Adlerian Principles in Parenting: A Practical Program to Enhance Parenting Skills

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Abstract

Parental involvement plays the most important role in the development of children in regards to their mental, physical and emotional health. Many parents lack the skills or confidence necessary to effectively contribute to their children’s lives. This paper outlines a practical program that helps parents to increase parenting skills and confidence in order to influence the development of their children. The Adlerian concepts of social interest, encouragement, the pampered versus the neglected child, and the purpose of behavior are incorporated into this program.
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Introduction

Parents are the first contact for a child as she learns about the new world in which she lives. Many researchers and family experts have concluded that parents also have the greatest effect on the development and well-being of their children.

Parents provide their children a lens through which they begin to view the world. In many ways the children keep this lens and later pass it on to their own children. Flaws in thinking can be passed down several generations unless a correction is made.

The parents’ role is to create a nurturing atmosphere that enriches the child’s development and to guide her toward independence. “Developmentally, at first parents closely supervise children’s conduct to assure that they conform to family rules and expectations. Gradually, however, regulation shifts to the child, and parents increasingly assume the role of distal monitors. Ultimately, most children come to treat standards of conduct as their own and begin to observe them even without adult surveillance. This shift is one of the major objectives of socialization” (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995, p. 236).

Many parents do not have the abilities or motivation to contribute to their children’s well-being in healthy ways. Even if they have the skills, they often lack confidence in their capability to raise a child. The Seven R’s for Families program helps to educate, encourage, and equip parents to cultivate a healthy family environment.

The program begins with a focus on the parent-child relationship and its impact on the child’s development. By the end, parents develop the structure necessary to limit chaos and increase positive interactions. Decreasing disorder provides further opportunity to reinforce a healthy relationship.
The assumption of this program is that participants need more than information. Many times parents know what to do, but have difficulty accomplishing it. They need to develop skills to implement effective parenting techniques. By being actively involved, they are more likely to create a lasting change in their families. The program brings parents beyond information to implementation.

The program leads parents through a series of exercises that help them create a healthier family environment by allowing them to ‘practice’ skills in a safe environment before instituting them in their families. Participants in the workshop share challenges and provide encouragement for others in the group. Every participant leaves with a plan to implement effective change.

**The importance of family structure.** Stability in the family is critical for a child’s development. While most people realize the necessity of consistent parenting, maintaining that consistency is one of the most difficult challenges parents face.

Structure in the family supports the consistency needed. Order helps in the development of healthy boundaries and relationships, and prepares the child for the authority structure that she will face throughout her life in school, sports, work and society in general. Her success in any endeavor she pursues will hinge on her ability to appropriately navigate the authority under which she operates.

Since children interpret consistency as security, stable rules and patterns create a foundation. This foundation allows children the ability to risk and learn about their world in healthy ways.

Inconsistent parenting can lead to anxiety and misbehavior. Erin Lewis, Mary Dozier, John Ackerman, and Sandra Sepulveda-Kozakowski assessed the relationship between the
instability of placement and the child’s behavior in a study of 102 five- to six-year-old foster and adopted children. They found that children who had caregiver stability showed less oppositional behavior and more inhibitory controls than foster children with caregiver instability (2009, p. 1422).

Some parents may think that the freedom the child constantly seeks is best for her. However, as Fink states in a training video “Rights without limits lead to chaos and breed insecurity” (Halpern & Fink, 2000). Although it may seem counter- intuitive to many parents, children seek boundaries.

**The parenting dilemma.** The dilemma is that parents find it difficult to balance long-range goals for their children with the desire for instant behavior change. Often the quickest way to immediate correction is not the best route for long-term sustained healthy conduct.

Parents may resort to the easiest solution when faced with a child’s difficult behavior. It may be enticing the child with candy at the store to pacify him, or it could be immediate punishment or threats to terminate unwanted behavior. Fink states, “Often we give in because we are busy, tired or feel we don’t have the energy to listen to the complaints anymore” (Halpern & Fink, 2000).

