

**GUIDELINES FOR
PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAMS
FOR FEDERALLY SENTENCED WOMEN**

**Correctional Service of Canada
January 1995**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	3
	Background.....	3
	What This Document is About	3
	How the Guidelines Should be Used	4
	How The Guidelines Were Developed	4
	The Kind of Information Which Is Included	5
II.	PROGRAM PRINCIPLES FOR FEDERALLY SENTENCED WOMEN.....	5
	Over-Arching Principles	5
	Key Features	6
III.	FEDERALLY SENTENCED WOMEN AND PARENTING	7
	Federally Sentenced Women and their Children	7
	Parenting Responsibilities.....	8
	Parenting Styles and Skills	8
	Mother-Child Relationships.....	8
IV.	FSW PARENTING PROGRAMS - OVERVIEW OF REQUIRED FEATURES.....	10
	Parenting Skills - Program Goal	10
	Issues and Themes to Consider.....	11
	Pedagogical Approach	14
	Methodological Approach	16
	Program Facilitation and Training Considerations.....	16
V.	PROGRAM CONTENT	17
VI.	BEST PRACTICES	18
	Community-based Programs.....	18
	Institutionally Based Programs.....	19
VII.	MONITORING AND EVALUATION	21
	Monitoring How the Program is Working.....	21
	Briefing FSW Management Team and Making Program Changes Based on Feedback	21
	Evaluating Program Outcome.....	22
VIII.	SELECTION CHECKLIST	22
	APPENDIX A: CONTENTS CHARTS	
	APPENDIX B: REFERENCES	

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

Before they were incarcerated, many federally sentenced women (FSW) were the sole caregivers for their children. Reestablishing and/or enhancing their relationships with their children is extremely important to most of them. Recognizing that, the Operational Plan for the new facilities for Federally Sentenced Women (FSW) describes a variety of possible options for mothers in the facilities to have more contact with their children, through:

- open visits;
- visiting through the Private Family Visiting Program;
- on and off-site visiting, with the child residing in foster care or alternative placement;
- occasional on-site child residency in the facility;
- part-time on-site child residency in the facility; and
- full-time on-site child residency in the facility.

A Parenting Skills Program is a key component in CSC's strategy to support FSW in their parenting efforts. Assistance in parenting skills is a program area which many FSW women surveyed in 1990 requested.

In this regard (as in many others) FSW are no different from many other mothers who want to become more effective parents. Increasingly, Canadians are seeking guidance and support in fulfilling their role as parents. The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs recently reported 1,585 listings of supports for families with young children, including family resource programs, toy libraries, parent education, self-help and support groups, drop-ins, supports for children and parents with special needs, and other related parent/child support services across Canada (1994). Bookstore shelves are crammed with advice to parents. Parenting workshops offered by community agencies across the country are regularly filled to capacity.

As is the case with all mothers, the attitudes, thoughts, and experiences of FSW as mothers are uniquely and deeply intertwined with the realities and learnings of their own lives. To be meaningful, any parenting skills program must make the connection between the personal struggles which FSW have had, and how those struggles have affected their roles and experiences as mothers.

What This Document is About

These guidelines have been designed to help CSC plan, develop, implement, and evaluate parenting skills programming for Federally Sentenced Women who will be residing in the new FSW facilities across the country.

The Guidelines are intended to:

GUIDELINES: PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAMS FOR FSW

- assist FSW Wardens and their Management Teams select, adapt or create, manage, and evaluate a parenting skills program which will best meet the needs of their specific population and work effectively within their programming environment; and
- help Program Developers design and deliver material which will best match the needs of the specific population.

How the Guidelines Should be Used

The Guidelines focus on the most promising and most appropriate approaches to providing parenting skills training to FSW. They should be considered more a menu from which you can choose, than a recipe to which you must strictly adhere. They provide helpful information and descriptions of processes through which a tailored program, truly grounded in life experiences, circumstances, and the different needs of FSW can be developed, implemented, and evaluated.

In the spirit of the Correctional Programming Strategy for FSW, FSW Wardens and their Management Teams will want to work closely with the FSW who have children and with Program Developers, to design a parenting skills program which meets the needs of FSW. These programs must be developed *in context*. Considerations such as the facility's overall Mother-Child policy and program delivery strategy (i.e. visiting arrangements, on-site child residency, day care,) may have a significant impact on the practical focus of any given parenting skills program. Facility management should also consider allowing or promoting the development of support groups for specific issues or groups emerging through the program (for example: a support group for young mothers).

These Guidelines are *not* intended to apply to the FSW Aboriginal Healing Lodge, for which a culturally-specific programming strategy is being developed. However, they will be available to the Healing Lodge.

