



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

Evidence-based guidelines

Topic of Rezekne Academy of Technologies

Parenting Science: Communication with Parents

The peculiarity of the 2020 session has been introduced by the pandemic that has changed the plans of the sessions and the whole project – the activities and communication with the course participants had to take place totally on-line even within the country. The project organizers had to modify the prepared organizational settings and materials for this format, as well as conducting sessions and activities.

Abstract

The guidelines consist of several sub-chapters to provide more detailed reflection, considerations, and suggestions that are based on the 2020 session of parent educators in Rezekne that has been conducted by the RTA ESEC project group.

The chapter that reveals *content and its organization* introduces the main idea of selecting the content for the session *Communication with parents* and organization of the content. The conception of the session reflects achieving parent educator qualities appropriate for implementing *positive parenting* on the background of communication as a fundamental basis of human individual development. The content of the activities in this session represent three groups of activities or phases of the development of communication skills or competencies: (a) those that initiate communication; to complete these participants have to communicate, discuss, share views, agree, disagree, etc.; (b) activities that are directed to evaluate and improve communication skills; these practice communication and to learn particular skills; (c) activities that develop skills of an active listener; these belong to a successful communication, nevertheless are seldom attended and included to parent education programs.

Another chapter is devoted to organizational issues and strategies; these deal with the considerations evolved while conducting the 2020 session and include: introduction on the workshop format on communication to implement positive parenting, as well as the peculiarities of covering the activities in the total on-line format; preparing the materials for the session in advance; registration for the session and introduction into the session; instruction on how to work with the materials, assignments, and manage the whole session in the total on-line format to overcome emotional obstacles.

Methodology introduces the mode of the session and the activities that are chosen to implement the main idea of the parent educator developmental program – modification of a workshop and



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hands-on modality designed according to the aim of the program. Reflections on the mode of the session, considerations, conclusions, suggestions, as well as some obstacles and difficulties are based on the experience collected at each cluster of the content and its methodological design: activities that initiate communication, those that improve communication skills, as well as activities that train skills of an active listener.

The leading idea of evaluation is: the lens of self-evaluation is the most effective form of educational activities that should open the whole session; in this case it is 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. Evaluation opens the session is an integrating component of the process that also closes the session and serves as a basis for further planning of parent and parent educator individual development, preferably in cooperation.

1.Content and content organization of the course (*with learning units have been selected to be taught face to face (platform) and with from individual learning and why. In which order did you use the ESEC COURSE MATERIAL what content adaptations you did in order to meet your participants training needs difficulties encountered and solutions*)

The session 2020 conducted by RTA *Communication with parents* cover the most topical issues of *Parenting Science* with a focus on communication. The items are chosen for discussions according to the parent most attended questions of parent integrated roles, communication among parents and children, parent educator communication with parents, peculiarities of communication in digital age; these are contextualized with the current social processes and needs. Course educators can add some specific activities to meet special needs of the course participants. Articles and clips are suggested to consider communication peculiarities, competence improvement, and discussion. The course consists of thematic activities that include short introductions and tests for the course participant self-evaluation of their communication skills and conflict prevention, as well as reflections on the content of the course. The transition situations when paradigm shifts in the societies make parents and their educators feel powerless to decision-making and acting or behaving to achieve the new more complex parental goals; parents feel losing control over their children that quite often is accompanied by a feeling of lost mutual understanding among the members of the family.

The leading conception. 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, as well as introduce a new paradigm of *Parenting Science*. This is not only because of the large variety of education possibilities and NGO that assist parents. The perceptions and conceptions change due to the diversity of cultures living side-by-side in the countries; this also because of the expanded knowledge on parenting and a shift in mindset that cause the need to replace the concept of parent authority, child obedience, and authoritarian style of child-rearing and communication in families – this is being replaced by the more complex concept of parental



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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.

