



Erasmus+ project “Extending Social Educators Competences” ESEC  
Project Nr. **2018-1-PL01-KA204-051126**

## Parenting Science: Communication with Parents

### C. Recommendations

#### Abstract

These recommendations are based on the experience and reflections of the participants of the ESEC project courses that have been conducted by Rēzekne Academy of technologies. More detailed evaluation of the worked-out program and activities of the project are provided in part A. *Evidence-based guidelines*. The recommendations consist of several sub-chapters to provide more detailed reflection on the activities, materials, and feedback on the focus of the courses that have been appreciated by the course participants in Latvia. RTA have suggested the part of the ESEC course *Parenting Science: Communication with Parents* in line with the methodological conception that communication alongside with cooperation is a fundamental basis of human individual development and central to initiate the children’s activities, practice behaviour in a cultural context, and implement positive parenting. The conception of the session follows the idea that achieving by the parent educator qualities appropriate for implementing positive parenting is a starting point of assisting parents, as well as the pre-condition to have the conception/idea of the program implemented and objectives completed.

The content of the activities represents three focusses of activities or phases of the development of communication skills or competencies: (a) initiating communication, (b) self-evaluation and improvement of the specific communication skills appropriate for creating positive parenting, (c) improving skills of an active listener.

Teaching methodology includes and highlights introduction of the workshop format of courses and the mode of the hands-on and workshop sessions to implement positive parenting, peculiarities of covering the activities in the total on-line format and forced by Covid-19 context, prior preparing for the upcoming session, instruction on how to manage the whole session to overcome emotional obstacles. The course educator should follow the leading idea of evaluation by commenting the pedagogical reason of each step to help parent educators understand the decisive impact of self-evaluation and evaluation on the improvement of their communicative competence: (a) the lens of self-evaluation is the most effective form of educational activities and these should open the whole session; (b) in this case it is a suggested by the program table that covers the skills necessary for positive parenting and holding an appropriate mindset; (c) individual features or other qualities that participants of the session self-evaluate. To conduct a session of positive parenting self-evaluation and evaluation should open the session to function as an integrating component of the process; this also closes the session and serves as a basis for further planning of parent and parent educator individual development, preferably in cooperation.



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The suggested by the ESEC program structure of the recommendations that are oriented to ‘the most useful ...’ needs a comparative investigation and at least several repeated sessions of the courses to choose an evidence-based ‘the most’. These recommendations are based on a productive experience collected during limited by the project program sessions, mainly based on the participant subjective evaluation that reveals a progress in their skills and attitudes where participant achievements are compared to their previous quality of skills and attitudes.

**1. The most useful learning units**

When creating the content of the course program the RTA project group started with the conception that the basis of human individual development is communication and different kinds of activities; relations become problematic if families hold poor communication skills.

The course participants in Latvia spotted out *Evaluation*; the chosen mode of teaching-learning has broken the traditional manner of delivering classes where evaluation is a component of teaching-learning that should introduce learner learning-centered process. In a program of Parenting Science evaluation should be present at all steps of acquiring the content. Simple feedback limited to information is of little use – the feedback must be discussed and conclusions driven in line with the idea and aims of the program. The course experience in the ESEC program prompts the following:

1. Unobtrusive identification of readiness and interests in the first session. If the participants are university educators, the course educator must be aware that they are sensitive to instructions. Therefore, the assessment of their readiness to work with the parents should take a form of a free conversation.
2. Comments of parent roles should reveal the course participants’ priorities, understanding and even a pedagogical paradigm or approach that they implement in their activities.
3. Self-evaluation of their parenting skills or the participants’ parent educator skills (depend on the course target) should take place no later than studies have covered about 30% of the content. This is a sufficient time to get accommodated to the course and educators when the participants have grasped the idea of the course and the possible benefit.
4. The final evaluation is twofold: it provides with the information on the course participant skills’ improvement and their attitudinal changes: educators should improve their teaching skills and attitude that are specific for their further work with parent educators; parents improve their skills of positive parenting.

