Reid et al. 2001). Other investigators have replicated these findings with African American families (Gross, Fogg et al. 2003; Miller Brotman, Klein et al. 2003), Hispanic families (Barrera, Biglan et al. 2002), Korean families (Kim, E. unpublished manuscript) and multi-ethnic families in England (Scott, Spender et al. 2001).

Bringing the IY parenting programs to parents who speak different languages and who represent different cultural backgrounds is a special privilege and opportunity because of the rich diversity of the individuals in the groups and the chance for these families to learn from each other and build support networks. To deliver this program to parents who don't speak English, it is necessary to partner with interpreters who share the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the parents. We begin this partnership by offering joint interpreters and parent group leaders' training workshops. In this training, group leaders learn about the values, parenting beliefs, and unique problems of each culture while interpreters learn about child development principles, relationship skills, and behavior change strategies as well as the IY parenting program content and methods. Two videotapes of parent groups showing group leaders working with interpreters representing four different languages form the basis for these discussions.

The following article is based on transcripts of workshops between Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, several English speaking IY parent group leaders and interpreters representing the following countries – Ethiopia (Amharic, Arabic, Tigrinya, Oromo), China, Vietnam, Somalia, and Mexico. The article begins with a discussion of the special issues and problems for new immigrant families. This information forms the background context for introducing the IY parent program and for addressing the goals that will be relevant for these families. Next principles of effective interpreting for the IY program and for training interpreters are reviewed. The final section includes program evaluation by interpreters after they have delivered the program in collaboration with a group leader.

### **Interpreters Helping Group Leaders Understand New Immigrant Family Needs**

Carolyn: I want to start by brainstorming together. What do you see as the needs of the first generation immigrant parents that you are working with? What

concerns do these families have about their parenting? What help or support do you think they need to successfully navigate the American culture? What I'm asking you to do is to represent the point of view of the parents you are working with. We're going to brainstorm and write down our ideas.

### **Theme #1: Parent Discipline Problems & Loss of Power with Children**

Head Start  
Education

Manager: What I'm going to say, I only know second hand. But I've been presented with this idea from immigrant families, "We're in America, and so we're free, which means the children are free, which means they can do whatever they want." I've heard that from immigrant parents with older children and they were not comfortable with that idea.

Carolyn: So, the idea is that because they are living in America, a so-called free society, parents think they shouldn't impose limits on their children? Have others here experienced that?

Amharic,  
Tigrinya  
Interpreter:

In our culture we are obliged to discipline our children, and it is not harmful to them, but we have to give them direction. But when we came to America, it was a problem. There is a communication gap between the parents and the children. Because the children grasp the language so fast, the parents are behind. I mean parents don't express themselves when they have a problem. And that creates more frustration and misunderstanding in the house, and there are a lot of problems. And you Americans, you see it from your own culture and with your own language. When there is no communication in the house, it is a big problem that is threatening the family and the kids. For example, we have a lot of kids who are running away from African families because there is no communication. The parent usually is not educated while the kids are more assimilated in the culture. And the father is isolated there, so that creates a lot of problems. What would be the solution? That is a big question. Make them understand both sides.

Carolyn: Let me see if I understand this right. So what you are saying is because the children speak the language of the dominant culture and the parents don't, that gives the children a lot of power in the family and results in the parents having less power because they can't navigate the American culture, and they can't communicate about what's going on. Moreover, after awhile they might not be able to communicate with their own children? So it creates a kind of a breakdown within the family itself.

The parents feel powerless and the children are having too much power in that family.

Amharic,  
Tigrinya

Interpreter: I don't know if you guys are observing this when you are assessing the families, but the male, he doesn't get to express usually. The females are more expressive.

Carolyn: And so for the man or father, it might be a particularly difficult problem?

Amharic,  
Tigrinya

Interpreter: Yes, because for him, he cannot control his family so he depends on the children. For example, if a letter comes to the home, the children have to read it for him. That is humiliating for him and causes a lot of problems.

Carolyn: So, it's particularly difficult for the man. I'm gathering, in your culture, he may have had a lot more power and control traditionally, then he comes here, and feels very powerless.

Amharic,  
Tigrinya

Interpreter: Yes ...powerless.

Carolyn: Not only powerless out in the world, but in his own house. I hear you asking about solutions. What we're trying to do now is brainstorm and learn about the issues, and then we'll come to solutions: What are the solutions or how do we give parents more power? In fact, that might be our goal for the parenting program—how can we help mothers and fathers have more control over what's happening at home particularly with regard to their parenting?

Spanish

Interpreter: I also sense a lot of frustration about the culture of "no spanking" in America.

Carolyn: Can you tell me a little more about that? What do you mean by "frustration"?

Spanish

Interpreter: Well, a lot of the Hispanic parents were raised with the "spare the rod, spoil the children" philosophy, and it worked for them. They're grown up now and they're fine.

Carolyn: So the parents are feeling that they want to spank their children, but the American culture is not accepting of that?

Spanish

Interpreter: Yes because they'll get reported to Child Protective Services (CPS).

Head Start  
Education

Manager: We hear that too. There seems to be a significant misunderstanding about the role of CPS and how that works and what is reportable and what isn't. It's a piece that worries parents. And there are a number of situations where children have the empowerment to call 911 regardless.

Vietnamese,  
Cambodian

Interpreter: Also the children are learning at school. For example, the children are told, if your parents touch you, call 911. That information sometimes comes from older friends or older siblings. The young children don't know what 911 is for. They just have some idea about people saying 911 is police and sometimes for fire, too.

Carolyn: And so a parent might not really understand that it means for a child to call 911—what's going to happen. Are you also saying the children don't understand what they are doing either?

Vietnamese,  
Cambodian

Interpreter: Yes. Sometime they learn if you want someone to protect you, call 911. But they don't understand that their parent can protect them more than anybody else. The police they come. They take a report, and then they take the child away and then there'll be more problems for their family. The children don't understand what the consequences are.

Parent Group

Leader #3: It sounds like a broader issue, too. When a child and parent speak the same language, the parent can help filter for the child and can help explain things to the child. But in this case, that breaks down. And a lot of things that a parent would be able to reassure or explain to a child about, the parents are not able to do. So that probably translates to a lot more situations than just the 911.

Carolyn: The 911 is certainly an example of it. The sense that children have the freedom to do whatever they want and the parents don't feel like they have any control over it.

Head Start  
Education  
Manager: Yes.

Carolyn: How does that get translated into practice? Are parents afraid to tell you if they're spanking the children? Do they talk about it in parent groups? Or, are they afraid to talk about it because they worry they're going to be reported to CPS?

Parent Group

Leader #1: That actually did come up two or three weeks in a row in our parenting group discussions this year. The parents were asking what the rules were for hitting and were looking for some kind of information. They argued a bit about how they felt they should have the right to spank, and how that was the best way to discipline the child. It was an interesting for us to talk about the rules in the U.S .versus their ideals. We would say, "That is one way to parent, but we would like to offer you another way." We kind of danced around the subject trying not to be judgmental, but yet still talking with them a lot. At least three of our four cultural groups talked about all sorts of physical punishment.

Parent Group

Leader #2: Yes. You know, I remember when we were talking about Time Out, there was one dad who said he made his child stick his head between his legs for a long period of time. He asked, "Is there anything wrong with that? He wanted to do that instead of putting a child on a chair for Time-Out.

