Parent Session

Discipline, Organization, and Self-Management for Twice-Exceptional Children

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PROJECT2EXCEL

University of St. Thomas
PROJECT2EXCEL

PARENT DISCUSSION

Organization, Discipline, and Self-Management for Twice-Exceptional Children

What: Guided discussion group for parents of children whose children are participating in PROJECT2EXCEL

When: Day, Date, 2010
      7:00 – 9:00 pm

Where: Your School
       Your School Address

Co-Facilitators: Carol Malueg and Nancy Arey Cohen
                 Project Managers, PROJECT2EXCEL
                 Your School Representative

Preparation: Pre-reading assignment (attached)

Potential Topics:

- Organization
  • Setting Goals
  • Modeling Behaviors
  • Routines

- Discipline
  • Differences between discipline and punishment
  • Setting limits
  • Expectations

- Self-Management
  • Communicating confidence in child
  • Providing choices
  • Personal responsibility
  • Tools for self-management

Essential Questions:
1. Why should we have concerns about being organized?
2. Can becoming more organized resolve issues with discipline?
3. Does a feeling that one controls the situation lead to confidence in controlling one’s emotional life?

Objective: Establish an environment in which parents of twice-exceptional children can receive and provide support, guidance, and professional advice through discussion with other parents and trained leaders.
Discussion Rules

1. What's said in the group stays in the group.
2. There are no wrong ideas.
3. Stay on topic.
4. The facilitator is the guide, not the expert.
As facilitator of the discussion, the questions to be asked are numbered. Questions and anecdotes in italics are secondary and to be used as conversation starters if necessary.

Prior to tackling the questions of the night, perhaps the facilitator would like to ask parents to introduce themselves and share what brought them to this discussion group.

The facilitator begins by sharing the following story with the group:

“Teach Organizational Skills”
(from Teaching Moments and Other Parenting Strategies)

Keeping organized is a challenge children with NLD need to cope with now and as adults. When I work with children on this skill, I teach them an organizational system that can last through college and throughout life. I use a system that is easy to use and simple enough that, once a child learns it, she can use it forever. I use a simple day planner and have him log all his daily assignments and scheduling. Long-term assignments are broken down into their sequential parts and logged in as well.

Helping your child organize her home space can make a big difference in both reducing his stress and teaching him life skills. It makes a big difference in the day-to-day levels of stress if your child has learned to organize homework, clothes, toys, etc. While I struggle to maintain organizational of all my various papers and projects, I put forth the daily effort to clear clutter, label drawers, and empty leftovers from the fridge. Each member of the family sees how helping Zac stay organized makes our lives calmer and more successful. When Zac was younger, we borrowed an idea from Kathy Allen’s book Star-Shaped Pegs in Round Holes. Our way of keeping organized was to pretend his belongings were in jail. If his shoes were in the living room, I’d say, “Oh, no, the shoes have escaped from jail. Let’s take them back to jail.” Jail for the shoes was in the closet on the left, and jail for the backpack was in the closet on the hook. Jail for the books is inside the backpack.

We also organize his workspace. Zac’s pencils and pens belong in a box on his desk. He’s allowed to bring them out to the kitchen table, where he prefers to do his homework, and they always go back on his desk so he can find them next time.

Zachary has a bulletin board hung at his height in the kitchen, where he knows to look for important papers. We also hung a white board there for him. When he gets home from school, he writes his afternoon schedule on the white board. “Okay I’m going to do homework from four to four-thirty, and then I’m going to take a break and watch my show from four-thirty to five, and then I’m going to skateboard, and then I’m going to do the rest of my homework.” He writes it all down on the white board every day. It’s a

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little unusual for a ten-year-old, but it works. He’ll be doing the same when he’s fifty. For a child with organizational deficits, providing him with a place to write this and places for all his belongings helps enormously.

I. Organization

1. After listening to the systems Zac’s parents put in place, what are some systems you have put in place that help your child to be more organized?
   a. Have you tried using a chart of the entire family’s responsibilities so that the child sees his or her place in the family and how everyone is responsible for something?
   b. Have you tried rewards for effort?

2. Organizational and self-management styles differ greatly. Does your style match your child’s?
   a. If your style is fluid, would you be able to understand if your child’s style was more structured?
   b. If you are a detail-oriented person, would you be able to understand if your child needed be less structured?