How The Guidelines Were Developed

The guidelines are based on:

- a review of the literature on parenting skills in women's correctional settings;
- an analysis of women-centred parenting program curricula in the community;
- consultation with community-based parenting educators; and
- advice and input from the wardens of the new FSW facilities, FSW program committee members across the country, and the Program Development and Implementation Unit, Correctional Programs at CSC National Headquarters.

The Kind of Information Which Is Included

The Guidelines include information on:

- the driving principles behind FSW programming in the new facilities;
- contextual information on FSW and their children;
- philosophy and principles which should guide FSW parenting programming;
- recommended program content;
- information on existing programs which match the principles of FSW parenting programming;
- evaluation issues; and,
- resources.

II. PROGRAM PRINCIPLES FOR FEDERALLY SENTENCED WOMEN

Over-Arching Principles

The 1990 Task Force Report, *Creating Choices* echoed virtually all of the commissions, task forces, and reports which have looked at the problems of federally sentenced women (FSW) since 1934. The Task Force examined the disadvantages that FSW face which federally sentenced men do not experience, including separation from their children and families, isolation from their cultures and communities, and the lack of appropriate women-centred programs and services.

Creating Choices set forth five principles which should guide CSC's programming strategy for FSW. These principles have been incorporated into CSC's *Correctional Program Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women*, and are summarized below:

- **Empowerment:** The inequities and inequalities encountered by Canadian women and experienced acutely by FSW, have eroded FSW's self-esteem and belief in their power to control their own lives. Strategies which assist FSW to gain insight into their life situations, to identify and build on their inherent strengths, as well as support and challenge them to take positive action to gain control over their lives, are recommended.
- **Meaningful and Responsible Choices:** FSW have experienced reduced life choices due to their lack of empowerment. Furthermore, dependencies on alcohol and drugs, men, and social and financial assistance, have prevented them from making free and responsible choices about their lives. Opportunities to make real choices is an essential part of their healing.

- **Respect and Dignity:** Mutual respect among offenders and staff has been lacking in the past. Establishing mutual respect and dignity is a necessary precondition for change.
- **Supportive Environment:** A positive and supportive living environment will help foster self-esteem and self-worth, and dignity and respect for themselves and others. There are many dimensions to a supportive environment, including: socio-political, physical layout, emotional/psychological, spiritual and financial.
- **Shared Responsibility:** A holistic approach to the development of support systems for FSW involves all levels of government, the private sector, NGO's and the community working together. This will help ensure that FSW are successfully reintegrated into their community networks on release.

Key Features

The *Correctional Program Strategy for FSW* further defines the key features of effective, women-centred correctional programming, which should be embodied in the design and delivery of FSW programming. The six key features are briefly outlined below.

- **Adhering to Women-Centred Principles**, which include:
 - viewing problems not just individually, but in the social context of FSW's lives;
 - viewing learning as a cooperative venture, not one heavily controlled by a facilitator;
 - connecting women with each other to develop sharing and trust;
 - supporting, encouraging, empathizing with and challenging FSW in a non-confrontational framework
 - recognizing FSW as active agents of positive change in their own lives.
- **Adhering to the Principles of Adult Education for Women**, which recognize that:
 - women learn through connection and relationships;
 - diverse activities and creative approaches enhance learning;
 - building on what women have experienced and learned in their own lives is more effective than academic theory
 - adults learn by modelling themselves on others
 - humour, mutual support, and social interaction are powerful teaching tools and learning aids.
- **Valuing Diversity**, by:
 - promoting an atmosphere of tolerance for, and understanding of cultural, sexual, and other forms of diversity
 - using participant diversity as a learning tool
 - being sensitive to individual needs.

- **Using an Analytical Approach** which emphasizes:
 - strengthening problem-solving skills
 - fostering creative and critical thinking
 - encouraging FSW to consider their values, and the relationship between values, thoughts and actions
 - enhancing social skills.

- **Structuring and Supporting Programs** so that:
 - staff understand the whys and wherefores of programming;
 - programs are flexible enough to adapt to the needs of different participants;
 - program integrity and commitment to women-centred principles are evident; and
 - programs are accessible by all FSW who want and need them.

- **Providing a Program Implementation Process** which includes:
 - proper screening;
 - mutually agreed upon group rules;
 - proper management and monitoring;
 - program/management reporting protocols; and
 - evaluation.

The pedagogical implications of these six key features for parenting skills programming are explored more fully in section IV of these guidelines.

III. FEDERALLY SENTENCED WOMEN AND PARENTING

Federally Sentenced Women and their Children

Shaw et al's 1990 survey of the Federally Sentenced Women population indicated that approximately 2/3 (65%) of the 203 women surveyed had children. The majority of women had 1-3 children (Shaw et al, 1991-4, 10-11). In total, those women had 264 children, ranging from babies to adult children, who were living in a variety of arrangements in the community.

