International Journal of Child Health and Human Development
Volume 2, Issue 1. pp. 17-32
ISSN: 1936-5965

Affirming diversity: Multi-cultural collaboration to deliver the incredible years parent programs

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Abstract

With the numbers of minority groups being served in community mental health settings increasing, there is a need to better understand how evidence based practices (EBPs) are being tailored to ensure cultural sensitivity and fit with these populations. While cultural adaptations have been made for specific cultural groups, the appeal of the more "generic" but culturally sensitive EBP is that it is cost effective and allows for more flexibility in program delivery because it can be used with heterogeneous cultural groups rather than single culture groups. Multicultural groups can also foster greater understanding among parents of differing cultural backgrounds and experiences leading to more tolerant and respectful communities. The challenge of this approach is to train therapists to provide the EBPs using culturally sensitive principles that are generalizeable across cultures. The Incredible Years (IY) Parenting program has shown promising effects in many random control group studies with diverse cultures in United States as well as in numerous other countries. This paper reviews the "principles" embedded deeply in the IY program, which are designed to provide a culturally sensitive structure to the delivery of the program.

Keywords: Children, parents, family, parenthood, prevention.

Introduction

The field of children's mental health is currently focused on the task of transporting evidence-based programs (EBPs) into "real world" settings with fidelity (1,2). Weisz and others (3) have reported that the effective implementation of EBPs in community settings will depend on such things as therapist adherence to the program content, methods, therapeutic processes and protocols as well as quality of therapist education, training, ongoing supervision and organizational support. At the same time, others

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have argued that the effectiveness of EBPs with increasingly culturally diverse populations have shown a mixed record of effectiveness (4) and may be compromised because of a failure to address differing values, customs, child-rearing traditions and expectancies, language, and distinctive contextual stressors associated with different cultural groups (5). These cultural factors may affect initial recruitment, ability to engage families in treatment and result in sporadic attendance and a reduced dose of the intervention, attrition as well as less effective outcomes (6,7). Despite these warnings, response to treatment by ethnicity analysis is rarely reported in the literature. With the numbers of minority groups being served in community mental health settings increasing to half of those served (Center for Mental Health Services), there is a need to better understand how EBPs are being adapted to ensure cultural sensitivity and fit with these populations.

While there are few logical objections to the importance of providing culturally sensitive EBPs that respect family values and traditions, there is a debate about how to accomplish this. There are those who advocate for adaptations to be made of each EBP for every cultural group. For example, three adaptations of the EBP—Strengthening Families Program (SFP), including material on cultural family values, have been made for rural Appalachian families, Asian Pacific Islanders, and Latino families. Results indicated retention was improved, however, there was no effect on parenting outcomes (8). The caution regarding cultural adaptations is to guard against compromising the fidelity of the original EBP and thereby reducing the program's effectiveness. For example, core skill components of the EBPs have sometimes been left out and dosage reduced in order to accommodate the cultural adjunct materials. Moreover, the proliferation of adapted variations of each EBP, for each clinical problem, for every cultural group is costly and needs to be justified by superior clinical outcomes. The appeal of the more "generic", but culturally sensitive, EBP is that it is cost effective and allows for more flexibility in program delivery because it can be used with heterogeneous cultural groups rather than single culture groups. Multicultural groups can also foster greater understanding among parents of differing cultural backgrounds leading to more tolerant and respectful communities. The challenge of this approach is to train therapists to provide the EBP using culturally sensitive principles that are generalizeable across cultures.

Evidence based parenting programs

Parent management training is one of the most well established EBPs for documenting effectiveness in promoting positive parenting skills and reducing child conduct problems (9). There is, however, inconsistent evidence regarding the differential effects of EBPs with minority groups. Some researchers have suggested that minority parents have been less receptive to positive parenting strategies and have shown less improvement with discipline (10) and in teacher rated aggression (11). More often there have been concerns that it is more difficult to engage minority parents in the programs and that drop out rates for minorities are higher than for Caucasians (12,13). On the other hand, there is evidence that some EBPs have been effective with large, culturally diverse samples. For example, the effects of Parent-Child Interaction Therapy in reducing abusive parenting has been shown in Latinos and African Americans with no treatment by ethnicity interactions (14). The Incredible Years (IY) program has also shown effectiveness in several randomized control group trails (RCTs) (for review of studies see (15) with a number of different minority groups in United States including Latino, African-American, and Asian-American populations (16,17) as well as a multicultural new immigrant population (18). It is noteworthy that in a RCT of 634 culturally diverse families with children enrolled in Head Start in the Seattle area (19% African American, 11% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 50% Caucasian), ethnicity analyses revealed few differences in intervention outcomes across ethnic groups according to observed parenting behavior at home. All groups made significant improvements in hypothesized directions. Consumer satisfaction indicated that all ethnic groups reported high levels of satisfaction with the program. Hispanic parents rated therapists more highly than Caucasian parents, and Asian families were more likely than the other groups to request future parent classes and had the highest levels of attendance. All minority groups

had attendance similar or greater than the Caucasian group and rated the sessions on praise as the most helpful content area. In a second RCT where the IY program was offered in primary grade public schools (with 60% or more children receiving free lunch programs), culturally diverse families (52% minority), who had children exhibiting high rates of aggressive behavior were invited to participate in the IY parent program. Results again showed that mothers were significantly more positive in their parenting interactions than control families and their children had significantly less aggressive behavior and (18). In a third RCT with exclusively Korean families led by bilingual Korean group leaders, results showed that intervention mothers were significantly more positive and less harsh compared to control group mothers who relied more on authoritarian traditional discipline. Drop outs were minimal and consumer satisfaction was high (19).