The term *positive parenting* has entered the area of family up-bringing to inform about the approach that has emerged from European policies in the family relation area, but parents do not know how to implement this; and their educators need some assistance to prepare them for implementing this paradigm shift. More specifically the term 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 that aim to foster equal opportunities for families; it necessarily implies providing support for the NGO, educators, other professionals who work with families on regular basis.

The chapter of the project completed by Rezekne Technological academy followed the philosophy that 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) willing to improve family education and want to be successful.

Participants of the project courses 2019 concluded: improvements in parent care can enhance positive development by the positive character of mutual relations in families. At the same time, it is also recognized that parents themselves are not only recipients of assistance, but as contributors and partners they can contribute by positive communication in families, by analysing and evaluating their own experiences of what brings positive reactions of each family member, by positive mood of the services. When choosing the RTA contribution to the parenting program the project group started with the conception that the basis of human individual development is communication and different kinds of activities. It is extremely common for communication within the family to become problematic if parents or relatives have poor communication skills.

The content of 2020 session conducted in Rezekne is split into three mutually integrated parts; these consist of several sub-topics of communication that are organized on the logic of integrating the content instead of suggesting separate themes related to communication – this breaks the traditional way of content organization. Therefore, the content is offered through several activities in each part (activities had been selected from the suggested by the program according to the participant choice – therefore, the program suggested more activities than selected to cover during one session). The three parts of activities are:



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- (a) those that initiate communication; to complete these, participants have to communicate, discuss, share views, agree, disagree, etc. – this makes a reason to communicate, covers the functions of warm-up, and starts integrating the content;
- (b) activities that are directed to evaluate and improve communication skills – these make use of part (a) to have an evidence-based discussion on communication and skill improvement;
- (c) activities that develop skills of an *active listener* – this belongs to a successful communication and improves parent and parent educator competencies; unfortunately, this part usually is missing in traditional programs.

The main novelty that this special content organization brings is the integrating activities by involving experiences of parent education to identify and practice the above-mentioned paradigm shift.

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. The notion of *positive parenting* was defined by the Council of Europe Recommendation 19 (2006) on Policy to Support Positive Parenting as: “parental behaviour-based on the best interest of the child that is nurturing, empowering, nonviolent and provides recognition 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. *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:

- starting with an introductory warm-up activity that is integrated with a part of the content;
- discussing the group, pair, individual, plenary discussions in totally on-line format;
- explaining the concept of the session in a simple language and informing the participants about the possible achievements of the suggested activities;
- introducing activities by inviting the participants to think of their experiences and possible illustrations for the discussions;
- sharing reactions and observations by reflecting on what happened in their cases and during this session; comparative evaluation of the described experiences and evidences;
- generalizing to discover what was learned and how it connects to real life;



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- 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.

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 “power point”, ‘pdf’, ‘doc’; introduction to the session activities can be in ‘PP’ format; the size of each file should be about 1 MB and do not exceed 8 MB. 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*. The materials are discussed in the country project group when being prepared; therefore, all up-loaded original materials should not have the name of their authors, except for the otherwise published materials – either cited, completely downloaded, or modified - the author and source should be mentioned.

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.

Details on access to the ESEC website and course materials are on page <https://tdl.rta.lv/mod/page/view.php?id=28> .

Introduction into the session and assignments prior to the session should be accessible before or right after the registration. The session and activities of 2020 at RTA had been introduced by (a) e-mailed program of the session and activities and (b) up-loaded to the website. The two ways are preferable for easy-to-find the assignments because of different levels of the parent digital competencies. Besides, the totally on-line format on the one hand increases the number of volunteers, while on the other, open addressing of the possible participants of the session can also reach those parents who had poor IT skills: the web invitation to the session should denote the desired IT skills or, if there is a possibility, offer some instruction prior to the session.

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).



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Management of the session, usage of the materials, and difficulties encountered depend much on the introduction and how well the participants are prepared for the particular activities or whether they have completed assignments. It is wise to remind the participants prior to the session that their achievements during the session depend on how well they got acquainted with the recommended sources, selected an experienced situation for discussion and described it or otherwise prepared, 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.