47% of the FSW surveyed had at least one child (excluding adoptees) under the age of 17 for whom they had some responsibility at the time of their incarceration (representing 142 children). At least 24% of the women with children under the age of 17 (41 women) had at least one child under the age of 5 years (representing 52 children).

Mother-child separation has been an on-going concern for federally sentenced women for many years (McLeod, 1986, Cannings, 1990, Shaw et al 1991-4, 1992-13). For many women, the pain of imprisonment is exemplified and exacerbated by the pain and anxiety of losing their children to others. Shaw et al noted that federally sentenced women serving time in provincial institutions had better, regular contact with their children than federally sentenced women serving time at Prison for Women.

The new facilities will afford FSW more options, but it is not known what new kinds of contacts or relationships FSW will seek with their children. As the Shaw et al survey noted, approximately 40% of FSW indicated that they would like to live with their children in a half-way house environment. Others felt that their children would be best left in their present caregiving situations (Shaw, 1991-4, 15).

Parenting Responsibilities

In the same 1990 survey, prior to incarceration almost 2/3 of the women had been single parents either always, or for the most part of their children's lives. In the majority (53%) of cases, the woman's children were living with her alone prior to her offence. Children were being cared for by both parents in 39% of the cases, and in 9% of cases, children were either being cared for by relatives, or they were in care.

Research from American jurisdictions suggests that the children of incarcerated women are more likely to be placed in care or forced to relocate to live with other relatives, than are the children of male offenders, who are less likely in the first place to be the primary caregiver prior to incarceration (Adalist-Estrin, 1986). Children will therefore experience more disruption to their lives when their mothers, rather than their fathers, are incarcerated.

Parenting Styles and Skills

The Shaw et al survey noted that over half of the Federally Sentenced Women who were mothers felt it would be worthwhile to participate in a parent education program. As noted in the introduction, this interest in parent education echoes demands for parent education programming and support within the community at large.

There is virtually no information on the parenting styles or skills of Federally Sentenced Women before they were incarcerated, or during incarceration, and how they compare to the styles and skills of mothers in the community generally. Research indicates however, that parenting styles and skills are generally learned behaviours. If that is the case, then information on the childhood experiences of FSW may be significant.

The Shaw et al (1991-4) survey noted that over half of FSW had experienced "over-lapping and interrelated" childhood traumas, such as physical and sexual abuse, death of parents, parental alcoholism, physical, or mental illness, multiple foster home placements, and residential placements. While such childhood experiences are not unique to FSW, and are not absolute predeterminants of future behaviour, this is nevertheless, an important dimension of reality which needs to be considered in program design. It means that many FSW have probably been exposed to negative parenting models.

Mother-Child Relationships

We have very limited information about the children of federally sentenced women in Canada, and virtually no qualitative information about the nature of their lives and their relationships

with their mothers. More qualitative information will need to be gathered at local levels, to fully contextualize their situations. However, if we look to the experiences of mothers incarcerated in other jurisdictions (see Reference List, Appendix B), we find that:

- While there is a public impression that women offenders are inherently "unfit mothers", there is no empirical evidence to support that contention (Johnston, 1993). In fact, several studies which have examined the maternal attitudes and behaviours of incarcerated women demonstrate that these women have a positive and realistic understanding of their role as mothers (LeFlore and Holston, 1990). Moreover, they want to be "good mothers" (Elizabeth Fry Edmonton, 1994, 156-157).
- Learning to cope with motherhood and mothering is a challenge that most women face; women who have histories of childhood trauma and abuse, experienced inconsistent or uncaring parenting themselves, become mothers unintentionally, and have compounding problems such as drug addiction, conflicts with the law, etc., need to acquire the necessary skills as well as emotionally heal themselves to parent effectively (Elizabeth Fry Society, 1994)
- Maternal decision-making is of key concern to many women offenders. Decisions about their child's placement and caregiving arrangements, health care, schooling and religion, as well as material participation in child custody issues have been identified as areas where incarcerated mothers may choose to actively engage. Moreover, women offenders need to be supported and affirmed in their maternal decision-making (Elizabeth Fry Society Edmonton, 1994, LeFlore and Holston, 1990, and McGowan and Blumenthal, 1978, cited in Johnston, 1993). In this respect, it is also important that women receive education about their parental rights.
- Children of incarcerated mothers are likely to have problems shaped by the quality and nature of their relationship with their mothers prior to incarceration, and their age. Problems which they are likely to experience may include:
 - traumatization, due to witnessing or experiencing abuse witnessing criminal activity and/or her mother's arrest and apprehension, having to move or change schools, foster placement, etc.
 - cognitive and emotional difficulties in processing her mother's arrest and incarceration. The age of the child, as well as if and how the facts around her mother's incarceration have been explained to the child, are also important factors. The child may feel anger, guilt and fear. If the mother's offence is publicly known, the child may also feel shame and embarrassment, and face stigmatization by others. In some instances, a child may isolate herself and withdraw from her social world (Gamer and Schrader, 1981).
 - children *may* cope with their mother's incarceration by adopting inappropriate behaviours, such as verbal and physical aggression, bed-wetting, eating disorders, becoming anxious or depressed, developing attention deficits, academic and

