






Developing Values in Children

Activity 7-1	What's New?	 10-15 minutes
Activity 7-2	My Life as a Father	 15-20 minutes
Activity 7-3	The Values Auction	 30-40 minutes
Activity 7-4	Communicating Values	 25-30 minutes
Activity 7-5	Feedback/Wrap-up	 10-15 minutes

Key Concepts

- Children begin to develop values (important beliefs or principles that guide behavior) from the moment they are born. Children learn what other people think is right and wrong by watching and imitating their parents and other caregivers and by having their behavior corrected when they do not act in accordance with their parents' and caregivers' values.
- Fathers need to identify the values that they want to pass on to their children in order to develop effective strategies for communicating their values.
- There is no one single “right” way of parenting, and every child is different. Parents who successfully communicate values to their children are likely to develop a solid relationship with them based on love and trust.

Materials Checklist

Activity 7-2 **My Life as a Father**

- Newsprint
 - Marker
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Activity 7-3 **The Values Auction**

- Leader Resource, “Childhood Behaviors” (on newsprint)
 - Play money
 - Newsprint
 - Marker
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Activity 7-4 **Communicating Values**

- Leader Resources, “Communicating Values” and “Moral Development of Children”
- Index cards

What's New?

Planning Note: Fathers who do not see their children regularly or who are estranged from them may have difficulty participating in Sessions 7 through 9 (especially if they are mandated to pay child support, but have no access to their children). It will be important to find ways for everyone to participate and learn from each other. Try to balance discussions of general issues with the more specific concerns that the fathers want to share with the group regarding their children. Since one goal of peer support is to help fathers develop healthy relationships with their children, look for and encourage opportunities for the men to assist each other in connecting with their children.

Begin the activity by asking participants what they thought about the last session. In your own words, ask the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. Would somebody like to summarize what we talked about last session?
2. What were your reactions to our discussion about being a father? About being a provider?
3. Has anyone's opinions about paying child support changed because of our discussion? If so, what has changed?
4. Have you had any new ideas about how to deal with the things (or people) that get in the way of providing for your children? If so, what are your ideas?
5. What questions about child support or establishing paternity do you still have? How do you suggest we go about answering them?
6. What, if anything, about the last session did you discuss with your partner, friends, or family?

My Life as a Father

Purpose: To encourage the participants to talk about how things are going for them right now as fathers. To identify the fathers' concerns about their children that can be addressed in the next two sessions.

Materials: Newsprint and marker.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Procedure: Begin by saying something like, "So far, you've talked about what you value as individuals and what experiences have shaped your view of yourselves as men and fathers. You have also worked at improving your communication skills, and you have talked about the characteristics of being a good father and provider for your children. Many of our discussions have focused in your role as fathers and on your relationships with your children. The next few sessions will direct out attention to the children themselves — to what they need from fathers to grow up feeling good about themselves and to be productive in their lives. Today you will identify what you value as a parent and which values you want to communicate to your children as you respond to the situations in their lives. Whenever you interact with your children, you communicate certain values and messages about how you feel about them and about how they should feel about themselves. The goal is to send the best messages you can."

Tell the men, "To begin, I would like each of you to remind the group of how many children you have and your children's names and ages. Also tell us something that you like about your children, and any characteristics they have that you feel you had a hand in shaping. For example, if your child is honest, what have you done to encourage that quality? Finally, tell the group how much time you spend with your children and how you feel about that. This is also an opportunity to ask for advice about any particular problem or concern you may have about your children right now."

Remind the group that not all the fathers are in contact with their children, and so the men should be supportive of members who may be upset by the session or who may have a hard time participating in it. Assure those who are estranged from their children that they can benefit from the other fathers' experiences and that, at the same time, the group may be helpful in their efforts to connect with their children.

Then ask each father to give the following information. (Post the list on newsprint for all to see.)

- The names and ages of your children.
- What you like about your children. (For example, your son's or daughter's personality, humor, intelligence, etc.)
- Characteristics or qualities that you helped your children develop. (For example, independence, persistence, honesty, etc.)
- How often you see your children.
- How satisfied you are with the amount of time you spend with your children.
- A concern or problem you may be having with your children.
- For fathers who are not be in contact with their children, what steps, if any, do you plan to take to establish visits?

