

Developing Parent Programs: Challenges & Solutions

□ **Start with a Leadership Team to:**

- ♦ Achieve diversity of ideas and increased communication among parents
- ♦ Ensure continuation of programs by not depending on only one or two people
- ♦ Involve more people who are committed to make things happen
- ♦ Share the work – from preparing announcements, letters and handouts to room set-up, hosting and evaluating

□ **How to Build a Great Leadership Team**

Faith-based - Meet with clergy, school principal, religious education director, guidance counselor, and one or two teachers (religion, science and health teacher).

Public School Setting - Meet with the school principal, guidance counselor, and one or two teachers (science and health teacher).

- ♦ Ask for a list of three qualified people to join the leadership team:
- ♦ Members who reflect each family of origin.
- ♦ People who share the same values and teachings.
- ♦ Professionals to enlist — doctor, nurse, social worker, teacher
- ♦ PTA officers and Parents -who know the best times for programs, have great communication networks, and can address other parents' concerns
- ♦ Grandparents – who often share child care and may have fund-raising contacts

□ **Communications**

- ♦ Communicate early and often. No one regretted notifying parents too soon but many said they waited too long. Those who had a meeting early in the process prevented misinformation from growing and spreading.
- ♦ Communicate with catechists/teachers. The easiest beginnings occurred when the leader/principal had the catechists/teachers and school counselors lined up and fully informed.
- ♦ Evaluate all programs. Include summaries of the evaluations in the bulletin/newsletter and keep copies in the church/school library. This encourages attendance when programs are offered again.

□ **Funding Programs**

- ♦ Decide to use an all-purpose fund or one with a line item for parent programs. Most prefer the line item as it provided more of a guarantee for the program's existence.
- ♦ Ask the parents' association to purchase library resources and sponsor speakers.
- ♦ Request a fee to cover child care, refreshments/dinner and/or handouts. Child care increases attendance. If you feed them, they will come.
- ♦ Purchase parent sexuality education books in bulk and sell at full price. #1 parent request is to have books available for purchase at meetings.
- ♦ Share the speaker's fee with a neighboring parish/school by co-sponsoring some programs.

□ Addressing Concerns and Objections

- ◆ Listen to concerns. Always be polite. Listen carefully when others take the time to voice concerns and address their concerns without being drawn into emotional or harangue-type discussions.
- ◆ Objections may be voiced by a few vocal parents - Often the difficult people you deal with have the greatest need for healing.
- ◆ Continue to Keep the Door Open - even if you do not agree, learn to disagree without being disagreeable. Bring them in to share the books and evaluations.
- ◆ Publicity is the best proactive defense. Hold open meetings that are advertised in bulletins/newsletters and keep copies of the minutes available in the church or school

□ The Introductory Meeting

- ◆ A general meeting early in the process lets people meet the leadership team and learn how the guidelines/programs were developed.
- ◆ Emphasize the rights and responsibilities of parents as the primary educators of their children.
- ◆ Clarify programs' four purposes to help parents to:
 1. communicate their values and beliefs about the gift of sexuality with their children
 2. prepare for what to say by learning kids' most frequently asked questions
 3. plan the content to include first puberty and later sex education talks with their children
 4. develop a parent support network to help parents help each other
- ◆ Have outlines of the programs and books available for review

□ Things to Remember

- ◆ Pray. Sometimes it is hard not to be discouraged or take opposition and criticism personally.
- ◆ Ask other churches/synagogues and schools to share their experience with you.
- ◆ Realize that parents will "parent" the same way they were raised. Many weren't taught themselves.
- ◆ Accept that some parents need help to learn how to effectively communicate their values and beliefs.
- ◆ Understand that a parent's sexual history, how they view their church teachings, from acceptance to anger, and their lifestyle, e.g.; a mom with a live-in boyfriend, can block parents from effectively helping their children.
- ◆ Don't rush into implementing a program. Go slowly.

□ **What You Should Include**

1. *When* and *What* kids are asking – Parents who know the answers to the most frequently asked questions will be less uncomfortable, better prepared and more willing to talk with their children.
2. *When* and *What* happens during puberty – especially for boys
3. *What* are the Church's/Synagogue's teachings and *What* parents should say about:
 - Abstinence/Chastity – kids want reasons. They say “convince us.”
 - Condoms – kids see condom use as “responsible” sex
 - Dating – priority to delay couple dating and establish family rules
 - God and Sex - Is sex good or bad? What and Why do we believe
 - Homosexuality – confused by the media, parents MUST discuss
 - Inappropriate Touch – knowing safety rules lessens the risk and the child's fear
 - Masturbation – frequent question from both parents and children
 - Modesty – parents need suggestions as many feel it is a “losing battle”
 - Oral sex – kids need answers but parents don't know what to say
 - Peer Pressure – informed parents can be their child's greatest protection
 - Pornography – kids argue “light porn” is OK. Also need to discuss the internet.
 - STD/AIDS – young kids are afraid but older kids believe the “safe sex” messages
4. *What* are the *Stages of Intimacy*; what is a good relationship and most importantly, how do we learn to love? How do we develop the virtues/character traits needed to love others as we wish we would be loved? These topics are often forgotten in the discussions.