

Benefits of Using the Incredible Years® Home Coaching Parent Programs: Assuring Success

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Introduction

There is widespread evidence that evidence-based parent interventions treat a range of child mental health and behavioral problems (Kazdin & Weisz, 2010). Moreover, group-based parent interventions frequently rank high on lists of evidence-based practices (Furlong et al., 2012) with studies demonstrating that well-designed group-based models are often at least as effective as the best alternative one-on-one approaches.

There are several possible reasons for the greater effectiveness and acceptability of group-based interventions. Groups allow parents to learn from each other's experiences and to realize they are not alone in their parenting frustrations and difficulties. In addition to benefitting from hearing about parents who are struggling with similar child behaviors, parents will also be exposed to discussions and problem solving about behavioral issues that their child is not yet experiencing. This prepares parents for coping with new problems that may arise in the future. In these groups, parents often form strong supportive networks that are continued after the parenting program has ended.

For many parents, receiving feedback and ideas from other parents is more motivating and acceptable than similar feedback given by a therapist. The

supportive group dynamics often increases parents' motivation to try new approaches. Some studies have shown that some parents find group-based approaches more acceptable and less stigmatizing than one-on-one office-based therapy (50% vs. 32% (Cunningham, Bremner, & Boyle, 1995). These authors reported that parents for whom English was a second language had an even greater aversion to attending office-based therapy (19% willing vs. 63% who agreed to attend a group program).

Although group-based services have a number of advantages, including cost-effectiveness and acceptability to parents, there are unique barriers that can inhibit their wider dissemination. Agencies may have too few clients to fill a group, parents may have to wait too long before the next group starts, or there is no financial mechanism or incentive for billing group work. This can be especially true for small communities or private practitioners. Moreover, some parents are not able or motivated to access parenting groups either because of work schedule conflicts, travel distance barriers, illness, lack of babysitting support, or anxiety and fear about group disclosure and lack of family privacy. Factors predicting poor treatment outcome or drop out from any evidence-based programs (group or individual) include child factors (e.g., ADHD, high levels of externalizing problems); parent factors (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, marital discord; and family demographics (e.g., single parent, poverty, poor education) (Bagner & Graziano, 2012). This suggests that the format and delivery of evidence-based interventions may strongly influence the number of people who could be served by an intervention. This also suggests that providing different options for service delivery is necessary, especially providing extra support for more vulnerable families. This is important because the societal impact of an intervention is determined not only by its effectiveness but also by its reach, ease of adoption, implementation, and ability to sustain long term outcomes.

This article describes a home coaching model for delivering the Incredible Years Baby, Toddler, Preschool and School Age Parenting programs. Multiple randomized control group studies utilizing the Incredible Years group-based model over the past 3 decades have shown that parents make significant changes in their parenting and their children, in turn, show reductions in behavior problems and increases in their social, emotional and school readiness outcomes (Menting, Orobio de Castro, & Matthys, 2013; Webster-Stratton, 2016). It is believed that adapting this evidence-based program to a home-based format utilizing many of the same group-based principles will overcome some of the logistical and psychological barriers to accessing services.

Incredible Years Home Coaching Programs

The Incredible Years Home Coaching program is designed to support children and families in several ways. It can be offered as an additional support to parents attending Incredible Years parenting groups, because it can be used to make-up sessions with parents who miss a group session, or need supplemental coaching

with their children. Additionally IY home coaching can be used for parents and caregivers who are unable to attend an Incredible Years parenting group due to depression, schedule conflicts, or in cases where a parent group is not scheduled to start immediately. The Home Coaching program is a good way to offer immediate individual services to a family in situations where it is not acceptable to delay treatment (for example, child welfare involved family) or if parents have a family circumstance or mental illness that prevents them from attending group treatment. Ideally, some families who receive the Home Coaching sessions will eventually transition to an IY group so that they receive the benefit of the group support. Home coaching of the IY Baby, Toddler, Preschool or School Age programs are delivered by “coaches” who have received authorized group-based basic training in IY concepts and principles plus additional home IY coach training. During the home visits, coaches help parents identify their goals and barriers. As in the group model, vignettes are selected to show to parents based on their child’s developmental level, family circumstances, and presenting child-problems. . Coaches set up targeted parenting practice strategies between parents and their children and provide modeling, feedback, praise, prompts and support. If parents are receiving home coaching as a supplement to the parent group, then the home coaches coordinate the home coaching sessions to fit with what the parent is learning, and struggling with, in the group setting.

