



How to ...

Run a Care for the Family *Parentalk* Parenting Course

Parentalk Courses

Being a parent brings some of life's biggest joys, as well as its greatest challenge. For most jobs you receive some kind of training, but as parents we're thrown in the deep end. A parenting course is valuable for all parents, not just those who are experiencing particular difficulties. It allows parents who want to do the best job they can at bringing up their children to come together and share their experiences, learn from each other, and explore some essential parenting principles.

Care for the Family's *Parentalk* courses (*The Primary Years* and *The Teenage Years*) can be run in a wide range of settings, e.g. schools, parent and toddler groups, churches, or your own home. They provide a great opportunity not only to help parents in your church but also to connect with parents in your wider community.

Over six sessions, each course looks at valuable principles that parents can apply on a day-to-day basis with children and teenagers. Each session is video-based (available as a DVD pack or online download) and includes questions to give everyone an opportunity to take part in the discussion. You can find more information on the content at [Parentalk Courses](#).

You don't need any special experience to run the course - being a parent yourself is probably the most useful qualification! You don't have to be an expert or have all the answers. Your role is to build an atmosphere where everyone feels part of the group and to ensure that the discussions keep on track and that everyone has the chance to contribute.

Publicity

You may be running a course for an existing group of parents, or already have a group in mind. If, however, you plan to invite parents from wider afield, here are a few ideas on how to go about it.

- Register your course at [Parentalk Courses](#). You can then download publicity leaflets to over-print with your own details. You can also download a promotional video to show.
- Personally invite parents you think may be interested in attending.
- Give some leaflets to your church congregation to invite their friends or family.
- Use social media to let your own contacts know about the course. Many communities also have Facebook pages to promote events in their area.
- Ask permission to give out leaflets at school gates, in church, in local schools, doctors and dental surgeries, libraries, even hairdressers – anywhere people are likely to visit.
- Put up posters on community noticeboards e.g. in libraries, pubs and supermarkets.
- Council or community websites often have a place to promote community events.
- Approach your local newspaper to see if they'll promote your course. You could write a short article or send a letter to the letters page.
- Ask your local radio station to promote your course, or ask if they would interview you about it.

Where to meet?

You may choose to meet in your own home, or in a church or community building. Whichever you choose, ensure that your venue:

- is bright and relaxing with good lighting, heating and ventilation and free from distractions
- Is the right size for the number of people you're expecting, and allows you space to set your chairs out in a circle. This enables everyone to see each other and encourages interaction

- has facilities for serving refreshments
- is easy for people to find and get to by public transport or car, and is accessible for all
- has public liability insurance to cover you and your group if an accident occurs

Setting up

Before each session, allow plenty of time to put out the chairs, prepare refreshments, etc. Make sure the equipment is working i.e. your DVD player, or laptop if you download or stream content, has the right connection to your TV or projector and the sound is clearly audible.

Starting off

It's important to set the right tone at your first session. Your role is to ensure that your group feels at ease and that you set the tone for the course right at the beginning. You might want to start with refreshments, followed by some kind of opening activity or 'ice-breaker'. Choose something that will relax people rather than making them feel threatened or silly.

Once your group is relaxed, you can move on to the housekeeping. This would include:

- Confirmation of start and finish times and dates of sessions
- Where the toilets are located
- Location of refreshments
- House rules: eg level of confidentiality expected, overview of course content, role of participants

Some dos and don'ts when leading

DO Try to prepare well. Read the session notes and watch the video content beforehand. Think about how the discussion might go, but be prepared for the unexpected!

DON'T Let one person dominate the discussion, give direct advice, or criticise another member of the group. Everyone can have their say as long as this does not deflate the confidence of another person or imply that they've got it wrong.

DO Try to summarise people's contributions to the discussion and link them in with the main points to keep the discussion on track. You'll find that if you acknowledge what someone says (e.g. "I found what Anne said really helpful"), each person will feel a vital part of the group and grow in confidence.

DON'T Constantly start sessions late or over-run. If you always start promptly, those who turn up late should soon get the message that they will miss something. Waiting for latecomers to arrive devalues the efforts of those who come on time and runs the risk of the session ending later and later, inconveniencing everyone.

DO Think in advance how you might handle things if anybody becomes upset or angry. It doesn't often happen, but it may occur occasionally. It often helps to have someone else as your assistant for a course who can handle not just refreshments, but will be there if someone needs to take time out.

DON'T Feel you have to use every word of the notes, cover every main point, or ask every question. Be flexible. Your group will get the best from the course if you gear it to their needs.

DO Remind everyone of the importance of confidentiality and the rule that things said during a discussion should be kept within the group.

The Parentalk Leader's Guide that comes with the pack has more information and tips on leading a group.

Feedback from those who have run the course has been overwhelmingly positive, with many stories of parents feeling encouraged and equipped. Visit [Parentalk Courses](#) for more information and take advantage of a special offer: by contacting Chris Priddy you can receive 50% discount on the price of a *Parentalk* course. chris.priddy@bristoldiocese.org