Secondary Research in Relation to Parenting Models

Providing parenting education to Travellers and ethnic minority groups – best practice approaches

Part One:

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Introduction

Parenting is challenging for all parents, and all parents will need support at some time in the process of raising a family. This can be especially true for those who experience marginalisation and discrimination in their lives.
This report explores best practice in providing parenting education to members of ethnic minority groups. A specific focus has been placed on the needs of Travellers, as a specific ethnic minority group in Ireland. The key values and principles of best practice can be equally applied to the provision of parenting education to any ethnic minority in Ireland.

Strengths of the report

There is growing awareness of the need for culturally appropriate material for the delivery of parenting training for ethnic minority groups in Ireland. Research has shown that the provision of parenting education to families from ethnic minority backgrounds or those experiencing significant disadvantage and discrimination that does not place their culture and experience at the cornerstone of programme delivery will seldom be effective. Recent best practice documents on the general delivery of parenting education have all highlighted this need. (See, for example, G. French, 2000, or Riordan, 2001).
This is the first report to focus specifically on ways of adapting parenting education materials to ensure that they are culturally appropriate for ethnic minorities or disadvantaged groups in an Irish context.

Weaknesses of the report

Based on a literature review of the best practice in parenting education, and the needs of ethnic minorities for culturally appropriate material in any educational setting, this report represents a major first step in developing best practice in this area. Due to constraints on time and funding consultation was not carried out with participants of parenting programmes. Ultimately, the knowledge of their own lived reality, and their personal experience of disadvantage of any group will remain the ultimate authority on the topic.
As this report is put into practice by facilitators knowledge of the needs and realities of the participants will increase. Just as the report stresses the constant valuing of the existing knowledge and skills of parents taking parent in programmes, so to facilitators can use this report to add confidence to their practice, while also recognising and valuing their own growing skills and awareness

Using this report

This report provides best practice guidelines on the provision of parenting education so as to ensure that it is accessible to ethnic minority or disadvantaged

groups. Some parenting groups will have a specific target audience, and others will be open to the general population. In both cases members of ethnic minority groups may participate, and this report is designed to assist the inclusion of members of ethnic minority groups in all parenting education initiatives.

Section one provides a theoretical overview of parenting education, and the specific issues as they relate to ethnic minority groups in Ireland, including a detailed spotlight on the Travelling community.

Section two provides an outline of key values and principles for providing parenting education for ethnic minorities.

Section three details sample sessions that can be used in the provision of parenting training with ethnic minorities. These sessions are intended as a resource for facilitators, and can be easily combined with any existing programme. The values and principles of this report can also be used as a guideline to ensure best practice when delivering any parenting education activity without following any of the session layouts.

It is strongly recommended, however, that at least one session be incorporated into any programme not specifically targeted at ethnic minorities that allows them to explore and discuss the issues of their own culture, as the main focus of the session. Session two of the suggested sessions from this report in particular can be used along with any other programme, and it is recommended that it is inserted early in any parenting programme.

Section One – the role of parenting education with ethnic minority groups

The challenging job of parenting

Parenting is one of the toughest jobs in the world. On duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, a parent's job involved hard physical labour, highly intense emotional commitment and an incomparable level of responsibility. Research has shown, for example, that it takes an average Irish mother 50 hours per week to provide basic physical care for her baby – feeding, washing, changing, etc. And this is just one aspect of the job. (Daly, 1993 p125)
It is also the one job we truly have for life. Once a child comes along, the parents will *always* be parents. At its best, it is also highly rewarding and emotionally fulfilling. All the many positives however, don't make it easy.

The impact of parenting is also without doubt. Children's early experiences in the family are fundamental years of growth. It has been well established that parents play a key role in the emotional, intellectual and physical development of their children, an effect which lasts throughout life. On the one hand, harsh and inconsistent parenting is a key predictor of behavioural problems in teenagers and young adults, while high quality parenting can act in a protective way, sheltering the growing child from negative life circumstances and ensuring a positive outcome despite other disadvantages. (Bradley and Hayes 2007, p8+9)

Parent support

Given the importance of the role of parents in society, it is unsurprising that the need for parent support is long established. All parents, without exception, need some support. For some, support offered by the family and friends will be all that is required. For others, either without a strong extended family network and community integration, or because their support needs are greater, this will not be enough.
Support for parents can therefore take many forms, from informal advice offered by family and friends to highly structured interventions and programmes.
This approach to the provision of parenting support can be summarised as "all will need some, and some will need all" (Best Health for Children,1998). (Riordan 2001 p12-13)

Parenting Education

Parenting classes are one key form that parent support can take. Parenting classes, also referred to as parent education, or parent training, can come in many varied forms, but all are underpinned by the core belief that parenting is a learned skill. It comprises a set of attitudes and abilities that no one is 'born with'. Each and every parent learns to be a parent through experience and knowledge gained along the way. In short, each parent must figure out for themselves how to be a parent, and they do so in the context of their social circumstances, the culture in which they are raised and live, their own unique personality and that of their children. In western society patterns of family formation have changed dramatically and are in a state of flux. This fluidity of family forms has created many additional life-chances for many, created greater opportunities for equality and opportunity, but it has also been shown to create strain in the process by which many parents learn to parent.

Firstly, many traditional norms are no longer accepted as the only way of raising a family. A weakening of tradition creates opportunities, but also lost certainties. If there is no longer one certain way to raise a family, this creates the need for a reflexive choice from multiple options. A parent has to think through, and decide for themselves, what approach to parenting they want to take, in a way that was not as obvious in a traditional society. New opportunities therefore bring with them new challenges and new uncertainties, leading to new worries and anxieties. (Giddens 1998)

Secondly, many of the changing family forms have led to smaller family sizes and less exposure for young people to the experience of caring for younger children. This significant change means that many more parents nowadays find themselves parenting without the experience of ever previously having held, fed or changed a young infant. Traditional skills are therefore not being passed on in the same traditional ways.

This is where Parenting classes can play an important role for many parents. Parenting classes can come in a great variety of forms, but the common aim of improving parents overall knowledge and skill with the purpose of facilitating the development and wellbeing of their children.
The most common form of parenting education in Ireland is the provision of a group class, with anything between 4 and 20 participants. These vary from highly structured programmes such as the Parents Plus Programme or the Family Caring Trust programme both of which involve the use of a set curriculum for a given number of weeks, and use a series of worksheets, video clips and role play as educational tools. The 'Triple P' programme, developed in Australia, has recently been brought into use in Ireland. It has the advantage of being one of the most rigorously evaluated programmes and follows a similar model with a structured curriculum drawing on worksheets, and video clips. In other centers facilitators first meet with participants and negotiate content with them in

advance, providing facilitation of discussions on the topics that the parents themselves chose. Home visits involving one-to-one sessions are also becoming increasingly popular in the field of parenting education in Ireland and include such well-known initiatives as ‘Lifestart’ and the ‘Community Mothers Programme’. (G. French, 1998, p20)

Evaluation of Parenting Education

While parenting classes are becoming evermore popular across the western world, and many participants report satisfaction with the process of taking part, overall there has been a lack of clear evaluation of the practice of providing training in parenting skills, and definitive statements about the long-term effects on parents and children cannot be made. (G. French. 2000 page 8)
Not all evaluations are assessing the same criteria, and most do not include any form of control group. Most evaluations are internal evaluations, that is, they are conducted by the organization promoting the model of parenting education, or a closely related organization, not an impartial outsider. Among the most rigorously evaluated parenting education programmes it can be discerned that there is considerable benefit for some participants, the results have not always been able to identify the most beneficial elements of the programmes. (G. French. 2000 page 8)

Effectiveness of Parenting Education

Despite this obvious weakness, a significant amount of information is nonetheless available to point possible effectiveness of parenting education. A review of the literature does suggest that

- Programmes can be an effective way of changing the behavior of children
- Behaviorally oriented programmes appear to be most effective
- Group based programmes may produce better results that one-to-one work with parents

(G. French. 2000 page 7)

Parenting programmes do not work for everybody. Even in the most well constructed programmes, up to a third of parents involved continued to report problems in their children after taking part. (G. French. 2000 p8)

Significantly, it has been found that parenting classes start change in parents who complete the course, but then other factors come into play, such as social support. Parents with strong social support networks, secure accommodation, reliable income and an absence of mental health issues will change most. The effectiveness of the parenting programme for families in adverse circumstances may be overwritten by other major difficulties in their lives. (C L Guttentag, et al. 2006)

Parenting classes can nonetheless play a part, however, even for families in very difficult circumstances with multiple issues, where they are part of a coordinated support and intervention system. With highly disadvantaged families it has been found that the cumulative effects of two or more supportive programmes can have considerably greater effect. Parenting programmes can therefore play an important part of an overall support system.

Who takes part in parenting education?