The Incredible Years program has also been evaluated with replicable results in other cultures and countries including Norway (20), United Kingdom (21), Wales (22), and New Zealand (23). Several other control group studies are ongoing in Australia, Holland, Portugal, and Russia. The program has been translated into Spanish, French, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Russian, Turkish, Chinese and Portuguese. These results provide support for the idea that rather than focusing on developing different interventions for every cultural group, it is possible to develop programs that are flexible enough to be used with diverse populations.

Incredible Years (IY) program

The IY Program objectives focus on strengthening parent competencies, fostering parents' involvement with school, decreasing children's problem behaviors, strengthening children's social and academic competencies, and building supportive family networks. The program process includes a group format in which a trained group leader facilitates discussions among parents about parenting, child development, and family issues. The program is not a didactic, one-size-fits all approach but rather is based on a collaborative model, which has been described in some detail in a book entitled, Troubled Families—Problem Children: Working With Parents: A Collaborative Process (24). Collaboration implies a reciprocal relationship based on utilizing equally the therapist or group leader's knowledge and the parents' unique strengths and cultural perspectives. Collaboration implies respect for each person's contributions, a non-blaming relationship built on trust and open communication. For example parents are shown videotaped vignettes of parents in a variety of common parenting situations and settings, and these serve as "triggers" to start discussions among parents. This collaborative process assures interactive learning and self-management. Parents and children shown on the vignettes represent multiple cultural backgrounds. The leader's manuals (25) provides recommended protocols for offering the BASIC Parenting Program in 12 to 20, 2-hour sessions with groups of 10 to 14 parents. These protocols are considered the "minimal" number of core sessions, vignettes, and content to be covered in order to achieve results similar to those in the published literature. However, the length of the program, the number of vignettes shown, and the emphasis given to certain components of the program will be lengthened as needed according to the parents' cultural background experiences, education, knowledge and values.

Part of using the IY program model successfully is for the group leader to understand how to tailor the program according to each individual family's needs and each child's developmental, social, and emotional goals. Group leaders can achieve flexible applications of the manual when there is understanding of the program on multiple levels, including the program model, content, methods, and clinical processes as well as the elements involved in tailoring the program to the individual needs of each family. A prior paper outlines how to tailor this program according to children's risk factors and developmental needs (26). The purpose of this article is to describe the Incredible Years Parenting program "principles" that are built in to address attitudinal and cultural barriers to engagement and that are deeply embedded in the program delivery and the training of group leaders and interpreters. I believe these principles promote and guide a culturally responsive structure for delivering the program to diverse populations.

No group leader can claim to be aware of all the nuances of a culture that differs from his or her own, or be free of cultural biases. And, each leader needs to examine his or her underlying prejudicial beliefs and attitudes and may need some training to do this effectively. Indeed, becoming a parent group leader of multicultural groups is an ongoing and dynamic process of learning more about families, their culture, and their perspectives and experiences. Group leaders affirming diversity means that cultural, linguistic, and other family differences are acknowledged, accepted, respected, and used as a basis for learning and teaching. Rather than ignoring diversity or viewing cultural diversity as a burden, or even a barrier, it can be approached as integral to a successful learning process for parents. The following discussion provides a description of some of the principles that are considered important when group leaders are working with multicultural parent groups.

Principle 1: Respecting and affirming cultural differences

Education and orientation about being in groups. Many parents will have had little exposure to a parenting group before and will come to the first session with a variety of differing expectations for the group. Some parents may be expecting the traditional hierarchical teaching approach whereby the "professional" tells parents what to do in a didactic fashion and parents listen and remain passive. They may come from a culture where parents do not ask questions of professionals who are viewed as authority figures and respected as such. In their culture they may not openly express disagreement with professionals, and they may believe that family matters are private and not to be shared outside the family. This will affect their willingness to share and participate in a group program. Other families may mistrust mental health programs or feel that participating in them is stigmatizing, or looked down upon by their community. On the other hand, some parents may come from a culture that tends to be more open and expressive and such parents may challenge group leaders to provide rationale and evidence for the approaches recommended. Nevertheless, none of the parents will know what to expect when they participate in their first group.

Therefore, the group leader will start the program by providing an orientation to the IY program content and topic schedule (using the parenting pyramid) and give parents a chance to ask questions to determine if the program will address their needs. Group leaders will also explain how and what parents will learn from the program. Group leaders will encourage parents to ask questions and share ideas with each other, to problem-solve together as they watch video vignettes, and to ask them questions. The group leader explains the value of parents supporting and learning from each other. The leader also clarifies her own role as supportive "coach" and facilitator of discussions and how s/he will share her knowledge regarding effective management principles.