Carolyn: It sounds as though the parents felt comfortable talking about physical punishment with you. In fact they were willing to really argue for their point of view.

Parent Group

Leader #1: Some of them, yes. Some were a little quieter, and we'd find out later that they also supported that view about spanking but tell us more privately about it.

Carolyn: Was there a feeling of openness to trying some different parenting ideas?

Parent Group

Leader #1: Yes, I think, initially, it was to avoid CPS issues as opposed to wanting an alternative. But over time in the parent group, I really felt that they bought into the alternatives to spanking as a positive opportunity.

Home

Visitor: When I visit parents in the home, they don't know what else to do besides spanking. So then it becomes this yelling, and just a loss of control.

Carolyn: You are saying they are feeling no control because they can't spank, and they don't know what else to do instead.

Home

Visitor: Right.

Carolyn: So, maybe once they experienced that an alternative method worked and it gave them power, then they were able to let go of some of the...spanking?

Parent Group

Leader #1: Yes, it felt that way to me at least.

Carolyn: Okay, so that's going to be a really important piece for us to understand when talking about the discipline portion of the program with parents.

### **What is Discipline and What is Love?**

Tigrinya

Interpreter : I know with the families that we work with, a lot of the mothers, they can't talk about the fathers, because they feel like we'll report it to housing. So they hide the fact there's even a father in the house (to get housing benefits), because you have to be the single mom with the kids. So that's another issue that they're facing.

Parent  
Group

Leader #2: That's really feeding into that powerlessness of those fathers.

Carolyn: So now we have these "phantom fathers"?

Arabic

Interpreter: Two things I would say. One problem is also a kind of parenting style. Yes. In every culture, father is supposed to be different. They are different and they will treat their children very different. But I've seen so many times that there's inconsistency, that the kids are not getting the same message (from both parents). The children learn to manipulate the parents.

And the second point I want to make is on an emotional level. We have to define what it means to love a child. For example, most of our parents come from very difficult circumstances. They've been deprived of freedom; so most of them are living their lives through their children. So what they are looking at is no limit setting and love with no boundaries. They give their children everything.

Parent  
Group

Leader #2: I think the Chinese interpreter was talking to us about a similar thing where some families just shower their children with everything and anything that they want. And those children often have more trouble than children that have to work for those things.

Carolyn: I think that this is a really important point, because we talked earlier about the parents not knowing how to discipline if they can't hit. But what you're suggesting is a bigger question; that is how do parents love their children? And it was suggested that some parents think the way to love their children is to buy their children presents and give them freedom. But how do you love? How do you nurture your child at the same time as discipline? I see this as part of love. So there is confusion, as you put it, about what that means.

Arabic

Interpreter: Discipline is not considered love. If you discipline your child...  
...that means you are not loving your child. Another thing, as you said earlier, I have seen so many parents that have known only two extremes: very left or either very right.

Carolyn: So, they are either very free or very controlling in the way they parent?

Arabic

Interpreter: Yes, some parents say, "Okay, this is a free country, right? My children can do whatever they want to do so that's it. Let them do whatever they want to do. This is America." And other parents are so afraid their kids are going to be out of control, they start controlling and criticize everything.

Carolyn: It seems there is a lot of confusion about how much power parents should have with children. On one hand, you're saying parents can over-control children so the child is not allowed to do anything. On the other hand, parents give children free rein with no limits at all. And so helping parents know what is the right amount of power would be an important goal in our parent groups.

Arabic

Interpreter: Yes. There is a family I'm working with and the dad is bombarding his child. He is sending his child to Koran School six to seven hours every day. He says that he expects his child to be a real Muslim. To do that you have to learn your verses—all of the verses. The boy is not even five years old. He will resent his dad because he's going to see other kids going around having a lot of fun, while he's the one sitting inside learning the verses. The father is kind of unrealistic.

Carolyn: Perhaps he doesn't understand what is developmentally appropriate for children this age.

Arabic

Interpreter: Exactly. Like putting your child in a bucket of water and expect that child not to wade.

Carolyn:

We've had a great discussion, and we've also had some very interesting discussion about the difficulties for the fathers navigating the culture, as well as the mothers. By the way, it's wonderful to see so many men involved in working with parents in this room. So often when we do a lot of this training, we see primarily women. And the fact that there are men involved, I think really bodes well for trying to get more fathers involved in some of the issues around parenting and navigating schools. So I think we could have some quite interesting discussions about how to involve fathers in parenting.

### **Discussion of Theme #1**

One of the key themes that this discussion repeatedly addresses is the concern about the **loss of control or the loss of power of parents** in the home regarding child rearing. Parents have difficulty knowing how to discipline in the American culture, especially because they know they can't spank due to the child abuse laws. There is a perception that because America's a free country, it's a "free for all." They believe that American culture means that children can do whatever they want without limits being imposed on them. This belief undermines the parents' power and confidence regarding disciplining their children. Moreover this power is further eroded because of language barriers. The children actually are given more power and control because they speak English, and the parents don't. Because of language barriers, a lot more responsibility is given to the children to do translating and interpreting for their parents in the wider context. That added responsibility for children really disrupts the natural family dynamic where parents are the ones who have more power than the children. This understanding forms our first goal for the IY parenting program.



**Goal: To Increase Parents' Knowledge About and Use of Effective Discipline and To Increase their Confidence as Parents**

The IY program will help parents obtain the knowledge and skills to effectively interact with and to discipline their children. Parents will also be provided with information about American cultural norms and laws, so that they can make their own decisions about how to discipline without fearing that they will be reported to CPS or will be in legal trouble. It is a goal of the IY program that parents learn to discipline without having to use spanking or physical punishment, but it is important that parents are able to come to that decision themselves, after thinking about the effects that different kinds of discipline have on children. Parents will be provided with ideas of ways to promote their children's positive behaviors and to reduce their misbehaviors by using alternatives to physical punishment. They will discuss how to set limits with their children while at the same time provide nurturing and loving relationships. They will be encouraged to try out these ideas in ways that are compatible with their cultural identity. They will think about ways to balance their adult power with children so that they are neither too harsh nor too lenient. The goal of this process is to help them to feel more confident in their interactions with their children while not sacrificing the ideas that are important to their cultural heritage.

**Theme #2: Family Stress – Poverty and Multiple Jobs**

As the discussion continues, the interpreters began to explain to the group leaders the competing priorities for the parents. Many of the parents are preoccupied by long work hours and financial struggles and these stressors take priority over other family needs. Because of these competing practical demands, many parents are not able to devote time to parenting and to their child's social and academic development. In addition, the language barrier makes it difficult for parents to communicate with the school or to help their children with homework.

Chinese

Interpreter: I also see a problem that parents are so busy working that they don't have time for their kids. And they turn over their children to the school or to sources outside, friends or whoever, who can help their children learn. And sometimes if they don't speak the language or they don't know what's going on in school. Eventually they lose control over their kids. So they don't know what else to do and their children kind slip out from their hands.

Carolyn: So, because they are working and because of the language barrier, they don't know really what's happening in school or how to be part of it or work with the teacher.

Chinese

Interpreter: Yes.

Parent  
Group

Leader #2: And it is my observation, that sometimes the parents are working two and three jobs to better themselves, to support their families, and...

All: Yes!

Chinese

Interpreter: And they think, just bringing the money home is good enough for them. And it's not always the case.