Reading a range of literature on parenting education, it becomes clear that the main target of most programmes are families where children are experiencing behavioural difficulties, and the parenting education programme is aimed at alleviating these difficulties.
Ironically, most parents who show an interest in taking part in such a programme are not always, or even often, from families where children are experiencing behavioural problems.

In an Irish context Riordan found that 'parents with slightly higher incomes express the greatest interest in parenting classes' (Riordan 2001 p79) This suggests that parents in limited financial circumstances will see the benefits of parenting education as less appropriate to them, with the practicalities of life, such as housing, employment opportunities and accessing adequate income being more dominant priorities. It's interesting to note that studies of the effectiveness of parenting education also shows that these parents will indeed achieve least benefit if they do take part.
On the other hand, a UK based study which compared interest in attending parenting education if it was available with the presence of behavioral problems in the children found that those parents most interested in attending were from families where the eldest child was under the age of 4 and at least one child had behavioral difficulties. Parents least interested in attending were from the opposite situation, ie where the oldest child over the age of four, and no child with any behavioral problems. (Patterson et al, 2002)

What Parents Themselves want from Parenting Education

In Ireland parents have identified that they wish to attend parenting classes due to isolation from other parents, lack of support from extended family and community, and a feeling that the norms which their parents and generations before them followed were possibly no longer applicable or even relevant to today's society. (Riordan 2001 p80)
The concerns that parents expressed related to two main areas. The first of these related to the physical care of children, and including being able to provide adequate food, housing etc, safety, access to medical assistance, and finding

safe childcare facilities. The second related to overall parenting concerns, which included worries about exposure of children to drugs, the influence of the media, and maintaining a positive relationship with the children. (Riordan 2001 p87)

Parenting education did not appeal to all parents in the survey, and many saw it as inappropriate to their needs, either due to an absence of need or because they did not see how their specific needs would be addressed in a group or due to practical issues, such as childcare and transport. *(*Riordan 2001 *p76)*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the difficulty the job of parenting and the constraints placed on that role by society in general mean that all parents will need some support in their role at some time. For some parents the support needs will be slight, and can be filled just by family and friends. For many others however additional structured supports in one form or another will prove beneficial. Parenting education is one established means of providing support to families. Through parenting education parents are supported and assisted in gaining parenting skills to improve the well-being of their children. There is a significant body of evidence to support the effectiveness of parenting education as a valuable approach, although there are also gaps in the research, and a need for more rigorous evaluation procedures. There is also evidence that parenting education appeals most to those whose basic deficit needs for adequate income, housing, employment opportunities etc. have already been met. Ironically, this can mean that often parenting education is targeted by providers at ‘problem’ families, but sought out by ‘normal’ families.

Parenting and equality

Parenting education, as we have seen, is a practice that can be highly effective, but can be less appropriate to the needs of people experiencing other disadvantaged life circumstances. In this section we will take an overview of the issues that can arise in the practice of parenting education in relation to some key areas of equality; gender, social class and ethnic minority status, with a spotlight on the Travelling Community.

Parenting education and social class

'Jane' excused herself from the parenting class group at tea break, and the facilitator soon came across her crying the in toilets. The facilitator asked Jane why she was crying and Jane's answer was 'I'm such a bad Mother'. The facilitator expected Jane to raise issues about discipline, communication or other topics covered in the class, but instead Jane went on to explain her worries in a very different light. That morning, getting her toddler ready to head out to the family centre, her son complained furiously that his shoes hurt him. Jane checked, and discovered that they were too small. Jane had no idea where she would find the money for new shoes for her son, and was afraid that it would be several weeks before she would be able to get him a new pair, during which time damage could be done to his feet if they were squashed into the old small ones.

Access to adequate financial resources is closely related to parent's confidence in their own parenting, the available resources to them to support positive parenting practices, the level of targeting by service professionals offering parenting education and the effectiveness of any training that the parents take part in.

Income adequacy and confidence in the role of parent

Research suggests that parents who lack adequate income to maintain basic lifestyle requirements are also at greater risk of having low confidence in their own ability to parent effectively and may be at greater risk of developing low self esteem in their parenting role. (R Hughes and M Perry Jenkins, 1996) In the example above, 'Jane' was developing a negative view of her own parenting ability due to her lack of capacity to provide basic material goods for her son, despite the fact that this was a situation outside her direct control.
In short, parents on low income may have, on average, less belief in their ability to parent than others.

Income adequacy and parenting practice

Research has also found that parents in very disadvantaged economic circumstances are at greater risk of negative parenting practices. They are more likely than better off parents to use harsh punishments and less likely to use positive reinforcements or to stimulate their children's' language and cognitive developments. (C L Guttentag et al, 2006)
This does not, of course mean that all parents living in poverty use negative parenting practices, (or indeed that all well-to-do parents use positive parenting practices), only that difficult life circumstances mean that parents from low income groups are *at greater risk* of these behaviours, due to the additional stresses of disadvantage.

Targeting by parenting professionals

Due to the established links between low income and a range of family stresses including increased risk of poor parenting practices, depression, lack of access to quality childcare facilities, etc. and due to the established poorer educational, health and social outcome for children growing up in poverty many services target low income groups specifically for parenting education. This happens on both a local level and also on the level of national policy. The commission on the status of the Family (1998) suggests specific targeting lone parent families, traveller families etc as well as providing general parenting education to all parents.
This targeting on the one hand may well level the playing field by providing an extra service to those who are at greater disadvantage in society and therefore need it most. On the other hand, it can also create a feeling of stigma for those taking part in the service. If a service is only for 'disadvantaged', 'needy' or worse still 'difficult' families, then taking part is an admission of being 'disadvantaged', 'needy' or 'difficult'. Furthermore, there can be a built in assumption in such targeting that disadvantaged families are deficient or deviant and therefore need extra help that 'normal' families don't need. It is important to remember that research does identify extra risks to families in disadvantaged circumstances, but it does not by any stretch support an argument that all 'poor' families have 'bad' parents, or indeed that all middle-class families have 'good' parents.

Parenting education and gender

'Paul' attended the first night of a parenting class run in the local school with his wife. Both himself and his wife expected that the group would be made up of couples, as the invitations had been sent from the school to 'the parents of…'
In fact, he was the only man present. That alone made him feel uncomfortable, but some the other women started to snigger when they saw a man enter the room. During introductory rounds he explained that his was the step-father, and not the biological father, of the child he was there to discuss. This seemed for

some reason to increase hostility from the other mothers even further. After the first night he did not go back, and his wife attended alone. His wife further complained 'I think they were jealous, because none of them could get their husbands to come along, and they weren't even the step-fathers of their children, they were the fathers'.

'Parenting' is a general term that covers the daily care provided for children at home and is most commonly provided by mothers and/or fathers but can also include others with custodial care of children including step-parents, foster parents, grandparents or other relatives. Parenting can, therefore, be carried out by both men and women, as mothers, fathers or other carers.

However, the role of parent has been largely interpreted in both literature and practice of parenting education as that of Mother. For example, one typical research report opens with the sentence that 'it is well recognized that when parents provide higher quality stimulation of language and cognitive development and provide warm emotive nurturance…' and then goes on do describe a parenting programme specifically for Mothers. This has a dual negative effect. Firstly, by excluding men it minimizes their role in the family and denies these particular parents support. Secondly, it places a greater burden on Mothers.

On the first issue, studies in the UK show that many men who attend parenting education groups felt isolated, as in the Irish based case study above, and also felt that the course content was not appropriate to their needs. (Grimshaw & McGuire, 1997) In recent years in Ireland there is also anecdotal evidence that Family law courts are increasingly referring fathers to parenting classes as part of hearing in the courts, mainly relating to child access and guardianship. This has the added advantage of increasing the numbers of fathers attending, while the other side of the coin in the added stigma this could create.

To promote equality in parenting education and achieve best outcome for all family members, the parenting roles of Fathers needs to be taken into consideration. If parenting classes are not offered to fathers, then only one out of two parents in many families are getting the supports and benefits from such a service.

A presumption that parenting training should be targeted at Mothers has a second negative effect. It reinforces an existing trend in society where the primary responsibility for childcare (and any attached housework) lies with Mothers in most families. This actively contributes to women's lower earnings, and fewer life opportunities outside the family.
Where so called 'parenting' programmes fall into this trap of using the terms 'parent' and 'mother' synonymously it serves to reinforce a position of disadvantage for women in society.

Parenting education and ethnic minorities

'Mary' and a few of her friends heard about a parenting class being taught in the local resource centre and decided that they would like to take part. On the morning that the class was to take place they turned up, with their children in their buggies. A staff member met them at the door and tried to persuade them to leave their children in the drop-in crèche. The parents were not very happy with this, and the children did not settle. In Africa, where Mary and her friends had recently arrived from, community events were regularly organised in the local church hall, and all mothers brought their young children with them. No-one paid the children any mind, and they played around the feet of the women holding their group. Mary attended the parenting group for several weeks, but there was a lot of tension in the room. Mary could not understand why she had to leave her child in the drop-in crèche, and the other participants resented the fact that every week Mary's child ended up in the room with them half way through each session as he wouldn't settle in the crèche.