The Incredible Years Home Coaching program has been implemented in a number of countries including the United States, England, Ireland, New Zealand and Wales. A new study evaluating the IY group approach alone compared with the IY group approach PLUS home parent support for higher risk families has suggested few differences immediate post treatment but at 1-year follow-up home coaching produced more sustained outcomes on all measures (Lees & Fergusson, 2015)(Diane Lees 2016 personal communication). Attendance and retention was also greater in the intervention which included home parent support with the group-based IY parent program. Satisfaction was high in both groups.

Group IY Parent Program Plus Supplemental Home Coaching

Parents who may benefit from home coaching in addition to the group program include the following:

- parents referred or mandated to take the parenting program because of child neglect or abuse
- parents who have missed some group sessions due to illness or conflicting work schedules
- parents who are having difficulty understanding and using the recommended parenting approaches and/or fail to do the home activities
- parents with developmental delays or mental illness

If home coaching is used in addition to group sessions, it is recommended that a minimum of 4 visits are made. Visits are spaced at 3-4 week intervals following

completion of core units of the IY group program. In this way, the home coaching therapist can help summarize and solidify the parents' learning from the prior unit.

Home-based Coaching Model

For families who cannot attend groups, the entire IY program can be delivered as a home-based model. Home coaches meet with parents weekly in 60-90 minute sessions to define goals, show vignettes, and set up coached practice sessions. They explain home activity assignments and check in with parents about their progress each week. Depending on which of the four parent programs is being offered, it will take a minimum of 6 to 10 home visits to cover all the topic areas and many parents will require more sessions to complete the protocols. Home coaches are encouraged to tailor topics and sessions according to parents' level of understanding, success with practice activities and weekly assignments. A case study description of how the parent program was delivered at home over a 6 months period is described in a chapter in a book by J. Gordon (Gordon, 2015).

One randomized control group study evaluated the effects of an 11 week, 90 minute IY coach home visit intervention with American Indian communities (Dionne, Davis, Sheeber, & Madrigal, 2009). Coaches used the collaborative approach as recommended in standard group program delivery (Webster-Stratton, 2012). However, they also drew connections between the skills to be taught and traditional Indian values, traditions and beliefs. With every skill, culturally based stories were offered to create stronger connections with the skill. Fifty-five percent of the intervention families completed all the sessions and an average of 8 home sessions were completed. Results indicated significant improvement across time for intervention children and parents compared with the delayed-intervention group. Responses indicated 90% of parents saw benefits for themselves, their child, and their family, 89% reported feeling more confident in their ability to discipline their child and 93% reported improvements in their child's behavior.

Therapists delivering the home coaching program have learned key lessons and shared strategies that enhance the home coach's relationship with parents and caregivers and set up the intervention to effectively meet the family's goals. Below key areas of focus for home coaches are described, as well as strategies and skills for maximizing results for those participating in the Incredible Years home coaching program.

Preparing for Home Coaching Sessions

Before doing a home visit, the IY home coach prepares for this visit by reviewing parents' goals (see below) and selecting video vignettes to be shown and questions to be asked. The group leader basic group manual can be used by coaches to review the kinds of questions and considerations for each vignette selected. Next the IY home coach plans for the kind of practice activities that will be set up depending on whether the children will be home or not. The specific IY coach visit protocol for each topic can be reviewed in the IY home coaching guidelines manual. If the parent is also participating in the IY parent group, the coach will check with the

group leader to find out what parents' goals are and what successes or difficulties the parent has had with doing weekly home activities or practicing skills in the group sessions. The IY coach will also review what vignettes the parent has already viewed in the group and choose additional vignettes to show parents.

The IY coach prepares materials needed for this visit such as a working computer, appropriate DVD vignettes to be shown, goal statements, refrigerator handouts, home assignments and extra toys, puppets or stickers needed for practice or for keeping child engaged and reinforced for playing quietly while talking to parents.

