

ICDP PROJECT WITH FAMILIES RECENTLY ARRIVED FROM SYRIA

June 2022

The ICDP course provided refugee women in Stafford with an opportunity to share their experiences, challenges and successes within a safe and nurturing space. The course took the participants through the ICDP sensitization process to enhance their interaction with young children and adolescents. In addition, they were given tools to help them adjust to their life in England and support their families. The role of women, their health and wellbeing, stress management and bridging the gap between the two cultures, were additional topics covered by the course. The course took place over 19 weekly sessions, conducted in Arabic and English. WhatsApp was used for feedback on tasks assigned in-between the online sessions and for sharing of experiences around the key topics.



Summary of activities /topics discussed

Week 1: Introduction

Agreed on rules for sessions-punctuality, commitment, respect and consideration for others' opinions, supporting one another etc..

Each participant in turn spoke about their experience , their journey and the challenges they face in general

We identified challenges such as language, different traditions, being a foreigner, homesickness, weather, and various worries .

Week 2: Change in eating habits , concern about children's preference of junk food rather than traditional home-cooked meals, difficulties in adapting but also awareness of the necessity to adapt were discussed. How they felt about and how much/or little this affected family dynamics.

Week 3: Health 1 . What it means to be healthy. What factors affect our health. Diet, exercise , hydrating enough, getting sunshine and fresh air.

Week 4: Health 2. They talked about the measures they take to be healthy. Importance of exercise . Some have joined the gym, others make a point of going out everyday for a walk etc.. There was a

lot of discussion about different diets they had recently discovered. Ideas and suggestions were exchanged.

Week 5: Health 3. Effect of mind and emotions on health. The concept of health being more than just the absence of disease. How do we achieve wellbeing? Difference between eastern and western concepts. Breathing exercise they could practice at home.

Week 6: Stress. What it is. How it affects us . What can we do about it? They shared their thoughts about how stress could be affecting them and what measures they take to reduce its effect on them. We did a little guided-imagery exercise and learnt to relax the mind and body to relieve stress .

Week 7: Mind and emotions. We looked at anger, sadness, guilt , fear most of them felt when having to leave family/way of life behind. We then spoke about hope and gratitude and the many advantages/blessings of having found a home here in the UK . We looked at the many positive elements of their life over here.

Week 8: Practised abdominal breathing. They wanted to talk more about health, effects of too much coffee and sugar, not drinking enough water. We looked at how they could encourage their children to eat better.

Week 9: Women's role. Difference between eastern and western culture . How the war and then the displacement affected their role as women, as wives, as mothers. What influence can/do they have in society, the community, family? What do they want for their daughters?

Week 10: How do we communicate with our children? How do we show love? How do we listen? The importance of non-verbal communication. How do we use praise? They each shared their experiences

Week 11: We continued the discussion on positive communication in the family. We explored the past, our childhood , how it affected us now that we are parents . We emphasized the importance of creating positive, happy memories for our children. What can we do together with our children? They mentioned the worries concerning bringing up teenagers, the freedom they have in this society compared to their home country and how to handle this.

Week 12: As many had been ill , the topic went back to health. Also as many were absent in the last 2 sessions we didn't move on to a new topic.

They seem to want to continue the sessions now that we have changed the time. The focus will be on family dynamics and integration into society . Also I will be encouraging them to continue to be supportive of each other after the sessions end.

Week 13 : - We explored the difficulties in relating to others, lack of inclination to socialize, rushing all the time to get things done, too tired etc.. We examined our expectations of others and the importance of understanding context and individual circumstances.

Week 14 : We discussed parenting questionnaire. They talked about instilling values in children, how to encourage empathy and kindness as well as self-confidence.

Week 15 : We talked about adolescence, how teenagers think. We looked at aspects of novelty seeking, social engagement, emotional intensity, creative exploration. We discussed teaching by example compared to "Do as I say but not as I do" . Importance of spending time with children, creating memorable moments- guidelines 5,6,7.

Week 16 : Continued discussion on adolescence, impact of experience on brain structure, how the pandemic affected teenagers , addictions . How feasible is it to limit exposure to social media, mobile phone etc..? Discussed importance of structure(rules,responsibilities,organization etc..) that still allows creative expression. Guidelines 8a,8b.

Week 17 :.We looked at regulating behavior and avoiding extremes between chaos and rigidity, finding balance and middle ground in educating teenagers. Importance of respecting their views. Participants reflected on their own teenage years and on how their parents managed. Introduced the concept of interactive profile (Lichter scale)

Week 18 : Discussed results of Lichter scale, how they felt about completing the interactive profile about their parents and comparing with their own. They identified similarities and differences in parenting styles between the 2 generations .Talked about the importance /usefulness of story-telling. Looked at praise/labelling more closely and the importance of focusing more on the action/behavior rather than the person. Question was asked as to the possibility of “spoiling “ children. One of the participants shared about a recent issue and welcomed feedback from group.

Week 19+20(in Stafford) : Revision of main points discussed. Reviewed the 8 ICDP Guidelines and 3 dialogues. Did practice in abdominal breathing and muscle relaxation for stress relief + Guided imagery session. Short video: Dr.Tronnick still- face experiment+ discussion.

Role play: mother and teenager after school interaction , others observe and identify icdp guidelines and the ones lacking. Repeat and observe differences.

After having done this course, what changes would you implement, how would this impact your interactions, apply this in your life? Please fill out evaluation form.

Here is some feedback on the course:

The course was very well received. Those who were too strict with their children learned to listen more to their teenagers.

One of the mother's commented: " This course made me look at things differently. I need to be more patient and listen better to my kids."

Another participant with the opposite problem, that her "child was the boss at home ". She found the guideline on structure and setting limits very useful.

Another mother said: " I started to pay attention to how I was saying things and not just what I was saying".

Another commented: " You made me think of things I had never thought about before ".

All liked the pace and format of the training but wished we had been able to meet regularly in person.

The organizer was very happy with the training as she had received very positive feedback from the participants.

Michelle MacDonald