



Parenting Education, Discussion and Application

In many schools, ParentNet and Parenting Education programs already work hand in hand. When parents have the opportunity to attend formal parenting workshops or listen to parent educators, topics from those programs will normally enrich grade level ParentNet discussions. Parents naturally want the opportunity to discuss the real-world application of these new parenting theories or models. The reverse is also true. Sometimes, through ParentNet discussions, specific needs are identified that help shape the school's Parenting Education program. In this instance, workshops or speakers are brought to the school because parents themselves have requested additional help with several or more aspects of parenting.

With this design, Parenting Education and ParentNet are brought together in a ParentNet Forum. In this two-hour program, parents from multiple grade levels assemble to hear a speaker or panel of speakers, then break into small groups to discuss the application of the information to their own parenting situations. This design should be used as an addition to regular ParentNet meetings rather than as a replacement for them. It is an excellent opportunity for parent facilitators to use and refine their skills in leading small groups, and it adds variety to the basic ParentNet meeting format.

Goal

To learn new ideas, information and perspectives on parenting and to apply this knowledge to our own parenting situations and school community.

Planning the Program

There are many topics, speakers, and programs appropriate for this ParentNet Forum. A speaker or panel of speakers is asked to make a 45-minute presentation. Topics might include "Positive Discipline," "Drugs and Alcohol," "Learning Disabilities," "Power Struggles," etc. One school that was working with the "40 Developmental Assets" from the Search Institute of Minneapolis presented data collected from their own student body, and then broke into discussion groups to process and apply the information. Your community has many resources for parenting programs, many of which are free of charge. The most important point to consider: Choose a program filled with thought-provoking information that can be effectively shared in 45 minutes! This means topics must be well defined and specific, giving parents useful information, tools, or techniques for parenting children or adolescents.

Since programs of this kind typically involve more than one grade level, it is important to have the school ParentNet Chair involved from the beginning of your planning. If, for example, you want to plan a program for Grades Pre-K through 2, ask the ParentNet Chair to schedule a planning meeting of Grade Representatives from each of those grades. At this meeting, explore the kinds of topics that would meet the needs of parents in these grades. Review the ParentNet Meeting summaries for these grades for clues to parental interests. Find out if anyone has contacts in the community for such a program, and assign follow-up tasks to individuals. Determine your budget and, if necessary, be creative to find funds! Next, do your research to find a motivated speaker or panel who will share their knowledge with your parents.

Before the Forum, make sure you have trained ParentNet facilitators committed to leading discussion groups and you have selected a person who will lead the entire meeting. It is **not** recommended that the featured speaker lead any other part of the Forum. By doing this, you give up control of the process to someone unfamiliar with ParentNet and its guidelines. Distribute this design to all facilitators and review with them the process for small group discussions.

Interviewing and Briefing the Speaker or Panel of Speakers

When talking to potential speakers for the ParentNet Forum, you will want to inform them of the format for your meeting. Explain that they will have 45 minutes to make a presentation on the agreed upon subject. Following their presentation, parents will break into small groups for 30 minutes to discuss the real-world application to their own parenting situations. Trained parent facilitators from your school will lead these small groups. Following these discussions, summaries from each small group will be shared with the large group. Explain to the speaker(s) that a ParentNet Leader will introduce the program, organize the discussion groups, and lead the summary of discussions at the end of the program. Although the speaker(s) are not involved in the 30-minute discussion groups, they are encouraged to remain for the entire program if possible. During the summary discussion, the speaker may wish to add additional points, answer questions, or clarify information.

Advertising the Program

The ParentNet Forum should always be distinguished in your marketing materials so as not to be confused with a ParentNet Meeting. Your advertising should describe the topic and invited speakers, as well as the reasons parents would benefit from attending. You should tell parents that they will have the opportunity to meet in small groups following the presentation to discuss and apply the information to their own parenting situations. The ParentNet Parent Contract will be used to guide these discussions. Be sure to include the details of time, place, and contact phone numbers. An example of content follows:

You are invited to attend a ParentNet Forum, entitled "Power Struggles: The Great Mystery" given by local parenting educator, Ross Davis, Ph.D.