As with social class, membership of ethnic minority groups is associated with poorer outcome for children, and greater strain on the parenting roles. Research in the USA has found that members of ethnic minorities are significantly less likely to complete parenting programmes. Members of ethnic minority groups are much less likely to sign up for a programme in the first place, more likely to drop out during the course of classes if they do sign up, and less likely to show positive beneficial results even if they complete the entire course. (Diana Birkett et al 2004)
The reason for this lack of success in promoting parenting education among groups who, on the surface it would appear possibly need it most, have been found to result from feelings of alienation that members of specific ethnic minorities feel when engaging with a parenting programme devised within the majority culture. Rather, members of specific minority groups look for support in parenting from within their own culture, and are less likely to rely on information about parenting from books, leaflets, TV, video or any other 'expert' source from the majority culture. Some specific cultural groups also displayed a difficulty relying on friends or family for information either, further isolating the individual parents concerned. (Diana Birkett et al 2004)

The recognition and acknowledgement of their own culture, with open, honest and unprejudiced discussion proved to be essential in evaluations of parenting education targeted at members of minority ethnic groups. However, as Suzanne M Murphy and Doris Bryant have pointed out, white middle class parenting facilitators are programmed by their own culture not to speak about or acknowledge racial and class differences. This negatively impacts on the experience of the participant. 'A culture of silence fosters a sense of disconnection'. Cultural pride is a vitally important aspect of parenting, and therefore also parent education.

A further positive factor in providing parenting education to members of minority groups is found when members of that cultural or ethnic group are employed as facilitators, providing a positive message that parenting leaders can exist within their own group. A process of inverse racism can however result in a situation where group members can be particularly rejecting of the facilitator from within their own culture, and chronically undermine their leadership. Any attempt to encourage members of ethnic minorities to co-facilitate parenting programmes in a tokenistic manner can therefore create far more harm than good. Thorough training and supports are needed to ensure the development of genuine leadership skills in *any* facilitator.
Finally, collaborative programmes where the group set the topics for discussion and input into the content have been found to be effective where parenting programmes which follow a set curriculum or programme are not
'Collaborative programmes are inherently more accommodating of cultural and ethnic differences, whereas non-collaborative interventions are more likely to be shaped by the values and norms of the facilitators/therapists.' (Eva Lloyd (ed) 1999 page 105)

Spotlight: A profile of the Travelling Community in Ireland

Travellers in Ireland are an example of a minority ethnic group. This section will explore what exactly it means to be a traveller, as an example of the issues faced by one ethnic minority group and how these may interact with the process of accessing parenting education.

Who are the Travellers?

The prevailing theory on the origins of Travellers in Ireland is that they are the decedents of people who lost their land during the famine and took to the roads as a result. However, there is some evidence that Travellers in fact existed long before this time. It is typical of the exclusion of Travellers from overall Irish society that little or no serious historical account of their history exists.

We do know that Travellers have a long history in Ireland as a group of Irish people with their own unique culture, identity, economy and way of life. Specifically, the Travellers in Ireland are a nomadic group – that is to say that their culture, identity and economy are reliant on the ability to move from place to place. Travellers are still Travellers even if they do not move around, but considerable strain can be placed on the identity, security and earning capacity of Travellers who are pressurised into 'settling' against their will.

Travellers' unique identity

Travellers are an ethnic minority within Ireland. They have a cultural identity of their own, which is separate from the majority population. As part of this they

have a distinct language, cultural practices, traditions and rituals of birth marriage and death,
This culture is a rich and vibrant expression of what it means to be a Traveller. Michael McDonagh explains what it means to him to be a Traveller when he says:

If you ask a country person [settled person] 'what are you? The answer will be 'I'm a farmer' or 'a postman' or 'a teacher'. Country people identify with the work that they do and the more specialized, the better. They insist on defining Travellers in this way too; we used to be tin smiths, now we are scrap dealers. But none of this makes any sense from a Traveller's point of view. Ask a Traveller 'what are you?' and the answer will be 'I'm a McDonagh or I'm one of the Joyce's' or 'Collins'

To be a Traveller is to be part of the community. In some ways Travellers and settled people use the term Traveller to mean mobility, but it does not mean mobility. Although being mobile is part of being a Traveller, it is not what a Traveller is. Being a Traveller means being part of a community that has a shared history, shared culture and an understanding of what it is like to be a Traveller. It's having a family with a support mechanism there. It's a way of life. (Michael McDonagh p28-29)

Travellers and Disadvantage- The Traveller economy

The traditional Traveller economy is one based on nomadism. A traditional niche existed for over 100 years – possibly several hundred, where the mobility of the Travelling community meant they were able to provide services to the larger community which could not be provided based in one location as the customer base would be too small, or because the work was seasonal.
Recycling has always been one important aspect of the Traveller economy, and as one Traveller says 'Travellers were recycling before it was fashionable and we're very proud of that.' (National Co-Ordinating Committee for the European Year Against Racism)

Some Travellers to this day continue to operate successful businesses along these lines. Many however find that the greater difficulty in travelling traditional routes, combined with economic changes, have squeezed many Travellers out of these forms of employment.

Research has found in the past that 50% of scrap metal collected in Ireland is supplied by the Traveller community and hundreds of jobs in the settled community arise as a result.

Recent times have however seen the decline of many traditional Traveller industries due to a combination of straightforward economic change, and blatant

discrimination against Travellers which prevents them freely traveling to engage in these activities. As a result poverty and deprivation are significant problems for many Travellers. Halting sites where many Travellers live vary in standard, and the worst may have poor access to basic requirements such as running water, electricity supply, toilet facilities or rubbish collections. (National Co-Ordinating Committee for the European Year Against Racism Page 15)

The result of this widespread poverty that affects many members of the Travelling community can be clearly seen in it's impact on health.

The most comprehensive study of Traveller health status was carried out 20 years ago and found that there is twice the level of infant mortality in the Travelling community than the settled community, and that life expectancy was short – Traveller men live 12 years less, on average than settled men. This report has not, so far been comprehensively updated, but a recently released report by the Parish of the Travelling People finds that nothing has improved in the last 20 years. One third of all deaths in the Travelling community are to people under the age of 25, and 50% of Travellers die before the age of 39.

Travellers and racism

There is a pervasive defensive attitude among some settled people that Travellers can't experience 'real' racism because they are not a separate 'race' from the majority settled population. This is a fallacious statement, however. Biological studies have found that there is only one true race – the human race, of which we are all members. There is both endless difference and infinite similarity within the human genetic make-up, making it biologically impossible to truly categorise any genuine differences based on the social construct of 'race'.

This idea that Travellers are not a separate 'race' however masked the extreme extent that Travellers in Ireland do experience racism based on their ethnic status as Travellers.
In addition to masking this racism, a denial of the ethnic identity of travellers, and a general concept of travellers as simply 'failed settled people' has intensified much of the racism, and added additional dimensions to the problem. (National Co-Ordinating Committee for the European Year Against Racism p 6)

Racism arises from a deeply held belief and concept of group superiority. Seeing travellers as 'failed' settled people, who should give up their traveller identity and adopt the lifestyles of settled people therefore deeply supports the individual and structural racism that Travellers experience.
(National Co-Ordinating Committee for the European Year Against Racism page 15)

This experience of racism affects almost all Travellers. On an individual level travellers experience racism in most daily interactions with settled people –

where they can be refused service in any shop, hairdresser, launderette, pub, taxi-cab, etc. On an institutional level Travellers may face the reality of life as second class citizens with ill-equipped halting sites and inadequate social services. They have also experienced generations of institutionalised racism, where the operations of the state and state laws make the practice of traveller lifestyle difficult under the law, or build in obstacles, For example, the electoral act of 1992 changed the residency laws under which a person is entitled to vote, effectively disenfranchising any Traveller who did not choose to remain permanently at one address. (Irish Traveller Movement)

Travellers experience with the majority culture

One feature of the racism that groups such as Travellers experience is a profound sense of alienation from the majority culture. Groups can seldom avoid interactions however, and must engage with the majority culture to access education, health services, etc.
Many Travellers find that their experience of services denies them their identity, by completely ignoring it. This leads to feelings of isolation and rejection, which in turn can foster a feeling that any services on offer in the majority culture, such as parenting education, are not appropriate or relevant to them.
(Frank Murphy, Cathleen McDonagh and Erica Sheehan (eds) 2000 p40)

Travellers will only be able to fully access services within the majority culture when that culture and those services accepts and acknowledges the existence and value of Traveller culture. Efforts have been made within primary education for example, to provide a small range of books, jigsaws and other classroom equipment which features scenes from typical Traveller children's lives as well as those of settled children. Services such as parenting education can similarly be made more accessible to Travellers through incorporating an acknowledgement of the existence and validity of the Traveller way of life into the service.