3. Can you think of some ways you model the behaviors you want your children to learn?
   a. When you take out your Blackberry to type in an appointment, could you make the connection verbally that by writing down where and when you need to be somewhere, you will be there? Discuss how your child’s planner fills the same purpose.
   b. When you put the dishes away, could you talk about the benefits of having a place for everything so that you know exactly where it is. The next time you need a dish, you know where to look. Similarly, the next time your child needs his Math book, he should know where to find it if it is always in the same place.
   c. When you apologize to your child because you can’t make a soccer game because of a commitment at work, could this help your child to see how his or her commitments at school are equally important and need to be taken seriously? Watching television has to wait until homework is done, for example.

4. Do you have routines?
   a. Morning routines?
   b. Evening routines?
   c. Weekend routines?
   d. Work routines?
   e. Religious routines?
   f. Social routines?
II. Discipline

5. How do you define discipline? How do you define punishment? When do you think each should be used?
   a. **Discipline is defined as:** “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character” – Merriam Webster
   b. **Punishment is defined as:** “suffering, pain, or loss that serves as retribution” – Merriam Webster

6. We set limits because we care. How do we convey that to our children in a way that they understand?
   a. Do you simply tell them what the limits are?
   b. Do you explain why the limits are what they are?
   c. Do you not have clearly defined limits?

7. Experts suggest focusing on a single behavior at a time and rewarding positive changes. Is this doable?
   a. Johnny never remembers to hand in his homework. He is doing poorly in school not because he doesn’t know the material, but because he simply forgets to hand in the homework. Could you make a deal with Johnny that you will not say anything about time spent playing video games, teasing his sister, or not taking out the trash if he will remember to turn in his homework every day for a week (or two weeks or a month)? During that time, could you praise him every time he remembers to turn in his homework and help him to set up a system to remember, e.g., placing it by the back door, putting it in a bright red folder in his backpack, attaching a feather or a long straw or a long piece of yarn to it before putting it in his binder?
   b. Other examples?

8. If your child is struggling in one or more areas, when is it appropriate to change your expectations? How do you make those expectations clear to your child?
   a. Neihart talks about SMART goals: specific, simple, understandable goals. For example, instead of saying that your child needs to be more responsible, you could be specific about what you consider responsibility to be: Sally needs to put her toys away after playing with them or Johnny needs to write Spelling words 10 times each day in order to be ready for the test on Friday. What are some specific responsibility goals you could help your child to set?
   b. Instead of saying that your child needs to work harder, you could tell him what that means to you: only take a 30 minute break when you get home from school or work first, reward later. What specific ways could you help your child to understand what it means to work harder?

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III. Self-Management

9. What are some of the ways you can let your children know that you believe they are capable of self-management?
   a. Could you allow them to make certain decisions for themselves?
   b. Could you allow them to set up their own schedules so long as they accomplish what they need to accomplish?
   c. Children need to unwind as much as adults do – and each of them does it in as many different ways as adults do. Could you make a deal with them that so long as they hold up their end of the bargain, you will allow them to manage their own time?

10. What decisions do you make for your children? What decisions do your children make for themselves? What decisions do you make together?
    a. What types of decisions are appropriate for a parent to make?
    b. What types of decisions are appropriate for a child to make?
    c. What types of decisions are appropriate for families to make together?

11. What are natural consequences? Have you allowed your children to experience natural consequences?
    a. If your child forgets his lunch for the third time this week, could you let him go without lunch one day?
    b. If your child forgets her homework for the second time this week in fourth grade, could you let her fail the assignment?

12. Are you familiar with Gossen’s Restitution Model? Basically, it says that instead of telling your child what to do, you ask the child to determine how the task will be accomplished. Can you think of specific circumstances under which this would be useful?
    a. If Johnny is balking at doing his homework when you tell him he has to, how could you allow him to establish his own rules for doing it?
    b. Would learning contracts be useful if your child established the ground rules and promised to abide by them?