Do you worry that if you "give in" today; you will be giving in forever? Have you ever been frustrated because strategies like time out, or ignoring, work for your friends, but not for you? The real story is never what it looks like at first glance. And like a good mystery a power struggle cannot be solved until we discover the "real culprits". Dr. Davis will help us discover the common culprits behind power struggles. Learn effective, parent-tested techniques to help you stop reacting and instead develop a plan of action that wins cooperation and stops those tugs of war.

Following Dr. Davis' presentation, you will have the opportunity to meet in small groups to discuss the real-world application of this information to your own parenting situations. ParentNet facilitators will lead our discussions and we will honor the Parent Contract as we do at our grade level ParentNet meetings.

Forum Beginning: Parent Arrival

Three important tasks should be accomplished as parents arrive for this program.

1. **Name Tags:** Since there will be no parent introductions or ice breaker activity during this program, it is important to have each parent fill out a nametag.
2. **Sign-In Count:** One person should be assigned, as parents fill out nametags, to ask each person for their preference for a grade-level discussion group. Some parents may have children in several grades but will have to choose which grade discussion group they would like to participant in during the program. It is important to get this count at the beginning, so that the leader can plan the logistics of the small group discussions during the presentation. A simple "tally system" works well. If you have four grades represented, have a sheet of paper with four columns, and tally the number of parents who will choose that grade.
3. **Parent Contracts:** Distribute copies of the ParentNet Parent Contract as people arrive for the program. If you have a short bio of the featured speaker or program, you might consider printing it on one side of the handout with the Contract on the other side. Be sure to have someone verbally invite people to review the Contract as they are seated.

Welcome and Introductions

Begin your ParentNet Forum by describing the goal (see above) of this type of ParentNet Forum. This is a unique opportunity for us to put parenting theory into practice, to question what we have just learned, and to apply this knowledge to our real-life situations. Our agenda is different from a ParentNet Meeting and will be divided into three sections:

- Guest Presentation (45 minutes)
- Small Group Discussion (30 minutes)
- Large Group Summary and Discussion (30 minutes)

Briefly introduce your speaker with highlights of their background that gives them the expertise they will share with parents. As the 45-minute point in the presentation gets close, give your speaker a prearranged signal to wrap up. If the speaker appears to be going overtime by more than 5 minutes or so, be prepared to interrupt, saying that we'll have time to hear additional comments from the speaker at the end of the program.

During the Presentation – A Note to ParentNet Leader: During the presentation, someone must be in charge of reviewing the tallied number of parents in attendance and their choice of grade-level discussion groups. Decide how many groups will be formed, whether several grades must be combined, and who will be assigned to facilitate each group. As a general rule of thumb, an ideal group will consist of no more than 10 people, plus 1-2 facilitators. Be prepared with this information before the next section! With certain programs, it may be more beneficial to mix grade levels in discussion groups. You will need to decide and plan for this before the forum; in which case, you won't need to tally the grade levels at the beginning of the program. Instead, you would calculate the total number of people in attendance (not including facilitators), and then divide by 10 (the ideal number of people in each group.) First, ask facilitators to come forward (so they are not included in making the groups!) To mix people in groups, simply ask people to number off by whatever number you have calculated, assign facilitators to those groups, and tell them where to meet in the room or adjacent rooms. For example, 80 parents divided by 10 equals 8 groups. People would number off by 8's. "Group 1 will meet with Carol and John in Room 11; Group 2 will meet with Jan and Jeff in Room 12, etc." This information is important to prepare during the presentation. It will be used when you give participants the instructions for breaking into small groups below.

ParentNet Contract

Before breaking into small discussion groups, the leader will briefly review the ParentNet Contract with the group and its application to the ParentNet Forum. An example of how this can be accomplished follows:

Although we are not using our usual ParentNet meeting format, it's really important to remind ourselves of the communication guidelines contained in our Parent Contract. I trust everyone had a moment to review it as you arrived. In it, we are reminded to speak for ourselves, avoiding rumors or hearsay. In other words, "If it's your story to tell, please do. If not, please don't share it." We'll probably have different reactions to the presentation and ways of applying the information. That's great! Please be reminded that there are no right and wrong reactions. If you disagree with what someone says, please respect their opinion without judging them for sharing it. As always, we'd like to ask you to maintain the confidentiality of who said what, leaving the discussion with valued learning, not grist for the gossip mill. With that said, let me introduce the task of the small group discussions, where they will meet, and who will facilitate.