Group determining its own rules. Next, the group rules are negotiated and agreed upon within the parent group concerning group confidentiality, right not to speak or to pass on a question, acceptance of all ideas and values, respect for others, and the opportunity for parents to ask any question that they want. Group leaders carefully collaborate with each group about the particular group rules they want to adopt. This explanation by the leader of the group training process, the leader's role, and delineation of the rules is important because it helps the parents who are reluctant to share to feel safe in the group and to take their time developing trust with other members. Indeed, there is evidence that non-Caucasian families rate programs that are short- term, somewhat structured, goal directed and focused on the presenting problem and the future as more highly acceptable than long-term, unstructured, talk approaches focused on past experiences (27). There is also evidence that programs which are offered in nonstigmatizing locations, such as schools, are more likely to attract multicultural groups than programs offered in mental health clinics (28). Moreover, there is some suggestion that for cultures that emphasize cooperation and value the group above the individual, group approaches may be particularly suitable (29,30).

Parents determining their own goals. Group leaders who have a multicultural perspective will be acknowledging, respecting, and affirming of cultural differences. This is accomplished through a

collaborative process whereby group leaders learn about parents, their culture, values, childrearing traditions, attitudes, and goals while at the same time parents also learn from group leaders about effective behavior management and principles of child development. One of the first ways group leaders start this collaboration with parents is by asking them what their goals are for their children and themselves. In the first session, parents share what they would like to accomplish in the parenting program. This information helps group leaders to understand family values and what role children play in their family. For example, do parents want their children to have a strong sense of respect and allegiance for their family, elders, community and culture? Do they encourage their children to be obedient and dependent? Or, do they want their children to be competitive and individualistic, even encourage them to challenge authority? Is it important that their children do well in school and that they maintain their native language? How much value is placed on children being physically and verbally emotionally expressive? How important is nonverbal communication or open expression of feelings? How does socioeconomic disadvantage affect their ability to have time with their family? How is the extended family, such as grandmother involved in child rearing and discipline decisions?

Certainly, parents' expectations and knowledge regarding children's development and behavior vary across cultures. Key attributes such as dependence, obedience, respect for authority, acquisition and expression of language, meaning of eye contact, self-control and social responsibility, and competitive or cooperative behaviors acquire different meanings in different cultures—and in different families. However, it is also important to be careful not to make assumptions about entire cultures as if each culture produces a homogeneous set of values. Indeed, within each culture families come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences which will affect their goals. By asking parents to share their goals in the first session, group leaders can begin to get a sense about what is important for individual families. Once this is understood then group leaders can help them learn to use the parenting principles taught in the program to achieve their goals. In this way, generic content can be individualized to fit with specific experiences and backgrounds for group members, without the need for different curricula for different family backgrounds. Examples of parent goals:

- To decrease my child's disobedient behavior with authority figures
- To increase my child's respect for me
- To know how to help my child with homework
- To know how to talk to my child's teacher
- To learn how to encourage my child's social skills
- To meet other parents and make new friends
- To help my child be more respectful of his culture
- To manage my anger and hitting
- To know how to handle my child's angry outbursts
- To help my child be less fearful and separate from me more easily
- For my partner and I to be more consistent regarding parenting

Making culture visible and asking about cultural experiences. In addition to asking questions about parents' goals in the first session, throughout all the sessions group leaders encourage parents to share their family and cultural traditions and experiences being parented as children. This approach shows respect for different cultures and parenting styles, and the sharing amongst the parents makes culture visible. Rather than culture being ignored and perhaps being perceived by parents as a source of shame or embarrassment, this interest on the part of group leaders will make sure it is a source of pride and empowerment.

Developing culturally relevant metaphors. The group leader can be more effective by using culturally relevant images and metaphors to explain developmental theories and concepts. Ideally these metaphors should be developed out of the themes that are unique to a particular community or cultural group and come from the parents themselves. For example the Incredible Years program provides an analogy called the bank account analogy. This analogy suggests to parents that they think of praising and playing with their children like building up their bank

account with them. They must keep building their account by putting something in the bank all the time—so that they have something to draw on in the future when they might need to discipline. The point is made that discipline will not work unless there is a bank account of positive resources to draw from. One group leader who was working exclusively with American Indian tribes worked with the parents to develop an analogy that had more meaning for this population. Instead of a bank account she talked to the parents about the importance of planting the seeds of respect in their children. The idea was that these seeds would be watered daily with play, praise, and rewards so that they would grow. Then the analogy goes on to explain that once the tree has grown and is doing well, then it is important to trim and prune the tree. Watering alone is not sufficient for optimal development. The leader explains that pruning is the limit setting strategies like ignoring undesirable behavior, removing privileges, and time-out. However, the leader cautions parents they want to be careful and not to do too much pruning or the tree will be whittled down to nothing (Dionne, personal communication, Spirit Project, November 2007).

Another analogy that the IY program uses to describe the program components is the parenting pyramid. This is similar to the food pyramid where optimal physical growth comes from eating larger quantities at the bottom of the pyramid (grains and vegetables) and less from the top (fats and sweets). The base of the parenting pyramid shows the need to provide children with large doses of daily play, encouragement, joy, praise, and communication to encourage their social and emotional growth. The top of the parenting pyramid shows that discipline should come in much smaller quantities. A different analogy works more effectively for Native Americans. In this case the Incredible Years program is depicted as a Medicine Shield. The Medicine shield is something the parents can use to protect their children. The outer circles hold the inner circles in place. Group leaders talk about how often people rush to the inner circles before strengthening the outer circles. If this happens, the inner circles will lose some of their medicine and become less effective. The outer circle is depicted as the parent-child relationship and the spirit of respect being strong in that relationship. In this circle there is play and spending time together. The next circle consists of honoring ceremonies and uses praise, rewards, and other incentives or celebrations to build good behavior. When these circles are strong then the relationship is peaceful between the parent and child and there is less need to use medicines from the inner circles. Still the first two circles are not enough. The center circles reflect limit setting designed to teach self-discipline.

