

Changing Families

Prepared by
Sandra Brown, McDowell County Family Consumer Ed Agent
Margo Mosley, Alexander County Family Consumer Ed Agent
and
Members of the CEMP 09 Planning Team

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Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service
North Carolina State University

Changing Families

(Two hour lesson)

Program Description

All families experience change. Some changes are expected and welcome; other changes may be sudden and painful. This program helps families who may be experiencing significant change to adjust and successfully manage their roles as parents.

Program Objectives

1. Participants will recognize how change impacts the family.
2. Participants will identify their parenting strengths.
3. Participants will identify formal and informal sources of parenting support.
4. Participants will identify strategies for coping with change.

Intended Audience Families/parents experiencing change, e.g. divorce, separation, death, marriage, birth, parenting grandchildren, etc.

Materials Needed

1. Flip chart, markers, masking tape
2. Paper and crayons
3. Handouts and pencils or pens
4. Extension publications: FCS-457, FCS-477, HE-445-2
5. Overheads, overhead projector
6. Evaluation form

Topics and Time Frame

Introduction / Ice Breaker.....	10 minutes
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Family Changes.....	15 minutes
Parenting Practices.....	20 minutes
Impact of Change.....	15 minutes
Break.....	10 minutes
Strategies For Coping with Change.....	35 minutes
Summary.....	10 minutes
Evaluation.....	5 minutes

Introduction/Ice Breaker

Introduce yourself and then have participants introduce themselves. Give a brief overview of the lesson. Explain icebreaker. Ice Breaker: Distribute blank sheets of paper and crayons. Have participants draw their family (stick figures are fine). When finished ask for volunteers to share their "drawing" and describe their family. Purpose: to show the varieties of "families."

All families are different, just as each person in a family is different. We need to learn to celebrate our differences and be assured that there are positive qualities/strengths in each family. As an old saying goes, "You don't get harmony when everyone sings the same note." There is no right definition of the term, "family."

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- **Note to lesson leader:** Explain to participants that all class discussion is confidential. No personal information shared by individual members should be repeated outside of the class.

Family Changes

Over the course of time all families will experience change. Some of those changes are termed normative changes. These include such events as the birth of a child, members growing older and retirement. They are expected and welcome changes. Some changes are termed non-normative. Non-normative changes are those events like death, divorce or unemployment that are unexpected and painful.

Post on a flip chart or overhead some statistical information that shows the degree to which families today are experiencing change, such as:

- 1.15 million couples divorce each year. Approximately 1 in 2 new marriages end in divorce.
- 3.7 million children in the U.S. live with grandparents. 1.4 million of those children do so without their own parents living with them.
- 25 % of all families are step families.
- 13% of all families are single parent.
- The average family moves about 12 times during their lives.

Extending the ice breaker activity, ask "How is the family in your drawing, alike/different than the family in which you were raised? OR "How is your family different today than it was five years ago?" Give members a chance to respond. On chart paper, begin a list of changes that parents identify. Help them to see that all have experienced some type of change. Some changes are welcome, some are not.

Even though change is a constant, the family continues to be the primary institution for rearing children, caring for the elderly and providing a nurturing environment for all of its members. For parents to succeed in this role, they must recognize/acknowledge these changes when they occur and be ready to respond in ways appropriate for maintaining/supporting this nurturing environment.

Key Concepts

- Recognize the impact of change on one's parenting role.
- Recognize and celebrate one's own personal and parenting strengths.
- Ask for and accept support from others when needed.

Parenting Practices

Post on a flip chart the title, "Parenting Practices." Have participants brainstorm specific tasks of parenting under each of the following major headings: Care for Self, Understanding, Nurturing, Guiding, Motivating and Advocating. You may want to refer participants to the Extension bulletin, FCS-477, *Parenthood and Parenting*, for a description of these practices. (In the Appendix you will find "Parenting Practices." For this activity you may prefer to prepare an overhead of this page instead of a flip chart.)

From the list, have participants list *what is possible* for their situation. In the second column, have participants list *what is not possible*.

Why aren't some tasks possible?

Possible answers: Lack of time, money, energy, ability

Encourage all participants to identify areas in which they are succeeding. Even in the midst of great change, there are family strengths to recognize and celebrate. This activity should serve as a tool to identify areas of personal strength and parenting strength.

Impact of Change

Change may impact families in several ways:

- Change adds stress.
- Change may confuse parent roles.
- Some family members may respond by abusing drugs or alcohol.
- Children's behavior may change.
- Communication problems may increase.
- Financial problems may result.

Using the list parents created in the icebreaker above, ask "How have the family changes you personally identified had an impact on your ability to carry out your parenting tasks? What are some other effects of family change you have experienced? Allow group time to reflect on the effects of change. Recognition and awareness are important steps in coping/adapting to change.

