Ginott's Method of Parent Education

Haim Ginott developed a process for working with parents that helps parenting educators model the behaviors they are encouraging parents to practice with their children.

Ginott (Orgel, 1980) suggested that there are four steps in the process of supporting parents:

1. Recitation.

   In this first stage the parent(s) are encouraged to talk about their challenging experiences as parents. This allows parents to discover that all parents have problems. It also allows the parenting educator to model attention, understanding, and acceptance. Many parents have never had someone sensitively listen to them before. It is important for parents to feel heard and understood.

   Such sensitive listening may not be easy for the parenting educator. The educator must listen carefully, resist the temptation to correct or preach, and be skillful in remaining supportive, and encouraging: ‘Wow. That must have been very difficult.’ ‘You probably wondered what to do.’ ‘Yes. Parenting can be very challenging!’

   The objective at this stage of a discussion is not to teach new skills to the parents but to allow them to talk about their challenges while feeling valued and understood. This skill is especially important when parents have many challenges or are forced to participate in a parenting education program. When a parenting educator is supportive and encouraging, parents can embrace their unique strengths and feel safe enough to explore strategies to address their challenges.

   Sometimes class members lack confidence in their parenting skills and worry that they make many mistakes. The effective parenting educator recognizes, values and encourages each parent’s desire even as their skills are still emerging.

2. Sensitization.

   This second stage of parent education can begin when parents feel accepted, valued, and safe—which may take 30 minutes, a whole session, or many weeks or months. In the second stage the parenting educator turns the attention of the parents to understanding their children’s feelings. ‘How do you think your daughter felt in that situation?’ ‘Why might that have been especially difficult for your son?’

   The parenting educator may help the parents understand their children’s feelings by asking them how they might have felt in similar situations. ‘How might you feel if you worked all
day to get the house clean and your husband (or a friend) only noticed a dirty window?” Parents may come to better understand their children’s feelings when they relate them to their own experiences.

Everyone has struggles and disappointments. One of the challenges of parenting is to apply our own human struggles to understanding how our children feel. While we will never completely understand how an experience feels for our children, we can appreciate how real the pain (or joy or confusion) is.

Parenting is often made more difficult when parents react to their children’s behavior without taking time to understand. Under such circumstances the child is likely to become angry and resistant. When the child feels understood, the parent and child can work together more effectively.

3. Learning of concepts.

Parents can learn rules that will help them be more effective. For example ‘Take time to understand what your child feels.’ is a rule that can help parents listen. The parenting educator may have a series of rules to suggest. He or she can involve the group by asking them to apply the rules to situations in their homes. The parenting educator may even invite parents to develop their own rules as they examine their dilemmas with their children.

Parents may learn through these discussions to analyze and improve their parenting. They may better understand their children’s behavior and how to respond to it more effectively.

4. Teaching and practice of better skills.

In this final stage of Ginott's process, parents learn how to use their new skills and get practice in applying the principles. They may get practice by responding to situations presented by the parenting educator and other parents. They may also get practice by developing ways to deal with situations with their own children.

A wise parenting educator will not try to be the source of all answers but will ask parents for their ideas. For every situation there are many ways of responding. It is good for class members to hear many different ideas for dealing with a specific problem. If parenting skills are thought of as tools in a tool box, then it is important for parents to have many different tools and to know how to use them well. Each of us has different tools and different skills in using them. We may learn from each other.

It is also important for parents to learn how to evaluate their various options. For any idea that is suggested, you might invite parents to consider two critical questions: ‘Would that work for me and my child? Does it show respect for both of us?’

The main objective of Ginott’s four-step process in parenting is to provide parents with the personal experience of a warm, caring environment in which they can learn effective, respectful discipline strategies. Then they will be prepared to go home and create a warm, caring environment in which their children can learn more strong and humane ways of
acting. In a way, the parenting educator is a parent to the parents. In that role the parenting educator can be a model of a good parent.

Sometimes there will be parents in a class who are very angry or hostile (just as there will be children in a family who sometimes are very angry or hostile). An angry parent provides a parenting educator a great opportunity to model effective ways to deal with anger. “I can see that you feel very strongly about this.” “This must be very upsetting for you.”

There are extreme cases when parents feel so angry or stressed that they are not able to participate effectively with others in the classroom. These parents may benefit from individual counseling. Rather than acting as an individual therapist in this setting, parenting educators are encouraged to provide appropriate referrals to trained professionals.

For more information:

The ideas described here are also shared in:


The full chapter about Ginott’s method can be found in the first Handbook:


For more information, contact H. Wallace Goddard, Family Life Specialist, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (Phone: 501 671-2104; e-mail: wgoddard@uaex.edu)