Establishing a Collaborative Partnership

Developing a positive connection with the family will occur throughout every home visit. Coaches begin by introducing themselves and asking questions to find out about the family. They listen empathically to parents' experiences and concerns. Home coaches will be accepting, non-judgmental, and collaborative with parents. They will reinforce parents for their positive suggestions and behaviors and their attempts to try new parenting approaches. If the IY coach is also working with the parents in the parent group, then he/she may already have a relationship with the parents and know that family background. If so, less time can be spent on this initial stage, and the discussion can move quickly to the parents' goals. If the IY coach is meeting the family for the first time, then this rapport building and information getting is very important and may comprise most of the first visit.

Learning about Parents' Concerns, Culture and Goals

Coaches begin the collaborative process by asking in a respectful way open ended questions to allow the parent(s) to tell their story about their family and child. A typical first question might be, "Tell me more about what life is like with your child." Coaches ask the parents to talk about their child and follow-up with further questions to clarify. Coaches show genuine interest in what parents are telling them. They actively listen to what parents are saying. They explore any previous experiences with in-home services and ask what they think is important for them to know about their family.

The following are some questions the IY home coach can ask or keep in mind when establishing this collaborative partnership.

Coach:

What is important for me to know about being in your home?

What would you like me to know about you and your family?

What expectations do you have of me while I am in your home?

What would be the best way for us to work together during our sessions and make the most out of our time together?

What kind of environment is best for you to work/ learn in?

Would it be helpful to meet without the children here sometimes?

How should we handle phone calls or other family members during our time together?

What is the best time for us to meet when you feel safe to talk?

Child Problems

If a parent begins to talk about a problem they are concerned about, the coach asks the parent to elaborate further. In doing so, the parent is encouraged to tell about specific times the problem occurred. If a parent says, "He is always fighting with his sister or father or me" the IY coach might reply, "Tell me more about a recent time that happened."

Getting parents to focus on specific incidents gives the message that coaches are trying to solve the problem, not listen or gossip about their child. As parents tell coaches more about the incident, coaches continue to ask focused questions which get the parent to talk about the antecedents and consequences of the behavior (e.g., "What was happening when the child did that? "So how did you respond when he did that?")

It will be important to consider scheduling this first visit with the parent when the child is not at home or someone else can occupy the child. Parents may have a lot of concerns about their child and it will be important for them to be able to talk about these things without the child overhearing.

Child Strengths

As important as it is to learn about the problems a parent is facing with a child, it is also important to learn about the child's strengths. By asking about the child's strengths, home visitor coaches are emphasizing that it is important to look for the positive behaviors and aspects of the child's personality. Encourage parents to talk about what their child does well and what the child is interested in.

Developing Goals

Once coaches have a good understanding of the child and how the parents interact with him or her and the family situation, it is helpful to ask parents what specific goals they have for themselves and for their child. Helping parents and caregivers formulate their goals allows the IY coach to tailor the Incredible Years home coaching program to effectively meet the needs of families. Parents who are already participating in the IY group will have discussed these goals in the first group session. In this case, the IY coach will have a copy of these goals from the IY group leader and will review these with the parents and make sure these are still the goals parents want to work on. Parents who aren't attending the group should be given the *Parents Thinking Like Scientists* goals sheets and asked to complete it. For each goal, the IY coach helps the parents describe what they would like to happen in concrete, observable ways. For example,

Coach: *What are your child's problems that you would like help with?*

What would you like him to learn?

Parent: *He tantrums in the grocery store when he doesn't get what he wants and needs to be less disrespectful.*

Coach: *How will you know that he is respecting you more? What behaviors does he need to use to show you he is respectful?*

Parent: *He will mind me when I tell him to do something and stop tantruming!*

Coach: *What percentage of the time do you expect him to follow your directions when you ask him to do something?*