Recently, when I was doing a consultation in New Zealand we were talking about the Maori indigenous people. It was apparent that the bank account or pyramid analogies did not have as much meaning for them. We came up with the Maori basket of wisdom called a "kete." This basket traditionally was used for cooking—it would be filled with food and then lowered into hot mineral pools or a deep fire pit for cooking. There have been a lot of spiritual connections associated with the kete emanating from legends dating back to the first canoes arriving in New Zealand. There were four baskets of knowledge or wisdom, one spiritual wisdom, one with tikanga (customs and rituals of Maori way of doing things), and the other two were knowledge of ancestors and healing knowledge. We developed a metaphor where the parenting program was framed as filling their baskets with gifts of wisdom. When the parents completed the program their certificates were rolled up in small ketes. Both the Medicine Shield and the Basket of Wisdom analogies are important because they connect to the spirituality and culture of the family and help them see a connection between what they are learning and their cultural beliefs.

Provide modeling that represents diverse cultures

"Surface structural cultural modifications" as defined by (31) include such things as cultural match between therapist and parents and translating videotape material and written materials in the relevant languages to represent the cultures of the families in the parent groups. Indeed, the importance of having group leaders who represent the culture of the parents they are working with cannot be underestimated and there is a need to recruit parent group leaders who represent a variety of different cultural backgrounds. They can be powerful role models for the families they represent. However, this does not mean that only group leaders from the same

cultural background can work with families from those cultures. Moreover, this is impractical since many parent groups are so culturally heterogeneous that it is not possible to have a group leader who represents every cultural group. What is required, however, is parent group leaders who are understanding, caring, and who affirm and respect each parent's culture.

Another way the Incredible Years program can bring in more cultural diversity and sensitivity is by showing parents more video vignettes representing a variety of different cultures. Because group leaders have choices in the vignettes they can select from a particular DVD program component, they can choose vignettes representing the cultures of the parents participating in a particular group. Recently, the school age and preschool basic parenting programs were completely updated and revised to provide more choice of videotape vignette examples including Vietnamese, Chinese, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Latino, African American, Japanese, and Caucasian parents demonstrating each of the particular parenting skills. Sometimes the parents on the tapes speak in their own languages (with subtitles) and sometimes in English. Families are depicted during mealtimes, getting children ready for bed or getting them dressed for school in the morning, brushing teeth, doing homework, monitoring after school routines, reading with children, playing games, and going to the grocery store together. These vignettes can be selected by group leaders to provide more diverse models and examples of ways to interact successfully with children to promote their optimal social, emotional, and academic competence. The effect of showing culturally diverse models is that parents come to recognize the universality of parenting principles such as the importance of nurturing, encouragement, consistent rules, balanced discipline, and supervision for optimal development in children, regardless of their culture.

Give Parents the Message That Linguistic Diversity is a Resource. There are multiple ways that group leaders can give parents the message that linguistic diversity is a valued resource. Here are some suggestions for group leaders:

- Start by learning to say parents' names correctly rather than changing them.
- Check in with parents and interpreters to see if they understand the meaning of words such as ignoring, praising and coaching.
- Help parents practice using some of the newly learned coaching skills in their own language. This can be done by turning down the volume on the video and asking parents to practice descriptive commenting, emotion coaching, or praising in their own languages.
- Help parents understand that the play homework can be just as effective in their own languages and that it will not interfere in their children's learning; in fact, using native language in the home is not only an important means of maintaining culture and emotional attachment to family values, but has been proven crucial in children's development of literacy and preparation for school life.
- Avoid correcting parents' English.
- Ask parents to teach group leaders a few words or phrases from their own language; write them up on the flip chart; parents will be delighted that group leaders are showing a real interest in their language.
- Ask interpreters to translate notes from brainstorms and benefits exercises into their own language.
- Translate homework handouts and key points into parents' languages.

Principle 2: Exploring, understanding and addressing possible cultural barriers to intervention content. Key to enhancing parent engagement

Even more important than surface level cultural adaptations are the "deeper structural" principles that guide the delivery of the program and ensure cultural sensitivity and relevance (31). Such principles include a group leader's cultural consciousness such his or her awareness of cultural history or amount of acculturation stress (e.g., first generation immigrant) experienced by families. Cultural consciousness also includes the group leader's sensitivity to cultural differences in child rearing, because there is wide variation in parenting practices and family values

across cultural groups. This ability of the group leader to be collaborative and culturally responsive in the delivery of the program will make all the difference in terms of the parents' receptivity to new ideas and will promote greater program engagement and attendance. There are many possible cultural barriers to parents' understanding the content of what is presented in the parenting program. Noted below are a few examples of how we reframe the program content to adjust for cultural and attitudinal barriers and help parents see how a particular approach is potentially relevant for achieving their goals.