Travellers and family life

Family, as we have seen, is central to the Traveller way of life, the Traveller identity and culture. The large extended family network is of vital importance, as are family gatherings. Traveller families could be seen as being conservative or 'old-fashioned' in comparison to the settled community. Family sizes are large in comparison, and the role played by women in the family is often a traditional one of homemaker. The Traveller community, like the settled community, is not immune from social change. Family sizes are decreasing overall in the Traveller community, and more women are beginning to take on roles outside the home, due to the increasing availability of training options. Nevertheless these changes are slow, and not uniform throughout the Traveller community, and are hindered by the marginalized and disadvantaged position of Travellers within Irish society. (Colette Murray 1997)

For Traveller women, there is often the double burden of Traveller status, combined with gender as a basis of discrimination, and life is not always easy. Traveller women are at times more easily identifiable through dress than Traveller men, and are more likely to be refused service in shops and other services. Research has also shown that Traveller women often face the brute violence and degradation of evictions alone, as these normally can occur during working hours when men are out. As the main homemakers Traveller women also face the brunt of managing a family in poor living conditions and with inadequate access to resources. (National Co-Ordinating Committee for the European Year Against Racism p14)

Traveller mothers also have greater difficulty accessing mainstream services for themselves and their children. In direct contrast to the settled population, research has found that access to information about child development, child wellbeing and childcare facilities was not available in accessible formats to Traveller women. (Colette Murray 1997 p 43)

As Collette Murray has pointed out children in the Traveller community are a minority within a minority and suffer the brunt of the poverty and disadvantage experienced by Travellers.
'They are a minority within a minority, suffering all the ill effects of inadequate accommodation, poor living standards and discrimination experienced by their parents. This leads to restricted opportunities in society and has a detrimental effect on the self-esteem and on pride in traveler culture. In addition, children are especially vulnerable to ill health and poor physical development and subject to disadvantages in the areas of emotional and cognitive development'. (Colette Murray 1997 p 11)

Traveller children therefore face many disadvantages growing up, but they have some positive benefits as well. They grow up in a community where the family is highly valued, the extended family is often close by and supportive and they have a higher level of freedom and autonomy than children of the same age in the settled community. (Colette Murray 1997 P12)

Family life in the Traveller community is structured around a different set of norms that that in the settled community. Traveller families will therefore not slot into a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to family services of any sort, including parenting education. However, the need for support and recognition of Traveller families is clear to counteract the difficulties of discrimination and hardship that they face.

Teaching and Learning with Adults – Informal Education Strategies

In recent times more and more attention is paid to the ideas of life-long learning. It is widely acknowledged that learning and teaching can and must go on outside and beyond the formal education system of primary, secondary and third level structured education systems.
In the formal education system education is in many ways a preparation for life, while after that structure education can be seen as a way of life, and on-going process of personal and community development for individuals and groups.
There are many terms for ongoing education for adults. These include '*second chance education*', although this can be something of a misnomer. It implied that a person engaging with second chance education at some point has a 'first chance', and presumably they blew it. This is not always the case. Many people's engagement with initial primary education was so hampered by circumstances that it could not really be termed a 'chance' at all. This can be particularly true for Travellers, as we have seen in the section above, since many did not have any real first chance to gain literacy or other skills in a formal education system.

Another term often used, somewhat more accurately, is '*adult education'*. It is a simple descriptive term implying that this is education for adults. Adult education can therefore encompass any form of training or teaching with adults from the highly informal personal development or parenting class to the return of adults to formal college based courses.
Non-formal education is a term used for education outside of the formal qualification systems – it is geared towards the needs of adults and young people needing or seeking personal development, confidence building, and/or community development awareness either instead of, or as a preparatory to, engaging with formal, qualification based training.
Parenting education most closely fits into this bracket of adult, non-formal education. It can, however, also show elements of community education, depending on the model of parenting education used.
Community education strives to move beyond the goals of individualised learning or individualised change, and seeks to achieve education for entire groups with the goal of ultimately achieving social change. A community education approach seeks to raise participants' awareness of the root causes of disadvantage and discrimination in their community, and by doing so ultimately challenge those causes.
A parenting course can fit within this model if this is the approach chosen. To use an example to illustrate the point, an adult education approach to parenting education in a community where all the children play out on the road will focus on highlighting the dangers to children of playing on the road, possibly pointing out the terrible rates of death and injury that can occur to children as a result of road-

traffic accidents. The hoped for end result is a change in adult behaviour so that children are no longer sent out to play unsupervised.
A community education approach will do all of the above, but also ask the important question ‘why do children play out on the road’
The answer may well be because the houses are very small, and there are no back gardens, or all the back garden fences are broken down and the council has never repaired them, so it’s impossible to keep the children from running out the front.
From this approach a successful outcome may also be that a group of fathers from the local community come together and work to repair the fences in all the back gardens on their street, or a group of mothers lobby with the local council to have a safe playground located on a near-by wasteland.
An adult education approach will seek to change behaviour; a community education approach will seek to change behaviour, and also to change the underlying structural causes of that behaviour, thereby making the changes more sustainable.

Section Two: Key values– Valuing Families, Valuing Equality

The recommendations in this report are based on two key Values:

Valuing Families

Valuing Equality

Valuing Families

Families are a cornerstone of society. Families are the first and primary educator and carers of children. Families provide care and support to their members, and a safe haven from the stresses of the world. Families can also experience considerable strain, and precisely because of the many roles they play, when families can no longer function, very significant damage can be done to all members. This report is based on the key principle that families need support, recognition and protection.
As part of the key principle of valuing families a number of other principles are identified:

The caring role needs to be valued in society
One main role played by the Family is the provision of care to members, including children, the elderly and the sick, but also a general level of care and concern for all members.
In society this level of care provided by the family is often taken for granted and undervalued. It may be seen as 'just women's work' and is the only form of work that is not recognised as economic activity – despite the fact that the economy would surely cease to function overnight if the care provided by families to each member suddenly stopped. The caring role provided by families to all members, particularly children, is a cornerstone of society and needs to have a high value placed upon it.

The caring role needs to be supported in society
The valuable role of caring for children and other members of families needs to be supported. Parenting is a challenge, and all parents will need some support at some time. This is equally true for other caring roles in families. Learning to parent is an ongoing process, and while there may be those who parent poorly, there are no 'bad' parents. There are many parents who need extensive support due to social and economic constraints on their abilities. Caring and parenting take place within a community and within a social environment. When that environment fails to adequately support parents and carers great challenges are created. As an old African proverb states 'it takes a village to raise a child.'

There is a diversity of family forms
Families come in many forms. A so-called 'Traditional Family' encompasses a Mother, Father and dependant children all living under the same roof. Many other forms of families exist and provide all the same supports to their members. Forms that families that raise children include grandparents or other extended family residing with parents and children, grandparents or other family members raising children without the parents in residence, mothers or fathers parenting alone, parents living separately and sharing parenting, cohabiting couples parenting together, single sex couples raising children, or foster families.
All families have unique challenges, and also unique strengths. To truly value families they must be valued in all their infinite forms with the unique traits and contributions of each and every family acknowledged. This cannot happen if a prescriptive idea that families must fit into boxes, with each one taking the same form as all others.

Valuing equality

To value and support members of families it is important to acknowledge the fundamental human rights of all family members, and to recognise the need for equality for all.
Family members from ethnic minorities often face racism, discrimination and prejudice in their daily lives. To truly value the worth of these families the racism and discrimination needs to be highlighted and ultimately eradicated so that the equality of all families can stand strong.
Gender discrimination has the potential to undermine the value and support given to families. The equal value and worth of all men and women in families needs recognition free from dimensions of gender inequality
Children in families can find themselves in vulnerable positions. A focus on the rights of 'the family' can have an unintended effect of minimising the position of children within the family who can come to be perceived almost as possessions of adult members of families, and not individual humans with a full range or rights, entitlements and needs of their own. A recognition of the fundamental human rights and needs of all children is essential to a principle of valuing and supporting families, for the benefit of all members.
Inequality and discrimination are often cumulative. Women and children from within the Travelling community can find themselves as minorities within minorities, with discrimination piled on top of discrimination.
Any form of discrimination undermines the equality of families and therefore prevents value and support for families. The Equality Authority (http://www.equality.ie/) has identified nine grounds of discrimination with specific legal protection given to ensure that people cannot be discriminated against on these basis. The nine grounds are: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the travelling community. These and any other form of discrimination such as discrimination on the basis of social class or income level have the capacity to undermine families.

