

Initiating and Implementing a Family Education Program

*Lawrence Zuckerman
Valerie Zuckerman*

Many counselors possess the training and skills necessary for running either parent study groups and/or a family education center; however, few initiate these programs. Counselors who are employed with an agency that does not promote programs emphasizing the preventative aspect are frequently at a loss regarding ways for proposing the integration of parent study groups and family education center programs into the services of the agency.

Parent study groups and family education centers are established under the philosophy of parent education or family prevention. However, treatment of present family concerns does occur and can be emphasized as a major function if it is being proposed for an agency that primarily advocates treatment. This paper presents a general outline for proposing parent study group and family education center programs for agencies that stress treatment or prevention. The major “selling points” for a family education program overlap for both kinds of agencies; however, one may need to use the appropriate terminology for the specific agency, as well as placing emphasis in line with the agency’s goals.

Initiating a Parent Study Group Program

The following format was used to initiate a parent study group program within a drug-counseling center that typically emphasized treatment.

Step 1

Take an inventory of the present case load to determine whether the agency is carrying any prevention cases as defined by the agency. If not, check to see how many cases involve children, teenagers, as well as clients who mention difficulties with their children. More than likely, there will be cases that fall in this category. At this point you have already begun to collect valuable information to support a parent study group program.

Lawrence and Valerie Zuckerman are affiliated with the Family Education Center in Charleston, West Virginia.

Table 1
Number of Different Families Reached by One Counselor
Within a 2-Hour Time Period

Counseling method	Both parents	Either parent
Individual counseling	2	2
Parent study group	5-7.5	10-15

Step 2

Write a brief proposal for a parent study group program. Begin with parent study groups rather than a family education center to establish the groundwork and community support needed later in developing and maintaining a family education center. Within the proposal, one may wish to include the following categories.

Rationale. This section may include how a parent study group program would fit within the agency as well as how it would enhance the agency's functioning. Table 1 illustrates how a parent study group program can maximize the counselors' time and reach a greater number of families as opposed to individual counseling. The major selling point is, of course, an increase in client capacity that provides further benefits for agency funding.

Mode of operation. Present a brief description of how parent study groups operate in terms of time, weekly meetings, and the general philosophy followed. One may also wish to incorporate the idea of training parents to run future parent study groups. The advantage of this idea is twofold: (a) while professional staff is required at first, eventually the staff will be able to devote their time to previous functions; and (b) the agency is sponsoring a program utilizing community resources, which is usually viewed as favorable, as well as building a support system for future programs.

Advantages of a parent study group program. List as many advantages as possible, keeping in mind the agency's function. Examples are: (a) "broadens the agency's services to the community," (b) "the agency is reaching out to a larger number of people, which would otherwise be impossible to accomplish," (c) "increases the agency's efficiency by reaching a greater number of people in less time," (d) "encourages community support," (e) "builds a communication system between agency and community," and (f) "supplies an innovative and necessary service to the community."

Figure 1 illustrates possible growth of a parent study group program using one counselor. If charts would be helpful in the proposal, Figure 1 may serve as a model.