Barriers to child-directed play

Child-directed play is the first concept discussed, and it seems foreign to many parents. In fact, parents from most minority groups frequently believe just the opposite, that their children need to be taught to be "parent directed," that is, to be obedient and respectful of them. They may believe that the way to achieve this obedience and respect from their children is by being very critical or physically punitive when their children are disobedient or disrespectful. Such parents will not respond positively to efforts on the part of group leaders to convince them that child-directed play encourages independence, creativity, self-confidence, or self-esteem. In fact, if they hold values emphasizing parental control and child obedience or respect, they will respond negatively to their child's bid for autonomy. Instead, group leaders will explore these feelings and attitudes and acknowledge them as important. They will remember the parents' goals for their children and show them how child-directed approaches can help them achieve their goals. For example group leaders will help them learn about the "modeling principle"—that is, what parents model with their children is what their children learn from them. Over time, leaders will help them understand that if they are too controlling or punitive, their children will become more disrespectful, however if they model respect, joy and some compliance to their children's ideas, their children will become more respectful of them, more cooperative and more fun to interact with. I have found that one of the most powerful motivators for parents taking the time to engage in daily child-directed play is realizing that when they do this they are helping their children become attached to them and their family values. Within immigrant families, researchers have noted the adjustment difficulties as children acculturate more rapidly than their parents, resulting in attitudinal clashes, estrangement, and low family cohesion (32). Once parents understand how this positive play time together can promote strong family and cultural bonds, help their children retain their native language skills, and encourage their children's academic learning, they are committed participants to this approach.

One of the barriers to play is that many parents themselves were not played with as children by their parents and consequently are uncomfortable and uncertain about how to play. If this is the case, group leaders can set up fun play practice times for parents and children doing an art activity or playing with building blocks. During this practice the leaders coach and encourage parents for their efforts. As parents experience the joy and see their children's happy responses this often provides the motivation for them to continue playing. Another activity is to ask parents to draw a favorite place of theirs when they were a child and include the activities they used to engage in there. Many parents end up drawing a stream, or tree, or small room and talk about how they used to "invent" their own entertainment as children. Group leaders help them realize this was imaginary play and prompt them to think about what it would have been like if their parents had participated. Parents taking the perspective of their children recognize that this would have been a positive relationship building time.

Barriers to praise

A number of researchers have found substantial resistance to using praise for child compliance to parental instructions in a variety of cultural groups including African American families (33) and Chinese families (34). Due to elements of shame culture, Chinese parents have found it difficult to praise because of the worry that if they praise, their children will feel they have done enough and will stop trying to do better. Parents from some cultures worry that if they praise their children, they will spoil them and their children won't work unless they get praise or a reward. Again group leaders explore these attitudinal barriers and frame the strategies and goals in a culturally congruent manner. Sometimes group leaders will ask parents to try an experiment to see

what happens when they praise a particular behavior for a week. Once parents actually experience the change in their child's positive behavior, they no longer need convincing.

Barriers to ignoring

Many parents (from all cultures) find it difficult to ignore negative behavior especially in the presence of others. They are embarrassed by their children's inappropriate behavior and believe it is disrespectful to them. This disobedience can evoke stricter parental control and reliance on physical discipline. Parents find it difficult to understand why ignoring misbehavior can actually decrease a behavior rather than encourage it. As leaders help them understand how the attention principle works they begin to see how their attention may be actually contributing to their children's misbehavior rather than decreasing it. They eventually learn how to use their attention contingently to encourage behaviors they want to see more of and to reduce the behaviors they want to see less of.

Understanding cultural, socioeconomic and other barriers

Every Incredible Years group session protocol builds in methods to address attitudinal and cultural barriers to engagement. For example, for each new core component to be taught, the leader brainstorms possible benefits and barriers to using a particular parenting strategy. This exercise reveals reasons why parents might be resistant to using a particular parenting approach. For example, if parents think child-directed play will result in disrespectful or selfish children, then it is important for the leader to be aware of this so s/he can provide an explanation for how play can teach children to respect their parents. Often through the discussion of barriers, it is revealed that parents find a strategy difficult not necessarily because they do not understand its rationale or its importance but because their life is too stressful to be able to do it. Their priorities may be concerned with holding down two jobs to make ends meet, or working out how they will have enough money for their family's next meal. These basic life needs may overwhelm the goal of positive parenting or finding time to play with their children. In fact, this activity may seem very low on the list of their priorities. In economically disadvantaged families, often priorities are determined by meeting the most immediate basic need—such as getting food on the table—rather than thinking about long-term goals for their children and the implications for their relationship with their children. Parent group leaders must acknowledge these real and immediate life stressors and problem solve creative ways that parents can practice some of the new skills within their hectic life schedules. For instance, group leaders may help parents understand how they can do social coaching during bath times or meal times, or incorporate some ideas when they pick their children up from school or have some time off. Group leaders will make adjustments in home activities for parents to reflect these contextual factors that are disrupting their parenting skills.

In particular, the contextual stress associated with the challenges inherent in immigration, acculturation, and minority status need to be appreciated by group leaders. Acculturation stress stems from problems including communication barriers, unfamiliar cultural norms, lack of extended family support, societal discrimination and change in social status, especially if their foreign training and education is devalued. Because stress disrupts parenting, these strains may lead to harsher, more controlling or inconsistent parenting responses as well as difficulty for parents knowing how to advocate for their children's needs, particularly in schools. In a survey of 145 Chinese immigrant families, (Lau, personal communication, October 5, 2007) cultural values were examined related to firm parental control, contextual stressors related to acculturation, and children's problems in school. Lau's findings indicated children's school problems were associated with increased risk of physical discipline. Because in traditional Chinese culture, schooling is construed as the primary responsibility of parents, a child's success in school is perceived as an indicator of parental effectiveness defined as having strong values about the importance of parental control.