As the fathers share this information, record their responses on newsprint; in particular, record their concerns about their children.

When everyone has finished, tell the men that you will try to address all their concerns during this session and the next two. As a starting point, the next activity will help them to identify the behaviors and characteristics that they value in their children — and what they can do as fathers to encourage these characteristics.

The Values Auction

Purpose: To assist participants in identifying the values, behaviors, and characteristics that they want to nurture in their children.

Materials: Leader Resource, “Childhood Behaviors” (on newsprint); play money; newsprint and marker.

Time: 30-40 minutes.

Planning Note: This activity is a fun way to get the fathers thinking about which values are important to them and which kinds of behaviors they would like to promote in their children. Because play money is used, this activity often gets highly competitive and raucous. It is important to reserve at least 15 minutes after the activity to reflect on (1) which behaviors the men “bought” and why these things are important to them, (2) the *values* that underlie the behaviors they want to manage or encourage in their children, and (3) their ideas about how they need to interact with their children to promote the development of these values. This activity will give the fathers an opportunity to think about who their children are as individuals — and about the important role they can play in influencing their children’s development.

The Leader Resource “Childhood Behaviors” lists 35 possibilities. Depending on the size of your group, select 20 to 25 statements. The goal is to have enough statements so that each participant can select from one to three behaviors. With too many choices, the auction may take too long; but you also do not want to run out of choices before participants have “spent” their money. If possible, add statements that may be more relevant to your group.

Post the following statement on newsprint: “I value _____, and I want my child to value it.”

Procedure: Begin by saying, “One of the most important things you can give your children is a set of values and beliefs to help shape the kind of people they become. Good parenting starts with knowing what you as a father value in your relationship with your child, followed by how you treat the child in order to communicate those values. This activity will ask you to think about how you want your child to turn out. Which values, behaviors, and characteristics do you as a father want to develop in your child?”

Ask the fathers to define “values.” (If necessary, remind them of their work in Session 2, explaining that a value is something that you believe in, is important to you, and often guides your behavior.) Ask the fathers to call out examples of values (such as honesty, loyalty, respect for others). Then ask them to complete the statement, “I value _____, and I want my child to value it.” Write all their responses on the newsprint you prepared, and save it for use after the values auction.

Describe an auction and how it works. Then give each participant \$300 in play money and tell the men to look over the list of behaviors and characteristics that you posted on the newsprint; they should decide which values they would like to “buy” for their children. Explain that they may bid as much as \$300 or as little as \$20 for each value and that the father with the highest bid “buys” that value for his child.

Serve as the auctioneer and timekeeper, giving the men one minute to bid for each behavior. When the time is up, the father with the highest bid wins that item (write his name and the winning bid next to that item). Read aloud in a positive manner each behavior. If your group is small, limit the number of values to the ones most important to your group (thus ensuring that the fathers will buy only the values that are truly important to them).

After you have auctioned off all items on the list (or after everybody has spent his play money), point out the contradictions and relationships between certain behaviors and characteristics. For instance, some fathers may buy “A child who is successful in school” but not “A child who is curious and asks many questions.” Asking the group how one behavior or characteristic can influence another enables them to think more critically about how their children are growing and learning.

Then ask the participants to consider each behavior and characteristic and to identify its underlying *value*; record their responses on the newsprint next to each item. Also ask them to distinguish between characteristics that are basically part of a person’s *personality* and characteristics that can be developed by a parent’s encouragement and expectations. (For example, having a sense of humor is often characteristic of a person’s personality, something that a parent can influence only marginally, whereas feeling good about oneself or having high self-esteem is a characteristic greatly influenced by how a parent feels about and treats the child.)

Continue the discussion by asking the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. Why did you buy a particular behavior or characteristic?
2. Which were the three “best-selling” behaviors or characteristics? Why do you think so many of you chose these?
3. Which behaviors or characteristics went unsold? Why do you think these were not chosen?
4. Do any of the behaviors or characteristics that you bought contradict each other?
5. Would your selections change depending on whether you were buying values for a son or for a daughter? If so, how would they change, and why?