Parent  
Group

Leader #1 : Just the number of stressors the families have in general: assimilating, language, working through the different systems, I think it adds up.

Carolyn: So the issue of the stress of jobs, figuring out how to financially be able to provide for your family, also moves parents away from their children.

Public

Health Nurse: Well, most of our families are low income, and that's a huge stressor in itself and the things we've been talking about multiply it. You know, coming into this country and learning all the different systems, the school system, the DHHS system, the medical system, and more... Every time I call any of the places, I run into a road block, and I can communicate fine in English. But I just can't imagine what it is like with a language barrier. And there are not often classes offered for families at different levels of English that are appropriate for them. And they have children at home to watch. I think it's just really that stress adds up. And then the expectations sometimes are unrealistic. I know some of the women I work with, sometimes the husband is out working all the time, and the mother is doing so much, and she's tired, exhausted. And I see a lot of depression.

Carolyn: So the point is the fathers then are feeling powerless, and they're out trying to earn money. And the mothers is at home feeling overwhelmed, dealing with all the stressors.

Public  
Health

Nurse: Yes, feeling overwhelmed. Yes, yes. I'm sure the fathers feel that way, too.

Somali

Interpreter:

Yes, I'm a single mother, and I go to work, and I have to buy

Groceries, clean everything. So I have no relationship with the schools or outside. The kids: usually they're learning a lot of stuff outside, and they come to the house, and I don't even have time to sit down and to talk to them and to communicate and to try to understand them. So the kids think the parents don't understand what's going on. The parents understand, but they don't have enough time, and the kids say, "I want to buy this." Maybe the parent cannot afford it. The children think, "My mother doesn't know what's going on." So there's a lot of problems, but we're trying to hold as much as we can until they grow up and understand what's going on themselves. So we have a lot of problems— we don't know how to solve. We just keep running and running and do whatever we can.

Carolyn: So part of it is, with everything you have to do, is lack of time and finances. Were you saying that other people don't understand that? Or, were you saying your children don't think that the mother cares?

Somali

Interpreter: What I mean, for example, the kids they go to school. Right? As a parent I have to have time to communicate with teachers and schools and keep in touch and know what's going on in the classroom and what the children are learning. Like, sometimes I get a call my child has missed school. I don't get time to go back and follow up, and...

Head Start  
Manager:

Just to validate what she's saying. I think a lot of people that are born in this country and take so much for granted and things that come naturally to us, do have that judgmental view. They think if the parents are not present at school, that means they don't care.

Carolyn: You mean teachers don't understand all hundred other things that parents are having to do.

Head Start  
Manager:

Yes, they attribute parents' lack of involvement to apathy instead of knowing that there's only so much you can do. Families have different priorities. Maybe it is more important to have the food on the table than go to the school.

Group

Response: Yes.

## **Discussion of Theme #2**

This discussion of parents feeling stressed by financial problems and work demands has implications for the delivery of the parenting program. It is important that the program be offered at times that are realistic for parents to attend given their work schedules. This often means that the group must be held during the evening or on weekends. It also

means addressing as many financial and logistical barriers to attendance as possible. Providing dinner, day care, and transportation to the meetings will be make it much easier for socioeconomically disadvantaged families to attend.

**Goal: The IY program delivery must be sensitive to socioeconomic barriers and work schedules**

In addition to alleviating as many practical barriers to attendance as possible, it is also important that group leaders do not assume that parents do not understand or care about the need to be actively involved in parenting their children and supporting them at school. Most often parents *do* care passionately about these issues, but may lack the resources, the language, or the time to be as involved as they would like. Letting the parents set their own realistic goals for the parent-child homework interactions and for the amount of involvement they think they will be able to have in school related activities, will provide the parents with some control over the process in the parent group. In addition, parents may need practical support to become more involved, particularly with their child's school. The parent group leaders and interpreters can work with the teachers and school to ensure that materials are translated so that parents can read them. The interpreters may also be available to help facilitate meetings between parents and teachers and to communicate the parents' goals to the teachers. The interpreter may also help to set up systems for home-school communication when parents' work schedules don't allow them to be physically present at school.

**Theme #3: Shifting Parental Roles and Lack of Family and Community Support**

As the discussion resumed, the interpreters began to talk about the impact of the stress on their families and the lack of support they feel within and outside the family structure. In particular one of the interpreters, who was a single, working parent, wanted to express her worry about the mothers' sense of isolation and lack of support. The male interpreters, on the other hand, were very concerned about the marginalization of fathers from the home. There was recognition that the traditional male and female roles were not working well for families or for meeting their children' needs.

Vietnamese,  
Cambodian  
Interpreter  
(male):

Culturally, the mother is the one who takes care of the children. She has the responsibility to check on the children and what they are doing. But the father is depressed and is going out to work. He doesn't supervise the children because he believes his wife will take care of everything. So that is a big problem, because the father doesn't get involved with supervising the children lives. He's working a lot, and he comes once in awhile and talks to them. But the father is not involved with the children much. He doesn't go to check on the school, what the children are doing, how the school is doing for the children, or what his children are learning at the school. He doesn't follow up. That is basically how it was in our country. But here it is different. Most of the fathers, even if they get involved, they

have no control. And the father should be taught or in some way need to attend some classes to know what to do.

Somali  
Interpreter  
(female):

Yes, fathers need to participate more with the family's activity, especially for the children. The mother, she has to cook, she has to clean, she has to do the shopping. Everything is on her, and she cannot supervise the children. As you are saying, she doesn't have time. And there is the lack of male participation in the life of the children.

Carolyn:

It sounds like, for couples as well, that it must be very stressful. The fathers, and sometimes the mothers, are out there trying to work. The mothers are stressed and depressed. The fathers don't think they can be part of the children's life. This must be very difficult on the marriage itself.

Vietnamese  
Interpreter  
(male):

Yes, it is difficult.

Somali  
Interpreter:

What is even worse, imagine you are a single parent, father and mother both.

Parent Group  
Leader #2:

In the other Asian cultures, especially with the newer families to the U.S., does this sound similar are the fathers primarily workers? Do they participate in the children's discipline?

Chinese  
Interpreter:

In the family with two parents, it's similar. The father is the bread maker, and the mom is the homemaker. And the father is usually the strong, silent figure.

Carolyn:

Strong, silent figure. Can you be silent and be strong?

Chinese  
Interpreter:

I think it's more like they create it that way. Okay, maybe the dad's not saying anything. He might not be disciplining competently. But when the mother is out of control and can't discipline the kids any more, she says, "Go to your father," or "Let your father solve it," or something like that. But, in fact, the dad may not be involved enough with the kids—or even

communicating with them. And most often he'll say, "Oh, come here now," or, "I'll spank you, "or just try to scare the kid.

Carolyn: That's really hard on the fathers. He only gets pulled in to do the punitive or harsh role with the kids. He does the discipline, negative stuff with the kids, rather than the positive. So his relationship with the children is about ....

Chinese  
Interpreter: ...punishment.

Carolyn: That is very hard on the fathers then.

Arabic  
Interpreter: Well, an additional problem that I see, too, for families that are trying to fit into this culture is that when families do start to make that shift into more into Western ways, they don't get support from their own cultures. Women aren't supposed to work. The fathers aren't supposed to be in the kitchen and, you know, fathers aren't supposed to be sitting reading stories to their children. So when they do start to make that shift, not only is it all new to them, but they feel they are losing support or getting judged by the people in their cultural community.