The course experience prompts that it is useful to distinguish between the main targets of *evaluation*: (a) evaluation with dominating effect of teaching-learning (items 1, 2, 3) and (b) the final evaluation to assume the educative effect of the courses by evaluating the improvement of educator or parent skills and by evaluating in final discussions their attitudinal

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changes that inform of the productivity of the courses or other chosen forms of teaching-learning (item 4).

The following leading idea of evaluation in a Parenting Science course is productive: the lens of self-evaluation is the most effective form of education activities; evaluation opens the whole session. In this case it is an opening unobtrusive discussion and suggested by the program table with the skills necessary for positive parenting and holding an appropriate mindset, individual features or other qualities that participants of the session self-evaluate. The table of skills serves as a mile-stone for the studies and as evaluation criteria of the skills and attitudes to finish the course.

Self-evaluation and discussion on the obtained information is a non-stop affair during the course or even an activity; it is among the best means to make the program a unique, well-structured, or integrated affair. More detailed description of evaluation as a part of the program ‘*Parenting Science: Communication with Parents*’ is provided by the *Guidelines* and the *Handbook* of this project.

The *general items of the program content* should be chosen together with the course participants for discussions, and these follow the most topical theoretical issues of communication and its specificity in parent education and positive practical parenting. This is a general and mainly ‘neutral’ component that should be enriched by the educator's attitude, confidence, competence, manner of performance, and style of communication with the course participants to make the course synergetic. The mode of the course performance should be guided towards creating possibilities for the participants to spot out parts of the suggested content, tools, activities that are meaningful for the course participants and would improve their skills and attitudes that had been actualized during the first discussions of the course. Addressing the most important items in the theory of communication should be integrated with the most attended by parents and parent educators’ questions, understanding of the parent roles, communication among parent educators and parents, parents and children, peculiarities of communication in digital age, as well as introduced by Covid-19 changes during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the ESEC project, etc.

The course educators should have a possibility to add some specific items to the planned content to meet special, culture-oriented needs of the course participants. Articles and clips for reading and discussion are suggested to consider communication peculiarities, competence improvement, and introduce discussions. It is important to create the content of the courses from several thematic units, which correspond to the essence of communication, emphasize the current needs of parents, as well as show the logic of creating the content. The course consists of thematic chunks that are integrated by the mode of performance and should be contextualized with the course participant self-evaluation including short introductions and appropriate instructions either for learning or positive parenting practices.



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The leading conception of the course program content and the paradigm shift should be made clear to the parent educators: during the last decade the parent, social worker, parent educator, as well as stake-holder conception of what parenting is or what it should be has changed considerably and challenge a new look at the content of parent educator courses to introduce a new paradigm of Parenting Science. The perceptions change due to the diversity of cultures, the expanded knowledge on parenting and a shift in mindset that cause the need to replace the concept of parent authority, child obedience, authoritarian style of communication in families – this is being replaced by the more complex concept of parental responsibility, respect to the needs of each family member, mutual protection of everyone’s rights, fostering the child rights and skills of critical thinking, self-expression, or responsible autonomy. These qualities can hardly be taught in a traditional way and should be implemented by the learner and parent capability of conducting their skill and attitude improvement.

The content of the program in all its chunks or items should accentuate the term *positive parenting*; this has entered the area of family up-bringing to introduce the approach that has emerged from European policies in the family relation area. Not only parents, but their educators as well often do not know how to implement this and need some pedagogical assistance to implement this paradigm shift. The parent educators should address and discuss this term that has been described in the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2006) to Member States on Policy to Support Positive Parenting (<https://rm.coe.int/168046d340>). The positive parenting framework initiated by the Recommendations facilitates the development of programmes, projects, services and/or measures to support families; it necessarily implies providing support for the NGO, educators, other professionals who work with families on regular basis – each parent educator will address the Recommendations to add the appropriate specific features to the implementation of a particular program with particular parents.

By covering the suggested and/or chosen items of the program content for 2020 the recommendations of the course participants in 2019 were commented and highlighted by: (a) discussing improvements in parent care and implementing of positive parenting can enhance the positive character of mutual relations in families; (b) recognizing that parents themselves in their roles of partners can contribute to the positive communication in families and therefore provide their children opportunities to participate in creating a positive style of communication; (c) analysing and evaluating their experiences of what brings positive reactions and mood of each family member.