6. How does a child develop a “personality”? How much does the way parents raise a child contribute to his or her personality? (For example, does a parent’s treatment of the child influence such characteristics as being strong-willed, affectionate, or independent?)
7. Which of *your* personality traits do you see in your child? Do you tend to encourage (or discourage) these traits? How do you do this?
8. What things can you do to encourage your child to develop the characteristics and behaviors that you value? How likely is it that you will be successful?
9. Which behaviors would you like to buy that are not on the list?
10. Which of the behaviors on the list would have been valued by your father when you were a child?
11. Which of these characteristics did you display as a child?
12. How did your parents respond to you when you displayed behavior that they valued? How did they respond when you displayed behavior they didn’t value?
13. How did you feel when your parents responded to your behavior? How did their response influence or shape the kind of person you have become?

Leader Resource

Childhood Behaviors

1. A child who is loyal to me at all times.
2. A child whose feelings are never hurt.
3. A child who is curious and asks many questions.
4. A child who always listens to me.
5. A child who never talks back.
6. A child who feels comfortable telling me everything he or she is feeling.
7. A child who has many friends.
8. A child who can control his or her temper.
9. A child who stands up for himself or herself, even if it means fighting.
10. A child who is a leader, not a follower.
11. A child who looks good.
12. A child more like me than like his or her mother.
13. A child who is successful in school.
14. A child who is physically fit and healthy.
15. A child who will follow my religious beliefs.
16. A child who is respectful of me and other adults.
17. A child who feels good about himself or herself.
18. A child who is honest.
19. A child who is good at sports.
20. A child who is affectionate.
21. A child who is strong-willed and purposeful.
22. A child who always feels free to approach me with problems.

- 23.** A child who is street-smart.
- 24.** A child who enjoys spending time with me, even when he or she doesn't have a problem or need financial assistance.
- 25.** A child who is easygoing and flexible.
- 26.** A child whose behavior makes me feel proud.
- 27.** A child who can take care of himself or herself.
- 28.** A child with a good sense of humor.
- 29.** A child who stands up for his or her beliefs.
- 30.** A child who is adventuresome and daring.
- 31.** A child who never fears or hates me.
- 32.** A child who is popular in school.
- 33.** A child who has a lot of hobbies.
- 34.** A child who is interested in his or her culture.
- 35.** A child who is self-disciplined.

Communicating Values

Purpose: To identify and practice positive ways of communicating values to children within daily situations.

Materials: Leader Resources, “Communicating Values” and “Moral Development of Children”; index cards.

Time: 25-30 minutes.

Planning Note: The facilitator should write the information from the Leader Resource “Communicating Values” onto index cards, putting each scenario on a separate card. Also review the Leader Resource “Moral Development of Children” before the activity so you can provide information to answer question 6.

Procedure: Begin by saying something like, “You have just identified the values that you feel are important to pass on to your children. Now we need to figure out what you can do to communicate these values to them.” Remind the fathers that children learn by observing and listening to their parents. What parents do is as important as what they say — and sometimes it is even more important.

Tell participants that you have several situations (or scenarios) that you want them to consider. Each situation describes an opportunity for the parent to communicate something about values. Remind the men that a value might be some characteristic they believe in (such as honesty or respect for elders); it might be an attitude (such as that the human body is natural and beautiful); or it might be a guideline for behavior (such as the idea that it is good to share).

Divide the fathers into small groups, and give each group an index card describing a scenario. The scenarios involve children whose ages range from 2 to 17. In composing small groups, try to team up fathers whose children's ages match the scenarios. This will give the men an opportunity to brainstorm ways to handle situations that are likely to arise with their own children.

After each group reads its scenario, have the group discuss the following questions:

- What's going on here?
- What do you want your child to understand and learn?
- What would you do to communicate this? (Keep in mind the child's age and level of development.)