Frequently parents react quickly because they have not had the time to fully process the information. The quality of the decision may be sacrificed for expedience. These decisions can result in poor choices made by parents that only lead to prolonged, more difficult challenges.

**Challenges parents face.** One of the main challenges parents face is that they lack the skills to be effective parents. Often the only skills they have learned were acquired through observing their own parents and family.
This can lead to their biggest obstacle, overcoming their past. Many people have been raised in homes with unhealthy parental modeling so they have no idea how to parent their children.

Beyond that, parents may also face problems with their own personal issues. Anxiety, depression or extreme anger will only compound parenting difficulties. In his audio training material, Hal Runkel reports, “Our biggest struggle with parenting is our own emotional reactivity” (2007).

The basis of the problem is that parents seek to alter unwanted behavior in their children without growing and developing themselves. They are seeking a shortcut. Rina Eiden, Ellen Edwards, and Kenneth Leonard, in their study of 220 families on the effects of alcoholism, noted that depression, alcoholism, and antisocial behavior in parents had a negative impact on the child’s behavior and outlook (2006, p. 306).

The Scream Free Parenting audio series promotes the principle that parents should focus on what they can control, their own attitudes and actions, rather than focusing on their children’s actions. “Parenting is not about children. It is about parents” (Runkel, 2007).

Rather than focusing on changing the child’s behavior, parents can ensure that they have actions and attitudes that contribute to a healthier atmosphere. They can build their parenting on principles rather than on curing misbehavior.

The need for the program. Many parents improvise when it comes to raising children. They often ignore the sage wisdom that “failing to plan is planning to fail.” Parenting requires planning. Without preparation, the resulting chaos can lead parents to default to frustration and anger.

Developing a comprehensive plan and predetermining specific responses to behavior
are important methods to ensure that the parenting stays focused on the lasting effects on the family. Long-term thinking contributes to consistency and healthy solutions.

Beyond the concept of planning, many parents lack other skills necessary for parenting effectively. They may not understand age-appropriate boundaries or effective discipline principles. Without education and training, they will continue in frustration.

Even parents who have ability may lack confidence. They may feel that their job as parents lacks opportunities for success and carries only the possibility of failure. Parents face discouragement with the challenges and may believe they are not doing well; they just need the courage to continue with new information.

**The Program**

**The Seven R’s for Families.** The Seven R’s for Families is a program designed to guide parents as they implement greater structure in their families and develop healthier relationships with their children. Increasing order and promoting the parent-child relationship creates an environment more conducive to a child’s healthy maturation. The order and relationships encourage appropriate socialization as the child moves toward independence.

In the field of Adlerian thought, one of the primary roles for parents is the development of social interest in their children. Social interest is a sense “in which the individual's development and accomplishments involve a concern with others as well as for the self” (Crandall, 1980, p. 483). A lack of social interest can lead to feelings of alienation and competition in the child, and may increase insecurity and inferiority (Crandall, 1980, p. 483).

The goal is that parents will establish more consistency in their parenting by predetermining familial organization. The increased order will enhance the child’s
environment by creating more predictable responses, thereby allowing for healthier development.

The premise is that as a family establishes greater order, negative parent-child encounters will be replaced with cooperation. Grazyna Kochanska and Nazan Arksan studied 103 dyads of mothers with 26- to 41-month-old children. They noted that higher levels of mutually positive interactions in the parent-child relationship resulted in children following parental rules even when not being watched (1995, p. 249). The closer the child felt to the mother, the more likely that she would obey rules even when not observed. The relationship created the foundation for the rules.

Karla Van Leeuwen and Ad Vermulst published a summary of two studies of 775 families. Utilizing the Ghent Parental Behavior Questionnaire, they demonstrated a positive correlation between “inadequate parenting practices (like harsh punishment or inconsistent discipline) and externalizing problem behavior” (Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2004, p. 293). However, warm parenting, involvement, increased order, and positive reinforcement was correlated with decreased behavior problems.