The main novelty that has been pointed out by the participants is this special integrated content organization to identify and practice the above-mentioned paradigm shift, as well as the integrating functioning of evaluation. All activities with the selected chunks of content fall under the umbrella of the evidence-based *positive parenting* framework with the content focus of communication suggested by the Council of Europe: “...parental behaviour-based on the best interest of the child that is nurturing, empowering, nonviolent and provides recognition



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and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child” (Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 2006).

## 2. **More useful teaching methodology**

The value of any prepared by a program learning unit depends on the methodology and performance chosen by the educators: the content, materials, suggested activities remain neutral to the student until the time when he encounters the educator's pedagogical performance, in which the educator's own conviction and the focus of the whole program appear. Besides, these courses are designed for a two-step educational affair when educators are being prepared for their future work with parents; each unit follows a twofold objective: to enhance the educators' skill development and provide comments on the most influential and culture-oriented pedagogical assistance for their further activities with parents. The chosen methodology of the courses in *Parenting Science: Communication with Parents* has been implemented by the teaching-learning modality - exercises used at the session in major follow the interactivities of the hands-on or workshop sessions:

- short hands-on activities, their evaluation and identifying possible modalities to conclude on their usefulness when working with parents in particular cultural settings – this focus on the skill of evaluating appropriateness of the chosen activity;
- individual experiences and situation analysis of positive parenting in practice to come to conclusions of their possible usage to meet the parent particular needs; identifying experienced or possible situations when the conclusion or the activity might be helpful – this leads to creating a mind-set in line with the chosen pedagogical paradigm;
- a suggested by educators and formulated by the course participants set of questions related to the content and activities of the sessions (these are included into the session program and activity plans); especially topical are those related to parent and educator activities during and after the Covid-19 – this demonstrates a mode of integrating the current topicality;
- identifying traditional and innovative qualities relevant for communication leading to positive parenting, skills etc. to conclude about their appropriateness for the current situations and parent or children need; these are concentrated in the table to serve as mile-stones during the course and for self-evaluation;
- video-clips, pictures, etc. that are chosen due to their essential message like apps that are popular among children and less popular among parents; video clips that inform of characteristic features of communication, etc.; the very process of selection of these by the participants already pay their attention to the phenomena that the video-clips or pictures inform of;
- prior to the session the participants should be asked to prepare their own exercise to suggest for the classes (especially valuable if the group of educators or parents is experienced and the



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planned activities take less time, therefore there appear an extra time; participants also can suggest their exercise if this is in line with the planned ones, therefore these suggestions can provide another context or angle).

A topical peculiarity of the methodology should be its openness to introducing the transition situations for discussions that demonstrate the rapid paradigm shifts in the societies and make parents and their educators feel powerless to decision-making or behaving to achieve the new more complex parental goals or create mutual understanding in families. The most topical situations related to digital technologies and especially Covid-19 are welcome because the suggested pedagogical technologies have been too few yet and the only productive way is to discuss, create educator and parent vision and mind-set of adequate pedagogical changes that empower both parent educators and parents. This has been considered by the course participants a valuable contribution of this project to appropriate educational transitions.

### 3. **More useful material**

Sessions with the parent educators conducted in Rezekne is organized in three mutually integrating parts with their specific methodological accents and appropriate materials to make the logic of the course: initiating communication, improving general communication skills, and skills of an active listener. The didactic materials and those suggested for autonomous learning are chosen accordingly; the initiative of the participants is welcome.

The suggested materials and activities should be related to positive parenting, provide some information about important decisions on parenting and discussions on local strategies in the wider context, etc. The activities should not inform directly, for instance, what is positive parenting; the participants should open a discussion on it and thus come to their conclusions that are based on the materials that they have read. The activities should inform the participants of the session by talking about the target issues and trigger discussions that should involve the information and conclusions raised by the suggested materials.

Here are illustrations (one for each part, more – in the Guidelines of the report) of such activities that should be modified according to the specific needs of the participants of the sessions in local areas and cultural settings.