Carolyn: There's a sense that they're giving up or betraying some of their own cultural identity to do that?

Arabic  
Interpreter: Yes and some of the community support. I've heard some people say that, "When I have children, I'm just not going to have people from the community into my home because they're going to judge me. I'm doing things differently than we do back home. They'll be judging me as a parent and my children. So I just won't have anybody in, but it really isolates me."

Carolyn: So the community itself is not supportive of these changes? So, in summary we have been having a discussion about fathers feeling powerless or only brought in when there's a big discipline needed; mothers feel stressed about managing everything in the home; often times families doing several jobs. All of those stressors that are disrupting the parenting and interfering with developing good relationships with children.

Vietnamese  
Interpreter: I also want to say something about when a family is having difficulty disciplining children. It is also based on their experiences in their own countries. Each situation is different. There is one family where the

mother was a teacher in Vietnam, and the father an officer in the Vietnamese government. They are highly educated. So they understand that for children to be a success in life, you have to have support from parents. So when they come here and have children, they support their children. Both parents are working and the children go to school but they come home early and the father takes the children to the library. At dinner they are eating and talking about school, there is no TV.

But another family I worked with was a broken family. The father, was a farm boy in Vietnam, uneducated, and when he comes here—in his life, he only sees the importance of working: how to make money, how to bring food on the table, and he does not value education or children's success.

Carolyn: So you are saying the experiences they bring with them from their culture also determines their values. Within the same culture, the family values can be different. We should not assume the same values for everyone from a particular culture.

Vietnamese  
Interpreter: Yes. Yes.

Carolyn: Yes, each family may have differing goals, perhaps, for themselves and their children.

### **Discussion of Theme #3**

From this discussion there is an awareness of the **lack of support both within the family** as well as from the outside community. The change in mothers' and fathers' traditional roles creates further stress for parents. Because men perceive themselves as being the breadwinners, their main concerns are working and employment. The mothers, on the other hand, have primary responsibility for meals and the care and discipline of the children. Fathers are frequently peripheral to the daily care of the children unless there is a critical discipline matter that they need to address. So perhaps because of the traditional division of labor regarding their roles, mothers and fathers have difficulty knowing how to support each other. Moreover when those traditional roles do begin to shift, and some acculturation occurs, there is a perception that the various cultural communities will not support or approve it. Parents may worry they are not being true to their cultural and traditions. This results in a feeling of disconnection and confusion. "If I do this, am I not being faithful to my own culture?"

In addition, the Vietnamese interpreter reminds the group that each culture does not produce a homogeneous set of parents with identical goals, skills or needs. Within each culture families are coming from a variety of backgrounds and experiences that will affect their views of child rearing, school involvement, and parental roles within the family. It is therefore important not to make assumptions that apply to an entire culture, group leaders must be sensitive to each individual family's needs, goals and prior experiences.

**Goal: To Build Support Within the Family and Community**

Efforts will be made to involve fathers in the parenting program and to help parents understand their changing roles. One of the benefits of delivering this program to culturally diverse families is that the group format can give parents a sense of personal and collective power. This is especially important for parents from different cultures who will come to realize that they are experiencing very similar processes in their efforts to parent their children. In these groups, they receive support to advocate for their children who are navigating a different world from the world and culture their parents grew up in. Group leaders and interpreters can help assure that these feelings are shared and acknowledged.

**Theme #4: Balancing Act between Maintaining Cultural Identity and Acculturation**

The discussion so far has begun to hint at the tension between preserving one's cultural identity and traditions while at the same time making the necessary adaptations so they can be successful in the American culture.

Carolyn: You raised the important point that as parents become more flexible in their roles, for example, fathers going to the school and doing some of the things that would be traditionally thought of as mothers' roles, the community might not support the change in roles, because it's not felt to be the African way. I sense there's this balancing act between how you remain faithful or connected to your own cultural heritage and what parts of America you take on. One foot in each world, right? As families start doing some of that acculturation, to navigate the system, how does the community perceive that? And one of you raised the issue that you don't necessarily get support for those changing roles.

Spanish

Interpreter: Maybe just for clarity, and I think everyone's said this, but you can think of it like, "Balancing the faith to your own culture with the natural acculturation that happens."

Carolyn: Now, that, I think, is a great goal that we take away from this discussion. These are sort of the difficulties or the barriers that the families face.

Spanish

Interpreter: Well, that's the rub. Maybe that's the goal, but it's also the tension of how to balance those things, because acculturation is going to happen. But how do we balance that? How do our kids balance that? And how do we balance that when our kids are changing faster than we are? Because it's not just a language thing. The kids are also getting the culture at a much faster rate, and so you feel proud that they're getting the culture, while at the same time, that same pride you have scares you. Because it means it's going to take them away from you. And it's going to take them away from



their grandparents who maybe are in their home country. And, you know, there's all these kind of tensions around that.

Carolyn: Yes, kind of the worry that if you do this acculturation thing, what's that doing to your own cultural identity?

Spanish

Interpreters: Yes, that's probably something that you wake up with every day.

Head

Start

Manager: And your home is maybe one of the only places that your children will get your culture. Because they do get acculturated so much more quickly. Sometimes the parents don't necessarily want to their kids to change. So that tension as the kids hit adolescence is really, really tough. They're way into it, and the parents are feeling like they're the only bastion "I'm it for preserving the culture for my kids."

#### **Discussion of Theme #4**

It is important for group leaders and interpreters to help parents understand that being involved in a parenting program does not mean they are giving up their culture. In fact, they will learn ways to build a strong connection and positive relationship with their children. This bond will be one of the ways they can preserve their children's attachment to their family and culture. Also an important component of the parent program is that from the very first session parents determine the goals they have for themselves and their children. Goals can vary for each parent so that individual family values are respected. Goals have included some of the following:

##### **For Children:**

- helping my child to be more respectful of me and other adults
- understanding how to encourage my child's school readiness skills (e.g., reading)
- helping my child to obey me more
- fostering my child's problem solving skills
- teaching my child how to make friends
- helping my child to be less aggressive
- knowing how to help my child learn English and still keep the family language
- helping my child to be proud of his cultural background
- helping my child be more self-confident and stand up for himself

##### **For Parents:**

- knowing how to help my child with homework
- knowing how to parent without yelling or hitting

- understanding how I can work with my child’s teacher to help my child learn
- getting to know other parents
- knowing how to read with my child

Parents then will learn and discuss behavior management principles and parenting styles that they can apply to their individual goals.

**Goal: Promote Respect for Families Culture, Individual Values, and Goals**

To work with parents on ways to strengthen their relationships with their children as a means of strengthening their child’s bond to them and their culture. For example, one of the content components of the program covers “interactive reading”. In this component parents are encouraged to read using their own language. They are also encouraged to continue their oral history by telling them stories about their childhoods and what it was like growing up in their families and country of origin. In this way they are encouraging their children’ speaking and learning their own language and promoting their connections with their past.

Another goal might be to help parents appreciate their child’s strengths and accomplishments in both cultures. Group leaders also facilitate discussions about ways that parents can learn more about the American culture that their children are being exposed to. By understanding the culture that their children are growing up in, parents may better be able to help their children navigate the new culture without rejecting their home culture.