The 7 Rs for Families program has two formats, with the first being a workshop for parents. It utilizes exercises and group interchanges to assist participants as they improve their parenting skill and develop a plan for raising their children. Second, a workbook format, which includes exercises from the workshop, is designed to be used individually or in conjunction with individual counseling or group therapy. Successful completion of either the workshop or the workbook provides participants with the tools and encouragement they need to parent more effectively.

The First R – Relationships. The primary purpose of the program is to provide
parents with the opportunity to create healthier relationships, which are foundational to a child’s development. Closeness to parents is related to higher psychological functioning and greater life satisfaction (Flouri, 2004, p. 343).

Behavioral and emotional involvement with parents is important to the well-being of the child, with variations according to the age and gender of the child using longitudinal data from the National Survey of Children, Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan and Blair studied the effect of parental involvement during childhood on well-being in adolescence. They reported that the child’s perception of the parental relationship is more important even if the father is not present in the home. It is the relationship, more than the residence, that makes the difference (Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan, & Blair, 1994, p. 234).

In discussing nonresident fathers, King and Sobolewski state that, “Having strong ties to one parent is nearly as beneficial as having strong ties to both parents.” However, “adolescents who report close ties to both parents report significantly higher grades, fewer externalizing and internalizing problems, and less acting out at school” (King & Sobolewski, 2006, p. 552).

Kimberly Howard, Jennifer Burke Lefever, John Borkowski and Thomas Whitman studied the impact of the relationship with fathers on children of adolescent mothers in the first ten years of life. They determined that father involvement had a strong impact on school success and school behavior. They noted that “at age eight, children with low father contact were judged to have higher levels of hyperactivity and more intense conduct problems than children who had contact with their fathers” (Howard, Burke Lefever, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2006, p. 473).

Closeness with parents also tends to limit delinquency and alcohol abuse, and
lowering depressive symptoms in adolescents (Cookston & Finlay, 2006, p. 144).

It is generally agreed that relationships are built on trust. The remaining six parts of the program lay a foundation that facilitates the trust a parent can demonstrate to the child. By consistently keeping his or her word, the subject of this sentence needs to be the parent. You changed it to the child here. the child knows that what the parent says is true. Since the early 1900’s Adlerian theory “has emphasized the importance of a warm, cooperative parent-child relationship in which clear, well-defined boundaries exist” (Gfroerer, Kern, & Curlette, 2004, p. 382).

The mother has the responsibility to “interpret society to the individual” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 341) and awaken the child’s social interest. Beginning with nursing, the mother requires the cooperation of the infant. “The possibilities for social interest first take on life and become tangible in the relationship between mother and child” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 137).

For a parent to have a stronger relationship with her child, she must be available to develop the relationship, investing her time and energy. Often parents allow themselves to be overly busy, which results in their losing focus on the relationship with their children.

Physical contact with a child is important. Holding the newborn begins the bonding process. Without healthy attachment with the parent, children may have difficulty forming their identity (Nystul, 1982, p. 186).

It is important for parents to choose family activities that children enjoy. If the child is not interested or unable to participate, the activity does not support the development of the relationship. Kids become friends with people they “have fun with” (Popkin, 2007, p. 43). Fun activities assist in the development of the parent-child relationship.
Parents can create special time with a child, referred to as a ‘daddy-daughter date’ or ‘special time with mom’. The idea involves carving time from the schedule to spend one-on-one time with a child.

One father gives his account of his time with his ten year old daughter:

Last week we had our first ‘daddy-daughter date’. We had the time planned, but I was a little concerned that I wouldn’t be able to keep the conversation flowing for a few hours. We had lunch planned, but we didn’t have anything planned afterward. As we ate our meal, there were quiet times, but I discovered that she was ok with it. We were able to figure out what we would do after lunch at the restaurant and the day went really well.

My daughter didn’t want the time to end and she started bugging me the next day to plan another ‘daddy-daughter date’ (personal reference, October 20, 2009).

Ironically, this father had to overcome some apprehension over cultivating a deeper relationship with his daughter. Being with an adolescent may require the use of different skills than those adults typically use. While adults are comfortable talking, children often prefer more activity.