Understanding and identifying our value system

The above key values are the underpinning values of this report and, we believe, central values for a positive approach to delivering parenting education to people from ethnic minorities or indeed any other circumstances. The value system of any person devising or delivering a parenting education programme can never be neutral. Every person holds a value system and every person has the right to hold a set of personal beliefs and values. Working with families can never be value free work, and we reflect our own values, and the values of the wider society in the approach we take to our work, often without even realising it.
Within the field of parenting education the value system of facilitators has come under the spotlight, raising the debate as to whether the service provided is an empowering one or a form of social control seeking to pressure disadvantaged families into set modes of socially approved behaviour, abandoning the benefits and pride of their own culture along with any other practices.
Before commencing work either designing or delivering parenting education it is important to view our own values closely, to be self-reflexive about what beliefs we hold and why we hold them, to allow ourselves to be the people that we are, but also to challenge ourselves honestly to look at any prejudices we inevitably hold.

Using the following table may be a beneficial self-reflexive exercise for facilitators intending to deliver parenting programmes, helping them identify the strengths and weaknesses of their personal value system, and creating greater self awareness about the values they bring to their work.

Worksheet for facilitators 1 – my value system, part A

Belief	**Positive beliefs**	**Negative beliefs**	**Why do I hold these beliefs**	**How may these beliefs show?**
I believe that parents are:				
I believe that children are				
I believe a Mother's role is				
I believe a Father's role is				
A child is				
Grandparents are				

Worksheet for facilitators 1 – my value system, part B

	values	How it could influence my work
General positive values in my culture that I am proud of are		
Negative values in my culture that I don't agree with are		

Our attitudes can only change when we acknowledge them, and then allow new information and awareness to challenge them

Worksheet for facilitators 2

Who are Travellers?

Travellers are:	Agree/Yes	Disagree/No	Comments
Drop-outs of society			
Poor people			
No different from anyone else			
Not like the real Travellers you knew years ago?			
Descendants of royalty			
Dirty people			
Closely related to gypsies in other countries			
Can't read or write			
Not intelligent			
Welfare fraudsters			
Always have loads of money			

Comments overleaf – fill out your answers and comments first, then look

Who are the Travellers? - answers

Travellers are:	Comments
Drop-outs of society	No – Travellers are a specific ethnic group with a long history. An idea that Travellers are, somewhere in their history just 'failed settled people' who lost their land, and therefore should ultimately return to being settled people for their own and everyone else's good is to totally deny the vibrant culture and ethnic status of the Traveller people.
Poor people	Many Travellers face extreme deprivation and disadvantage. Some Travellers still manage to find a positive economic niche and can produce good earnings for themselves and their families, therefore like all sweeping statements it is NOT true to say that 'All Travellers are poor'. It is true to recognize that *on average*, Travellers face far more hardship than settled people
No different from anyone else	We are all members of the human race. Travellers have their own unique culture, their own identity which makes them different from settled people. They are also members of our society, citizens of our country, with all the same range of human rights, thoughts, feelings and individuality as anyone else.
Not like the real Travellers you knew years ago?	Traveller society is changing. This isn't surprising, as settled society is changing rapidly too. Travellers are as entitled to adapt themselves and their culture as anyone else. This does not mean that today's Travellers are any less 'real' or 'authentic' Travellers than the romatisised notions from generations passed of Travellers in painted wagons.
Descendants of royalty	No-one can say with 100% certainty when Travellers first emerged. Their origins are often attributed to the famine, but there is evidence of anti-Traveller laws before this time. In other European countries there is a romantic notion that Travellers in the 16th century were descendants of ruling families from Egypt (The term 'Gypsy' comes from the word 'Egyptian'). Some Irish people will have heard of this idea, and applied it to Travellers in Ireland. There is no clear evidence to back up this urban myth.
Dirty people	Travellers living on halting sites and on the road-side to not have access to the same washing facilities as settled people, and some will be unable to maintain the exact same culturally standards of hygiene as prevalent in the settled community. However, Travellers are in no way 'dirty' people. In fact, traditional Traveller culture holds complex standards of hygiene quite separate from those held by settled people. For example, in Traveller culture there is a clear distinction between 'dirty' and 'clean' items – those relating to outside the body and inside the body respectively. For a Traveller who still holds to these traditional hygiene beliefs (not all do, as pressure on Traveller culture is causing many of these traditional beliefs to die out), it is polluting and disgusting to wash your hands

	in the same sink as food is prepared in. Toilets should be kept away form living quarters by the same beliefs. If Travellers are 'dirty' to settled people, then settled people are also 'dirty' by Traveller standards
Closely related to gypsies in other countries	Once again, because of the unchartered history of the Travelling people it is not always easy to make clear statements about the origins of Travellers. There is no evidence that Travellers came here from somewhere else – they are not 'gypsies' who arrived from abroad. They are a distinct group, and they are all Irish people. There are some shared aspects of cultural practices and beliefs, however, and there is also some intermarriage between Irish Travellers in England and other countries with 'Gypsy' Travellers from those countries creating some links.
Can't read or write	Because of the systematic deprivation of education to Travellers illiteracy is a real problem among adults in the Travelling community. A Traveller is *more likely* to have literacy difficulties than a settled person. However, as with everything else it is never wise to make sweeping statements or presumptions. There are also Travellers in Ireland who are very highly educated – to degree and post-graduate degree level. Those working with Travellers need to bear in mind that literacy will often be a problem, but at the same time not make assumptions.
Not intelligent	Many assume that Travellers are less intelligent than settled people – possibly because they become aware that many Travellers are less educated, but this is not the same thing. Any ethnic minority group will have all the same range of intelligence, or IQ, as any other group. Travellers can come in all shapes and sizes from the normal to the extremely intelligent, just like everyone else.
Always have loads of money	The Traveller economy is a cash economy. Banks are seldom used, not least because it is very difficult for a Traveller to open a bank account. It is completely false to presume that 'Travellers have loads of money'. One of the key ways in which racism works is by making any one individual representative of the entire group. If one settled person lives in a nice house or has plenty of money, it doesn't mean that all settled people do. This is equally true for Travellers. One wealthy Traveller is NOT evidence that all Travellers are secretly rich and defrauding the social welfare, and one splurge on a child's first holy communion does not mean that the family secretly has loads of money – settled people will often splurge on a major event too.

Key principles

Applying the core values of valuing families and valuing equality into action in parent education requires a number of principles of practice.

The report by Riordan (2001) 'Supporting parents, a study of parents support needs' lists 5 key principles, based on extensive previous research

These principles have been found by a number of researchers to be effective and important ways of winning parents respect
'The incorporation of these principles into the family support service has been found to play a major role in winning parents respect and ensuring their continued involvement in the service (Cutting, 1999; Schorr, 1997; Jaeckel, 1997; Johnson & Molloy, 1995; Smith & Pugh, 1994; Kagan & Seitz, 1988; Durlak & Wahler, 1983). (Riordan, 2001, p 44)

The five principles are:
1. Responsiveness and appropriateness
2. Placing parental knowledge and responsibility at the cornerstone of parental support programmes
3. Community empowerment and action
4. Address the issue of children's rights
5. Recognition of permitting life circumstances

1. Responsiveness and Appropriateness

A successful parenting programme needs to be appropriate to the needs of the participants at the time. It needs to take into account the needs, skills and preferences of the group and their cultural background.
Therefore, programmes need to be flexible. Flexibility is required in:

The method of delivery – not all participants will respond the same way to the same activities. One group may greatly enjoy role play exercises, and get great benefit from them. Another group may feel excessively self-conscious and silly. Strong facilitation allows for a number of facilitation styles so the leader may adapt to the like and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses of each group they work with

Content – The best content will still make little impact if it does not relate to the identified needs of the participants.

Mid-stream changes – if a week is a long time in politics as the saying goes, it can be even longer in a family. A lot can change both negatively and positively in very short spaces of time in individuals parenting circumstances. A strong facilitator can adapt on a session by session basis to the changing and adapting needs of the participants.

Finally, content needs to be culturally appropriate in its content and its delivery. Facilitators need to be aware of the cultural differences that may exist between themselves and the participants, to be respectful and open to learning about the parenting norms of groups outside of their own experience, and to deliver messages in an appropriate way, avoiding where possible the undermining of any cultural practices that participants may have.

2. Placing parental knowledge and responsibility at the cornerstone of parenting support programmes

Parents are the experts on their own children. Successful parenting education draws out and emphasizes the existing knowledge that parents have, and builds self-esteem of parents by focusing on what they are already doing right in addition to providing new information or techniques

3. Community empowerment and action

families are part of communities, and the greatest obstacles to family success often arise from structural conditions in the community. Successful parenting education focuses on strengthening ties with extended family, kin and community where possible, and encourages parents and children to be active citizens in a vibrant changing society.

4. Address the issue of children's rights

All children have inalienable rights and needs. Successful parenting programmes promote a child-centered philosophy, stressing the individuality and uniqueness of every child, their human dignity and inherent self-worth.

Where children are old enough, for example, in the delivery of parenting education for parents of older children or teenagers, consultation with the children as well as the parents on what issues they would like to see covered, and a few parallel or joint sessions with the children themselves are successful ways of ensuring that the real needs of the children are incorporated into the parenting education programme.