social problems and substance abuse (Gamer and Schrader, 1981, 206-211). These problems may be compounded by other health problems if the children are suffering from the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal drug addictions, HIV infection, etc (Johnston, 1992, 4-6). It should be noted that the literature on the coping skills of children of incarcerated parents is very limited; some children may cope adequately or well. The above findings should therefore be interpreted with caution.

- Mothers may cope with separation from their children in different ways. They may have mixed feelings of relief, guilt and/or shame about being separated from their children. They may feel powerless and unworthy of being mothers if they cannot be with their children (Elizabeth Fry, 1994). Consequently, they may be overwhelmed by the prospect of their children's visits or on-site residency.
- Mothers may cope with having their children on-site in different ways, and the experience may not always be positive. A key factor in how they feel and react to having their children on-site, is whether and how they are supported in caring for their children (i.e. through programs and services, by actions of their fellow inmates, and by the attitudes and behaviours of institutional staff(Hartz-Karp, 1983). Problems of feeling isolated which many mothers in the broader community share, may be also shared by incarcerated women who are tasked with 24-hour care of their infants, for example.

IV. FSW PARENTING PROGRAMS - OVERVIEW OF REQUIRED FEATURES

Parenting Skills - Program Goal

The overriding goal of any parenting skills program delivered in the new FSW facilities should be: *to strengthen the capacity of FSW to provide for and nurture their children*. The program should be driven:

- primarily, by the need to ensure that the children of FSW are raised in a safe, secure and nurturing environment; and
- secondarily by the desire to make parenting an enriching and affirming experience for the FSW.

The primacy of focus on the needs of the children precludes programming in which an unintended impact could be viewing children as vehicles for their mothers' rehabilitation.

The specific objectives of the Program should be clearly laid out, and should focus on:

- providing FSW with the necessary child development knowledge and skills to parent effectively;
- helping FSW make healthy lifestyle choices for both themselves and their children;

- supporting FSW maternal decision-making, including the decision to take responsibility for parenting, and for making decisions that will be in the best interests of the child; and
- assisting FSW in accessing community resources and networks which can help them and support them in their efforts to parent effectively.

Any FSW Parenting Program which is developed must conform to the general principles and essential elements of effective correctional programming for women outlined in CSC's *Correctional Program Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women*, and summarized earlier in this document.

It is particularly important that parenting skills program developers recognize the unique context within which FSW's relationships with their children will develop. Programs and programmers must be flexible enough to meet the needs of children and mothers within this context. Above all, program designers and deliverers must respect and support women's choices to work through their maternal responsibilities, whether they be exercised via an on-site residency arrangement, enhanced visits, or parenting from afar.

Issues and Themes to Consider

In addition to the basic content outlined in Appendix A, there are a number of issues or themes which should be woven into any given program. It doesn't matter whether these issues are dealt with in a targeted fashion, or are injected into lessons on other topics. But each issue is important enough to warrant repeated discussion. Program designers and deliverers should try to "recycle" these issues as often as practicable:

➤ **Taking Care of Yourself**

The linkage between mothers and their children is very strong. FSW need to take care of themselves, in order to be able to take good care of their children. In some cases, they may feel that this will be best accomplished by not taking their children into residence on a full-time basis. Any program chosen or selected must stress that FSW don't have to have their children with them to be good mothers, and that they needn't feel guilty or ashamed about making that choice.

➤ **Parenting and Self-Esteem**

Virtually all of the parenting literature underscores the importance of self-esteem as one of the most important qualities of parents as well as children (Illsely Clarke, 1989; Branden, 1994, cited in Elizabeth Fry Society, 1994). FSW will need to be supported and encouraged to work on their own personal self-esteem, so that they can parent more effectively, and help build self-esteem within their children.

➤ **Parenting Styles**

There are a number of different parenting styles, described many different ways in the literature. A particularly helpful parenting style scheme is found in the work of Jean Illsely-Clarke (1978, 1992). The four styles are:

- Nurturing
- Structuring and Protecting
- Coddling (Marshmallowing)
- Criticizing.

The first two styles are affirming, while the last two are negating. All parents, including FSW, need numerous concrete examples to help them adopt an affirmative approach to parenting, and to affirm them in the use of those styles.