13. Do your children have the tools they need for self-management?
    a. Planner of his or her choosing
    b. A cool pen or pencil to use just for the planner
    c. Highlighters or colored pens or pencils
    d. Post-it Notes
    e. Bulletin Board
    f. Binder with sections for each subject
    g. Specific place to do schoolwork that works for the whole family
    h. Reward system devised either by your child or together as a family
    i. Written contract to accomplish specific goals by a certain time
    j. Clock with a timer or alarm

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Rule #1: **Mean what you say and say what you mean.**

It's very easy to get caught up in the heat of the moment and say, "Do your homework or you won't play video games for a year!" Now we all know that you will crack before the year is up . . .

In a paper presented at the annual convention of the Council for Exceptional Children in Minneapolis back in 1998, the author suggested the use of Gossem's Restitution Model when all else fails. A child who is easily bored or has highly oppositional behaviors and refuses to change needs to take more responsibility for his or her actions. This model switches the loci of responsibility for change to the child rather than trying to instill a sense of responsibility on the child.

--- Inclusion for Children with Dual Exceptionalities

Rule #2: **If a child is struggling, but capable, do not lower expectations.**

Lowering your expectations may silently communicate a vote of no confidence in the child. Instead, keep your high expectations (if the child is capable of meeting them) and offer lots of empathy, support, and encouragement. Instead, say things such as:

"I can see that this is tough for you. I'm proud of the effort you are making."
"I know this is a difficult time, and I'm confident you can do it."
"This is hard and we'll get through it. We'll help you all we can."

--- Neihart, Peak Performance for Smart Kids

Real-life story:

"Our 11-year-old son, Jonathan, came home in a near panic over a complicated assignment that was due in 3 weeks. He wanted to do very well on it and was frantic about how much he would need to do to complete it. We had him sit down with a calendar and break the project down into specific, doable daily goals. When he finished, he seemed genuinely surprised that each of the daily goals was easy, and even more surprised that the assignment could actually get done ahead of schedule. He has a chapter test coming up in math in a few weeks and we saw him attack this in the same way, filling out his planner with daily goals to prepare. This helped us realize that he needs to learn how to break things down into

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smaller tasks; otherwise, he gets overwhelmed and avoids doing anything because the projects seem too huge.”

-- Neihart, Peak Performance for Smart Kids

Rule #3: **Establish goals that can be quantified.**

Rather than saying that Johnny needs to get his homework done, tell him he needs to get his Reading done by 4:00, his Math done by 5:00, his Spelling done by 6:00... and actually let him check them off as he completes them.

Instead of saying that your child needs to be more responsible, be specific about what you consider responsibility to be: Sally needs to put her toys away after playing with them or Johnny needs to write Spelling words 10 times each day in order to be ready for the test on Friday.

Instead of saying that your child needs to work harder, tell him what that means to you: only take a 30 minute break when you get home from school and then get to work on your homework – not stopping until you are finished, at which time you may play a video game for 30 minutes. Work first, reward later.

Rule #4: **Provide your child with the tools for self-management.**

If you want your child to improve his or her self-management ability, make sure that he or she has the tools needed (both physical and emotional).

**Physical Tools:**

- Planner of his or her choosing
- A cool pen or pencil to use just for the planner
- Highlighters or colored pens or pencils
- Post-it Notes
- Bulletin Board
- Binder with sections for each subject
- Specific place to do schoolwork that works for the whole family
- Reward system devised either by your child or together as a family
- Written contract to accomplish specific goals by a certain time
- Clock with a timer or alarm

**Emotional Tools:**

- Give him reason to believe that he is capable of self-management. Allow him to make certain decisions for himself. Have faith in him.
- Allow her to set up her own schedule so long as she accomplishes what she needs to accomplish. Maybe Sally NEEDS to unwind when she comes home from school before she can crack the books. Maybe Johnny NEEDS to get his homework done immediately because he WANTS to watch his favorite television

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shows at night and unwind then. Children need to unwind as much as adults do—and each of them does it in as many different ways as adults do.

- Try to set an example of the self-management style you wish your child to exhibit. Discuss why you are doing things the way you are in a way that makes sense to your child. For example:
  - When you take out your Blackberry to enter an appointment, make the connection that by writing down where and when you need to be somewhere, you will be there. Discuss how your child’s planner fills the same purpose.
  - When you put the dishes away, talk about the benefits of having a place for everything so that you know exactly where it is. The next time you need a dish, you know where to look. Similarly, the next time your child needs his Math book, he should know where to find it because it is always in the same place.
  - When you apologize to your child because you can’t make a soccer game because of a commitment at work, help your child to see how his or her commitments at school are equally important. Watching television has to wait until homework is done, for example.