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- **Note to lesson leader:** You may want to share some personal examples that illustrate changes your own family has experienced.
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Strategies For Coping With Change

Regardless of the change, families can successfully learn to manage or cope with the change.

Coping strategies may include:

- *A Family Support System.*

Identify and use available resources. Get outside help when needed. Reaching out is not a sign of weakness. Your family support system may include friends, extended family, neighbors, church, co-workers or helping professionals.

Organized support groups exist for a variety of family types: single parents, stepparents, grandparents parenting grandchildren. Interaction with others who share your situation or who care for you can provide valuable feedback and affirm your ability to manage successfully. Web-sites and addresses for some of those with national affiliation are listed at the end of this lesson.

For single parents, your family support system may include other appropriate role models for the missing parent figure.

- *Taking care of oneself.*

Eat a balanced diet, get plenty of rest. Try to exercise regularly. Your body will deal better with the stresses of change if it is in good working order. Find time to pamper yourself and allow other family members to do the same. Take a hot bath, enjoy your favorite music or a book. Trade back-rubs with other family members.

- *Family Cooperation*

Just as family members share resources, they also share responsibilities. Discuss ideas for family cooperation, for example:

- Household tasks and responsibilities.
- Family communication and conflict resolution.
- Relaxation and recreation.

The Appendix includes *Ten Commandments for an Enthusiastic Family*. You may want to make an overhead of this page and share with the group at this time.

Activity:

Distribute the *Case Study* handout. Divide the class into small discussion groups of 2-4 people. Assign each small group one or more case studies. Provide chart paper and markers. Have group members read their case study and respond to the questions:

- a. What changes has this family experienced?
- b. How do these changes impact the parent(s)? Keep in mind the "Parenting Practices."
- c. What resources exist to help this family manage change and maintain the parent role?

Allow 5-7 minutes for groups to complete activity. Reconvene the full class. Have a representative from each group post their responses and share their ideas.

Summary

All families experience change. Some are expected, some are unexpected. All families/parents have unique strengths. Change impacts your role as a parent. Being aware of the change and acknowledging that change will affect family members and parent roles is essential.

Parents can successfully cope with change. There are several strategies that help parents, such as:

- A Family Support System.
- Taking care of oneself.
- Family Cooperation.

Use any time remaining to highlight other Extension references/publications available. Have copies of some of those listed below. Highlight other resources available in the local area, e.g. support groups, community services, etc.

Evaluation

Miscellaneous Tips

Open ended questions may tempt some participants to monopolize class discussions. Be sensitive to their need to share, but be respectful of others right to speak. To help keep class focused, a large agenda posted on the wall would provide a visible reminder about the time and topics remaining.

If group members share a common family type, e.g. grandparents parenting grandchildren, single parents, etc., give members the opportunity to suggest future sessions that focus on their specific situation.

Humor is one strategy for helping families experiencing the stress of change. Collect some appropriate cartoons, bumper stickers or similar items to share. Emphasize the importance of taking time for fun.

References and Resources

Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren, American Association of Retired Persons, D15272, 1993.

Molgaard, V. (1993). Parenting in Step-families (Pm-1547c) fact sheet. Iowa Cooperative Extension Service.

Smith, C.A., Cudaback, D., Goddard, H.W., & Myers-Walls, J.(1994). *National Extension Parent Education Model*. Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas Cooperative Extension Service.

Extension Publications:

Building Positive Self Esteem in Families, FCS-467

Codependent: Obsessed With Other People, FCS-410-3

Compulsions and Obsessions, FCS-410-2

Compulsive Personalities, FCS-410-1

Dealing With Anger, HE 402

Dysfunctional Families, FCS-410-4

The Effects of Divorce on Children, FCS-471

Family Communication During Times of Stress, FCS-424

Helping Children Cope with Stress, FCS-457

Managing Your Stress, HE-403

Parenthood and Parenting, FCS-477

Single Parenting Series, HE-348

StepFamilies, HE-398-2

StepParenting, FCS-398-1

The Three Rs of Change, HE-445-2

Additional Resources Available through Agricultural Communications:

Blended Families, video, 30 minutes, guide, United Learning, 1983.

Building Family Strength (BFH), text, guide, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1986.

Empowering Single-Parent Families, video.

Family Communication When Times Are Tough, teaching guide, Dr. Wayne Matthews, North Carolina State University.

Footsteps - No. 13: "The Accident," video, 30 minutes, 1980's.

Grandparenting, video, 30 minutes, JVM Productions, 1993.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, video, 25 minutes, Terra Nova Films, Inc.

Helping People Adjust to Change, cassette tapes, 90 minutes, 1990.

Parenting Apart: Strategies for Effective Co-Parenting, curriculum/teaching guide, University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension Service and School of Family Studies, 1995.

Single Parenting, video, 30 minutes.

Strengthening StepFamilies, audiotapes, activity masters, leaders' guide, American Guidance Services, 1986.

Stepparenting, video, 28 minutes, 1990.