➤ **Modelling**

One of the most powerful teaching tools which parents have is their own behaviour. Any parenting skills program should help FSW attain insight into their own behaviours, and how positive role modelling can help their children.

➤ **Effective Coping Strategies**

FSW also need to consider the impact negative role modelling may have. Research shows that healthy child development is compromised in families where a parent is an alcohol or drug abuser, relationships are plagued by violence, and criminal activity is occurring (Elizabeth Fry Society Edmonton, 1994, Johnson, 1993). FSW should be supported in their efforts to understand and gain insight into the impact substance abuse, survivor issues, and criminal behaviour may have on their children.

Program deliverers must take care to deliver these messages impartially, preventing any judgemental quality from intruding into discussions. They must also refrain from attempting to deal with these issues themselves. Instead, they should build links to other programs FSW can access, and in *this* program, continue the child-centred focus by concentrating on the impact the mother's problems may have on her children.

➤ **Parenting, Stress and Frustration**

Stress and frustration "come with the territory" of parenting regardless of time, place, environment and culture. For FSW, the usual stresses of parenting may be compounded by other issues on which they're working, such as drug and alcohol dependencies and survivor of abuse issues. Living arrangements in the new facilities and learning to cope in an institutional setting may also take their toll on how well-equipped FSW will be to deal with their children at any given time.

Any parenting skills program must be able to help FSW cope with the stressful realities and frustrations of everyday parenting. And since added stresses and frustrations due to

incarceration are a given, the parenting skills program must be able to help FSW cope with the stresses which incarceration itself produces, so that the impact on their relationships with their children is minimized.

➤ **Dealing with Children With Special Problems**

Many children of FSW have experienced childhood traumas or experienced/witnessed abuse. As a result, they may manifest a higher-than-average incidence of behaviours which are difficult for any parent to deal with. These behaviours were described earlier in Section III. An effective program for FSW will provide opportunities to discuss ways FSW can help see their children through these kinds of problems.

➤ **The Need for Mutual Support**

Lack of support is a major issue for many primary caregivers in the community. It will be an especially important issue for women who choose an on-site residency arrangement for their children because they will be responsible for their children 24 hours per day. Creative and practical ways to build and encourage mutual support among FSW mothers and other offenders should be factored into any parenting skills program.

Helping FSW to access and use supportive self-help and services networks in the community is another way to bolster support and improve the parenting knowledge and competence of FSW. Programs which could match FSW with a trained, supportive mother in the community, for example, could be considered.

➤ **Helping Mothers Explain their Incarceration to their Children**

Children living in residence may be labelled by people they encounter in the larger community. Most women in prison are very concerned about how to help their children understand and deal with this, and with their other issues surrounding their mother's incarceration. Any parenting skills program for FSW should help mothers work their way through this with their children. Depending on local situations, it may be helpful to organize group activities for FSW children so that they will also feel mutually supported by others who share similar experiences.

➤ **A Focus on Everyday Problem-Solving**

A major focus on parenting skills should be on dealing with everyday problems. For example:

- women who do not have access to their children may need help in creating a plan to achieve access to their children;
- women who are parenting from afar may need guidance in how to effectively "co-parent" with the child's community care giver; and

- having children residing within the new facilities may bring new problems to institutional life. Guidance should be provided on how to help women problem-solve with their children, and with other offenders in their cottage, so that everyday issues which arise from having children around are resolved early on.

➤ **Dealing with Reintegration and Marginalization**

Most FSW come from and will return to marginal lifestyles and cash-strapped family environments. Their parenting program should include a focus on creative ways to parent that don't cost a lot of money, and on knowing about and accessing available community resources. It must also address ways mothers could seek assistance in getting family-oriented support on release (i.e. housing, parent support, daycare).

Above all, it should be acknowledged that the acquisition of positive parenting knowledge and skills is an on-going, life-long learning process. It will also be important to set realistic goals and expectations of how mother-child relationships will evolve over time.

Pedagogical Approach

As noted earlier, any parenting skills program chosen, adapted, or developed should be consistent with the *Correctional Program Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women*. The chart below shows the impact key features of the CPS Program elements should have on parenting skills programming.