Small Group Discussion

During the presentation, you will have calculated how you will break people into small groups and who will be assigned to facilitate each group. (See "Note to ParentNet Leader" above.) **Before** breaking into groups, you will first explain the assignment to the entire group. It is important to have the assignment

printed on newsprint as well as a handout for each facilitator. (Facilitator Guide is attached to the end of this design.)

<u>Group Discussion Assignment</u>
Reflect <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share reactions to or feelings about the presentation
Share Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examine shared experiences about the topic• Do experiences support or conflict with presented information? How?
Apply Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can we apply what we have learned?

Review the flipchart above with the entire group so that everyone understands the goals of the small group discussion. Explain that each group will be asked to choose a **reporter** who will report back to the large group on the third topic: How can we apply what we have learned?

At this time, give group assignments and locations, and tell groups how much time they will have.

Leading the Discussion Groups -- Tips for Facilitators

1. Facilitators should introduce themselves to the group and ask for a volunteer to be the reporter. Remember, the reporter focuses on "Applying Knowledge" so they don't have to take notes on the whole conversation as they would in a ParentNet Meeting.
2. Begin your discussion by asking everyone to briefly share his or her reactions to the presentation. Your goal here is to find out very quickly whether people were mesmerized, downright bored, or somewhere in the middle! Example: *"Let's begin by sharing our reactions to the material presented. Did you think it was useful or useless? Thought provoking or sleep producing? Somewhere in between? Would someone volunteer to start with a few adjectives?"*
3. Whether or not people found the presentation useful or informative, you will now ask people to share their own experiences on the specific topic. Do these experiences support or conflict with the presented information? How?
4. The "Applying Knowledge" phase of your discussion is what your group will share with others when you reconvene with the larger group. This phase of your discussion can be viewed as the "conclusions" your group draws about the topic and how you can apply what you've learned to your own parenting situations. Two things can happen here. 1) If the group found the presentation very helpful and informative and their own experience confirms the principles learned they would most likely have numerous ways of applying the information. 2) If the group did not find the presentation particularly useful and their own experiences conflict with the principles learned, they would still have ways of applying their knowledge, even though they may disagree with the presenter. Both outcomes are equally acceptable. It is also possible that your group's conclusions will fall somewhere in between these two outcomes or that you may include a minority opinion with your summary to the large group.
5. Five minutes before your group time is finished, review your "applications" and "conclusions" with the group to clarify what they will share with the larger group.

Large Group Summary and Discussion

When the small groups are reconvened, all the groups are given the opportunity to hear how parents would apply their knowledge to the topic at hand. Ask for the reporter from each group to share these applications and conclusions. Be aware of time. If you have five groups and 30 minutes left, you want to allow enough time for each group to report, plus a few minutes for speaker contributions or additional discussion. If the speaker(s) has remained for this part of the forum, invite him or her to comment on points made by groups or answer questions posed by groups.

Closure

Thank people for attending the ParentNet Forum and for their rich discussion and application of the subject. Formally thank the speaker(s) for their contribution and thought-provoking presentation. Before concluding, it is helpful to have a very brief evaluation ready for parents to complete – giving feedback about the experience, the quality of the presentation, and suggested topics for future ParentNet Forums. This should take no more than a few minutes to complete. (A sample EVALUATION follows)

ParentNet[®] Forum Facilitator Guide

Group Discussion Assignment

Reflect

- Share reactions to or feelings about the presentation

Share Experiences

- Examine shared experiences about the topic
- Do experiences support or conflict with presented information? How?

Apply Knowledge

- How can we apply what we have learned?

1. Introduce yourself and co-facilitator
2. Ask for a volunteer to be the Reporter who will provide summary of “How we can apply what we’ve learned” to the large group.
3. Begin discussion with “Reflect” above.
4. Lead your group through the remainder of assignment
5. Allow last 5 minutes to review your conclusions, how you can apply what you’ve learned. This will help the Reporter prepare a summary to share with large group.

ParentNet® Forum Participant Evaluation

Please help us by taking the time to fill out this brief evaluation. If you have additional thoughts to share, don't hesitate to contact our school ParentNet leaders.

1. I thought the PRESENTATION was

Not very useful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very thought-provoking!

2. The DISCUSSION in my small group was

Uninteresting 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Stimulating!

3. I can apply what I've learned here today to my own parenting situation.

Not too sure 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes, absolutely!

4. What topics would you like to see discussed at future ParentNet forums? Any other comments?

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