Another father reported:

We typically don’t plan the event or schedule it on the calendar. It just happens. When I have an errand to run, I’ll bring one of the kids. They will decide it is a special time with daddy. Sometimes we stop in for a little treat to help make it special. (T. Anderson, personal communication, May 2, 2010)
The key, as this dad found, was in being with the child. Parents need to be creative to overcome the hectic pace of life in order to increase their interaction time with their children. “If you saw the movie ‘Field of Dreams’, you’ll recall that it isn’t a good idea to wait until after you have died to play catch with your child” (Popkin, 2007, p. 44).

The Second R – Routines. Routines are simply patterns of behavior that are repeated over time: procedures consistently performed in the same order or process. The best routines provide efficiency, allowing our minds to be used for more important details in life. With them, families gain confidence knowing what to do at a given point in time.

Every family has routines; some of which are and some of which are not beneficial. The question is not whether a family has routines, but how well they contribute to the family. Even the chaotic bedtime is a routine, but one that is not intentional and does not promote peace and order.

The development of healthy routines is critical. It provides the child with behavioral standards, which consistently met, impart a sense of stability.

The development of positive routines can lead to changes in values and thinking patterns. Mark Anshel and Minsoo Kang published findings in a ten-week study on changing habitual unhealthy behavior for forty-one participants in the workplace. They reported that establishing healthy habits had a positive effect, not only on replacing unhealthy behaviors with healthy ones, but also on lifestyle improvements. As individuals changed activities, they recognized greater long-term health benefits and created self-regulating rituals to maintain the new behaviors (2007, p. 121).

As human beings we naturally create routines. Most people drive the same way to work for years unless change becomes necessary. Children are the same way, developing
patterns of behavior quickly to form routines.

As bedtime is a common parenting struggle, parent educators suggest that parents design a bedtime routine that supports the transition to sleep. The problem is that many families have defaulted to a bedtime routine that does not support an atmosphere that is conducive to rest.

Parents have the responsibility of establishing and reinforcing healthy routines. It is the parent who can evaluate and determine which practices are helpful and which need to be changed.

One study, by Hinsz, Nickell, and Park investigated the role of employee motivation on food safety habits in food processing plants. They reported that behaviors that are easily repeated more readily become habits. However, if the behavior required constant awareness or vigilance, the activities required more reinforcement and were less likely to become habits (2007, pp. 112-113).

In their study on the effect of family support processes and routines on dietary patterns, Sharon Denham, Margaret Manoogian and Lyndel Schuster found that education and attitude about the behavior, as well as family support, positively influenced the establishment of new dietary habits for individuals with Type 2 diabetes (2007, p. 49).

This is important as parents consider which behaviors to establish as habits. If the behavior is too challenging, or if the child is not motivated, it may only create frustration and discouragement and make it more difficult to gain cooperation in the future.

One key to developing a routine is for the family to practice when there is no contentious issue. For example, the family can ‘rehearse’ a healthy bedtime routine on a Saturday afternoon or practice the morning routine in the evening (Feigal, 2007, p. 64).
Practicing the routine gives the children a new map in their brains by which they can conceptualize the new behavior and act successfully.

**The Third R – Rituals.** Rituals are similar to routines as both are repeated behavior, with rituals adding deeper meaning. The difference has been described as “While routines are repetitious patterned behavior, rituals include the representation and beliefs concerning the family’s identity” (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, & Schwagler, 1993, p. 634).

Crespo, Davide, Costa and Fletcher add, “Routines and rituals are, therefore, intertwined in family events but are nevertheless distinct. Rituals, although grounded in routines, go beyond these behavioral interactions and become symbols of family cohesiveness, reaffirming their identity” (2008, p. 192).

Family rituals promote the family’s values, culture, or beliefs, and can be events as infrequent as weddings and funerals, or they can be annual or daily activities (i.e. birthdays, anniversaries, holidays or evening dinner).

