

Course teaches how to deal with children

Bedtime. Child resists. Parent insists. Tears, screams, bargains, drinks of water, trips to the bathroom — is there anyone who hasn't lived this scenario, whether parent, babysitter or hapless visitor?

To be a parent is to face innumerable issues like this one which, when added up, make parenting one of the most responsible jobs around. Yet, it is a job people have been expected to undertake without preparation.

Out of this need for people to have training in parenting has arisen an educational program called Parent Effectiveness Training or P.E.T. P.E.T. has been around in the United States since 1962, where it was launched by Dr. Thomas Gordon, a psychologist who found he could be more effective in helping troubled teenagers when he taught the parents ways of dealing with their offspring.

Hearing of his work, other parents wanted to get in on the information. This interest led to the development and spread of the program. However, P.E.T. didn't become big in Canada until well into the 1970s.

An Acton couple, Bruce and Margaret Brillinger, have been conducting P.E.T. sessions for five years. Mrs. Brillinger spoke about their work in a recent interview. P.E.T. teaches parents methods for dealing with problems, Mrs. Brillinger explains. It doesn't hand parents the solution to problems.

In the example of the child who doesn't want to go to bed, three families could come up with three different answers to the bedtime question. But they would have arrived at their solution using the same basic technique, a technique which gets parents talking with children about a given problem and involving the children in solving it.

"P.E.T. teaches methods parents can take home and use to work out their own answers to problems," Mrs. Brillinger says. The 24-hour course, spread over eight weekly sessions, is put together in step by step terms that anybody can follow.

"It's simple to understand, but it's not easy to do," she notes, explaining that it's all too easy to fall back into the old ways.

Fundamentally, P.E.T. is a course in communication skills. Although based on theories and viewpoints



MARGARET BRILLINGER

similar to those advanced by other child care experts, P.E.T. differs in that the course is concrete, that is, it teaches the "how to," Mrs. Brillinger says.

"These include how to listen so that children will want to talk with parents; how to deal with conflict so that both child and adult emerge satisfied, with neither feeling that he has lost; how, when children are doing things parents don't like, to confront them without putting them down; how, when values collide, to influence children without turning them off."

Continuing on the topic of values education, Mrs. Brillinger says values are inevitably conveyed just by the way people relate with each other, including the way parents act towards their children. Although there are

occasions when parents will want to talk with their children very explicitly about values, the kind of people parents are is more important than what they say.

Parents can demonstrate values by "modeling" the kind of behavior they want their children to follow. Children are quick to pick up discrepancies between what parents say and what they do, she points out, citing by way of example, the incongruity of parents who smoke lecturing their children about the perils of drugs.

Well over half the course is devoted to learning skills in dealing with behavior that bothers parents.

In the past parents did well with the resources they had available to them, Mrs. Brillinger says. But the world has changed.

Children are exposed to many more outside influences, such as television, than they were in years gone by. The absence of an extended family (grandparents,

aunts and other relatives) leaves parents isolated and having to be all things to their children.

At the same time, there have been advances in the understanding of human behavior. Much more is now known about how people learn, for example. "Why not take advantage of this knowledge?" Mrs. Brillinger asks. However, she stresses P.E.T. is education and not therapy.

P.E.T. is not the ultimate answer, but it does give people some tools for coping with everyday life, she says. The skills learned are not exclusive to parenting situations. They are applicable to any relationships, whether between couples, co-workers, or friends.

In their courses the Brillingers see not only parents but also single adults, grandparents, childless couples and professional workers.

Although many of the parents who take the course have encountered problems in parenting, others come because they want to enhance an already good family life or to make sure it continues to run smoothly.

Taking the course in a group (up to 30 people is maximum) gives participants the benefit of practicing their skills with each other, as in role playing, and of sharing their triumphs and difficulties.

A book on P.E.T. is provided. It is also available in libraries and bookstores. Asked what the course gives that the book does not, Mrs. Brillinger replies by comparing parent effectiveness training to the acquisition of any skill. She gives the example of learning to swim by reading a book as opposed

to practising swimming with an instructor's help.

The middle class is heavily represented in the course. It has to do with mind set, Mrs. Brillinger comments, explaining that effective parenting and solid home life are values to which middle class people subscribe. They're aware of the impact of parenting on children.

Moreover, thinking about relationships is a luxury for people wondering where their next meal is coming from, she adds.

A mother of four, Mrs. Brillinger was a high school teacher before she quit work to raise a family. The Brillingers' four children range in age from six to 13 years.

She read the book about P.E.T., found it challenged some of the beliefs she held, and was sold on the ideas presented by Dr. Gordon. By this time, too, she was becoming restless and looking for another outlet.

Taking the instructors' course for P.E.T. she concluded a husband-wife teaching team would be ideal, and persuaded her husband, a social worker, to take instructor training as well.

The course for instructors is given under the auspices of Effectiveness Training, Inc., the organization formed by Dr. Gordon. Graduates of the course are given a certificate authorizing them to offer sessions in P.E.T.

People who haven't taken instructor training are also teaching courses called parent effectiveness training. Mrs. Brillinger cautions. She advises anyone interested in the program to check whether it includes both the P.E.T. book and a workbook. Only courses given by authorized instructors use the workbook.

The Brillingers have had a great deal of success with their courses and have taught P.E.T. to more people than any other Canadian instructors, she believes.

Currently, they instruct both as a team and individually. They have given or are giving programs in Guelph and Orangeville as well as in Halton.

Some sessions are given on a regular on-going basis; others undertaken at the request of a community group like a church group or a nursery school. Most people who take P.E.T. have heard about it through word of mouth.

Another program based on the same principles but designed for teachers is called Teacher Effectiveness Training or T.E.T. Mrs. Brillinger has taught these as well.

At the same time, she is working on a masters degree in adult education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Mr. Brillinger is a social worker at a family treatment centre in Toronto four days a week and does counselling on a private basis as well.

In addition to their work in P.E.T., the Brillingers offer courses and workshops for couples, focusing on relationships between couples as opposed to those between

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Burlington pushes for all-weather track

Halton Board of Education moved to meet Burlington at least a third of the way towards bringing an all-weather track to Halton.

The City of Burlington asked for and received Thursday board permission to install an all-weather surface track at Burlington's Nelson school.

The cost, estimated to total between \$105,000 and \$110,000, is to be discussed by the board later. Board superintendent of business and finance B.T. Lindley said Burlington would want about a third of the cost from the Halton board.

Superintendent of Instruction J. Boich said if the track is built the region will be able to hold major track and field meets here rather than going to Etobicoke.

There is one all-weather track in Halton, but it is not standard, said Lindley.

Students at Georgetown are running on grass and turning out top notch runners such as Jan Clarke, said Georgetown trustee Barry Shepherd. Board chairman reminded Shepherd that Clarke is a cross-country runner.

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