**Theme #5: Barriers to Parents Ability to Support their Children’s Academic Success**

Our discussions indicated that not only was there a feeling of lack of support within the family and from the cultural community but also from the schools their children attend. Interpreters felt that parents did not understand the importance or necessity of their involvement in their children’s academic learning. Again language and communication barriers made it difficult for parents to know how to interact with teachers or to even be aware of possibilities at the school.

Vietnamese

Interpreter: So when you come to the U.S., you have to learn how the school system is working. You have to learn step-by-step. So we need, in the parent class, something in the curriculum that explains to the parents how the system works in this country. Because most parents in our country, when a child is in school, think it is the teacher’s responsibility. A child’s success or lack of success, is the teacher’s fault. It’s not the parent’s fault. So parents come here, thinking that way. The parent is only responsible to feed the children, to give them some clothes to wear, and some money to buy toys. And in our culture, the first people we respect are the parents. The second people we respect are the teachers. We also have a proverb, “You are not a success, without a teacher. If you want success, you have to have a teacher

with you.” So the teacher is also not only teaching about how to read and write, but teaching about how to become a good citizen, too. That is in our culture. And so when a parent comes here, if the child does something wrong, most of the time it’s blamed on the school.

Carolyn: So there’s a feeling of parents not knowing how to navigate the school system, because of not speaking the language and because of being very stressed out with all these other things going on in your lives. Parents think that the teacher takes care of the children’s education; and we at home as parents don’t have anything to do with academics with our children.

Vietnamese Interpreter: I don’t think that’s necessarily stress. That’s part of our culture.

Parent Group Leader #2: And is that similar in the Chinese culture?

Chinese Teacher: Yes. I have parents tell me, “Oh, my children need to be sent to teacher for discipline. I tell them something at home, they don’t listen to me.”

Carolyn: I think we see the parents’ sense of powerless coming back to the discussion again. The feeling that children will obey the teacher, but they don’t obey parents at home.

Chinese Teacher: Well, there’s kind of a reversal here. We have parents in my culture that don’t want the teachers teaching their children morals and values. The parents want to do that. In some of these cultures, it’s the exact opposite. That’s seen as the teacher’s job.

Tigrinya Interpreter: I just want to follow up that question. Culture is not the only reason we give all the responsibility to the teacher. Because the family doesn’t speak the language, they cannot understand the homework for their children. So there’s no way they can even be able to help with their school work. So maybe the mother stays home and the father’s at work. And they cannot get the help that they need. It’s not the parents’ fault, because the parent doesn’t even understand what’s going on or how to solve the problem they have. We don’t have that much ability to find out what is happening at school. No one asks us what we need. So we have no choice with that.

Carolyn: So the parents don't know what to do with the homework, and the schools aren't asking the parents for what kind of help they need.

Tigrinya

Interpreter: Yes, they send you a packet of homework and say, "Go home and do your homework, and your parents have to help you." And you, the parent, can't read the homework.

Carolyn: I'm exhausted. . . Parents need a lot of courage.

Spanish

Interpreter: Yes, there's a lot of information that gets sent home in English. that's been my experience. I'm always being asked by parents to translate what comes home from the school. So there's just a lot of breakdown in communication.

Tigrinya

Interpreter: I think it's confusion, not only between families, but between the system and the families. Like, confusion between schools and homes. I want to give you an example. There are some values that the schools teach and parents don't accept because these are not their values. And they don't want that to be told, but they don't have a choice. So those are the confusion between the home and the school system. This is a little story: One day a man went from America to his home, and the people asked him how was America, and he said, "America is good for our tummies, but bad for our brains." We have some support, like we can get food, we can get housing, but there are things that we can't figure out without losing our kids.

Arabic

Interpreter: You know on the home-school thing. My friend, his dad works two jobs, and he comes home and says, "Did you do your homework?" Every night "Did you do your homework today?" "Yeah." "Let me see," said the dad. "Dad, what do you know about homework?" "What do you know about homework?" the kid asked him. The father was shocked. He called me and said, "I can't believe my son. Every night, I ask him, 'Did you do your homework?' I'm assuming I'm doing a good thing, reminding him. Now it's come back to me, I don't have enough tools to ask him, 'How did you do this?' And I don't even have the time to go to school and get the tools so I can show my son the directions to doing his homework."

That's the most difficult. The parents do not have enough tools at home to help the children to become competitive like any other children in American and function within school and society. So what we see is that by the time children reach high school, they are often disengaged from their parents. How many immigrant children are successful today? What is the percent of success in every area? It's very small. By the time they reach high school, they end up dropping out. And when you ask them,

“Why can’t you go back to school? Why can’t you do the work for yourself?” They don’t want to talk about it.

Carolyn: Oh, I think it’s a really important point. I mean, this friend of yours, first of all, the first step was showing interest in his son’s homework, which was a really important step. Now he’s saying, “And then what?” “If I didn’t have homework where I grew up or if I can’t read the assignment, I’m not sure what to do next.”

Arabic

Interpreter: That’s true.

Carolyn: It reminds me, Saadia (Tigrinya interpreter), last year with our parent group, we invited the parents to come and be in the classroom and play with their children. And they were saying, “But I don’t know what to do when I get in the classroom. How do you want me to play with the children?” or “How do I read if I can’t read those English books? What do I do?” So how can we show support for the homework? You’re saying, “What tools can we give them so that they can provide that?” and make homework something they can be very encouraging about. Rather than just being some kind of a policeman.

Arabic

Interpreter: Yes.

Carolyn: So for that father who was asking about his son’s homework each night, the next step is being more than just the policeman role. But he’s got the motivation to do this. So that is excellent...

Arabic

Interpreter: Yeah, he’s thinking, “I have to work two jobs to support this and support that.” that balance between my family here and family back home. He wonders, “Am I good enough to have a child? Do I have the tools to bring my child this sort of help and give him all the tools so that he can be competitive back in the elementary program in school.” And lack of that knowledge makes it difficult.

Carolyn: Lack of knowledge, which leads to lack of power and feeling of powerlessness, doesn’t it?

Arabic

Interpreter: They’re all interwoven.

### **Discussion of Theme #5**

Another theme this discussion shows is the parents’ sense of alienation from their children’s school experiences. Teachers may not understand that parents have multiple

jobs and are preoccupied by making ends meet. Parents can't easily make school meetings or buy some of the things that are suggested by teachers that they get for their children. Parents may not understand the schools' expectations for how they should be involved in their children's education, either because of different cultural expectations or simply because of language or work schedule barriers.

**Goal: Increase Positive Connections Between Home and School**

The IY parenting program will focus on ways parents can support their children's learning at school. Parents will learn how to promote their children's school readiness skills and reading skills at home. Even if the parents don't read, they will learn ways to enhance their children's motivation to read and enjoyment of books. Parents will also learn about ways they can do homework with their children and be helped to know how to collaborate with teachers so they understand what is expected of their child. Ideally, the parent group leaders and interpreters will work with the school and teachers to find ways of increasing the two-way communication between home and school.

**Theme #6: Finding Common Ground**

Carolyn: Another theme that we have discussed is the theme of respecting different family values. We discovered that within the same culture there can be differing values and that we must respect each families goals for themselves and their children.