It is good if the platform allows educator to make small groups or pairs for discussion – this does not give much opportunities for the participants to do it themselves provided groups are made prior to the session.

3. **Methodology** (*teaching-learning modality, difficulties encountered and solutions*)

Teaching-learning modality

Exercises used at the sessions are suggested and described in the part of the program produced by RTA in major follows the interactivities of the hands-on or workshop sessions:

- suggested short hands-on activities, their evaluation and identifying possible modalities to conclude on their usefulness when working with parents;
- individual experiences and situation analysis to come to conclusions of possible usage to meet the parent particular needs; identifying experienced or possible situations when the conclusion or the activity might be helpful;
- a set of questions related to the content of the sessions (these are included into the session program and plans);
- lists of traditional and innovative qualities, skills etc. to compare, analyse and conclude about their appropriateness for the current situations and parent or children need; these are concentrated in the table for self-evaluation;
- illustrate some important aspects that emerge when examining the impact of particular parent education examples in real-life contexts;
- comment the chosen 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.,
- participants had been asked prior to the session to prepare their own exercise to suggest for the classes (especially valuable if the group of educators or parents is experienced and the planned activities take less time, therefore there appear an extra time; participants also can



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suggest their exercise if this is in line with the planned ones, therefore these suggestions can provide another context or angle).

Sessions with the parent educators conducted in Rezekne is organized in three mutually integrating parts with their specific methodological accents: initiating communication, improving general communication skills, and skills of an active listener.

The suggested activities should be related to *positive parenting*, provide some information about important decisions on parenting, local strategies in the wider context, etc. Anyway, 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. The activities should inform the participants of the session by talking about the target issues and trigger discussions.

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

Initiating communication

Activity 1. Reading small chapters of articles suggested for discussion or which the participants choose before the sessions; the latter choice needs some instruction on the topic to be chosen: read, comment, give views or experiences, conclusions, 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); the following statement and a question had been suggested:

(a) The full implementation of the Council of Europe Recommendation 19 on *positive parenting* requires an appropriate response to these challenges – what the challenges and achievements could be? Why the Recommendation 19 can be considered a paradigm shift in Parenting Science and practice, also in mindset etc.?

(b) What do you understand by notion *positive parenting*?

Reminding: reading a small chapter prior to the session helps the participants, be them educators of parents, helps them avoid stress and feel comfortable – normal emotional state to continue and benefit.

Improving communication skills

Activity 1. Self-evaluation. The activity starts with self-evaluation (table is given by the program) – participants evaluate their communication skills, make conclusions, and then discuss in groups/pairs: (a) the most advanced skills and (b) those that need improvements. The educator suggests to group their skills, usually these are the same in major. Then the discussion goes on by identifying the reasons why some skills are less developed. These also can be



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grouped: traditional or normative education and the child- or learner- learning centred ones. This activity assignment depends on the peculiarities of the session group.

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.

Active listening

This is an important component of communication, unfortunately, it is seldom addressed in parent or parent educator education programs.

The 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.

Communication is successful if partners are good listeners. Quite often a family communication fails if the partners do not know how to listen to each other or stop communication without hearing the others views, considerations, needs, etc.

Activity 2. The idea of this course seminar is suggested by Half, R. (2015). *10 Quotes to Inspire Active Listening*. (www.roberthalf.com/blog/salaries-and-skills/10-quotes-to-inspire-active-listening). Instead of the warming-up or instruction the participants commented on the Quotes to inspire active listening and have an evidence-based reason to discuss peculiarities of communication already identified by these activities (when time is limited, participants can choose one or two statements to comment, illustrate by their own situations when they were either successful or ‘bad’ listeners – this identification is especially valuable). The modified Quotes are: listen at least as much as you talk; listening is a sign of respect; never stop listening, the speaker will decide when to stop; or you can apologise and ask to stop; learn by listening and think what you can learn from your child or educator from a parent; listening should be open, demonstrate interest in it and will to know the speaker’s view; learn to keep silent when your partner/parent/child speaks; do not suggest several topics or problems at a time; demonstrate your perception of what is being told by all senses; exercise your creative force - listening creates us, we obtain our qualities by listening; do more listening than talking.