Even when we provide the program in the parents' own language and have parent handouts translated, another barrier exists for parents who are illiterate. For parents who have had little schooling or have had negative school experiences, they may find it difficult to relate to the program if it seems too

"school like". They may feel embarrassed by their inability to read the chapters and a sense of failure if they do not do the homework. It is helpful to change the language of the group and talk about home practice rather than homework and to ask parents to let you know the way they learn best –either by practice, or viewing videotapes, or discussion or reading.

Helping parents think about the possible benefits of a parenting strategy

Before introducing any new parenting strategy such as praise or play or incentives or limit setting, the group leaders brainstorm with parents about what they think are the possible benefits of a particular parenting strategy. These benefits are listed on a flip chart to refer to later. During this discussion, leaders ask questions about whether that particular skill (e.g., praise or ignoring) was part of their child rearing experience or culture. This is a helpful exercise because it reveals parents' values and prior understanding about the particular strategy before starting to present this approach. Once the leader understands whether this is a brand new concept or something parents are very familiar with then s/he knows how much emphasis to give this concept and how to direct the discussions and questions.

Respond flexibly and lengthen duration of program

For many parents, these basic management principles are completely unfamiliar, foreign and, at first, difficult to grasp. This process of group leaders exploring barriers and helping parents understand the potential benefits and how the parent management principles relate to their personal goals means it takes more time for leaders to present the program and for parents to understand, practice, and experience the results. Therefore, group leaders need to expand more sessions on some topics, show more video examples than in the standard protocol, and provide many more opportunities for parents to practice and to receive feedback. In a recent focus group of a pilot study (35) of a Chinese translated version of Incredible Years Parent Program with monolingual first generation Chinese families, group leaders reported, "monolingual first generation parents need more guidance, more support and hands-on practice". In one group leader's words, "it's seems like we do not have sufficient time to kind of walk them through the practice enough on those particular skills to be reinforced because we have to move on to the next topic".

Do More Practice and Less Talking. Particularly for non-English speaking families, but also for families who find this material foreign, group leaders minimize the amount of talking, show more vignettes and engage in a great deal of practice. Whenever possible, after a vignette has been shown and discussed, leaders plan a short practice in different languages to model the new skill. Leaders use toys that families are used to and will have in their own homes, and show how the interaction is the same as the vignette regardless of whether it is Legos, or pots and pans, or sand and water, or empty cereal boxes that are the objects of play. Sometimes these videotape vignettes may be re-enacted by interpreters so that the parents have the opportunity to see the interactions modeled in their own language. Another strategy is to replay the videotape vignette with the volume turned off, and ask the parents to practice the praise, descriptive commenting, or emotion coaching in their own languages. Small break-out groups of 2 or 3 parents help every parent to get practice with the new skill and to receive positive feedback from the group leader and interpreters. When parents are practicing, the interpreters help by modeling the behavior and then by coaching and praising the efforts the parents make to try out the new ideas.

Principle 3: Helping parents apply strategies to their goals

Parents are asked to make lists of child behaviors they want to see less of and behaviors they want to see more of. Group leaders help parents to understand how particular strategies can be used to achieve these goals. Role plays or practices are set up based on the child behaviors that parents have selected. At first some parents might find these practices intimidating, but after a few tries, most parents actually ask to do more of this because they realize how much it helps them learn. Parents can make choices about which strategies they are going to use for particular behaviors. Allowing parents flexibility in choosing targets of change in their own behavior and in their

children's behavior is felt to decrease parental resistance to foreign concepts and increase their acceptance.

Learning about effective discipline

Child rearing practices of some cultures are characterized by both indulgent affection and harsh punishment (36). Cultures vary in their styles of discipline, which may be short-term or long- term and may involve physical punishment, embarrassment or shame, withdrawal of love, or consequences such as loss of recreational activity or TV time. Discussion of physical punishment is a highly charged issue. Many parents have used spanking and hitting as their primary form of punishment. Research has shown that low-income and ethnic minority parents tend to find spanking a more acceptable form of discipline than timeout compared to middle-income and European-American parents (37). There is some suggestion that strong discipline, including physical punishment is felt to be important by parents because it will help their children learn to follow the rules and avoid confrontation with possible hostile authorities (38). Therefore, confronting parents with the statement that spanking is not acceptable may cause them to be defensive or combative or to hide the fact they spank. Instead, a culturally responsive delivery of the discipline concepts involves a respectful exploration of parents' goals for discipline including what parents see as the benefits and barriers of spanking compared with other discipline approaches. Such a collaborative approach is a useful way to help parents work through their values and for group leaders to address any misconceptions. For example, parents may think that in order for discipline to work it must involve their children experiencing some physical pain and expressing remorse. Consequently they may think a strategy such as time-out is too lenient, likely to result in "spoiled" children, and not punishing enough to make children realize the seriousness of their misbehavior, especially if the child does not cry or express sorrow. Group leaders remind parents of the modeling and attention learning principles and help them gain insight into how they may be inadvertently contributing to more aggression in their children rather than less if they are overly harsh. Group leaders help parents think through their long term goals for their children and the kind relationship they want with them versus their short term goals. It is important that parents understand that the group leader agrees with their goal to have control over their children's behavior, or for their children not to challenge authority and will work with them to successfully achieve this goal. Because discipline is not a topic that is discussed until the 8th or 9th session, already parents and group leaders will have established some trust in their relationship and by this time parents will also have worked hard to build up a positive relationship with their child and will have experienced the benefits of this approach. They are likely to be more open to trying a different approach to discipline, such as logical consequences and loss of privileges, especially if they understand how it will help them accomplish their goal.