Activity to *initiate communication*. Reading small chapters of articles suggested for discussion or chosen by the participants; an instruction obliges the participants to highlight the focus of the program on positive parenting, appropriate skills, challenges of the CE Recommendations, etc. At the classes in RTA chapters of the article had been suggested for discussion: (a) Rodrigo, M.H., Almeida, A., Spiel, Ch., and Koops, W. (2012). Introduction: Evidence-based parent education programmes to promote positive parenting. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(1), 2–10).

Activity to *improve communication skills*. Self-evaluation and spotting out the main positions of the individual skill improvement (table for self-evaluation is given) – participants evaluate



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their communication skills, make conclusions, and then discuss in groups/pairs: (a) the most advanced skills and (b) those that need improvements (more information in the program). The educator suggests to identify the reasons why some skills are less developed. These also can be grouped: traditional or normative education and the child- or learner- learning centred ones. This activity assignment depends on the peculiarities of the session group.

Activity to *become an active listener*. Communication is successful if partners are good listeners. Materials and activities on active listening focus on an important component of communication that is seldom addressed in parent or parent educator education programs. Several activities are modified from the TISSNTE project, 128825-CP-1-2006-1-UK-Comenius C21). Parent educators can choose any of the suggested activities or do all if there is enough time; it is possible also to suggest some activities for parent autonomous completion. For the autonomous preparing of presentations, the program suggested Half, R. (2015). *10 Quotes to Inspire Active Listening*. ([www.roberthalf.com/blog/salaries-and-skills/10-quotes-to-inspire-active-listening](http://www.roberthalf.com/blog/salaries-and-skills/10-quotes-to-inspire-active-listening)).

Notes: It is always useful if the educators who conduct such classes have extra exercises to change for the more appropriate ones or for those that better fit the context or participants need etc. Time allocated for each activity depends on the program planning and time allocated for each session.

The program philosophy of parent education and support programming should assume that parents are more likely to provide appropriate nurturing and guidance as they acquire a greater understanding of child development and children needs, as well as the parent roles in the changing and technology-rich social environment. All parents need support from community agencies: (a) to grasp the most topical changes in society and learn appropriate ways to implement these; (b) to improve family education and want to be successful; (c) to target their perception and self-evaluation of positive parenting.

#### 4. **More organization issues**

Organizational issues and strategies (how did you conduct the participants how did you communicate during and after training course difficulties encountered and solutions)

Introduction on the workshop format that is built upon the Experiential Learning Model to accentuate the shift in parent and parent educator mindset towards: (a) a greater autonomy and respect to all family members, creating positive parenting, (b) peculiarities of covering the activities in the total on-line format. The accents are implemented by the organizational setting of the session and the content of activities. The steps modified for this format are:

- uploaded program and a short instruction on how classes would take place in the totally online format (participants’ reading prior to each class and session, operating the platform and other local peculiarities, etc.); an introductory warm-up activity that is integrated with a part of the content and in line with the focus of the program;



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- conducting the group, pair, individual, plenary discussions in totally on-line format by using Moodle:
- explaining the concept of the session in a simple language and informing the participants about the possible achievements of the suggested activities; inviting the participants to think of their experiences and possible illustrations for sharing reactions and observations; comparative evaluation of the described experiences and evidences;
- generalizing to discover and summarize of what was learned and how it connects to real life; suggesting participants to give some examples of how the learned new knowledge, know-how, and considerations can be used in their practices.

The on-line session has proved that the above listed suggestions should be provided in a written form and up-loaded on the course platform for the parent educator further usage and saving the time allocated for the session.

Literature suggested for educator and parent choice is a part of the program; it is always benefiting if local literature is attended; this should not be highly sophisticated and theoretical, preferably performed in a language that helps easy-to-perceive the idea.

Preparing the materials for the session in advance is necessary to have the session successful. These are up-loaded to the project website and have to be in ‘txt’, ‘pdf’, ‘doc’; introduction to the session activities can be in ‘PP’ format. Anyway, the materials must be accessible for those who will use them for the purpose of knowledge improvement and competence development on *Parenting Science: Communication with Parents*. The materials are discussed in the country project group and contextualized.