See Table 1

Some parents have difficulty framing their goals as positive child behaviors rather than as negative behaviors. They may tell stories of all their child's misbehaviors but be unable to describe the "positive opposite" behaviors they want to encourage. For example, prompting a child to talk quietly with an inside voice versus yelling at her to stop yelling. Or, helping to teach the child to wait patiently versus imposing harsh discipline for grabbing. Sometimes during these discussions the group leader discovers that the parent has unrealistic goals for the child's developmental ability and age. For example, most toddlers will grab to get what they want, or throw tantrums when prohibited from having something they want. Parents may not understand that toddlers have not yet developed the self-regulation skills or language to ask for what they want or be able to control their impulsivity and wait. The group leader may discover that some parents expect preschoolers to be 100% compliant and polite in response to their directions and not understand that it is normal and healthy for preschoolers to resist directions 1/3 of the time. This discussion with the parents' regarding their goals helps the group leader understand whether the parent needs to learn more about some normal developmental milestones for the specific age of the child.

To make goals achievable, they should be stated in a manner that is positive, (e.g., what the parent wants to see the child doing) and they need to be realistic and age appropriate. Another way to think about helping parents and caregivers set goals is to have them think of the positive opposite behavior they want to see that replaces the negative behaviors they want to decrease. It is tempting to ask parents questions such as: What have you tried in the past? or What kinds of things can you think of that might work? However, it will be important for the IY coach to wait to problem solve or give advice until the parents have defined and agreed upon their short and long term goals. Even then, the IY model is not about therapists solving the problem and telling parents what to do. Instead, once goals are well defined, the

therapist and parent will begin a collaborative process of discussing the program content and applying it to the parents' goals.

It is also important for group leaders to help parents talk about their children's strengths and interests. For example,

Coach: *What aspects of your child's personality or temperament do you most enjoy?*

Parent: *He is very bright, always exploring things and not afraid to try out anything. He is very interested in animals and has learned about many kinds of birds and can name them.*

During this goal setting process the parent or caregiver may also realize there are some parenting behaviors they would like to change as well as child behaviors. Parents are encouraged to come up with some goals for themselves. (e.g., "I want to learn to stay calm and yell less"). Parents and caregivers can identify problem areas for themselves as well as recognize their strengths and goals for their own behavior. For example:

Parent Problem Area: *When my child tantrums in grocery store I end up yelling and that makes things worse.*

Parent Strengths: *I can keep my cool and I feel like I am a good parent.*

Goal: *Be able to react calmly in the grocery store when my child throws a tantrum.*

Once goals have been identified the IY coach can tailor the program by selecting vignettes, setting up practices, and creating home assignments that are in line with parents' and caregivers' goals.

Explaining the Incredible Years Program and Home Visit Methods

Once the IY coach understands the parents' goals then s/he explains how the IY program and content is designed to address some or all of the goals the parents has listed. For parents involved in the IY parent group, this will be a brief discussion providing parents with a chance to ask any further questions about the program philosophy and how the program addresses their goals and values. For parents not involved in the group, the IY coach will show them the Parent Pyramid and will explain the Incredible Years program philosophy, topics and how each component of the program addresses each of their goals. For example,

Coach: *The first topic we will discuss today is child-directed play; this skill will help you with your goal to help your child have more language and friendship skills and will build your enjoyment of being with your child. You will be learning ways to communicate with your child that help build his language skills as well as ways your child can talk with other children.*

The IY coach will also explain the basic format structure and schedule for each 1-hour visit. The coaches will review the use of video vignettes, coached practices with their children, home activities assignments and goal setting each week.

For example:

Coach: *Each week we will review your progress from the prior week and how you are doing achieving your weekly goals. Then we will look at some video vignettes together that I have selected based on your goals. We will discuss these vignettes together in terms of what is effective and what you might do differently. We will look at the benefits of various approaches for your children and for yourself as well as the barriers to trying out these ideas. After our discussion we will set up practice exercises with me or with your child so you can practice or rehearse the specific strategy. During this play practice, I may make some suggestions or model some particular strategy for you to try out. Afterwards we will debrief what you learned and how your child responded. At the end of our time together we will set new goals for the week which will involve child play activities and chapters to read. How does that sound?*

Showing Video Vignettes

Coaches select ahead of time appropriate vignettes for the family. If the parents are also in the IY group then the IY coach will check with the group leader and chose 1 or 2 different vignettes related to the topic that were not shown in the group. Parents not in a parent group will need to see more vignettes and will probably need at least 2-3 sessions for each topic. Selection of vignettes will be chosen to reflect the cultural identity of parents, age and developmental status of the children and the number of children parents are caring for at home. Examples of questions to ask for each video vignette can be found in the basic parent leader's guide.