Program Element	Implication for Parenting Skills Program
Women-Centred Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• base program design on experiences & realities of FSW & their children• help FSW build mutual support, learning from each other's experiences in parenting, and from others in the community• challenge and encourage FSW to question their assumptions and expectations about parenting, and support their efforts without judgement• build on the strengths which FSW bring, which can help them effect changes in their parenting styles

Program Element	Implication for Parenting Skills Program
Principles of Women's Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help women learn and grow through their connection to & relationships with their children and with each other • use a wide range activities in programs, ensuring that they draw heavily upon both the experiences and imaginations of FSW • programs should be practical, concrete and experiential. FSW should learn by doing, and drawing on their parenting experiences • make sure program deliverers have the skills and inclination to model what they teach, in all interactions with FSW and with their children • allow and encourage humour as a teaching strategy and identify humour as an important strength which can help FSW parent effectively.
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help build FSW tolerance & understanding for diversity by helping FSW to teach their children about differences in family forms and norms • capitalize on the diversity of mothers and children within the facilities in program design and delivery • recognize that the parenting needs of each FSW may be quite distinct, and allow for that in your programming model.
Analytical Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stress that effective parenting is something everyone needs to learn • use a problem-solving approach at all levels of the program - one that is practical and concrete • encourage creative <u>and</u> critical thinking by choosing activities which demand them • inject an exploration of values, and the role parents have in shaping them, into a wide range of topics • weave this analytic focus throughout the program, to help FSW recognize that problem solving permeates parenting - it's not a tool used only for special occasions, but a way of interacting with others.

Program Element	Implication for Parenting Skills Program
Program Structure and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• build awareness of parenting issues in FSW facility staff - remember we can <u>all</u> learn how to parent better• ensure the program is flexible enough to tailor to the unique needs of each group of FSW. Because parenting information and skill needs may vary, the intensity and duration of the program may also need to be variable• where possible, develop links to community groups and to other programs and services (like childcare)• ensure that the program delivered meets the conceptual model for Correctional Programming• consider on-going needs for parent/peer support.• devote the necessary resources required to ensure that the programs are accessible to all FSW who want them.
Program Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• make sure that the program process is well defined - screening criteria, group roles, management, monitoring, reporting protocols <u>and</u> evaluation should be addressed upfront.

Methodological Approach

To be consistent with the recommended pedagogical approach, (which is experiential and concrete) program designers and deliverers should:

- use discussion, groupwork, case studies, roleplays, and practical demonstrations;
- where possible, utilize community-based resources in delivery; and
- help FSW acquire and practice the social skills which will help them parent effectively.

Lectures are not recommended. Neither is an academic or theoretical approach. Plain language should be used by course deliverers in conducting the program, and should be featured in any supporting materials. Designers and deliverers should recognize that some FSW may have relatively low literacy levels.

Program Facilitation and Training Considerations

Consistent with the pedagogical and methodological approaches described above, program delivery should be through facilitators, rather than trainers or lecturers. The *Correctional Programming Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women* outlines the generic qualities required to effectively deliver FSW programming.

In addition, individuals delivering parenting skills programming to FSW should have:

- expertise in parenting education, particularly single-parent and non-traditional parenting issues;
- knowledge of mother/child relationships of incarcerated women;
- knowledge of local community resources and support networks;
- non-judgemental attitudes; and
- specific training in the delivery of the parenting program.

The use of community resources, such as public health nurses, child development professionals and parent support professionals is highly recommended, particularly when dealing with topics like health care, sexuality, sexually-transmitted diseases, and healthy birthing. FSW Management Teams must ensure that external community resources are fully briefed on the FSW Programming Strategy, and that they have the knowledge and skills needed to deliver programming to FSW specifications¹.

V. PROGRAM CONTENT

A series of program content charts are presented in Appendix A. These charts should be viewed as a "menu" of subjects and topics, all of which would be included in a comprehensive parenting program for FSW. This menu approach allows tiers of tailoring:

- Facility management, staff and program designers can identify the areas which they feel require the most intense focus in their own facility.
- Program deliverers and FSW can also tailor a program to suit their own needs, shifting emphasis as required.

The charts are organized into subjects (large sets like *Appropriate Discipline*) and topics (subsets, like *What is Discipline?*). When assessing existing programs against these content charts, it will probably be most practical to focus primarily on topics, rather than subjects, since there are so many ways that those topics might be organized and categorized. (Example: in these charts, we show *Anger* as a topic within two subjects: *Taking Care of Yourself*, and *Helping Children Deal With Their Emotions*. You may encounter programs in which *Anger* is the subject, and topics within it might include *Managing Your Anger*, and *Dealing with Angry Children*.)

Program subjects and topics are tightly interwoven; often there is some overlap or duplication among topics. This should be viewed as a strength. Just as it is hoped that certain issues or themes are recycled, this kind of appearance and re-appearance of topics will help FSW recognize that any one aspect of parenting may have an impact on others.

¹ See also Johnston, Denise (n.d.) *Report No. 15: Preparation for Working with Offenders and Their Families*, as additional background.

VI. BEST PRACTICES

We reviewed a variety of correctional and community-based parenting skills programs to see if there were any existing models which would be compatible with the recommended features, approach, and content for parenting programs for Federally Sentenced Women. Not surprisingly, we didn't find a parent education program which completely matches the Selection Criteria Checklist (presented in section VIII of this document) in its entirety. We also noted that there are few formally structured and evaluated programs which have provided parenting skills to incarcerated mothers.