Another topic that might be discussed is that despite the cultural acceptability of physical discipline, parents sometimes worry about using this strategy because they know that in some cases it might result in a Child Protective Services referral. Without an alternative to physical punishment, they feel powerless in knowing how to manage misbehavior. Open discussion about this and help with learning new and successful nonphysical discipline approaches can give them the power and control that is important to them in their relationship with their children. However, the group leader must be able to assess when the cultural norm of physical punishment becomes abusive and help parents find alternative and effective approaches.

Helping parents think about long-term goals

Group leaders help parents think about the long-term goals as well as the short-term goals for themselves and their children. For highly stressed and socio economic disadvantaged families it can be hard to think beyond the immediate daily needs at times; however, when group leaders help them understand that the advantages of some parenting approaches are for enhancing the future possibilities for their children—in terms of school success or strong attachment to their family and culture or ability to solve future problems by problem solving strategies—this can help parents try something new.

Principle 4: Work collaboratively with interpreters

Selecting interpreters. Partnering with carefully selected interpreters who are well-respected leaders from the same communities and cultural backgrounds as parents can provide another avenue of understanding between the group leaders and the families who do not speak the same language as the leaders. By collaborating closely with these interpreters, group leaders have further opportunities to learn more about a particular culture, values, and parenting beliefs. In preparation for leading groups, group leaders and interpreters can have thoughtful and sensitive discussions for how to translate particular parenting strategies across cultures, so that parents understand how the concepts are relevant for achieving their goals for their children. See focus group interview with interpreters (39).

Training interpreters

Before working with the parent groups, interpreters themselves need comprehensive training to understand the rationale, child development principles, and social learning theories underlying the parenting socialization concepts that underpin the Incredible Years program. Initially, interpreters themselves may find the parenting concepts to be foreign from their own experiences and may be unsure of the translations for particular concepts and the value of the skills 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, in a training workshop I was giving for interpreters from some East African countries, we got stuck on the definition of the word "praise". It was not until I understood that praise was the word reserved for praising God that I was able to define another word (encouragement) for use in describing the importance of parents giving positive feedback to children. In order to help interpreters understand the behavior management concepts underpinning the program, they are encouraged to participate "as a parent" in a parent group first and then practice the strategies they have learned with their own children or with children in a preschool setting. 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.

Using interpreters as coaches

This practical experience in the parent group as a participant and experience practicing with children will make it easier for interpreters to model and coach the parents and will give them examples to bring into their discussions with parents. In many ways, the interpreters also act as coaches for parents providing encouragement, support, and feedback to parents as needed. It is important that interpreters be trained in the collaborative methods of working with parents and the principles of building a positive relationship with them. Helping interpreters understand how to praise parents' efforts and develop a supportive and understanding relationship with them will be key to their success at coaching parents during the group practices as well as their effectiveness at making the weekly calls home. A note of caution is if the interpreter lives in the same community as the parents it will be important to review the rules of confidentiality and for interpreters to reassure parents they will not divulge parents personal issues outside the group.

Principle 5: Promoting a supportive group and empowering parents

Building informal and sustainable support networks. Cooperative and collaborative learning in groups results in cross cultural understanding and eventual friendships. This also leads to parents developing support systems within their schools and communities. Through the group discussions, parents not only learn about each other's cultural differences, but also discover that they have many issues in common. It can be very empowering for parents to realize that they are not alone in their worries about how to approach a teacher about their child's problem, or unsure how to help with homework, or unable to read the school newsletters. These group discussions will normalize their experiences and empower them to find some ways to approach the problem and will decrease their sense of isolation.

Another way in which group support and positive relationships are nurtured is by pairing up parent buddies in the group who make phone calls each week to share the experiences they have had using some of the strategies they have been learning. Sometimes these buddies may be paired up by language groups. These buddy calls are important in terms of building the support systems within the group and helping parents to experience the value of parental support.

Often ignored is the role of extended family and support systems in maintaining nurturing parenting. In fact, in some cultures child rearing is often done by extended family members and may be the primary disciplinarians (40). Therefore, cooperation between family members is important. In our program, partners and family members involved in the children's child rearing are invited to the parent groups. Studies have shown that the presence of a partner or grandparents at parent groups has been found to increase support for married as well as single parents, to result in more lasting effects for children's behavior over time (41) and to play an important role in preventing abuse (42).

