Children learn in three contexts: the school, the community and the family. Parents are the primary educators and their contribution is essential to academic success, self-esteem and social skills in their children.

However, in South Africa, poverty and resulting social conditions mean parents are often forced to live and work away from their families. This has led to generations of children growing up without an essential stable and consistent parenting presence. In addition, a significant number of children are born to young mothers, who are effectively still children themselves.

For these and other reasons, parents often lack the necessary skills and information to fulfil their vital function in their children’s lives.

In the analogy of nature, the family is the ground into which the seeds of tomorrow are sown. If the ground is fertile, the seed will flourish. In the same way, if society is committed to enriching family life through effective parenting, children have a greater chance of enjoying a richer future.

As a vital part of the Peace Education Initiative, a Parental Skills programme is a priority for the GM South Africa Foundation.

**Goals and objectives of the programme**

At the heart of the South African Schools Act is the premise that parents play an active role in the education of their children.

Parents naturally want to guide their children successfully into adulthood, creating productive and happy members of society. But parents often need guidance themselves in order to provide a foundation for children to be loved, disciplined and developed effectively.

The Parental Skills programme provides teachers and community members with a model for guiding and motivating parents. The ultimate goal is to equip parents to provide a supportive and emotionally healthy family environment.

The primary objectives of this programme are:

- To address parenting concerns by giving educators and community members a programme that can be used at schools, churches, or in communities for this purpose.
- To provide skills and strategies to assist parents in raising thoughtful, responsible young people.
- To encourage parents to consider and attend to their children’s physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual needs.
- To encourage parents to take up their role as primary educators in their children’s lives.
- To provide the opportunity for parents to engage with educators and other parents in a meaningful way.

**Programme background**

In 2009 the GM South Africa Foundation initiated the Parental Skills Programme, with the focus on ‘Positive Parenting’.

The programme was piloted in one school in Port Elizabeth in 2010. Based on the feedback, the programme was extended later that year to include eight schools.

Since then approximately fifty schools and community organisations in Port Elizabeth, Cradock, Gauteng and in the Western Cape have participated in this programme.
Programme structure and content

Parental Skills currently consists of ten modules of two hours each, with a strong focus on interaction and participation.

The Parental Skills programme modules focus on the following:

- Module 1 is an Introduction to Positive Parenting which encourages parents to get to know each other and start thinking about the concept of ‘Positive Parenting’.
- Module 2 is focused on Building a Sound Financial Base. This deals with budgeting, saving and the power of compound interest.
- Module 3 and 4 are about Building a Healthy Child. These modules include tips on nutrition, personal hygiene, domestic hygiene, and the importance of sleep, exercise and regular clinic visits.
- Module 5 is concerned with Building a Happy Child and introducing the concept of five love languages. The value of praise and the importance of building self-esteem are considered in this module.
- Module 6 deals with Building a Valued Child through Active Listening. This encompasses the spectrum of listening skills.
- Module 7 is about Building a Secure Child, with emphasis on boundaries and consequences.
- Module 8 focuses on Building a Disciplined Child. Attention is given to the nature and purpose of discipline, as well as tips on effective discipline.
- Module 9 focuses on Building a Successful Child, and ways in which parents can be involved in their children's school experience.
- Module 10 deals with Building Healthy Sexuality and helping children to make responsible decisions. This focuses on honest and accurate education from parents to counteract the negative perception of sexuality gained from the media and peers.

Partners and stakeholders

In this initiative the Foundation has teamed up with the Port Elizabeth District Office of the Department of Education as well as community-based organisations, participating principals, teachers, parents and SGB representatives.

Guidelines and support

The Programme has the following resources available to assist schools and organisations to implement the training programme:

- A detailed facilitator manual entitled Parenting: Heart to Heart which guides trainers in the roll-out of the learning programme.
- A structured approach assists facilitators in minimising preparation time, allowing them to fit the programme into their busy schedules.
- Facilitators to provide initial preparation, ongoing training and support, as well as mentoring to schools and officials during rollout of the programme.

Feedback from participants and facilitators:

‘The appreciation demonstrated by the parents was not only humbling experience but it reinforced the fact that an educator’s task should never end in the classroom. Soon a special bond existed among us. The positive feedback, from both the learners and the parents themselves, was worth every minute spent on Saturday mornings, empowering not only the parents, but also the educators.’

‘If we can do this with every parent we will have a different type of community’

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