Chinese

Interpreter: I just want to make a different point of view from a child's perspective. A child's going to be living here for a long time. They better be adapted to the society. And it's important for the parent to know that keeping their old values is a good thing, but also give them room to adapt to the new culture, where they're going to be living, function, or whatever, contribute to the society. So it's important to be open minded and then be educated in a way that keeps the good values of the old country but, is open to the new things as well. And it's easier for a child. Like in my experience, I feel much better now that my mom actually went back to school to take classes. One day she told me, "Wow, I didn't know that it was this difficult to take classes, go to college." And actually for me to hear her say that, "Wow, now she understands me." Because she has that knowledge, and it kind of fills the gap between the parents and the child as well.

Carolyn: So you are bringing up a key theme in terms of what we're going to want to think about in terms of how we help families -- that is acknowledging the integrity and respecting the culture of each family. At the same time how do we help parents navigate the things that they need to do in order to help their children be successful in this society? I know that our conversations have raised important points that will influence the way we work with parents.

Chinese

Interpreter: The values are different. We value the community but at school children are focused on the individual. And even at this age, it's such a hard thing to say, "me, me." And the parents are saying, "My child is becoming selfish." So just the way she put it, between this concept of community value and this individualistic nature of American society. It's a very hard thing for the parents to deal with, not having enough understanding about it.

Head

Start

Manager : The part I struggle with, personally, with is that our culture so much expects the families and the other cultures coming here to adopt our selfishness and rugged individualism. So there's a part of me that says, "Don't let go of that sense of community that you brought here." And that our country needs to be learning some things, too, from the cultures that come here.

Parent

Group

Leader #2: It goes back to balancing your faith to your culture versus the acculturation piece...

Head

Start

Manager : I just want to broaden this to say that this is true that there is no single American culture. And I know my own personal struggles raising my children, moving cities to find a school that I was willing to let my child be in. That balance between a really toxic society that we have in so many ways that very few of us would actually endorse. We've got a culture that's run crazy. And we are all in that balancing thing. And I think that the more we know we are all kind of in the same fight, that the stronger the fight can be. But it's not a different thing, it's a different level of the same thing.

Carolyn: Many of these concerns are true for a lot of us. Many of us have values for our children that seem to be outside mainstream American culture: most of us want our children to be respectful, to not be selfish, as you said, to be oriented to be giving back to the community. But sometimes I think when you're new to the culture, you think your views just represent your own culture and you think that all Americans think the same way. And it can be really empowering to discover many people from different cultures have similar goals.

Parent

Group

Leader: I wanted just to add in something. I think a lot of us in this American culture do struggle to figure out what values we want to pass on to our kids. And I think a lot about that. Also, I try once a week to just think: “Okay, imagine, I’m going to move my whole family to Ethiopia.” The whole thought of doing it is so overwhelming. I couldn’t even handle moving to another city in this country, just because of moving and how complicated that is. And you get there and you don’t speak the language and it’s just mind bending to me what people go through. I can’t really imagine why families aren’t in worse shape than they’re in, actually. I mean it’s just overwhelming.

Arabic

Interpreter: But, when I was growing up, I had the biggest playground. I came from school at 12 noon. Then I had a tree to climb. I had water in the river to swim in. Whatever thing I can do. I can swim in any time, whenever I want. Nobody talks to me. I’m not afraid of a child molester or somebody kidnapping me or anything like that. And I have a refuge from my family that’s always controlling me and telling me to do this. But children in this country, they don’t have that refuge, you see? They have no place to go. They are in one room with their whole family, controlled. No wonder the children are confused. Because parents need to change. The expectations for their children need to change. And one thing is accepting that they are in America. Right now. Number 1 is that they are in America, good or bad. They are here. And we have to figure out, “How can I raise my child in this situation? That is not the best situation I can raise my child in. But what can I do?” We have old tool that we came up with, and we try to do the same tool here, it doesn’t work.

Carolyn: That’s a really good point. I think some of the things that the last couple of people have talked about kind of come under the other themes that we have up here. One is the lack of knowledge. So there might be lack of information about how to navigate systems. Or, lack of information about the things they can do, the ways they can give children freedom and when they shouldn’t be giving them those freedoms. So we want to give parents this knowledge.

Tigrinya

Interpreter: Exactly. If they don’t have that knowledge, they will be confused about how to discipline. I’m confused, sometimes I give mixed messages to my kids. Because I don’t know what’s right, what’s their limit. I don’t set up the limit ...

Carolyn: So the lack of knowledge also contributes to the lack of control.

Tigrinya



Interpreter Exactly.

Carolyn: So we are back to lack of knowledge again. Next we will be discussing with you the content will be covered in this program with the parents. First it is important that you understand this information and have a chance to ask us questions about it.

## II. Group Leaders Helping Interpreters Understand their Role

### Training Interpreters

Training interpreters involves teaching the key principles (e.g., modeling or child-directed play) and key concepts (e.g., behavior that gets attention—even negative attention will be increased) of social learning theory and effective parenting skills (e.g., praise, ignore, logical consequences), as well as training them in the interpersonal skills and methods needed to be effective “coaches” and “advocates” for the parents during the break out practice sessions.

**Training in IY Program Content:** We begin the training by taking the interpreters through the content of the parenting program. We use the videotape programs (*Promoting Children’s Social and Emotional Competence*) because they show examples of parents from varying cultures speaking different languages and modeling the positive parenting skills. As we show interpreters the videotapes we stop to discuss words or ideas that are new to them or confusing as well as terminology that is more difficult to translate. In some cultures, words such as ‘praise’ may have other meaning. Without discussion of appropriate interpretation for these words with interpreters, misunderstandings can make it difficult for parents from other cultures to understand the intent of the content. For example, it may be appropriate to praise God but not to praise children.

#### Chinese

Interpreter: One of the things someone from our group was talking about is they don’t want to use the word praise. He said to him the word praise meant like praising god or so he wants to use the word encourage. So the leader tries to use the word encourage.

#### Spanish

Interpreter: There is also a distinction in Spanish between praising god and encouragement.

#### Tigrinya

Interpreter: You can not praise an individual – it is a religious type of word. Just use the word encouragement. So it is strange to talk about praising a child in our culture.

#### Arabic

Interpreter: Traditionally praise is used to refer to god. Parents need to understand it is used to make a relationship with your child. You have to help them understand the concept – I explain to parents the difference.

In this case, interpreters will use different translations to reflect the idea of providing positive encouragement for specific child behaviors the parent wants to encourage. Working to make sure the interpreters understand the underlying *meaning* behind each word and concept is important so that they can interpret in ways that provide parents with the essence of each part or the content rather than just the literal words.

There also may be concepts that parents find difficult to understand or reconcile with the way that they were parented. These concepts may not be directly translatable because they are not practiced in other cultures. For example the idea of modeling behavior for a child, engaging in child directed play, or of ignoring a child's misbehavior may be foreign to the parents, and may not be something they have experienced. It can take extra time and discussion to describe the meaning as well as the value of these concepts. This must first be discussed in the interpreter training because the concepts may also be new for the interpreters.

#### Spanish

Interpreter: Talking about the barriers first is a good way to understand any cultural differences. For example, the Spanish families said they don't usually ignore their children.

#### Somali

Interpreter: That is true for Somali too.

#### Vietnamese

Interpreter: Vietnamese mothers feel guilty if they ignore their children.

#### Arabic

Interpreter: It was interesting in our group last week to talk about the important rules in our different cultures. All of our four cultures in our group agreed that children's respect (politeness and no swearing) for the elders was an important rule.  
The English speaking American parents felt the same way. We were surprised. Everyone wanted their children to be obedient too.