Many of the rituals people perform started as simpler routines. Fiese et al found that, “any routine has the potential to become a ritual once it moves from an instrumental to a symbolic act” (Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas, Josephs, Poltrack, & Baker, 2002, p. 383).

In their study on family rituals, James Bossard and Eleanor Boll conclude that well-designed family rituals contribute to the integration of the family (1949, p. 469).

**The Fourth R - Responsibilities.** One of the primary functions of parents is the gradual development of independence in the child, as noted by Dreikurs and Soltz, “Parental love is best demonstrated through constant encouragement toward independence” (1990, p. 55). When children contribute to their family and community, they develop social interest and independence.
Leman warns, “If you want disaster and chaos in your life, do everything for your children. In the process, you will rob them of the opportunity to stand on their own two feet and to learn responsibility and accountability, two qualities that are vital in developing a well-balanced adult life” (2000, p. 34).

Nystul adds, “If children are not provided opportunities for positive involvement, they will demand involvement by moving towards one of the four goals of misbehavior (1982, p. 185). Contribution gives children appropriate control over their lives and reinforces individual responsibility.

Giving assignments for chores on a spontaneous basis is not very effective. It is much more effective to have a regular family meeting and create a plan for the week with each child’s assignment. Charting and earning money can be effective, but not all chores should earn money. Some should be completed solely because the child is a member of the family (Phelan, 2004).

It helps to have variety in the responsibilities of the home. Children can switch chores to allow for variation in their tasks (Leman, 2000, pp. 81-82).

Parents can have high expectations. “Give children grown-up tasks to do whenever it is feasible. The long-term effect of this tool is that children gain confidence in their own abilities, pride in their work, and an associated increase in self-esteem” (Feigal, 2007, p. 43).

Initially, parents should be prepared to accept the level of quality that fits the child’s age and development and the newness of the task. Encouragement is important to maintain the child’s positive attitude so he continues to develop the skills for the activity.

**The Fifth R - Rewards.** The purpose of rewards is to help the child develop the responsibilities and healthy attitudes for contributing. Ultimately, rewards should be shifted
One of the most important ways parents can reward children and promote good behavior is with encouragement. Dreikurs and Soltz note that “Encouragement is more important than any other aspect of child-raising” (1990, p. 36). They also state that, “A misbehaving child is a discouraged child” (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990, p. 36).

Parents can use “heart-felt appreciation” with the phrase “when you … I feel … because…” (Feigal, 2007, p. 29). This will not only affirm the child, but will give the child awareness of the specific actions that earned the appreciation and a target for future behavior.

In their study on the effect of awards on motivation in society, Bruno Frey and Susanne Neckermann found that the effect of a reward increased with the publicity associated with receiving it (2008, p. 206). For parents, publicly praising the child, or recognizing behavior when talking with grandparents, can have a greater effect. They also noted that unlike financial compensation, awards brought about more loyalty from the recipient (2008, p. 200).

Rewards should not be confused with bribery. Often parents tell a child, “You can have a lollipop if you sit quietly.” The problem is that this system is not sustainable. The child learns to constantly expect payment, typically in increasing amounts as she grows. Parents quickly run out of resources necessary to maintain the incentives. These children may soon develop the “What’s in it for me?” attitude that will limit them throughout their lives.

As they grow, children must develop internal motivation. The goal is that they have a desire to help with a job around the house that is based more on contribution and a sense of belonging rather than simply financial remuneration.

It is also important to distinguish between the child and the behavior. The child is not
good because he did a good thing. Encouragement should be focused on the attitudes and actions of the child, and not be confused with the child’s identity (Leman, 2000, pp. 70-71).

**Rules.** Every family needs to have rules to keep order and safety in the home. Every family has some rules; however, in many families the rules are unstated, unclear, inconsistent, and ineffectively enforced.

To eliminate chaos in the home, children need to have simple, clear boundaries, which should be consistently promoted and uniformly kept by the members of the family.