Increasingly, however, there are a number of community-based parenting/family support programs targeted to single parents who share similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics with FSW. With some adaptation, some of these programs could have much to offer FSW.

We've highlighted several program resources which could provide useful "food for thought" in designing a specific parenting skills program for FSW. The list is only a starting point for you; it is not an endorsement of these resources as suitable for FSW in their "as is" condition.

Community-based Programs

➤ **Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs 1994 *Directory of Programs for Families with Young Children***

The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs 1994 *Directory of Programs for Families with Young Children* provides a detailed listing of family support programs and services available throughout Canada, including the communities where the new facilities will be created. The Programs and Service listings provide a good basis for networking and program development.

➤ **Health Canada (1989) *Nobody's Perfect*.**

"Nobody's Perfect" is a parent education program which focuses on parenting children from 0 - age 5. It is specifically targeted to parents who meet one (or more) of the following criteria: are young, single, low-income, low-education, and who experience social, cultural or geographic isolation. The Program has been delivered primarily to women. It deals with the majority of themes, subjects, and topics which are recommended for FSW, excepting those which relate specifically to their incarceration and consequent living circumstances. An extensive network of trained facilitators exists across the country. The Program has also been formally evaluated.

➤ **Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton. (manual forthcoming, 1994) *Parent Companion Program: A Support Program for Single Young Parents*.**

The Parent Companion Support Program trains volunteers to provide parenting and life skills assistance to single, young mothers. Volunteers are specifically trained in parenting skills, behaviour management, problem-solving, community resources, health and safety, nutrition, and stress management. Each volunteer is matched with a single young parent who has been referred to the agency. Peer support groups for both mothers and volunteers have also been established. This program could serve as a useful model to build community-based peer support for FSW. The Program is in its first year of operation, and hasn't been evaluated formally. Programs which could match FSW to supportive mothers in the community should be explored.

➤ **Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (1988). *Parenting Skills for Indian Mothers with Young Children.***

Parenting Skills for Indian Mothers with Young Children is specifically designed for parents with young children, and is appropriate for single parents with limited resources and low literacy levels. It covers physical development, learning by helping, nutrition, listening and talking skills, health and safety issues, traditional Indian foods, family life today, learning through play, self-esteem, the family long ago, preparing for school, and language, social, and emotional development.

Institutionally Based Programs

➤ **Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. *The Children's Center - Bedford Hills Correctional Facility.*** As described in Roulet, Sister Elaine, Patricia O'Rourke, and Mary Reichers (1993) "The Children's Centre - Bedford Hills Correctional Facility", in The Fourth North American Conference on the Family and Corrections: "Exploring the Family Side of Justice". Proceedings. Quebec City, October 10-13, 1993.

The Bedford Hills Children's Center is a holistic program designed to help women offenders maintain and strengthen their ties with their children. Amongst its array of programs and services, it includes: a children's playroom, a parenting centre, nursery, infant daycare, prenatal center, child advocacy program and videotaping centre. The women are actively involved in planning the activities of the center.

The Parenting Center is of special note. It offers the following services and programs to women incarcerated at Bedford Hill:

- a Child Development Associate Course, which is a nationally accredited program which prepares offenders to teach in accredited nursery schools.
- a Children's Advocate Office, which assists mothers in maternal decision-making for their children.
- a Children's Library, which promotes mother/child reading, as well as a Toy Library.

- an Inmate Foster Care Committee which provides other inmates with foster care information and support, assists mothers in writing letters and telephoning their children, and helps mothers to work with their children's social worker.
- holiday activity programming, which for example provides programs and activities during Christmas.
- an Infant Day Care Center for incarcerated mothers who are going to school or work.
- a "Mental Hygiene" Program, which is described as a "parent the parent" program run by inmate staff.
- a Mother's Group, run by a social worker, which provides mothers with help in working through their mother-child relationships.
- Parenting Courses, including a video-based discussion group; a special parenting program aimed for mothers with children ages 0-5, and a program titled, "Choices and Changes", which is designed to enhance personal self-awareness, decision-making and accountability. These characteristics are presented as key elements underlying effective parenting.
- a Prenatal Center which offers parenting courses, provides opportunities to address substance abuse problems and teaches some home-making skills (sewing, crocheting, etc.)
- a "Sponsor a Baby" program which provide community support for an mother and her baby, once she leaves the facility.
- a Transportation Program, which helps transport children to and from the facility for visits.