#### Chinese

Interpreter: Quite a few of us talked about our worries about being a traitor to our culture and some of our conflicts with our parents.

At first interpreters, themselves, may find the parenting concepts to be different from their own experiences and they may be skeptical of the skills or of their value for their families. Therefore it is important to take the time to explore these issues with

interpreters before starting the group, so that interpreters will be confident and convincing in their translations to parents. For example, for many cultures it is very difficult for parents to understand the notion of child-directed play. In some cultures, the relationship between parents and children is very hierarchical, and parents do not play with children or follow their lead. Instead, it may be expected that children will follow the lead of parents. Therefore, when we introduce the idea of child-directed play and its importance for building parent-child relationships and increasing children's self-confidence, it can be disconcerting for many parents as well as for interpreters. The next interpreter is reflecting on her group's progress with child directed play after session four has been completed.

Amharic,  
Tigrinya

Interpreter : I can speak for myself. I was raised in a parent structured way. Parents are always right and children have to follow parents. Parents don't follow children. The idea in this program of following your child's lead in play was a big shift for me and for the families I was interpreting for. They didn't see it as a productive way of raising kids and at first they weren't comfortable with it. To be honest, I was worried they wouldn't come back. Knowing the families and knowing how I was raised I didn't think they would understand it – I was nervous how the group would go. But that didn't happen – now they aren't perfect but they are conscious now and they know they should follow their child's lead and understand why it is important. Most of the parents are now very very comfortable with it and are telling me they are doing it at home and they feel that the play is changing something with their children. I was really surprised.

In order to help interpreters understand the value of these skills, they are encouraged to practice the strategies they have learned with their own children or with children in a preschool setting. This practical experience with children will make it easier for them to model and coach the parents and will give them convincing examples to bring into their discussions with parents. Interpreters are encouraged to share their reservations about new concepts with group leaders and discussions should focus around ways to ensure that the concepts can be presented in a way that maintains cultural relevance while at the same time exploring a new way to interact with children.

In addition, interpreters are helped to understand the rationale for the strategies being taught. For example, interpreters learn that parents who engage in child-directed play will be encouraging their children's language, social skills, and school readiness. For instance, child-directed play can also provide a strong foundation for parent-child relationships. Ultimately this relationship will provide children with self-confidence to be successful in the American culture, while at the same time maintaining attachment to their own culture. In addition, the benefits of child directed play can be explained with regard to it's ability to increase child compliance, respect for the parent, and polite behavior with peers. In other words, it is important to think about the ways that each concept can meet the varied goals that parents may bring to the group.

The interpreters' role is not only to translate words but to help bridge the gap between the different cultures so that parents understand the meaning of the concepts and relevance for their families. Interpreters help define words being used, clarify misunderstandings, and model the parenting skills for the parents to observe. In many ways, the interpreters are the co-therapist providing encouragement, support and feedback as needed.

Head Start  
Education

Manager: Sometimes we see translating as means to an end. Many times it is the end in itself. Key concepts and metaphors communicated and interpreted maybe what needs to happen. We need to spend the time valuing the process of interpreting in and of itself. It is not about getting the puzzle right, but it is about the process needed to do the puzzle, the relationship piece. The priority should be that people enjoy groups and that they create an environment that allows people to work on their interactions.

The next interpreter talks about the self-study she did each week in order to provide effective interpreting.

Amharic,  
Tigrinya

Interpreter: Each week I would look at the book at home and try to understand what Idea we were trying to get across to the parents and how I will explain this. There are some words that are hard for me and I have an Amharic and Tigrinya dictionary. I look up the words and try to find a word ahead of time because it makes my job easier if I study ahead of time. In the medical field you don't have to do this because you interpret word for word but that doesn't work here. You have to explain it. Sometimes it doesn't have meaning at all if I interpret word for word.

**Training in Program Interpersonal Process and Coaching Skills:** Interpreters also must be trained in the interpersonal skills and methods needed to be effective coaches for the parents. Since there are many small group practice exercises in this parenting program, interpreters will play an important role in coaching, supporting and giving feedback to parents while they practice new parenting skills. Interpreters must give ample positive feedback to the parents for taking the first steps at trying something new. During the training, interpreters practice coaching small groups with some of them acting in the role of parents and others as coaches. Those in the role of parents give feedback to coaches about how positive and encouraging they were in their feedback. Interpreters learn how to model and coach without being critical or judgmental.

Interpreters are encouraged to practice the ideas they have learned with their own children or with children in a preschool setting. This practical experience with children

will make it easier for them to model the skills with the parents and will give them examples to bring into their discussions with parents.

Tigrinya

Interpreter: I couldn't believe how the child-directed play idea worked with my child. My 5 year old comes from school and he has to read a book every day. He didn't want to read with me. He said he wasn't going to read. I said okay. Let's do activities instead. "Okay the activity is to find 5 fish on the page, and we'll take turns." We did that for hours, and he enjoyed that. And I knew I was promoting his reading skills and enjoyment of books.

### **Bridging the Gap**

The interpreters' role is not only to translate words but to represent the families that they are interpreting for. Interpreters need to be comfortable telling group leaders when they are using terminology that is confusing or when parents are not understanding the principles being taught. They need to help group leaders understand the parents' goals and ask for help in making the principles relevant for achieving these goals.

### **Interpreting the Meaning of the Vignettes**

The interpreters are especially helpful in interpreting the meaning of the videotape vignettes. Even though the video vignettes are in English, the behaviors shown on the tapes are still appropriate because they demonstrate and model the skills being taught (and help them learn English!) The interpreters can then use the vignettes to stimulate a discussion of what behaviors they saw on the videotape and help attribute meaning to particular parenting skills demonstrated. Interpreters should be provided with the opportunity to watch each vignette in training workshops before they are shown and translated for parents in the group. Many interpreters find it helpful to use the scripts that are available for each vignette so that they can give their families a brief summary of the content of the vignette just prior to it being shown in the group. After a vignette is shown, the interpreter checks with the families to ensure that they understood the content of the vignette. After this has happened, then the group is ready to process the vignette and it's implications for how the parents might interact with their children.

### **Interpreter Expectations**

Interpreters are helped to understand the various components of their roles which include:

- Providing accurate translation of everything that is said by parents (all parents in the group) as well as group leaders. It is important that interpreters translate both the group leaders' words as well as the parents' responses. With direct translation of all interactions, parents of differing cultures will share ideas and get to know each other. It can be tempting to interpret only what the group leader is saying, but if this happens, the program will be didactic, rather than collaborative, and parents will not develop support networks or do their own problem solving.

The interpreters role is to help parents understand the meaning of concepts; to be objective and unbiased, to represent what the parent's point of view to the leader; to help

the leader understand when something isn't understood by a parent; interpret meaning not just the words. The interpreter must help the leader understand the cultural differences and their relevance to the topic being discussed. Ideally the interpreter straddles both cultures and helps to translate ideas between them.

- Helping group leaders to know when there is confusion or a need for clarification
- Signal group leaders to remember to stop frequently for translation
- Coach and reinforce parents for their efforts during small group practice
- Review video vignettes prior to each group and help parents to process their content
- Make buddy calls during the week to encourage parents to do their homework and answer questions
- To review homework activities with parents each week. Provide brief written translations of the homework materials if parents would find this useful.