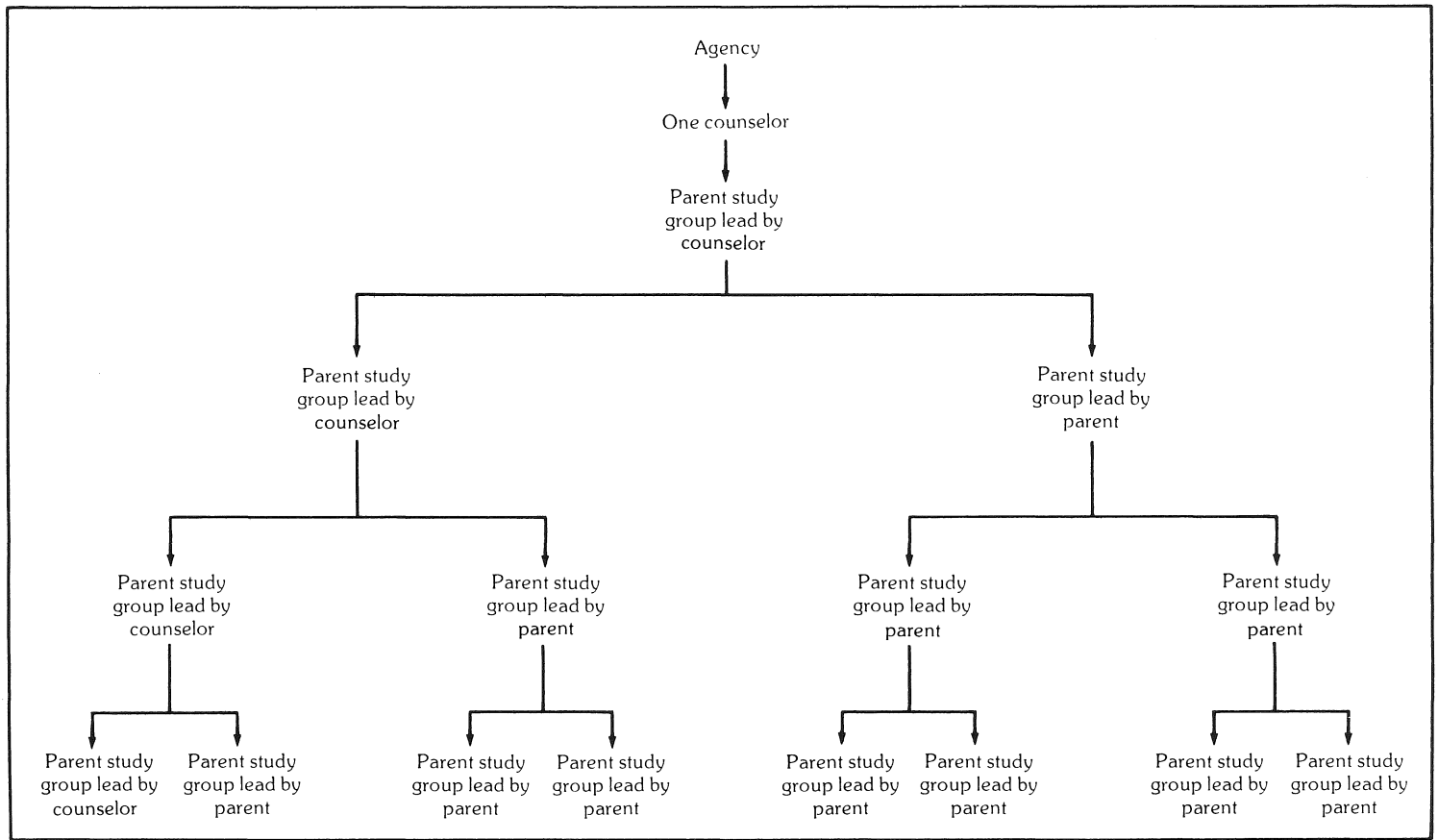


Figure 1
 Forty-Week Proposed Growth of the Parent Study Group Program
 Each group meets for a 10-week period; 15 groups can be generated in 40 weeks, reaching approximately 225 people by use of "parent power."

Long-range objective. One may choose to incorporate this section with the idea of proposing a family education center, including a brief explanation of a family education center with emphasis placed on treatment, establishing a satellite center, increased community support, or whatever aspect would be congruent with the agency. Mentioning the family education center in the parent study group proposal will be of great assistance, because, if the parent study group proposal is approved, so has the family education center been approved.

Initiating a Family Education Center

The following outline proposal of a family education center was presented for a drug-counseling agency after establishing parent study groups. It is provided only as a model to encourage counselors that one need not work in a prevention agency to initiate a family education center.

Beginnings. Within this section, state the growth of the parent study group program leading into the necessity for establishing a family education center.

Mode of operation. State briefly how the family education will run in terms of time, location, and operational format.