Having consistent limits helps the child develop relationally. Popkin writes, “Some parents try to avoid saying ‘no’ in an effort to improve the relationship with their children. But the effort usually backfires, as kids who never learn to accept ‘no’ for an answer grow to be more and more demanding until they find that no one wants to be around them” (2007, p. 57).

He adds, “When parents fail to address problems, set limits, and otherwise take the leadership role in the family, these kids do not just magically ‘grow out of it.’ They usually get worse, ending up in trouble at school and in the community” (2007, pp. 32-33). Leman notes that setting rules for the family teaches children accountability, which helps them develop a sound conscience (2000, p. 75).

Phelan reports that over time the family atmosphere should evolve from dictatorship to democracy. When a child is young the parent makes all the decisions. However, by the time he is seventeen, the family should be able to operate almost as a democracy (2004).

The rules must also be enforceable. When parents have unenforceable rules, it only confuses the child and undermines the parent’s authority when rules are not enforced.

Tina Feigal writes that the best way to have kids accept the rules is to have them
involved in the process of establishing them. This is done during a family meeting, during which children are able to join in the rule creation process and take ownership in the rules they created (2007, p. 34).

Feigal also recommends limiting the number of rules. Too many rules are harder for the child to remember and more difficult for parents to consistently enforce. Five to seven rules work well (2007, p. 34).

Especially for young children, rules need to begin with the word “no” (Feigal, 2007, p. 34). One study by Kochanska and Aksan noted, “‘Do’ requests are more challenging for young children and require more situational maintenance of compliance from the parent. Apparently, for toddlers it is much easier to ‘embrace’ maternal prohibition regarding touching attractive objects than to have similar wholehearted feelings about the task requiring a sustained mundane activity” (1995, p. 252).

**Results.** Results are the consequences that reinforce rules. They allow a child to make a decision to follow the rules in order to avoid the stated consequence.

Consequences create motivation for the child to follow the rule. Jan Engelmann and Luiz Pessoa studied the effects of motivation on attention using seventy university students, measuring their ability to maintain visual focus on stimuli, even with distractions. They found that both positive and negative reinforcement improved attention to a difficult task even when faced with distraction (Engelmann & Pessoa, 2007, p. 673).

Results should not be punitive. Punishment is fear-based and is not effective, as it only offers temporary relief of the problem behavior and tends to be retaliatory by the parent. This can become an even greater problem later when the child has learned this ‘get even’ lesson from the parent. It may develop into a war between parent and child.
The consequences should be purely for correcting the misbehavior. Unfortunately many parents use correction as punishment to get even with the child, in which case the lesson for changing the behavior is lost.

The concept of punishment differs from discipline. Punishment teaches a “dominate or be dominated” view of life. Leman writes, “Punishment teaches children that because we – their parents – are bigger and stronger, we can push them around” (2000, p. 73). Discipline or “training up a child means putting time and energy into teaching the child acceptable behavior in any number of social situations” (Leman, 2000, p. 75). Discipline includes teaching the child what is not acceptable and then training him on the appropriate behavior.

This works because the child is motivated to avoid the feelings that go along with the consequences. Children are supposed to suffer times of low self-esteem because it makes them try harder (Phelan, 2004).

The goal of discipline is to develop self-discipline in the child. When the child has the ability to make choices with clear results she grows in self-control. Fink states, “Consequences promote reflection and teach responsibility” (Halpern & Fink, 2000).

Liliana J. Lengua published a study focusing on how parenting style, along with temperament, predicted the internalization and externalization of problems in 188 eight- to twelve-year-old children. She confirmed what other studies have shown, that irregularity in parenting can lead to mental and emotional problems for the child. Erratic correction is one factor that predicts higher levels of anxiety and adjustment problems (Lengua, 2008, p. 555). Lengua also noted, “Inconsistent discipline might be particularly distressing for children high in frustration who might need more predictability and clearer boundaries to manage their emotions and behavior” (2008, p. 556).
It is best if results are natural consequences. Natural consequences are the typical result for an action when there is no intervention. Dreikurs gives the example of a child who continually forgets his lunch when going to school. The mother would rush the lunch to school each time, “bawl him out for his forgetfulness”, and the forgetting would continue. The natural consequence would be for the child to go hungry that day. It is probable that he would remember his lunch in the future, and would have learned from natural consequences (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990, p. 76).