There are a few things for the home IY coach to keep in mind as they use video clips to trigger a discussion or practice with a parent or caregiver one-on-one.

- The IY home coach should choose vignettes that best match the families' goals, culture, and child developmental level.
- The IY home coach can link parents' specific goals to vignettes when setting them up for parents and caregivers. For example, *"In this next vignette you are going to see a mother in the grocery store with her children, since your goal is to have more calm behavior from your children in the grocery store. Think about what this mother is doing that could be contributing her children's calm behavior."*
- A particular video vignette is paused several times so the IY coach can ask the parent or caregiver if they think something the parent in the vignette did would be worth trying to achieve their goal. The coach can ask the parent

- what she would do next and practice this idea. When the vignette is finished, the IY coach can help the parent to think about how she would put that principle or idea into real behaviors with her child.
- Children need to be provided with something else to do while the coach and parent are talking and viewing vignettes. Coaches may bring some special crayons, bubbles, puzzles, or books about the child's favorite topic to occupy the child while working with the parent. Parents can also be engaged in a discussion of what would work best for their children during the session. Coaches should provide children with incentives such as stickers, hand stamps and small treats for playing quietly. Not only does this keep the child occupied but models how to provide praise and rewards for the child's positive desired behavior.

The coach's task is to help the parents and caregivers understand how the Incredible Years video vignettes show behavior management principles that will be effective and relevant for achieving the parents' goals with their children. If parents seem skeptical of the strategies being recommended, the IY coach can help them complete the second *Parents Thinking like Scientists* handout to do a benefits and barriers exercise with them. For example, they can explore the benefits of ignoring instead of yelling when tantrums are occurring compared with the barriers or obstacles that make it difficult for them to stop their typical yelling responses. They can also help parents look at short term and long term benefits for particular strategies. For example, if parents understand that in the long term staying calm and ignoring helps children learn how to stay calm, they may be able to give up the short term benefits of yelling or threatening a child.

See Table 2

Coaching parents and children during play practices



After discussing 3-4 video clips with parents or caregivers, coaches set up practices using coached role-plays between parents and their children. The IY coach sets up these practices and role-plays in a gradual, sequenced way, starting with parent practice without the child being present, then progressing to coached scaffolded play times with the child, and finally providing less support as parents become more skilled and confident. Coaches will want to be sure they have appropriate toys for these practices such as blocks, Duplos, play dough, puppets or drawing materials. Coaches should bring a basket of these unstructured play activities with them in case parents do not have them in the home. Here is the sequence of setting up practices with parents and children.

1. **Set up a role-play first between the IY coach and parent.** This can be especially helpful if parents are learning and practicing a new skill for the first time. Sometimes it can be difficult for parents to implement a new skill with their child without knowing first what it looks like and sounds like. The IY coach starts by playing the parent role while the parent takes their child's role and then they can switch roles. This allows the parent to first see the behavior modeled by the coach and to experience its effects from the point of view of their child. Then they can try out the parenting strategy themselves while being supported with positive coach feedback. When the coach is in role as "child" s/he

does not misbehave in order to give the parent time to learn the skills before being challenged with misbehavior.

- 2. IY coach scaffolded parent play with the child.** Next the IY coach suggests that the IY coach and parent play together with the child. The IY coach models skills such as being child-directed play, being an appreciative audience, and social and emotion coaching. During this type of practice the IY coach and parent take turns making statements during the play. Then as the parent feels more comfortable the IY coach can gradually step out of the play interaction into more of a supportive observer/ IY coach role.
- 3. Coaching the parent and child.** The IY coach provides support while a parent is practicing new skills such as child-directed play with their child by being “an angel on the parent’s shoulder”. Coaches sit next to the parent and whisper to parents who need some extra help when trying out new skills.

For all of these ways of practicing new skills it will be important that the IY coach scaffolds the parent’s success by reviewing the parent’s goals and creating a “script” for the parent to use. For example a parent might have the goal of having their child share more frequently. The IY coach will first brainstorm with the parent ways to encourage and prompt sharing and then what statements/ comments they can make during the play. The home IY coach might suggest that if the child is not sharing, the parent can first model the desired behavior by offering to share their toy and say, “I would like to share my toy with you”.