Supportive Connections: Rural Communities and Single Parent Families, curriculum, 1993.

Take Time To Be A Family: Holding Successful Family Meetings, video, 13 minutes, 1990.

Vital Link: The Single Parent Family (The), video, 30 minutes, 1987.

Websites:

Census Bureau Reports:

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html>

Family Stress, Family Strengths and Divorce:

<http://www.humsci.auburn.edu/parent>

http://www.uwyo.edu/ag/ces/FAMILY/Dream/Building_Family.htm

<http://www.montana.edu/~wwwhd/index.html>

<http://www.cyfernet.org/>

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren:

<http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/NAIC/Notes/grandparents-grandchildren.html>

Humor: <http://www.ksu.edu/wwparent/humor>

Single Rose: <http://www.singlerose.com> is a resource for single mothers.

Today's Single Parent News: <http://mecklenburg.ces.state.nc.us/> (Click on newsletters.)

Appendix

Parenting Practices

What is possible?

What is not?

Care For Self

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Understanding

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Nurturing

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Guiding

- 1.

2.

3.

4.

Motivating

1.

2.

3.

4.

Advocating

1.

2.

3.

4.

Ten Commandments for an Enthusiastic Family

1. Help each other be right - not wrong.
2. Look for ways to make new ideas work - not for reasons they won't.
3. If in doubt - check it out! Don't make negative assumptions about each other.
4. Help each other win and take pride in each other's victories.
5. Speak positively about each other and about your family at every opportunity.
6. Maintain a positive mental attitude no matter what the circumstances.
7. Act with initiative and courage as if it all depends on you.
8. Do everything with enthusiasm - it's contagious!

9. Whatever you want - give it away.

10. Have fun!!

Case Studies

Robinson Family Case Study: Grandparents Parenting Grandchildren

Bill and Ellen Robinson are grandparents of four year old Jordan. Jordan's mother Lisa is a single parent and lives in a neighboring town. Lisa has decided to go back to school. With classes and a night shift job she does not feel able to fully care for her son. She has asked her parents to keep Jordan for the next couple of years until her life becomes more stable.

Bill and Ellen are both currently employed. Child care arrangements for Jordan will be necessary. Lisa cannot afford to pay child care fees in addition to her other living expenses and school fees. Bill and Ellen are anxious to have quality care for Jordan and have agreed to be responsible for it, but the extra expense is a worry. They have another daughter, Candace, age sixteen still at home, who also plans to attend college soon.

Since Jordan has moved in with his grandparents, he has begun wetting the bed at night and having difficulty adjusting to the child care center. Candace has begun spending more time away from home with friends and is not as lively and outgoing as she once was.

Questions for discussion:

- What changes have the Robinson' experienced?
- How do these changes impact the parent(s), grandparents? Keep in mind the "Parenting Practices."
- What resources exist to help this family manage change and maintain the parent role?

Carter Family Case Study: Divorce

Pat and Fred Carter have been married twelve years. They both work outside the home and have meaningful careers. They have two children, Amy (age 8) and Jeremy (age 6). After two trial separations they have decided to divorce. Fred has moved to an apartment two miles away. He and Pat are polite and friendly and share concern for the children. Amy is beginning to have problems in school such as rebellion and apathy. Jeremy is in denial, but greatly favors his dad and wants to be with him all the time. Fred is starting to date other people. Pat is busy with the children, house and her job.

Johnson Family Case Study: Birth of a Child

Jenny and Gary have just given birth to their second child. Their first child Rodney, is three years old. Jenny and Gary have tried to include Rodney in as many plans as possible with the new baby sister. He seemed adjusted until Jenny came home with the new baby. Since then he has regressed with potty training and other areas, too. He wants all his parents' attention and will go to great lengths to get it. The new baby has colic and Jenny is feeling stressed. Friends are dropping by often to visit, adding to the daily stress. Gary's parents live next

door and are somewhat dependent on Gary for errands and moral support. Jenny has two sisters who adore her and will support her and Gary any way they are asked.

Greene Family Case Study: Step Parents

Molly and Bill Greene were married one year ago. They each have children from other marriages. Molly's children live with them and Bill's children visit every other week. At first the adjustments seemed smooth. All family members got along quite well. Lately, Molly's children seem to resent Bill, especially when he corrects them. When Bill's children visit, everyone is constantly fighting and yelling. The other day, Bill's son said to Molly, "You don't have any right to tell me what to do. You're not my real mother." Molly feels like she is walking on egg shells all the time. Bill doubts. This marriage can last much longer.

Questions for discussion:

1. What changes has each family experienced?
2. How do these changes impact the parent(s)? Keep in mind the "Parenting Practices."
3. What resources exist to help each family manage change and maintain the parent role?

***Feel free to develop your own case studies. Other options to consider: job transfer/move, job loss, death of a parent, sudden illness or disability.**