Registration of the participants onto the project website takes place on volunteer bases and access to it should be made as simple as possible. The organizers should take into consideration that many offers are suggested on-line; therefore, the social workers, parent educators, parents, and anyone who wants to join the whole program or a particular session has to assume the profile of the project and course sessions from the first lines of information (more details in the Guidelines). The session and activities of 2020 at RTA had been introduced by 2 ways: (a) e-mailed program of the session and activities and (b) up-loaded to the website.

Instruction on how to work with the materials and assignments opens the chapter *Parenting Science: Communication with Parents* of the Handbook. This can be located either prior or right after the defined aim of the session so that the participants of the session can anticipate possible synergy, as well as guess about the way to their success (new knowledge, considerations, and know-how).

For a good management of the session, usage of the materials, and activities it is wise to remind the participants prior to the session that their achievements during the session depend on how well they get acquainted with the recommended sources, selected an experienced situation for



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discussion, formulated questions or statements for the discussion, etc. The peculiarity of total on-line format damages eye-contact between the educator and the participants; this changes the way how participants are invited to speak or ‘jump’ into the discussion – face-to-face and on-line formats impose slightly different pace of the activities; on-line might take more time because this experience has just started. Besides, the course educators will need a platform that can easily split the participants into groups, re-organize groups, etc.- there are limited opportunities for the participants to do it themselves provided groups are made prior to the session.

*The main difficulties can be classified in three groups:*

1. Different level of digital technologies’ skills. In 2020 the online format was the only appropriate possibility because of the pandemic. The obstacle was mainly related on the syndrome of unexpectedness and possible unpreparedness. Thus, the main difficulty has been related to emotional aspect of the session, and this can be overcome by a couple of emotionally positive plays/games.

2. Different experiences of the parents or parent educators who participated in the session; these had been admitted to the courses on volunteer basis – among them there were beginners and experienced ones; therefore, the classes had been modified accordingly. It will always be a success if the experienced ones share their considerations and practices and the beginners construct their individual developmental plans for parenting skills. Total online format will be successful when adequately prepared.

3. The first project group meeting with the project initiators (in Rezekne) had been poorly prepared and could not provide clear plans for the activities, their aims and context – some uncertainties remained and these caused some lost time at the beginning.

#### **4. Duration of the training course**

The parent educator training courses had been organized in 2019, improved and conducted in 2020. The aim: to extend and develop the current competence and skills of both social educators and support teachers; consolidate their knowledge and skills obtained during the ESEC project.

Learners, in 4 small groups, will design, organize, and run a parent training course (15 hours face to face lessons, 50 hours of distance learning).

#### **5. Alternative content**

Special alternative content has not been created. Instead the content of the program included optional possibilities so that the course participants and the course educators could follow their priorities and select the two parts of the content: the basic component included the main items



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of the theory of communication that has been integrated with the second component - optional items and activities to meet the most topical questions of communication related to positive parenting practices. Suggested accents for the future improvements:

- The integrated national and wider context was considered critical and even problematic when implementing a successful practice in one location and adopting it in another.
- The participants of the sessions remarked that sessions might have poor influence on practice because traditionally the most of the content is forgotten if the appropriate practice does not follow by implementing ideas short after the classes. This does not happen without a special all-community responsibility for positive parenting because family as a social unit is located and to a large extent integrated into a wider social structure.
- The chosen educational methodology is unlikely to change anything if it is not continued after the courses – paradigm shift or mindset changes must be a constant and complex care in practicing change in Parenting Science and positive parenting; this is more likely successful through adoption of changes in thinking. The best practices and considerations, judgements and solutions come with cooperation and communication; local communities should provide special standing support to families by creating methodological centres and networks of practice to provide parents opportunities of getting assistance any-time - this must be placed within a country’s national, regional and local development strategies and planning framework, positive transitions of parenting must become a responsibility of the whole community.

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## 8. Annexes:

- Everything related to the course program *Parenting Science: Communication with Parents* is included into the course program.

- The Handbook