5. Recognition of 'permitting life circumstances'

A successful parenting programme will acknowledge and support parents from all walks of life. It will be respectful of, and will address, the external pressures on families, particularly the need for social and economic support.

Delivering Parenting Education

Each facilitator will have a style that they are comfortable with, and that works for them. As far as possible, while recognizing the unique skills, abilities and approaches of each individual facilitator, best practice facilitation of parenting education for ethnic minority groups will

- Model positive parenting
- Value all learning styles
- Value the culture, background and experience of all participants
- Encourage collective as well as individual action

<u>Modeling positive parenting</u>
A strong facilitation style will avoid the trap of presenting the message 'do what I say, not what I do'. Herbert and Napper (2000) tell anyone facilitating groups of parents that it is important to also remember that they are demonstrating parenting through their delivery style. Beneficial facilitation style therefore includes:

- Active listening and being responsive to participants
- Sharing care and concern
- Demonstrating empathy
- Praising and reinforcing positives freely
- Focusing on the positive not the negative in parent's parenting practice
- Valuing everyone equally and respecting their difference
- Setting clear boundaries, in consultation with participants, that are communicated consistently and clearly

John Sommers-Flanagan (2007) reports that in a successful parenting education encounter where the specific parenting practice of the parents is never criticized, there clear guidelines are laid down, and communicated with clarity (and in writing) this specifically assists parents to remember to apply these same standards with their children at home.

It is also worth noting that in any parenting education setting parents may possibly transfer their own feelings of an idealised parent, or a rejecting parent, onto the facilitator.

<u>Valuing all learning styles</u>

Some of us will reach out to pick up a pen with our right hands, some with our left. There is no right or wrong way to do it, it is simply a refection of who we are

– right handed or left handed. In a learning situation, we will reach out to learning in different ways, except that there is far more variety in the forms of learning styles that people may favour. People can all learn through a variety of ways, but will all be most comfortable when the learning style on offer most closely matches the learning style that is most innate to them – just as people can use both hands for any task, but will be most comfortable and most successful when using their dominant hand.

Learning styles can be aural (some people prefer to take in information by *hearing* it), they can be visual (some people prefer to *see* information), they can be active (some people prefer to *actively try out* something in order to learn about it) while others will be happier and more confident if they are enabled to acquire information, and reflect on it in advance before putting it into practice. Some people learn better in a situation where they have ample opportunity to discuss ideas through fully in company of others, while some absorb information better if they have ample time for quite reflection so they can mull new ideas over on their own.

A facilitation style that presents different methods of absorbing and refining ideas will therefore have greater chances of reaching more people in any group. To achieve this a facilitator can present material in a variety of ways, allowing participants to discuss ideas, to hear input on them, to see visual representations of the ideas, role play or try out different techniques, and to show what they already know through not only discussion but also through demonstration and visual or creative/artistic techniques.

<u>Valuing the culture, background and experience of all participants</u>

As has been highlighted in the report, it is often difficult for 'typical', white, middle class facilitators to directly address race and cultural issues in a group. Our culture tells us it is rude to make unnecessary comments about people's appearance, culture, 'race', ethnicity or social class. Unfortunately this can create a culture of silence, fostering feelings of rejection in participants because the reality of their lives is not acknowledged.

When facilitating groups it *is* necessary to address issues of culture, ethnicity, etc, to allow the participants to bring the totality of their experience and their identity into the group.

By allowing and actively listening to participants talking about their own culture, their own background and the norms that they have around childrearing a facilitator can value and acknowledge that practice.

<u>Encouraging collective as well as individual action</u>

A facilitator faced with a group experiencing major structural disadvantaged in life may feel that little can be done beyond the totally individualized level. However, collective and group actions can often have far more far reaching consequences. Most of all, they can create a strong sense of empowerment in the participants, a sense of being heard, believed and understood, as well as a reduction in the

feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, futility and apathy that disadvantage and discrimination breed so freely.
One parenting group, for example (who were all lone parents on very low income), chose to write a collective letter to the local school explaining how a recent change in school uniform policy meant that the children now had to have a crest on the school uniform jumper, in addition to specific shoes and coats had more than doubled the cost of the uniform and placed greatly increased burden on parents. This increased the parent's sense of control over a difficult situation, and thereby increased their confidence in themselves as parents.

Content of parenting programme

In devising content for parenting programmes for ethnic minorities or disadvantaged groups it is important to remember that the more collaborative the process of deciding the content of the programme is the more chance that the end result will be culturally appropriate. Rigid following of pre-set programmes are unlikely to cover the specific issues of concern to the participants, and are therefore considerably more likely to be culturally alienating and counter-productive. Facilitators will need to balance this need with the base-line standard of the rights and needs of every child from all communities and backgrounds.

In the Barnardos produced report by G. French (2000) a minimum content for a parenting programme should include the five topics. By including these five sessions a facilitator can ensure room for collaborative work with parents and incorporate sessions which cover their specific concerns while also essential issues around children's human rights

- Introductory session covering expectations, guidelines, and programme content
- The needs and strengths of parents and children
- The developmental stages of children
- Positive strategies in managing behaviour and esteem building in parents and children
- Communication

Who should deliver Parenting Education?

There is no set qualification for the delivery of parenting education. The right person can be anyone from a parent from the community who has previously undertaken a parenting course to a skilled and qualified community health worker, community development worker, public health nurse, teacher, childcare worker, etc.
The fundamental requirements of a facilitator for parenting education to ethnic minority groups are:

- Respect for diversity and respect for the target community
- Respect for the challenging job of parenting and differing parenting styles
- A belief in parent's ability to support each other, and learn from each others experience
- A greater desire to support than to 'teach'
- Strong empathy and leadership skills
- Skills, knowledge and experience relevant to the specific programme

Background training or experience for facilitators is recommended in the following areas

- Group facilitation
- The programme content
- Evaluation methods

The provision of parenting education to any ethnic minority group can be greatly strengthened if the course is delivered in the first language of the group and/or if the facilitator who delivers the programme is from the same group – this will eliminate cultural barriers and provide community pride by providing positive role models from within the community in question.
It is extremely important however, not to fall into the trap of asking a person from a target community to facilitate or co-facilitate in a tokenistic way. A mute 'co-facilitator' from the same community as the participants sitting beside the main person delivering the programme will not earn any further respect from any group. Such efforts are highly transparent and can only lose respect, not gain it. Furthermore, inverse racism and resentments born of restricted life choices mean that often a person will find it is most difficult to be a prophet in their home town, or a facilitator with their own community. Familiarity can, unfortunately breed contempt. If one woman is selected from a halting site, and provided with the opportunity to deliver programmes to the remaining women from that site it would not be uncommon for the participants to begin asking 'what's so special about her', to undermine her authority and not to accord her the respect they would of another facilitator.
It is important therefore that the leadership and other skills of any target community are developed, that potential community leaders and future group facilitators are identified and offered training and supports, but that these efforts are rigorous, and that high standards are expected of any facilitator.
External support and supervision, as well as strong internal management in any programme delivering parenting education are recommended for all facilitators. Where a member of a target community is being encouraged for the first time to step into the leadership role these needs are increased, and skilled external support and supervision is even more important so that the new leader has a confidential and neutral place to work out any issues they may be facing in their new role as facilitator.

Before you start

Before offering a parenting education programme it is important to decide

1. Who it is targeted at

2. What your aims and objectives are

3. All necessary facilities are available

4. What evaluation procedures will be put in place

Who it is targeted at?
Decide in advance who the programme is going to be for. Is it a course open to everyone, including but not exclusively members of ethnic minority groups? This can be the least stigmatizing way of delivering programmes, as it does not imply that it is only presented to 'needy' families. However, exceptionally disadvantaged groups may not feel comfortable if heavily outnumbered in a group from the majority culture. Therefore you may decide to run specific groups to meet specific needs – a group specifically for Travellers, or specifically for lone parents or any other interest group or minority group. The group may be just for Mothers, just for Fathers, or open to both. The more specific the group, the more it allows for the particular unique issues of that specific interest group to be fully explored. The more open a group, the lower the risk of attaching a stigma to attendance. Being aware of the disadvantages of whatever approach you choose will help the facilitator to plan ways of counteracting these disadvantages.

Once the target group has been identified, the next step is to ensure that as much information as possible is available about the specific issues that may arise for this group. The more the facilitator knows in advance about the culture of any ethnic minority group, and the more that is known about the issues faced by any particular disadvantaged group in the community, the more prepared they are for delivering the programme. This will show clearly and increase respect from participants once the course commences.

Use the worksheets for facilitators in the back of this report to explore your own pre-conceptions about your culture and the culture of the group you will be working with.

What are your aims and objectives?