Allow approximately 10 minutes for the small-group discussions. Then have each group read its scenario and responses. After all groups have shared their responses, open up a large-group discussion by asking the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. What values might be communicated in each situation? (In situation 1, the issue is self-defense and fighting: Is it OK to defend oneself when attacked, or to hurt another person who “messes” with you? In situation 2, the issue is acceptable social behavior, and situation 3 involves acceptable behavior for boys. In situation 7, the issue is being comfortable with your sexuality and your body.)
2. In situation 4, how might the actions of the adults influence the child’s use of profanity?
3. In situation 4, how might the father handle his two-year-old daughter’s swearing? (Sample responses: Tell her firmly that she should not say “shit,” but don’t give her too much attention. She is probably using the word because she knows it gets a reaction. The father should be careful about his own language, because she will imitate him.)
4. In situation 8, what might be going on with 10-year-old Jernisha? (Sample responses: She may be having a hard time adjusting to the new school. She may not feel good enough about herself to say no to peer pressure. She may be lonely and want friends, regardless of what they are like.)
5. Have any similar situations involving values come up with your own children? If so, how do you handle them?
6. At what age would you expect your children to accept and practice the values you’ve taught them? (See the Leader Resource “Moral Development of Children.”)
7. Was there a time in your childhood when you realized that you were acting in a way that represented your parents’ values? If so, how old were you? What was the experience like?
8. Was there a time in your childhood when you acted in a way that opposed a belief or value that was important to your parents? How old were you?
9. Have situations occurred with your child’s mother, grandmother, teachers, etc., where your values differed from theirs? If so, how do you handle this? (For example, what do you do if you feel strongly that children should not be hit, yet other caregivers believe in spanking or hitting children as a form of discipline?)

Leader Resource

Communicating Values

SITUATION 1: Your son, Paul, is five years old and has been fighting at his Head Start program. His mother has told him not to fight, but he just keeps doing it. Paul says that the other kids mess with him, so he fights back. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 2: Your three-year-old, Michelle, has started to stick out her tongue at people and to throw food at the dinner table when she visits you. You find out from her mother that there are some “wild kids” at the babysitter’s who behave this way. Today, you and your buddy Keenan have taken Michelle to lunch at a fast-food restaurant. Michelle is laughing and having fun eating her french fries with lots of ketchup. You and Keenan start talking about a game you watched on TV last night, and suddenly Michelle throws a french fry at you and it lands right on your nose. Keenan bursts out laughing. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 3: Your son, Akeem, is six years old and very lovable. He has a lot of friends because he is a fun kid to be around. He is also amazingly well coordinated for his age. He can catch a football and a baseball, and he’s a fast runner. He’s also a great dancer and can imitate most of his favorite rap stars on TV. Akeem goes to the Roots Early Childhood Center, a private school in his community. His grandmother pays the tuition. The dance teacher at Roots, Ms. Johnson, is so impressed with Akeem that she wants him to take some classes that include lessons in ballet, tap, and basic jazz steps. Ms. Johnson thinks Akeem could end up dancing with the Alvin Ailey Company. Akeem’s mother and grandmother are all for it. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 4: Your two-year-old, Courtney, has started saying the word “shit” from time to time. Often people laugh at her because she sounds so funny cursing. You know that she has heard you and her mother use profanity. Today, Courtney is at your house playing with some blocks. When they tumble over, Courtney says, “Shit!” What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 5: You see your four-year-old, Jason, go into the closet and take money from your jacket pocket. When Jason approaches you, he has the money in his hand. You ask him where he got the money, and he responds by shrugging his shoulders. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 6: Your two-year-old, Shenika, is playing with a three-year-old cousin. Her cousin tries to get her to play a game of catch, but Shenika pulls the ball away and says, “It’s my ball; you can’t touch it!” Shenika makes it clear that she doesn’t want to share her ball with anyone. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 7: Your four-year-old daughter, Marquetta, is spending the weekend with you. She wanders into your bedroom as you get out of the shower. She smiles at you, looks right at your penis, and says, “Daddy, is that your penis?” You nod yes. Marquetta asks, “Why don’t I have a penis?” What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 8: Jernisha, your 10-year-old daughter, is an honor student and has transferred to a new school. A month after getting to this school, she starts hanging out with some older students who cut classes and who smoke outside of school. You get a call from Jernisha’s mother, saying that your daughter’s grades have begun to fall. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 9: Your 13-year-old daughter, Tammy, has been living with you for about six months. When she came to your house, you laid down some rules about how you want her to dress. You also told her that she cannot wear makeup until she is 16 years old. One day, you visit Tammy at school and find her wearing makeup and dressed in a very skimpy outfit — not the clothes she was wearing when she left for school that morning. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 10: Your 16-year-old son, Vince, borrowed his mother’s car to take his girlfriend on a date. The next day, while looking for something in the back seat of the car, his mother finds a used condom. Before confronting Vince about the condom, his mother comes to you for advice and help. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 11: Your 17-year-old son, Malcolm, comes to you for advice. His 15-year-old girlfriend, Phyllicia, is pregnant with his child. He asks, “What should I do, Dad? I mean, you got mom pregnant with me when I was your age.” What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 12: Your 14-year-old daughter, Stephanie, comes for a weekend visit. When she opens her suitcase, you notice that it is filled with expensive clothes, all of them with the tags still on them. When you ask her where she got the clothes, she says, “Mom’s boyfriend, Johnny, bought them for me.” You’ve heard from others that Johnny is the neighborhood bookie. What do you think? What do you do?