After the role-play or practice is over, the learning will be strengthened when the IY coach processes how the parent felt either playing with the child or role-playing with the home coach. Positive feedback, specific praise and encouragement is very important to the practice learning.

Review of learning and home assignments

After debriefing the play practice, the coach and parent review the key learning for that session and read the refrigerator notes for the topic. Then they discuss the home assignments. Home assignments are an important part of the Incredible Years home coaching program and will be most effective when they are tailored to the parent’s goals and life situation.

At the end of the session, the IY coach asks the parent to complete the weekly self-monitoring checklist. On this from, the parent makes a commitment regarding how often they will do a play practice with their child each week using the new skills and what reading they will do. Having the parent put their commitment to completing the home assignment in writing will help with accountability and monitoring progress.

At the beginning of each home coaching session starting with session 2 the IY coach will spend the first 10 to 15 minutes of the session reviewing how the home assignment and practice went. During this time coaches will ask about their successes and their problems or difficulties and offer suggestions about ways to handle these. Coaches ask about the child's behavior in response to parents' play activities. This is time when home coaches can be cheerleaders for parents and celebrate their success. Some example questions include:

Coach: *Tell me about your experience with child-directed play?
Does your child enjoy the play time? Did you enjoy it?
How was it to use social and emotional coaching? What do you think
your child is learning from this approach?
What did you find difficult?*

For every session, parents will have the assignment of doing play sessions with their child; as the program progresses, there will also be other assignments to try new skills learned in the sessions (praise, sticker charts, ignoring). It is important to start with discussion of any efforts parents made to try out something new they learned from their last session. After learning about the parent's difficulties or obstacles then it is important for coaches to take some time to talk about ways to overcome the barriers. For example, if a parent had agreed to practice child-directed play in the prior session but they tell the coach they did not have time to do this, then the coach explores the barriers to doing this assignment. For example:

Coach: *What got in the way of finding time to do the play activities?*

Parent: *I was too busy with my job and doing laundry and getting the children fed and ready for bed when I got home. I was just too tired to do this.*

Coach: *Could you possibly use any of these child-directed play activities when you are folding laundry, or giving your child a bath, or driving home from school? Could you sing when you are making dinner?*

It is important the parents understand how many of the child-directed play and social and emotional coaching language as well as praise and rewards could be used at other times of the day in their interactions with their children and not just during a formal play time with toys.

For parents who do achieve their goals for play times or reading, or even partially complete their goals it is important for coaches to provide enthusiastic praise for their steps at making change in their interactions. Coaches can provide small rewards for success such as special tea, lotion, small treat, or parent tool award certificate.

Sample Session Structure

We have discussed all of the important elements in order to engage a parent in a home coaching session. The first home visit will primarily be spent learning about the family culture and values and the child's problems and strengths and developing goals. Hopefully there will be some time for learning by showing a few video vignettes related to child-directed play. The following is a sample of subsequent home schedule time table (90 minutes).

1. Begin by joining with the parent reviewing home activities, weekly goals and successes and barriers to achieving the goals. Problem solve ways to overcome obstacles (15 minutes)
2. Start new teaching by referring to the Incredible Years pyramid and link in with the parent's goals (5 minutes)
3. Show approximately 2-4 child-directed play vignettes while pausing for reflections and questions (30 minutes)
4. Complete a child-directed play practice and debrief (20 minutes)
5. Discuss the next weeks home assignment, have parent fill out the self monitoring goal sheet, and an evaluation, schedule next week's appointment (15 minutes)

Summary

The IY home-based program holds promise for providing added support for parents attending the IY group-based program. It can be used either to provide additional personalized practice for parents with their children at home, or as a make-up session if they have missed a group session. The IY home-based model can also be used to deliver the entire program one-on-one at home. More research is needed to evaluate the added benefits of either using the program as a supplement to the IY group or as a stand alone, one-on-one approach. However preliminary studies evaluating both these approaches suggests that the IY group plus home-based support serves to help parents sustain positive parenting changes in the longer term (Lees & Fergusson, 2015) . The fully home-based model appears to be particularly effective for high risk parents, parents with scheduling conflicts, or parents experiencing other interpersonal or health factors (Dionne et al., 2009). The flexibility and ease of delivering the IY model in a family's home may allow agencies to better meet the needs of high risk families and especially families living in rural areas who cannot access a group-based program in order to promote their children's optimal growth and development.