Difficulties encountered and solutions

The main difficulties are related to:

(a) 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



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a success if the experienced ones share their considerations and practices and the beginners construct their individual developmental plans for parenting skills.

(b) Different level of digital technologies’ skills. The courses in April, 2019 had been designed for the on-line format, while on April, 2020 this format was the only appropriate possibility because of the pandemic. The obstacle was mainly related on the syndrome of unexpectedness and possible unpreparedness to total on-line format. Thus, the main difficulty has been related to emotional aspect of the session, and this can be overcome by a couple of emotionally positive play/game. For instance, suggest the participants to get to know each other by saying something positive about another participant of the session or suggest participants telling a very short humorous story that has happened to them related to the digital technologies.

(c) 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.

Suggested accents for the future improvements

- *Sharing experiences and inventory practices*: the argument in support of analysis of the national contexts was also considered to be critical when implementing a successful practice in one location and adopting it in another.

- As suggested by the participants of the sessions, *educators and organizers practice* sometimes are not considerably changed by parent courses or suggested technology; achievements in positive parenting do not appear by being at such classes when traditional classes suggest parent listening and completing some activities. Unfortunately, the most of this is forgotten if the appropriate practice does not follow practicing and implementing ideas short after these classes; and this usually does not happen without a special all-community responsibility for positive parenting.

- Simply providing educational methodology, even practicing technology or making people aware of an innovative practice is *unlikely to change anything* – paradigm shift or mindset changes must be a constant care in initiating, managing, and practicing change in parenting science and practice of *positive parenting*, more likely through adoption of changes in thinking that might reach the desired success. The best practices and considerations, judgements and solutions come with cooperation and communication.

- Some ideas had been shared, like this - greater impact on parent and also their educator activities might provide *standing support of special communities*, methodological centres, and networks of practice to provide parents opportunities of getting assistance any-time.



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- All family support actions, as well as those related to parent and parent educator education *must be placed within a country’s national*, regional and local planning framework – this must become responsibility of the whole community.

Evaluation

(method, process, tools and results of the knowledge evaluation and method, posses, tools and results of training course evaluation)

The leading idea of evaluation is: the lens of self-evaluation is the most effective form of education activities. Evaluation should open the whole session (in this case it is a 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).

Self-evaluation is a non-stop affair during the session or even each activity; it is among the best means to make the program a unique, well-structured, or integrated affair.

- *At the very beginning* of the session the participants self-evaluate their parenting skills via online discussion. This will introduce the whole set of skills and/or competencies that parents and parent educators should hold, which are already well-developed, which are under-developed, what each of the participant aims to improve during the session or do it after.

- During the session reflections and self-evaluation should be practiced to self-manage the competence improvement of even enhancement. Therefore, the educator should introduce orally or in written what qualities will be trained during each activity. The educators and participants of the courses on communication conducted by RTA concluded, that such detailed identification of the target skills should be integrated by reminding of the whole set of these presented by the table to make this affair *synergetic and synthesised*.

- If the educator or participants decide to go into the evaluation deeper, the table can be split into chunks according to thematical basis – identify what skills or qualities can be improved by several activities, make it a *cross-thematic affair*.

- The educator should remind the participants of the *role of self-evaluation to successfully implement positive parenting* or development of critical mindset etc. The focus of self-evaluation depends on the focus of the whole education program or particular activities.

- Self-assessment closes the session. A common questionnaire, developed within the framework of the ESEC project, is offered, which allows the participant to evaluate their initial skills and compare them with those acquired during the lessons.

- If the allocated time allows it is very useful to suggest parent educators to make a *draft project* for their future practices in parent education. This time they will be more prepared for conducting activities on communication with parents.