SITUATION 13: Your 16-year-old son, Tony, comes home one day and tells you that he has become a born-again Christian (or Muslim). He denounces you for the way that you live, and he says that he is going to go live with his religious leader so that he can study the Bible (Koran). What do you think? What do you do?

Leader Resource

Moral Development of Children

A child's ability to learn right from wrong starts as early as two years old and continues beyond his or her teenage years. The process occurs slowly and at different rates for different children. When parents know what children of different ages are capable of, they can help guide their children's moral development.

AGES 2 TO 5: Children are "me"-focused; they begin to understand right and wrong, based on responses from parents (for example, child reacts to parent saying "good girl" or "bad girl"). When children receive love and attention in these early years, they will develop the capacity to care about others. Parents should begin to set limits, such as "No, don't hit," and should model good behavior, thereby setting the foundation for their children's moral development.

AGES 5 TO 7: Children understand right from wrong by the time they are five or six years old, yet their conscience is just beginning to form. Children of this age are also learning that they are part of a community; thus they enjoy helping others. Children often start to lie at this age, as well as to tattletale on others who do things wrong. Parents should encourage sharing, helping, honesty, fair play, good manners, etc. Also, enforce family rules, and explain why the rules are necessary (for example, "We don't hit, because it hurts").

AGES 8 TO 11: Children become more assertive; they have a very strict idea of what's right and wrong, stemming from a strong conscience. Children of this age are good because others will think well of them, yet may act "bad" to impress peers. They are now beginning to care about people in the world whom they don't know. Parents should show respect for their children and expect respect in return. Children need to be taught how to resolve conflicts through discussion and compromise. Parents can encourage their children to do volunteer or community work that helps others.

AGES 12 TO 18: The teenager has a real sense of what it means to be a good person, yet is beginning to question values of adults; teens continue to respect authority, but will begin to raise questions and challenge the way society is run. This is also a time when one's peers become more and more important. Parents should stay involved in their children's lives and at the same time support their children's attempts to sort out their own beliefs. Parents also need to allow their teens to rebel in safe ways (such as in style of dress, hair, political views, choice of music, etc.). This is an important time to openly discuss moral issues with teens.

References: Laura Sessions Stepp, "Raising a Moral Child," *Child* (December/January 1993); and James P. Comer and Alvin F. Poussaint, *Raising Black Children* (New York: Plume, 1992).

Feedback/Wrap-up

End this session by reviewing the Key Concepts about communicating values to children. Ask the following questions to discuss today's session.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. What is your overall reaction to today's session?
2. Which values are important enough to you that you want your children to have them, too?
3. How well do you think you are doing in your efforts to communicate and develop these values in your children? What, if anything, can you do differently?

Conclude by saying that in Session 8 the group will talk about how to handle children on a day-to-day basis, particularly when the fathers have full responsibility for their children's care. Say something like, "All that we talked about today sounds terrific, and yet all parents have trouble at times knowing what their children need at different stages of development. In the next sessions, we will learn what children need from parents at different ages, and how parents can best respond to children's needs."

Thank the men for their participation, and remind them of when the next session meets.