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Table 1 Parents Setting Goals

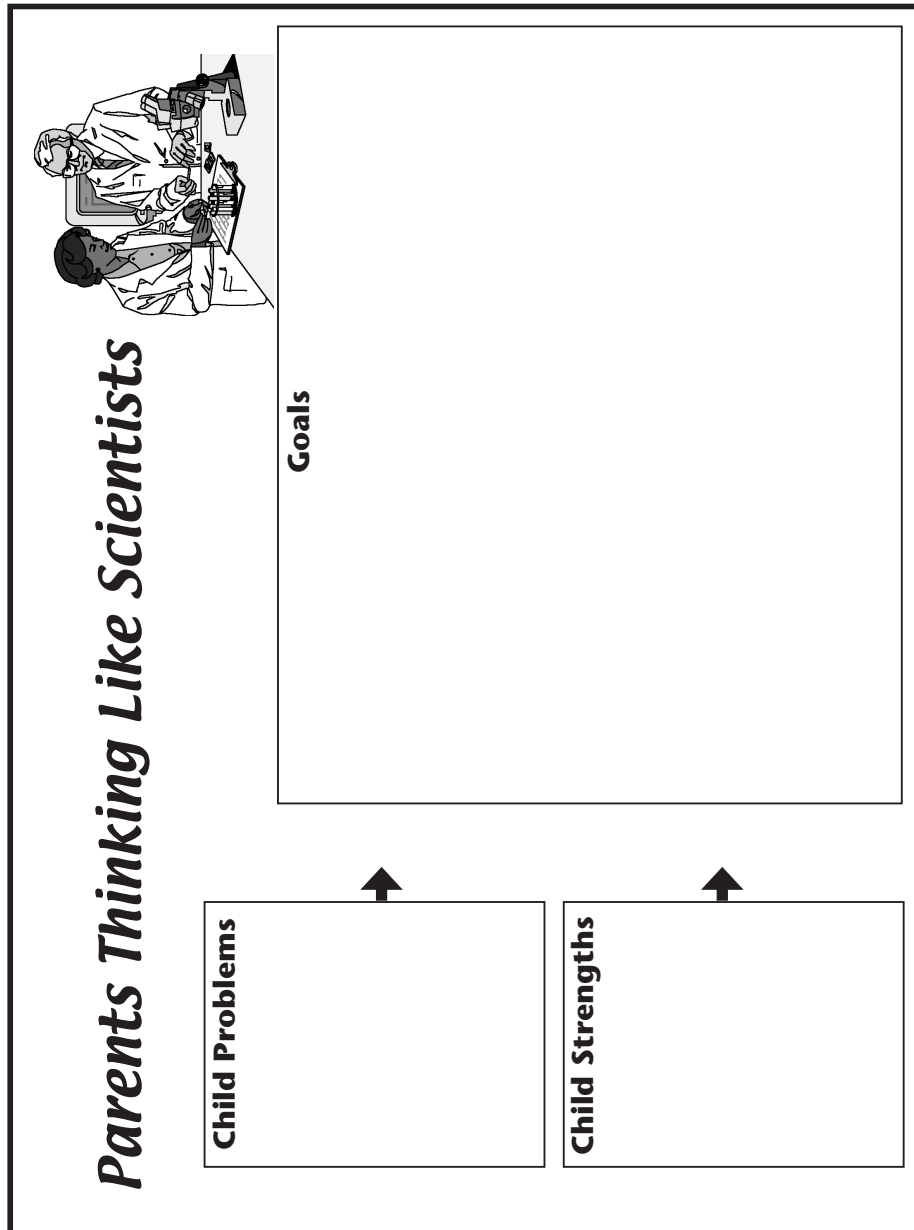


Table 2: Exploring Benefits and Obstacles

