



SENG-Model parent support groups

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When SENG was first established in 1981, a specific model of a support group for parents of gifted children was developed within SENG by Jim Webb and Betty Meckstroth. Parents of gifted children were invited to participate in a ten-week series to discuss social and emotional needs of gifted children and parenting issues related to those needs. We chose ten topics: Characteristics, Motivation, Discipline, Peer Relations, Sibling Relations, Stress Management, Depression, Communication of Feelings, Tradition Breaking, and Parent Relationships. We met once each week as a group. The handouts prepared for these groups grew and became *Guiding the Gifted Child*, a book which still serves as the matrix around which the group discussions are focused. The emphasis is on positive aspects of parenting, avoiding power struggles, and helping gifted children learn appropriate life skills while enhancing the parent/child relationship.

The groups proved to be powerful in helping parents. Several characteristics of parents of gifted children quickly became evident. They were as intense as their children, and needed to interact with other parents to receive support, guidance and advice. Most reported having no other place where they could discuss these issues and hear from other parents. A clear pattern of the groups emerged across the ten sessions.

Because this SENG model was distinctly describable and predictable, as well as helpful, we are attempting to "export" the model. In 1984, the first training workshop was held. Among the participants was Arlene DeVries from Des Moines, Iowa. Arlene took the SENG model home, and is now on her forty-eighth ten-session series. In addition, Arlene has become a primary trainer in helping others learn how to establish and facilitate SENG-Model Parent Support Groups. To date, training workshops have been held in more than eleven states and four countries, and more than 300 leaders have been trained. The entire Board of the California Association for the Gifted participated in the training, and is establishing groups. In Chicago, as a result of the SENG training, groups are being conducted in other languages as well.

Because it is so meaningful, we hope to expand this training in the SENG-Model Parent Support Groups. Virtually always, parenting proves to be far more important than teaching in the long-term outcome of gifted children. Although teaching is important, parenting that nurtures, guides, and supports gifted children often can help a child overcome mediocre, poor or even awful school experiences. But the reverse seldom is true; that is, teaching very seldom can overcome inadequate or poor parenting and family experiences. The irony, though, is that parents of gifted children so seldom have places to turn for information, support, and guidance about these special children.

Because we feel so strongly about these groups, we have listed below some typical comments from parents who have participated in the parenting groups, as well as comments from persons who have taken the two-day training to become a facilitator. We have found that educators, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and experienced parents all make excellent facilitators of these groups, and that the groups are indeed therapeutic.

We hope you may wish to establish SENG-Model Parent Support Groups in your area. To obtain more information about receiving training to become a facilitator contact the SENG office, or you may contact Jim Webb directly at (602) 954-4200, or get information via the Internet at www.giftedbooks.com.

Here are some comments from past participants:

Parents Say:

- "I do not feel alone now."
- "I've learned how to communicate with my child, and it's working."
- "After an attempted suicide, we have been able to reestablish self-esteem for the child involved and the family."
- "I honestly feel that this group has saved my family."
- "Our child has been showing less anxiety and is not so overwhelmed about school."
- "My child's a happier child, my family a healthier family, and I'm a better person as a result of this group."

Past Training Participants Say:

- "I thoroughly enjoyed this workshop. Great ideas presented with humor." (Helena, MT)
- "Much practical useful information presented in a relaxed informal style." (Dayton, OH)
- "Jim and Arlene's own modeling behavior was very powerful." (Detroit, MI)
- "Appreciated the new ideas, new techniques." (Phoenix, AZ)
- "The evening parent groups were dynamic." (St. Paul, MN)