ADLERIAN-BASED PARENTING PROGRAM IN LITHUANIA: Developing the First STEP

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- this presentation was prepared in cooperation with professor Roy M. Kern (VMU) -
Psychologically and socially safe family milieu is a base for person’s development (Bartell, 2004; Dreikurs Ferguson, 1984; Rodrigo, 2010). Parents are the most important people who take care of psychological, physical, social, economic well-being of children (Bornstein et al., 2010; Bunting, 2004; Scott, 2010).

Though it might look as if today’s children have never lived so well and happy (many of them have more possessions, better homes, are more educated and less often sick, etc.; Scott, 2010), families lately face a wide range of positive and negative changes in their lives. Furthermore, today’s parents cope with various parenting problems (Bornstein et al, 2010; Sidebotham et al, 2001).

More and more parents agree that skills of parenting and communicating with a child are not innate, and need to be trained. Therefore many parents are interested in creating more effective communication with their child (Bornstein et al., 2010; Radey, Randolph, 2009; Sidebotham et al, 2001).
Parenting challenges in Lithuania

- Growing number of one parent families (because of parents’ divorces or emigration to other countries);
- Endless hours of parents’ work and professional activities;
- Inadequate parenting/communication methods including neglect, physical, psychological and/or sexual violence, abuse;
- Old-fashioned (mostly authoritarian) parenting methods; etc.

- Ineffective, disturbed communication between parents and children;
- Parents’ feelings of incompetence, lack of self-confidence;
- Distrustful and irresponsible child who is not ready to cooperate.
Psychological-social help for families

- **Individual** consultations or sessions provided by psychologist, psychotherapist or social worker;
- **Group** therapy or self-help, support groups for parents;
- TV shows, books, magazines;
- Consulting with friends, colleagues or acquaintances who have children of similar age; etc.

Parents obviously lack psycho-educational information related to parenting which might increase their chances of dealing with their children more effectively.
STEP – Systematic Training for Effective Parenting

- **1st edition:** 1976 m. USA  
  **2nd edition:** 1997 m. USA
- **authors:** dr. Don Dinkmeyer (Sr.), dr. Gary D. McKay, 
  dr. Don Dinkmeyer (Jr.)
- **based on** the book “Children: The Challenge” written by Rudolf Dreikurs and Vicki Soltz in 1964
- **theoretical base:** Alfred Adler’s and Rudolf Dreikurs’ ideas  
  (Individual psychology)

- **STEP versions:** *Early Childhood STEP*, *STEP: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting*, *STEP/ Teen*
- **Delivery settings:** adoptive home, birth family home, 
  community agency, foster home, hospital, outpatient 
  clinic, school, etc.
- **STEP is used not only in North America but also** 
  Spain, Germany, France, Japan, China, etc.

Adlerian principles in STEP

- All individuals are equal, and although there may be age differences, they deserve to be respected.
- The key goal for an individual (parent or child) is need to belong.
- The child develops a set of beliefs in the family that he/she uses to deal with challenges in social relationships.
- These beliefs are the basis of the child’s personality and are influenced by family dynamics such as ordinal position, family atmosphere and methods of child training used by parents.
- The child’s biological and genetic attributes as well the psychological and social family milieu (parental values, roles, inter-relationships or parenting methods) are important for his/her development.
STEP major goals

- develop understanding of various aspects of human behavior;
- teach new procedures of more effective communication with children;
- promote a more effective communication between parents and children through developing parental skills for listening and resolving conflicts;
- develop parental skills in using encouragement, logical consequences and other active strategies for communication with children;
- strengthen parents’ self-confidence in thoughts, ideas and skills related to parenting*.

STEP group sessions

1. Understanding Yourself & Your Child
2. Understanding Beliefs & Feelings
3. Encouraging Your Child & Yourself
4. Listening & Talking to Your Child
5. Helping Children Cooperate
6. Discipline that Makes Sense
7. Choosing Your Approach

- Reading the Parent’s Handbook
- Giving information
- Analysis of challenging situations
- Group discussions
- Analyzing videos
- Homework
- Role plays

http://www.step.projektas.lt/
Major parenting skills trained

- reflective listening;
- using I-messages;
- exploring alternatives for solving problems;
- using natural and creating logical consequences of an action;
- showing respect;
- identifying the four goals of misbehavior;
- having regular family meetings, etc.
“Different” parents: „Difficulties look more simple now...“

Did you find some time in the past to communicate with the child in a way that was meaningful and complex? Did you notice that one day you could understand your child’s feelings, thoughts, and actions perfectly, and the next day — not?

I doubt if we could avoid the diversity of our experience when communicating with children. It’s possible the essential issue for someone, open and committed relationship between parents and children. However, it’s too late to see child’s personality growing with the help of perfect relationship with parents. So the curriculum can be drawn: the more simple communication is, the better it is.

„Difficulties look more simple now“ - these are the words of the mother who participated in the STEP program in 2011. I believe that the parenting skills which were taught in STEP parenting classes supported her better understanding of self and child’s behavior and feelings. I also believe that starting with this spring, the communication with the child will be more intimate and followed by more effective parenting methods.

I have the same wishes for other participants of STEP parenting groups. In 2011, over 200 parents and in 2010, STEP program in Kaunas and Vilnius’ cities. Though parents had original experiences related to this program and finished the groups with different parental motivation for further endeavors for strengthening their effective parenting skills, I sincerely believe that STEP groups at least gave them a chance to find out more about effective communication with the child, to share their experience related to parenting and encouraged their sense of belonging to other parents.

To be honest, I am proud of parents who completed the STEP program despite of intensive everyday life’s activities. I feel grateful for your participation as well as suggestions for adapting the STEP program for Lithuanian parents.