Empowering parents' insights and reframing their understanding of their child's developmental needs

When discussing the video vignettes, the group leaders ask open-ended questions and highlight key points or principles that are discovered by the parents. For example, after showing a vignette a group leader might ask, "What do you think the child learns from this parent's approach?" If a parent observes on the videotape vignette that the parent's controlling style seemed to stifle the child's concentration or persistence with his homework, then the parent would be given credit for the principle. The leader would summarize, "Sophie's principle is that encouragement rather than excessive control leads children to be more motivated to do their homework and stick with a difficult task." This principle is written down on a flip chart next to the parent's name. The interpreters can translate these on paper for parents who do not speak English. Each week a typed list of the parents' principles is given out to the parents. For parents who do not read, the interpreters can refer to the list each week to verbally review the prior week's key principles, using the parent's name for the principle as the group leader does. The purpose of this approach is to empower parents' insights and give them ownership of the principles they discover. Moreover, this approach helps parents with some cognitive restructuring by reframing their role as parents to include more than controlling misbehavior with discipline. Through out the discussions, leaders help parents to understand children's developmental tasks and to see their child's point of view. They reframe the parents' negative cognitions triggered by children's misbehavior, which may lead to harsh responses. For example, a child's bid for autonomy or independence may be explained as a key skill for children's eventual success in school, something that could be encouraged. Or, a young child's difficulty sustaining his attention or being cooperative can be explained as part of what is developmentally normal for the child's age, requiring not excessive discipline from parents, but instead, social and persistence coaching so that they can help their children learn to be more focused or more cooperative with others.

Reviewing weekly session evaluations and making adjustments according to learning styles and parents' personal goals

Culturally relevant practice involves not only collaborative planning with parents to meet their goals but also regular program evaluations to ask parents how they are doing achieving their goals and whether they are experiencing success. After every weekly group session parents complete a session evaluation which asks them to rate their satisfaction with program content, methods, group leadership skills, relevance of video tape vignettes, and quality of group discussions. Group leaders use these evaluations to explore with parents their experiences with the learning process—for example, do parents want to view more or fewer vignettes, engage in more discussion or practices, or would they prefer audio CDs of the book rather than written materials? Do they feel the program is being rushed or not long enough? How difficult are they finding the home activities or buddy calls? Group leaders acknowledge that each parent's learning style is different and will be respected. Asking for feedback on the methods that are working well for them (or less well) periodically can help group leaders to make adjustments so that the methods and processes work for everyone. This

respect on the part of the group leader for different learning styles is important modeling for the parents and builds group tolerance for accepting differences in learning styles—an approach we hope they will also use with their own children.

Part of the parent program involves asking parents to do some home activities that may include reading a chapter from the IY parent book, or recording their observations of their play interactions, or determining their house rules and routines. Because some of these assignments require reading or writing ability they may be difficult for some parents. Group leaders can offer the option of listening to the chapters on CD rather than reading them and can tailor the other activities so that they are meaningful to every parent. One of the ways that this individual adjustment is done is by asking parents to complete a self-monitoring checklist each week. On this checklist parents determine their own goals for their home activities for that week—be it the reading, observations, or playtime with their children. Thus, parents are making choices regarding what learning approach they believe is most useful and most realistic for them. In the subsequent session, group leaders check to see if they have achieved their personal goals and if not, explore the barriers to achieving them. This process is respectful to different learning styles and acknowledges parents' self-determination regarding what is the best learning method for them.

Empowering parents and helping children develop a healthy ethnic identity

Sometimes parents fail to become involved with schools in the traditional ways such as attending parent orientation nights, meeting with teachers, or volunteering in classrooms, or joining parent organizations, or knowing how to help their child with homework. Language and possible reading barriers, difficult work schedules, multiple jobs, beliefs that parents should not question teachers regarding school matters, prior bad experiences with schools, lack of child care, and lack of understanding how to participate in classrooms or children's homework are all possible barriers to parents' school involvement. Being respectful of cultural diversity means that leaders not only understand the barriers families face but also can empower parents by expanding the meaning of parent involvement to include other ways they can support their children. For example, helping parents understand that they are involved with their children when they encourage their children to stay in school, or when they express their high expectations for their children to succeed, or when they provide consistent open and ongoing communication with their children, and when they provide loving support, pride in their culture and family traditions. Indeed research has shown that higher student grade point averages correlates with maintenance of traditional values, ethnic pride, and close social and cultural ties with members of the same ethnic group (43). Parents are encouraged to promote their children's pride in their cultural background by continuing their oral history, by telling them stories about their childhoods and what it was like for them growing up.

Advocating for and with parents

Finally, in addition to empowering parents by helping them realize the essential role they play in their children's lives, group leaders can also advocate for parents' needs as well as help parents advocate for themselves. For example, a group leader can advocate for schools to provide interpreters for parents for school orientation nights or teacher meetings. They can recommend newsletters that go home be translated in the language of the parent. They can invite teachers to parent groups to explain classroom curriculum or ways parents can help their children at home to be successful at school. Together with parents, parent group leaders can communicate with teachers about particular concerns they face in regard to assisting their children with their academic needs.

Conclusions

It is an immensely rewarding opportunity to bring information about effective child management parenting practices and child development principles to parents who may not have had a chance to learn this in their culture or from family background experiences. Leaders who have a multicultural perspective will be caring and collaborative in their approach, take time to listen and understand parents, will try to make the material relevant for parents' goals and family circumstances, will recognize the

importance of native language, family traditions, and rituals, and will acknowledge and call on parents to share their cultural knowledge during discussions. Collaborating with parents in this way has the effect of giving back dignity, respect, and self-control to parents who may be feeling low self-confidence, stress, and uncertainty about the appropriateness of a parenting program for their family and culture. This collaborative model has the multiple advantages of reducing attrition rates, increasing motivation and commitment, and reducing resistance. Working together in this collaborative way will not only enhance parents confidence and build family support systems, but will also strengthen communities by highlighting parents' common goals for their children that transcend culture thereby providing mutual understanding.

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Submitted: January 03, 2008.
Revised: January 25, 2008.
Accepted: January 27, 2008.