Research shows that successful programmes are those with clear aims and objectives, stated simply and in an accessible way, and communicated to parents in advance.

The aim is a simple statement of what you are shooting at, for example

'To support family life in my community'
'To provide a safe and secure setting for Traveller parents to explore their strengths as parents'

The objectives are statements of specific targets you hope to achieve

These could include, for example

To support and strengthen the skills of parents in my community
To promote the rights and needs of children
To promote a child-centered approach to child-rearing practice

Using the self-reflexive questionnaires at the back of this report may be of assistance in deciding what your aims and objectives are

Ensuring all necessary facilities are available.

To successfully run a parenting education programme you will need to determine Where it will take place – is there adequate light, heat, tea, coffee facilities, etc. for parents and facilitator to be comfortable?
What Materials are available on site, and what will need to be provided? Is there access to a wide range of materials, from TV with video/DVD player to paper, pens, balls of wool etc for creative activities? Gathering a box of tricks in advance prevents weekly panics looking for the correct materials for that session. It also allows for facilitators to be adaptive during sessions, to change plans and alter activities as needed to suit participants.

How will the sessions be evaluated?

Evaluation of the programme should be planned from the outset. Both internal and external evaluation should be considered. Setting minimum evaluation plans in advance, in line with the aims and objectives of the programme ensures that this does not get overlooked. Further aspects of the evaluation should be agreed with participants during sessions, as they may have their own concerns that they would like to see evaluated.
Formats for evaluation of programmes are included at the back of this report.

Methods in facilitating parenting education

Methods of parenting education delivery should at all times be culturally appropriate, varied to take into account different learning styles, strengths and

weaknesses of participants and their likes and dislikes for particular types of activities.
Methods should also play to the strengths of the facilitator, where possible. There are a great variety of methods available, and these include:

Warm-up exercises/energizers

Warm-up exercises, also called energizers, have two purposes. They literally create energy in the participants, by getting them to move about and be physically active. They also increase concentration and ground the participant in the moment.
As participants enter the room they will be bringing with them the baggage of their day – a worry about an unpaid bill, a tiff with a spouse or colleague, or some other daily concern on their mind. Energizers are designed to require total concentration, and therefore help the participants clear their minds and become grounded in the moment before exploring the topic of the session. Energizers involve clapping games, ball games, and name games. The most successful energizers will involve both physical movement and total concentration. Energizers are often used at the very commencement of the session. They can also be used after a tea-break, or after a difficult discussion in the middle of a session to help participants clear their minds before going on to the next part of the topic. A list of energizers is provided at the back of the report

Introductions and name games

Introductions and name games also have two purposes. Firstly, they help create a sense of group cohesion by helping the participants and facilitator learn each other's names and learn a little about each other. They also help enable participation and create equality in the group.
In any group there will be people who are vocal, and those who are hesitant to speak out. For a successful group, all participants must feel comfortable contributing to any discussions that take place. It is hard to speak out for the first time about a personal matter you feel deeply about, such as a parenting issue. It is much easier to speak out in a group for the first time if all you have to say is 'My name is … and my favourite colour is…'. By leading in with structured introductions a facilitator can set the tone of the group as a safe place to speak out and help towards greater equality of participation.
The more structure on a round of introductions, especially early in the course of a parenting programme, the better. When asked 'Tell us your name and a little something about yourself' there will inevitably be one participant who will ramble on with their entire life story. This puts pressure on the other participants who feel they must say just as much. A greater danger is that of major self-disclosure of personal problems too early in the course of sessions. Disclosures of domestic violence, childhood abuse, etc. are possible.
People disclose deeply personal and troubling problems to two categories of people – total strangers and close personal friends/family. People are never

comfortable with acquaintances knowing their most intimate secrets. Therefore, there is the tendency of participants to disclose deeply personal secrets in the first week or two of a session because they are talking to strangers. After that moment, however, the participant who disclosed personal secrets will be motivated to keep the group and facilitator as strangers from then on. Either they will not come back at all, once they have reflected on what they said, or they will remain distant and stand-offish with the group.
Structured rounds of introductions or name games are therefore better practice than open 'tell us a little about yourself' types. They can be as simple or as complicated as the facilitator likes, and can follow formats such as 'tell your name and favorite song/colour/food/happy childhood memory/etc – selected as appropriate to the session content. Alternatively they can be more complex name games, and suggestions are included in the appendices. As the group develops and gels together the introduction sessions can put less focus on learning names and allow for more self-disclosure from participants.

Facilitator input

A facilitator may choose to introduce a topic with the input of specific information and materials. This can be done through very brief talks (if possible backed up by visual aids – ie. a poster of the food pyramid if taking about nutrition, key words and pictures on a flip chart or power-point presentation if the literacy level of the group is already established.
Remember, it is ultimately important never to embarrass any participant with low or nonexistent literacy levels by providing written *work* if this is an issue. However, learning literacy, like learning parenting, is an ongoing process. One or two illustrated key words on a flip chart, powerpoint projector or poster can have the benefit of increasing literacy skills in the group as well as parenting skills if they are used selectively, wisely, and called out clearly so everyone in the room knows what they say whether or not they can read them.

Video/DVDs

Material can be used as part of a full programme from video-based parenting packages such as Triple P, Parents Plus or the Family Caring trust programmes, or individual sessions may be used along with other material. Specific DVDs on cultural issues and social issues can also be sourced from organizations such as Pavee Point, and can be extremely useful ways of raising issues and triggering thought and discussion.
Use of television media can also be very occasionally incorporated if the facilitator has a clip of a TV programme such as Malcom in the Middle, the Simpsons, etc which they would like to use. 'What Homer did wrong' could prove both a fun discussion and a way of raising real issues.

Small group discussions and feedback

The facilitator may ask the participants to break into small groups or 3 or 4 participants and discuss a topic, possibly answering specific questions. Small group discussions allow for more time for each participant to take part than large group discussions, and are easier for the shyer members.
One the allotted time is up, one member of each small group gives a feed-back to the main group about what the group thought of the issue. Encouraging participants to give feedback to the man group can help develop leadership skills and confidence.

Talking in pairs
Participants can also be asked to discus a topic in pairs. This allows for even greater input from each individual, as they are only talking with one other person. Talking in pairs is more likely to wander off-topic, and also does not generally allow for feedback, as even a small group of 12 will have 6 pairs and time will generally not allow for feedback from all groups.

Full group discussion

It generally takes a skilled and experienced facilitator using a variety or techniques to ensure all participants engage with full group discussion equally, but it has very significant advantages. Everyone gets to hear and learn from what everyone else has to say, learning to speak out in the full group and have their ideas accepted greatly increases confidence and self-esteem of participants, participants feel their input is heard and valued.

Art work

Art work provides ample opportunity to explore and raise awareness of issues. For many groups where English is not their first language or they have been significantly educationally deprived verbal skills may not be strong, and participants may not have the words to adequately express the depth of their thought and feelings on a topic. Research has shown that even in individual's whose language 'IQ' is below average, their logical and reasoning intelligence will still be in the normal range, if they can express these through alternative means. Art-work provides participants to 'show' rather than 'tell' and to 'see' rather than 'hear', which suits many. Artwork can include collage, where participants either in groups or individually create illustrations of topics from collections of different individual pictures cut form magazines, newspapers or other sources.
3-dimentional construction work involves participants creating structures from anything including Lego bricks to empty cereal packets and can be a highly effective way of exploring issues around the use of buildings, for example in a session that helps parents focus on finding appropriate childcare they can use the technique of constructing their 'dream' location for their child to be minded in. 'Constructing' a play room for a child in a session can be a highly effective way to trigger discussion on the importance of play, and so forth.

‘Mapping’ is a technique where participants create a map of a location or a body. It is a technique often used in preventative health education in a development context, and has proved highly useful. By drawing a ‘map’ of their child a parent can start to show, and then talk about that child’s needs.
Working with clay (or any version such as playdough or breaddough) is extremely emotionally releasing and can be incorporated into sessions on children’s emotional needs.
Quilting is an activity where participants create one large group quilt made up from different patches that they create individually. It can be a useful way of stimulating discussion, reflection and learning through memory and recall. Creating a quilt takes several sessions, and therefore doesn’t fit in well as a once off activity. It can however be a way of beginning discussions, and provides focus and reason for a group, if the making of the quilt is organized around a particular theme.

Drama

Drama, like artwork, can be a very powerful tool. Simple role plays may take the form of asking participants to act out scenes involving typical family situations to assist with the empathy skills, or to practice new techniques in advance. Slightly more detailed dramas can be used to enable participants to explore issues further.
Participants may act out a typical problematic scene from their home life that they think is unsolvable and other participants can then ask questions about what is happening here. They can make suggestions, or take over in the role to demonstrate suggestions for alternative strategies for dealing with the problem. This allows for deeper exploration of both the causes and potential solutions to the issues that parents bring to the session.