➤ **Johnston, Denise (1994) *Prison Parents' Education Project: Curriculum Manual*. (rev.ed.) Pacific Oaks, Ca.: The Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents.**

The *Prison Parents' Education Project: Curriculum Manual* provides basic parenting information and addresses issues of particular concern for incarcerated parents. It is not a gender-sensitive program, and therefore does not meet most of the Selection Checklist criteria. However, its coverage of issues of particular concern for incarcerated parents may offer some insight to program designers for FSW programming. These issues include: children and separation, inter-generational behaviours, substance-dependent parents and their children, children in placement, planning for family reunification, and children and recovery. This program has not been formally evaluated.

- **Virginians for Child Abuse Prevention, Inc. (1992) *MILK: Mothers/Men Inside Loving Kids*. Richmond, Virginia: Virginians for Child Abuse Prevention.**

The MILK Program is an institutionally-based parent/child visitation program, which could serve as a stepping stone for women working towards having their children reside with them. The Manual details the process to establish such a program. Note: the Parent Education Module included as part of the program does is based on a very abridged version of the STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting). The STEP Program focuses primarily on child behaviour and discipline, and does not meet most of the criteria of our selection checklist.

VII. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The creation of effective parenting skills programs for Federally Sentenced Women is just beginning. It will be important to invest in evaluation efforts which will help the FSW Management Team monitor how the program is working, what changes or adaptations are needed, and eventually, what the program achieves. An open, participatory model of evaluation, which involves staff, program designers and deliverers, and program participants, is recommended.

FSW Management Team will need to carefully plan for an evaluation at the following levels:

Monitoring How the Program is Working

As per the *Correctional Program Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women*, the Program delivery should be monitored to ensure that quality control and program integrity.

Monitoring efforts must include a Program Deliverer self-evaluation process (How did I do today? What do I need to change?). Because this is a new program area, it's important that Program Deliverers keep an on-going, written log of what they actually cover in each session, how program participants actually participated, how they felt about the session, what worked, what didn't work (and why).

On-going monitoring must also include an open process for Program Participants to provide feedback on the program and offer their views on how the program should be changed. This should be done on a session by session basis. In addition, there should be a mechanism for client feedback on Program Deliverers, including any community-based specialists invited to participate in the program.

Briefing FSW Management Team and Making Program Changes Based on Feedback

Good program development is an on-going process based on actual experience in delivery. Program deliverers will need to provide on-going feedback to FSW Management, and work with them to initiate any program changes or further program development. A process for making Program changes should be agreed upon before the Program commences.

Evaluating Program Outcome

Every parenting skills program should be evaluated in terms of client participation and outcome. The scope, depth and sophistication of the evaluation will depend on the nature of the program itself, as well as the level of resources available to conduct the evaluation. It should also be evaluated in the context of the broader Mother-Child strategy in place in the facility.

It is important to establish an evaluation framework and plan as soon as the Program has been developed. We recommend the use of an external evaluator, with in-depth knowledge of parenting/family support measurement tools, qualitative evaluation techniques, and skilled in participatory models of evaluation. The evaluator should work with the Program staff and participants from the outset, in designing the evaluation, establishing realistic outcome criteria, collecting data, and evaluating the Program.

VIII. SELECTION CHECKLIST

The checklist below summarizes the features required in an effective parenting program for FSW.

- Does the program focus primarily on ensuring that children of FSW are raised in a safe, secure and nurturing environment?

- Will the program's structure allow each of the following issues to be "recycled" numerous times, when dealing with different topics?
 - Parenting and Self-Esteem
 - Styles of Parenting
 - Modelling
 - Developing Effective Coping Strategies
 - The Stress and Frustration of Parenting
 - The Need for Mutual Support
 - Helping Mothers Explain Incarceration
 - Everyday Problem-Solving
 - Creative Ways to Deal with Marginalization
 - Dealing with Problem Behaviours

- Does the program draw on the past experiences of FSW?

- Is the program practical and hands-on, so FSW can experience self-discovery, learning primarily by doing and discussing?

GUIDELINES: PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAMS FOR FSW

- Does the program provide opportunities for FSW to learn from one another, from their children, and from resources in the community?
- Does the program allow and encourage humour?
- Can the program capitalize on the many differences between FSW and their children, using those differences to build tolerance?
- Does the program focus on building effective, creative everyday problem-solving skills, rather than on imparting theoretical knowledge?
- Is the program flexible enough to change the focus, length and duration as required to suit the needs of different groups of FSW?
- Does the program use varied interactive techniques, (like groupwork, case studies, roleplays) which draw upon and enhance the imaginative and practical abilities of FSW?
- Are the program materials at the right literacy level for FSW?
- Can the program be effectively delivered by the resources available? If not, can training be arranged to ensure that the program can be effectively delivered by the resources available?
- Has the program been formally evaluated, and is the program having the kind of impact that is intended?