I feel particularly grateful for the team of STEP leaders for their commitment and resolution in organizing the STEP groups.

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Group sessions of STEP Lithuanian

1. Understanding Yourself & Your Child
2. Understanding Beliefs & Feelings
3. Encouraging Your Child & Yourself
4. Listening & Talking to Your Child
5. Helping Children Cooperate
6. Discipline that Makes Sense
7. Choosing Your Approach

Introductory Session. Pre-test & Introduction to STEP

Final Session. Post-test & Discussion on STEP

Reading the Parent’s Handbook
Analysis of challenging situations
Giving information

Homework
Role plays
Group discussions

Analyzing videos

http://www.step.projektas.lt/
The major purpose of this research project is to explore the effectiveness of parent training program STEP.

**Quasi-experimental design:**
- pre-test
- post-test
- follow-up

**Independent variable**

**BASIS-A**

**Sociodemographic characteristics**
- Parental age, education, birth order, marital status
- Family's composition, number of children
- Child's gender, age, birth order

**Factors of participating in program**
- Participating with/without partner, number of sessions participated, number of chapters in Parent's Handbook read, frequency of doing homework

**Leader's lifestyle personality attributes and characteristics**
- Leader's lifestyle personality attributes
- Leader's age, gender, birth order, ethnicity, occupation, experience using IP principles

**Dependent variables**

**APACBS**

**PSDQ**

Employing the effective parenting methods

**Quasi-experimental design:**
- experimental group (STEP group)
- control group (no intervention)

http://www.step.projektas.lt/
Continuous leaders’ training model

- Introductory meeting. Introduction to STEP & leaders’ training (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting I. Dynamics of STEP group. Introductory STEP session (≈ 4 hours)
- Meeting II. Discussion on Introductory STEP session. STEP session I (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting III. Discussion on STEP session I. STEP session II (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting IV. Discussion on STEP session II. STEP session III (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting V. Discussion on STEP session III. STEP session IV (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting VI. Discussion on STEP session IV. STEP session V (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting VII. Discussion on STEP session V. STEP session VI (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting VIII. Discussion on STEP session VI. STEP session VII (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting IX. Discussion on STEP session VII. Final session (≈ 2 hours)
- Meeting X. Discussion on Final session and Leader’s training (≈ 2 hours)

- Introductory session. Pre-test & Introduction to STEP
- Session I. Understanding Yourself & Your Child
- Session II. Understanding Beliefs & Feelings
- Session III. Encouraging Your Child & Yourself
- Session IV. Listening and Talking to Your Child
- Session V. Helping Children Cooperate
- Session VI. Discipline that Makes Sense
- Session VII. Choosing Your Approach
- Final session. Post-test & Discussion on STEP

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Research participants

- 16 psychologists and IP consultants participated in the training in 2010 Autumn and 2011 Spring;

- 21 parenting group was organized in 18 institutions (schools, preschools, gymnasiums, outpatient clinics and day-care centers) in 3 Lithuanian cities;

- 224 parents started the STEP program; 173 parents of them (77%) finished;

- Parents were recruited using several strategies.

* Based on the data collected in 2011 Spring
Specifics of parenting groups

- heterogenic groups;
- motivated parents who want to improve their relationship with a child;
- parents with a target child from 6 to 12 years of age;
- mostly mothers (92%);
- from one Lithuanian city (Kaunas) mainly (81%).
Preliminary results: parenting styles

Authoritative/ Democratic Parenting style:
high control and high warmth, reasonable limits and freedom

Authoritarian Parenting style:
high control and low warmth, strict limits and little/ no freedom

http://www.step.projektas.lt/
**Preliminary results: effective parenting methods I**

Are there changes in...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>identifying the reasons for child’s behavior?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoiding doing things that children can do by themselves?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recognizing child’s positive qualities and actions?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening for child’s feelings?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expressing feelings in a calm manner?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exploring alternatives for solving problems?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*do less; p < 0.05

*do less; p < 0.001
### Preliminary results: effective parenting methods II

Are there changes in…

- using natural and creating logical consequences? **YES**
  - do less; \( p < 0.05 \)
- using discipline related to child’s misbehavior? **YES**
  - do less; \( p < 0.05 \)
- knowing which parenting method to use in a specific situation? **YES**
  - do less; \( p < 0.05 \)
- organizing family meetings? **YES**
  - do more; \( p < 0.05 \)
- accepting child’s mistakes? **YES**
  - do less; \( p < 0.05 \)
- showing respect? **YES**
  - do less; \( p < 0.05 \)
Preliminary results: child’s behavior

- Responsible behavior: independent, cooperative, and other positive actions
- Emotionally charged behavior: misbehavior which cause “upset” feelings
- School Task: leaving for school, getting dressed, taking necessary possessions
- Peer relationship: tattling on others, including parents into solving conflicts

http://www.step.projektas.lt/
What parents say

I am a „different“ mom now. Every day I encourage, say „thank you“, I contribute, make choices, demonstrate respect to my son and the rest of the family.
Mom of two children (20 and 9 year olds), Vilnius, 2011

I learned to keep my ears open not only to myself but to my child’s wishes and feelings also <…>. We started talking about our own problems, feelings, we became more open to each other.
Mom of two children (8 and 3 year olds), Kupiskis, 2010

Before I started with STEP parenting groups I felt I was stuck in a no-go situation. I didn’t know what to do with my children as no shouting or threatening helped me. Now I finally know what to do and what to say <…>. I feel I have become a better mom. I trust myself.
Mom of two children (8 and 4 year olds), Kaunas, 2010
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Thank you for your attention