Rationale. (a) The family education center will supply a service to the community in a manner unlike any presently established in the local community, serving as a model for other agencies to follow in developing a unique and innovative approach to family guidance. (b) The family education center will allow follow-up service to members who have participated in the parent study group program. (Using some form of questionnaire to gather the number of parents who wish a follow-up service would be supportive.) (c) Reemphasize the number of families that can be reached through this program as well as freeing up counselors' time to deal directly with treatment. (d) Emphasize the fact that community support is being established through the family education center and that the center can serve as an avenue for future program development. (e) Within much of the agency's literature (referring to the drug-counseling agency), drug usage was caused by: peer pressure, escape from reality, easing of unhappy feelings, and for fun. Family disorganization was also stated as a key element in drug abuse. Utilizing the agency's stance on drug abuse, an explanation was given on how the family education center deals directly with these areas and is, therefore, a drug-prevention program. This rationale was of paramount importance in showing that a family education center fits within agency guidelines.

Staffing and materials needed. State the various staff required at the family education center, such as playroom supervisor, recorder, etc., with a brief description of their functions. If your agency uses or has access to

volunteers, emphasize their importance in assuming staff functions. One would not want to give the impression that the agency's entire professional staff is required for the family education center's operation.

Conclusion. Reiterate in a concise manner the family education center's purpose and how it enhances the agency's overall functioning.

The outlines given for proposing a parent study group and family education center program overlap, with a slight modification for each. Usually, a brief and concise proposal will be read as opposed to a cumbersome one. Most agencies would be able to establish such programs, if one is willing to take the time to become familiar with the agency's guidelines and to then write a proposal following the guidelines and function of the agency. Establishing a family education program does not have to be an overwhelming task, but one needs to take steps toward initiating such programs, and then work steadily and consistently toward successfully establishing the program.

Implementing a Parent Study Group Program

Location

The parent study group should preferably be held in a comfortable and informal setting. If the agency does not have adequate space, community centers or public libraries may have facilities available. Parents are often willing to hold meetings in their homes on a rotating basis. Playroom facilities, if at all possible, should be made available in order not to discourage some parents from joining. If securing playroom facilities, toys, and a playroom supervisor are unobtainable, do not abandon the parent study group program, however, since most parents can make arrangements for their children.

Population

The first place to recruit parents is from the agency's present case load. There may only be one or two parents who show an interest, but they can spread the word to their friends and neighbors. You'll be surprised how many parents can be recruited from other parents. You could also contact community organizations such as public schools, churches, temples, women's clubs, day care centers, etc., to recruit parents. Every community has numerous untapped sources looking for programs such as parent study groups.

Publicity

Some agencies will approve funds for publicity. If so, simply distribute fliers and/or posters to all community organizations, shopping centers, and

other “parent hangouts” in the community. The publicity materials should clearly state: what a parent study group is, who is sponsoring the program, and how one can obtain more information. Lack of funding for publicity is not crucial for successful implementation. Free publicity is usually available through local television and radio stations and newspapers. One can also contact other community organizations and agencies about the program. The more channels utilized for publicity, the greater the probability for success.

Books

Two primary avenues to obtain books are: (a) using agency funding to provide a book loaning service and (b) asking the parents to secure their own copies. Usually, discounts are available for books purchased in quantity.

Implementing a Family Education Center

Location

As with parent study groups, the setting should preferably be comfortable, allowing for an informal atmosphere. The room should be large enough to accommodate the anticipated number of participants, with room for growth. A playroom area close to the parent room is also necessary. Community resources such as churches, temples, public schools, public libraries, day care centers, club halls, etc., are excellent possibilities.

Population

The parent study group program offers a built-in population to initiate the family education center. Sending letters of invitation, including an invitation to bring a friend, for the opening meeting encourages participation. Community presentations will give added support to the family education center.

Publicity

If funding for family education center publicity is available, it can be used for fliers and posters to be distributed throughout the community. If funding is not available, utilize the same resources as suggested for parent study group publicity.

This paper has attempted to supply the reader with practical steps for initiating and implementing a family education program with the hope of encouraging counselors in a variety of agency settings to take steps toward establishing this type of program. If one just sits and thinks, nothing will be accomplished; remember, actions speak louder than words.