Music

Music is increasingly being used as a strategy for dealing with difficult issues in group facilitation. Percussion can be used both as an energizer activity and a form of emotional release, while asking participants to sing songs they remember form their childhood, or songs with particular meaning can be a means of using the participants own culture to explore topics for discussion from the content of the songs.

Explaining the reasons for the methods you choose

Groups who are highly discriminated against may be more sensitive to being patronized than other groups, precisely because they are more used to patronizing behaviour than the majority community. Therefore, members of ethnic minority groups are not always comfortable with unusual or creative

techniques, despite the fact that the traditional didactic methods are also less appropriate. Introduce a game with playdough to a group of middle class parents and they may enjoy it, while a group of Travellers may complain that they don't need to go back to playschool. This is fully understandable if you consider the reason for their feelings of being patronized.
For this reason it remains important to use a wide variety of techniques, but it is also important to highlight the reasons why any technique is being used. Explain clearly what the benefits of the activity are. It can also be useful in the context of parenting education to point out that most games and activities are not only useful tools in the parenting class itself, but also positive demonstrations of play activities that parents can bring home and do with their children.

Evaluating the programme

Evaluation of any programme is ideally an ongoing process carried out using a variety of techniques, and planned out in advance. Evaluation is an invaluable tool in parenting supports, as it is only through careful and honest evaluations that learning and evidence can be gathered to ensure the ongoing effectiveness. It is a tool where evidence is gathered on the work carried out, and then used to bolster and support further programmes.

What is evaluated?

Any aspect of a parenting programme can be evaluated. The overall aims and objectives of the activity are the cornerstone to any evaluation, and the process gathers evidence of what was actually done, in the light of the hopes or aims that were initially identified to find out how closely they match.
Celia Smith (1996) recommends that an evaluation of a parenting programme will incorporate four main areas of information:

A) Management Information
This is information gathered about the characteristics of the participants such as employment status and area they live in, attendance records, how participants heard about the programme, etc. This allows the programme organizers to see, easily and clearly who the programme is reaching, if the participants are from the previously identified target groups, and who the programme is working for.

B) Process Information
This is mainly gathered by the facilitator, with the assistance of the participants on a session by session basis and looks at the actual processes and methods of delivery – any particular problems, or notably successful activities that were tried, etc.

C) Outcome information
This is where the key evidence of the success of the programme is gathered, and

relates to reports of change in the parents and their children. An evaluation may look for evidence of
Change in children's self-esteem
Change in parent's self esteem
Change in parent's knowledge
Increased child-centered approach in parents
Specific data on change in children's attendance rates at school, or health status may also be sought, depending on the exact aims of the programme and the needs of the target group.

D) Values and principles of the programme
The core values and principles of the programme can be evaluated to ensure that the actions carried out are in line with the stated values of the programme. (Celia Smith p100-113 1996)

In the book *Developing Parenting Programmes* by Celia Smith there are several useful resources for planning an evaluation, including suggested questionnaires for facilitators. This text is published in the UK by the National Children's Bureau, and a copy is available is the Barnardoes Resource Centre in Dublin.

Appendixes

Appendix one – summary of parenting programmes available in Ireland

Family Caring Trust

Available from Family caring Trust, 8 Ashtree Enterprise Part, Newry, Co. Down, BT34 1BY

http://www.familycaring.co.uk/

Cost €106.8 per age group (three packs available for three different age groups). Additional materials also available

Designed in Northern Ireland for Irish and British parents, it has been in use for a long time and stood the test of time, as well as being up-dated as appropriate. It expects a certain level of literacy and uses DVD/video input.

Aim: 'To improve parent/child communication and offer parents some skills, sense of direction and community support for positive parenting'

'Growing Together' – Barnardos

Available free from Barnardos, Christchurch square, Dublin 8, phone: 01-4549699

Cost effective, simple, straightforward. Designed in Ireland for Irish parents. Not geared specifically to the needs of ethnic minorities but several of the sessions are easily adaptable

Aim;
To build on and complement existing community based supports for parents by providing training resources and methods for facilitators of parenting groups. To enhance and enrich the parent/child relationship and thereby further the welfare of children.

Parents Plus
Available from the Matter Department of Child and Family Psychiatry, Mater Hospital, Dublin 7,
http://www.parentsplus.ie/
Cost in the region of €480 for one pack to deliver to parents of children of one age group. Multiple packs for different age groups available as are other supporting materials.

This programme is designed in Ireland for Irish parents and is well-known. It uses video/DVD presentations in conjunction with facilitated exercises and hand-outs. Expects a certain level of literacy. Recent new editions have attempted to make the material more multi- culturally by presenting families of different ‘races’.

Overall aim:
‘The Parents Plus Programmes are practical and positive video-based parenting courses designed to support and empower parents to manage and solve discipline problems, to create satisfying and enjoyable family relationships and to help children and young people grow up and reach their full potential.’

(Related – John McSharry DVDs to run on community centre computers)

Triple P - Positive Parenting Programme

Availability in Ireland – specific health board areas are licensed to deliver triple P, therefore it is currently only available in some parts of the country.

Very rigorously evaluated world-wide, and stands up well to evaluation proving it a tried and trusted method. Not long available in Ireland, and not available in all areas. Makes use of video and expects literacy from participants.
Because the Triple P programme is designed around a number of ‘levels’ – one of which is group based parenting education but others include providing leaflets and media information to the general public, and the provision of support for one to one sessions this means that this programme may have relevant material for those working with a range of families, proving group parenting programmes but also information that can be used in single session or one-to-one interventions.

Aim: ‘Triple P is a system of easy to implement, proven parenting solutions that helps solve current parenting problems and prevents future problems before they arise.’

Webster-Stratton - The Incredible Years

Available from the USA, can be ordered on line at
http://www.incredibleyears.com/

Cost per age group (three different age groups available varies from $995 to $1300 per pack.

This programme is aimed at families where children have aggression and conduct problems. Training is not required before ordering and using resources, but it is very strongly recommended. At present training for facilitators is not available in Ireland.

Aim: designed to promote social competence and prevent, reduce, and treat aggression and related conduct problems in young children (ages 4 to 8 years).

Appendix two – Resources

A number of resources are available to provide extra materials or ideas in delivering parenting education.
Pavee Point provides a range of traveller specific materials that may assist in creating a culturally appropriate parenting programme to travellers. These include

- Whisht- Irish Traveller folk-tales and songs (available to download in PDF format)
- A selection of 6 Traveller health promotion posters illustrating key points regarding nutrition, dental health, child inoculation and breast feeding.

- Pavee Gailles: Traveller Children's Health - A video on children's health in the Traveller Community focusing on the four key topics of Asthma, SIDS, Immunisation and Child Development. This video comes with a workbook Price: €25.40

- Pavee Beoir: Different But Equal - A video looking at issues affecting Traveller women and the work that they are undertaking to address these issues. Price €25.40

The Combat Poverty Agency Produce two handbooks on developing facilitation skills, that will provide a wealth of ideas, facilitation techniques and activities for group work for anyone providing a parenting education programme.

- Developing Facilitation Skills: a handbook for group facilitators (2nd edition) 2004 – 10 euro,
- Facilitation with People Experiencing Poverty 2005 (companion to *Developing Facilitation Skills*) – €10

Trocaire provide a range of educational resources on developmental education for both children and adults. Many of their publications include packs of pictures of families and children in a range of cultural settings , and while designed for different purposes, would nonetheless prove useful tools to the facilitator of a parenting group with participants from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The 'Watoto' pack in particular provides a facilitator with a wealth of pictures of children from many cultural backgrounds which could be used in a variety of games and exercises in a parenting education context.

Appendix three – useful web sites

Parenting education resources available in Ireland

http://www.parentsplus.ie/ - The Parents Plus Programme – information and ordering

http://www1.triplep.net/ - Triple P programme information

http://www.familycaring.co.uk/ - The Family Caring Trust Web site information and ordering

http://www.incredibleyears.com/ - The Incredible Years information and ordering

Other parenting education web sites

http://www.k-state.edu/wwparent/programs/basic/index.htm - the 'basic parenting' programme

http://www.familylinks.org.uk/nurturing/index.htm the 'Nurturing programme' UK site

http://nurturingparenting.com/index.php the nurturing parenting US site

http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_sbp_11.asp the confident parenting programme

http://www.families-first.org/ -the families first programme

Information about different ethnic groups in Ireland

http://www.paveepoint.ie/ - Pavee Point – information about the Travelling community

http://www.itmtrav.com/ - The Irish Travellers Movement -

http://www.iol.ie/employment/integra/projects/bcd.html - information about the Bosnian community development project

http://www.diversityireland.ie/ - the governments national action plan against racism

Other resources

http://www.cpa.ie/ - The Combat Poverty Agency provides a wide range of publications

http://www.lent.ie/ trocaire web site provides information and ordering information for resources

http://www.frcnf.com/ - The Family Resource Centre National Forum

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