### **III. Interpreter's On Going Support And Evaluation of Group**

As groups continue, interpreters meet weekly with group leaders to review content and plan for subsequent sessions. It is helpful if there are multiple group leaders to meet in groups because of the added support of interpreters being able to share with each other their respective experiences. Interpreters are gratified by their ability to support other parents and sometimes surprised by the parents' openness.

Spanish

Interpreter: Our group is going great. We have 10 regular participants and attendance has been very regular. People have really engaged I think. We have 2 interpreters for different languages, and we have 2 English speaking people without interpreters, and they add a lot to the group. Our group is feeling very comfortable now. They are really doing the work. You can tell from their questions that they are really trying it. Real barriers are coming up. For example, one asked "what happens when my child doesn't want me to do descriptive commenting?" That is really good because they are doing work. They are comfortable bringing up the issues. There is a balance of participation to include everyone to share their ideas. People who are getting interpretations are often a few seconds behind. We have adjusted to wait for them. Then we balance so that the English speaking people are engaged and involved. We try hard to make sure everyone has an opportunity to participate.

Vietnamese

Interpreter: I asked the parents if they were comfortable. When I check in by phone as their buddy on the weekends I found they were doing the homework. They said they were happy with their children's responses. That makes my job worthwhile.

Group

Leader: They want to learn. One mom had a baby and brought her baby to the group when she was one week old. She wanted to be there. It was her first outing. She said the parenting group was the only thing she was going to. She wanted to be there. I was honored by that.

After the program had been completed, the interpreters participate in doing home visits to obtain parents evaluation of the program. They asked the parents what they learned from participating in the program. After this the interpreters met together to share their experience with the program over the prior year.

Carolyn: How do you think the parents benefited from the program?

### *Friendships*

Vietnamese Interpreter: I just finished a home interview with a parent, and the one point she raised was that even though she has lived in this country three years she didn't have much outside contact. She has three children and stays around the house. She really looked forward to the parent group, and after it ended—and she said she was really glad that she had made outside contacts because she has friends now.

Carolyn: So for her, she appreciated the friends she made —social connections in the community?

Vietnamese Interpreter : Right, “outside connections.” That’s what she said.

### *Parenting Skills*

Tagrynia & Amharic Interpreter: I interviewed a grandmother from Ethiopia who had already raised 7 kids in her country. She was raising her 2 grandchildren and said, “We never had the opportunity to learn how you can manage kids here.” She said her grandchildren were wild, because she didn't know how to manage them here. Once she got to the program, she was so happy that she took that class. It helped her. She knows what to do now. She told me she talks to the teachers now and plays with her kids every day. That grandma (from Ethiopia) says she wished that everyone coming to American could get this training.

Carolyn: Do you remember in our first meeting you discussed the goal of helping parents to have an alternative to spanking or hitting children? Do you think you were successful with that?

Amharic Interpreter: In our country the discipline we learned was different -- harsher, more hitting. I really think the parents and myself as well learned a better way that was more beneficial. They learned to ignore, to take away privileges and to teach them other behaviors -- they learned a lot.

Arabic Interpreter: Back home, kids have to listen to and respect parents. You taught us to listen to our kids and follow their lead. I've learned that if you listen to them, they will listen to you. At first I was worried and the parents were skeptical because it seemed you were giving the kids all the power and parents less. In the end the parents were surprised that they got more power over their children.

#### *Working with Schools*

Arabic Interpreter: In one family I interviewed I saw that everyone was involved with the homework. The parent said, "I have never had my kids discussing and sharing ideas, but when you start doing homework, the family has to communicate more.

Group Leader: About 2/3 of the children regularly did dinosaur homework with their parents each week. And the two toughest kids in one classroom by far did the competent homework. It was something they enjoyed doing together.

#### *Training and Role of Interpreters*

Carolyn: Did you find the training adequately prepared you for your roles?

Vietnamese Interpreter: We really needed to learn ahead of time the content of what would be interpreted. It was helpful because we were crossing cultural boundaries. We needed to know the theory and the program and then we were better able to explain things to parents.

Chinese Interpreter: Learning how to coach the parents was wonderful. I needed to practice that.

Tagrynia & Amharic



Interpreter: Yes some of the parents I worked with kept asking me questions and liked to challenge me. In the first session she asked questions about things we weren't covering until much later in the program. I kept having to tell her to wait, we have to go step-by-step. We will be there soon. It was good.

Carolyn: So understanding what was coming ahead in the program was helpful. But you are also describing your coaching role because it is like starting with a 2-pound weight before you pick up a 25 pound weight. You do each step and build your muscles to be ready for what lies ahead. A really important part of your role is to help parents take this information in—in small chunks at a time.

Carolyn: It sounds as though you became very close to these families. Some of you have described parents calling you during the week – one parent I heard about asked about checking out books at the library. It sounds as though people have really used you as a resource.

Chinese Interpreter: Yes one parent even called me to ask about how to dye her hair.

Carolyn: Was it a good experience for you?

Arabic Interpreter: It was an excellent experience because you not only know the parents, but you know everyone there. Whenever they meet me in the hallway, they say “hi,” and ask me questions. And you feel more friendship and contacts and with the kids. It was good.

Carolyn: So it seems as though you were like a friend and helped parents form a bridge or a connection with school. We had talked about the parents feeling kind of alienated, and you are providing that bridge. Even if it's calling about how to dye your hair!

### **Conclusion**

It is an immensely rewarding opportunity to bring information to parents who may have not had the chance to learn about these strategies in their prior family life or educational experience. Nonetheless, it is the caring, warmth and support on the part of the group leaders and interpreters that provide the climate for this knowledge to be able to be assimilated by parents in a meaningful way. Working together with interpreters in this collaborative fashion will not only enhance the parents' confidence, community and family support and connection with schools but will enrich the experience for the group leaders as well.

## References

- Barrera, M., A. Biglan, et al. (2002). "Early elementary school intervention to reduce conduct problems: A randomized trial with Hispanic and non-Hispanic children." Prevention Science **3**(2): 83-94.
- Gross, D., L. Fogg, et al. (2003). "Parent training with families of toddlers in day care in low-income urban communities." Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology **71**(2): 261-278.
- Miller Brotman, L., R. G. Klein, et al. (2003). "Preventive intervention for urban, low-income preschoolers at familial risk for conduct problems: A randomized pilot study." Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry **32**(2): 246-257.
- Reid, M. J., C. Webster-Stratton, et al. (2001). "Parent training in Head Start: A comparison of program response among African American, Asian American, Caucasian, and Hispanic mothers." Prevention Science **2**(4): 209-227.
- Scott, S., Q. Spender, et al. (2001). "Multicentre controlled trial of parenting groups for child antisocial behaviour in clinical practice." British Medical Journal **323**(28): 1-5.
- Webster-Stratton, C. and M. J. Reid (2003). The Incredible Years Parents, Teachers and Child Training Series: A multifaceted treatment approach for young children with conduct problems. Evidence-based psychotherapies for children and adolescents. A. E. Kazdin and J. R. Weisz. New York, Guilford Press: 224-240.
- Webster-Stratton, C., M. J. Reid, et al. (2001). "Preventing conduct problems, promoting social competence: A parent and teacher training partnership in Head Start." Journal of Clinical Child Psychology **30**(3): 283-302.