Rule #5: Establish routines.

Establishing routines allows your child to know what to expect and when to expect it. How can you expect him to be disciplined and manage his time well if he is constantly surprised by inconsistent routines? On the other hand, if he always knows that he has from 6:00 – 8:00 pm to work on his homework, that is an established routine. If he always knows that he has to get his math done in the car while he waits for his sister’s gymnastics to be over, that is an established routine. Routines don’t have to be June Cleaver pretty. They just need to be reliable.

Rule #6: Celebrate minor victories!

Rather than expecting your child to improve all bad habits overnight, talk about one aspect that the child is capable of improving and agree to not nag about anything else so long as the child is working on improving that one thing. For example:

Johnny is doing poorly in school not because he doesn’t know the material, but because he simply forgets to hand in the homework. Make a deal with Johnny that you will not say anything about time spent playing video games, teasing his sister, or not taking out the trash if he will remember to turn in his homework every day for a week (or two weeks or a month). During that time, praise him every time he remembers to turn in his homework and help him to set up a system to remember—perhaps placing it by the back door, putting it in a bright red folder in his backpack, or attaching a feather or a long straw or a long piece of yarn to it before putting it in his binder. Once that problem is solved, focus on another (if necessary).
Food for Thought

“Children today are tyrants. They contradict their parents, gobble their food, and tyrannize their teachers.”

-- Socrates

“That isn’t a kid. He’s a two-legged stress test.”

-- Dennis, The Menace

“Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it’s not all mixed up.”

-- A. A. Milne

Modified from Tools for Life In a Jar: 101 Lessons for Getting Along

“When life hands you lemons, don’t limit yourself to lemonade.”

“Finito, concluso, fini, terminado, done! No matter how you say it, it’s an accomplishment when you’ve worked through a disagreement together. Closing the argument is the last step: restate the problem, and its solution, shake hands, and put a smile on your face. You just solved a problem – constructively!”

“Sometimes the silent observer has the most to say. Invite ideas from someone who hasn’t said much; chances are this person has been listening and gathering thoughts and is waiting for a chance to voice an opinion. This person may see something others have overlooked.”

“Ever heard ‘Practice what you preach’? This is key in conflict resolution. Lead by example. Your attitude toward the effectiveness of problem solving is important. When sessions hit a snag, your continued belief and demonstrated trust in the process will ease the tension.”

“Do you hate it when people talk down to you or tell you what to do? Take a different approach and try to empower others when resolving issues: Listen to the speaker even if you don’t agree with what you’re hearing. Ask questions so you really understand.”

“When people have worked hard to solve a problem, it’s worth noticing. ‘Great work!’ ‘Wow – that’s real cooperation!’ Words like these are a great way to seal a deal.”

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“When coping with a problem or conflict, deal with things as they are – not as you wish they were.”

“Be kind, because everyone you meet is struggling with something.”

“Keep in mind that your tone of voice can say something quite different from the words you are speaking. When you speak to someone, be sure your voice matches your message.”

“When listening, be a mirror: reflect back what you hear. Do this by rephrasing what the person has said to make sure you understand.”

“In a conflict, everyone wants something. You know what you want – but what about the other people involved? Try to move from thinking ‘How can I get what I want?’ to ‘How can we all get what we need?’”

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Further Reading


Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2009). Smart but Scattered


Haynes, B. (1997). The Dog Ate My Homework


Whitney, R. (2002). Bridging the Gap

Whitney, R. V. (2002). Nonverbal Learning Disorder: Understanding and Coping with NLD and Asperger’s – What Parents and Teachers Need to Know, “Teaching Moments and Other Parenting Strategies” (Ch. 8).

Online Resources:

http://www.stthomas.edu/project2excel/
Website for PROJECT2EXCEL. Project updates, resources, and information.

Lists parenting issues. Discover advice from the experts and resources for further reading.

http://www.studygs.net/
University of St. Thomas study guides on topics ranging from organization to time-management.

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