Obviously there are cases when natural consequences are not understood by the child or when they are too dangerous. When natural consequences are not possible, the results should relate to the offense as closely as possible. Kevin Leman refers to this as reality discipline.

“Reality discipline” could simply be holding a child accountable to pay or replace his friend’s toy that he has broken, rather than administering punishment. In this way the child is able to learn the lesson without scarring the ego or damaging the parent-child relationship. “Punishment centers in on the child and misses the real problem” (Leman, 2000, p. 42).

The parent may be able to stand back for the consequences to teach the child. Leman describes this as “In so many situations, you can let reality be the teacher if you only stand back and allow reality to happen” (Leman, 2000, p. 42).

In his parent training video, Phelan discusses “Independence Training” to teach adolescents to be on time for school. He suggests allowing the child to be responsible for getting out of bed on his own. He then can face the consequences of being late for school and talking with the principal. He reports that it takes only a few days for a child to develop the ability to get up on time (Phelan, 2004).
Phelan suggests using natural consequences for adolescents to teach responsibility for homework. He does report that if natural consequences fail to make a change for a child taking responsibility in three or four weeks, another plan is needed.

Results should be predetermined and easily carried out. This will increase the consistency of the child’s responsive behavior. Often parents make statements about consequences that they are not willing or able to back up.

When the results are predetermined, they can be communicated clearly to the child prior to the offense. Communicating the expectations is vital to effective parenting (Halpern & Fink, 2000). This gives the child the ability to make a choice to follow the rule or receive the result. It remains easier for the parent to keep the focus on the action and result, rather than on the identity of the child.

The results should be quickly, simply, and unemotionally administered to reinforce the effect. This reinforces that it is the behavior and not the person that is unacceptable.

When discussing the effectiveness of results Fink states, “It’s not the severity of the consequences but the certainty of the consequences occurring” (Halpern & Fink, 2000).

One result could be a simple thirty-second ‘break’ for breaking one of the family rules. The child stops and is quiet for thirty seconds in the room, has control over when the break begins (when he is calm), and knows in advance that it is not a punishment (Feigal, 2007, p. 35).

**Results Expected from the Program**

Many programs present information to the participants assuming that the new information will result in changes in behavior. This program is designed with information
and exercises to give parents the motivation, encouragement, and skills to create the changes that will result in healthier family interactions.

Most individuals will be contemplating or preparing change at the beginning of the program. This program is designed to move participants from contemplation or preparation into action.

The confidences participants have when they finish the 7 R’s for Families program will give them the ability to effectively initiate and sustain changes in their family system.

Parent education may be effective even for parents with mental, emotional or chemical issues. In their study on alcoholic families, Eiden, Edwards, and Leonard conclude that parent education “may be one potential target for intervention among children of alcoholic parents, even in the face of paternal reluctance to seek treatment for alcoholism” (2006, p. 312).

In his evaluation of Adlerian parenting programs, Paul Burnett concludes that studies strongly support the effectiveness of Adlerian based parent education programs. Children’s behavior became more compliant and they had better self-concepts. He noted that parents’ behavior and attitude also improved (1988, p. 74).

Conclusion

While most parents have a benevolent attitude toward their children, they often lack the skills and confidence they need for child-rearing. High expectations combined with low preparation and capability lead to mediocrity.

The Seven R’s for Families training program is designed to assist parents in developing the plan and the skills for effective parenting. Parents will be able to develop
structure that facilitates consistent discipline and ultimately improves the parent-child relationship.

By incorporating exercises, parents begin movement during the program, rather than waiting until they return home to make changes. This anchors the learning and increases the chance of lasting change.

Each participant will have the opportunity to develop as a parent. “Above all, remember that we are not working for perfection, but only for improvement” (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990, p. 56).
References


