



Compassionate Child-Rearing Parent Education Program

SYLLABUS

For Instructors

MAY 2018

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I. Overview of the Course

A. Concepts

The Concept of the Compassionate Parent

*Parents who have learned to value their own lives can better allow their children to preserve their human heritage. An awareness of how we were hurt or misunderstood as children can serve to remind us how vital it is **not** to damage a child's feelings, self-respect, special qualities and desires, and the spirit in which he or she approaches life and invest it with his or her own personal meaning.*

Compassionate Child-Rearing by Robert Firestone

The perspective of educated, compassionate parenting reflects an understanding attitude toward people, a truly humanistic viewpoint. It is a nonjudgmental, non-categorical, and non-critical approach to parents' struggles and limitations. This view is supportive of parents evolving their own intuitive methods of childrearing based on the insights they develop regarding events and experiences that may have impacted them in their own upbringing.

Our approach helps parents to develop an objective, realistic view of their own parents, neither overly critical and blaming, nor idealized and protective. Our philosophical view emphasizes that the child is a person separate from the parent; that is, children do not 'belong' to their parents in the proprietary sense of the word and should not be used to fulfill a parent's needs or fantasies.

The *Compassionate Child-Rearing Parent Education Program* emphasizes that effective parenting develops out of a parent's knowledge, insight, and understanding of him or herself as a *person*, separate from parental roles or expectations. Thus, the course focuses *first* on exploring parents' experiences in childhood, *then* on reflecting on the interactions they have with their children.



Class discussions explore the concepts of parental ambivalence, the critical inner voice, the important distinction between emotional hunger and love, factors that have an impact on children's feelings of being safe, secure, soothed and seen, and reasons parents often have difficulty maintaining a close, attuned relationship with their infant and young child. In Classes 5 and 6, participants learn about secure and insecure attachments, reflect on the kind of attachment they had with their parents, and explore their attitudes toward discipline. At the conclusion of class 6, they discuss and potentially plan to share child-rearing functions with other class participants, family members, and friends.

The *Instructors' Guide* was designed to help therapists and parent educators make the best use of the resource material and video clips. There are suggestions for activities to facilitate the group process, for introducing topics, and for conducting open discussion after participants view excerpts from the Compassionate Child-Rearing Parent Education Program series of streaming video clips.

B. Goals

It is unusual for a course in parenting to focus attention on the parents' feelings about themselves and about how *they* were parented. We feel strongly that exploring early relationships and making sense of one's painful experiences in childhood is the crux of childrearing and, indeed, of any relationship between two people.

The focus of this program is twofold: (1) to explore parents' attitudes, feelings, and behaviors in interactions with their children, and (2) to recall and explore parents' own childhood experiences with a view toward giving meaning to those experiences. The classes will balance information about infant and child development with insights into parenting issues. Most important, the course will focus on enhancing the participants' self-understanding, self-compassion, and positive attitudes toward themselves and their children.



Primary goals include:

- To enhance self-compassion and feelings of confidence in participants.
- To provide information about infant and child development.
- To establish an ongoing group where new parents can find support and emotional and practical resources. An example of practical support has been the formation of a baby-sitting exchange among participants in previous classes. Logistics for setting up a support group are incorporated into the last meeting of the course.
- To support parents in learning about themselves as individuals in a relationship with another individual, their child.
- To help parents value themselves and their experiences; to help them develop feelings of compassion toward themselves by exploring and making sense of painful events, trauma, or loss they may have experienced in growing up.

Some related goals include:

- To disseminate practical information and guidelines about child-rearing practices based on constructive attitude change in parents.
- To help new parents cope with the critical developmental transition to parenthood. To identify feelings of guilt, anxiety, fear, resentment, and other feelings related to the responsibility of taking care of another person. To suggest alternative child-care arrangements to help support parents when they return to work.
- To correct myths and misconceptions about children and ‘proper’ child-rearing practices.
- To offer assistance and referrals to mental health professionals for parents who have specific problems with family relationships that are beyond the scope of regular class meetings.



C. Requirements for Instructors

Instructors for the *Compassionate Child-Rearing Parent Education Program* need to have an extensive background in psychology, with a minimum of a Masters degree in psychology, social work, or family studies (MFCC or MSW). An individual with a B.A. in these areas of study, or a LCSW can qualify if supervised by a M.A. or Ph.D. This supervision needs to be ongoing during the six-week course.

Some experience in working with children and parents in either an educational or therapeutic setting is necessary. Instructors also need to be (or have been) a parent or foster parent, or to have had some type of experience raising children in some capacity for a period of time.

Instructors should read *Compassionate Child-Rearing, Parenting from the Inside Out* and *Raising a Secure Child*, and view selected excerpts from Glendon Association's videotape productions for the Parent-Child Relations Series as well as *Invisible Child Abuse* (1992). Instructors are required to meet with Joyce Catlett or Lisa Firestone for a 2-day Instructor's Training Seminar (or 6-7 contact hours for individual Skype training) to explore the philosophy and concepts set forth in the course material. The Glendon staff will arrange these seminars.

Instructors need to have an empathic attitude toward both parents and children. It is important that they have insight into their own personal development, that they are not blaming or critical of parents, or denying parents' influence (both positive and negative) on their children. They should have a deep-seated belief in the rights of children to follow their own path in life and to develop a sense of belonging to themselves, of being persons in their own right.



D. Course Material (Included with Parent Education Package):

1. Books

Firestone, Robert W. (1990). *Compassionate Child-Rearing: An In-Depth Approach to Optimal Parenting*. Santa Barbara, CA: Glendon Association.

Hoffman, Cooper, & Powell, (2017) *Raising a Secure Child: How Circle of Security Parenting can help you nurture your child's attachment, emotional resilience, and freedom to explore*. New York: Guilford Press.

Siegel, Daniel J. and Hartzell, Mary (2003). *Parenting From the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher Putnam.

2. Video Clips (streamed) or DVDs from the Parent-Child Relations Series (Geoff Parr, producer, The Glendon Association)

Class 1 Selected clips from *Parental Ambivalence*.

Class 2 Selected clips from *The Inner Voice in Child Abuse* and *Invisible Child Abuse*

Class 3 Selected clips from *The Implicit Pain of Sensitive Child-Rearing*.

Class 4 Selected clips from *Hunger versus Love*

Streaming video clips of Interviews with Parents (Classes 2, 5 and 6)

Reiner, R. (2005) *The First Years Last Forever*: Hosted by Rob Reiner: I Am Your Child Video Series: Practical Advice for Parents. www.parentsaction.org

[DVD] Classes 1 and 5 OPTIONAL

PsychAlive YouTube Clips – (Links to each clip are listed and embedded in the Instructor's Guide for viewing in the relevant class.)



E. Recommended Reading

Brazelton, Berry T. (2006) *Touchpoints: Birth to 3*. Da Capo Lifelong Books; Revised edition.

Brazelton, Berry T. (2001) *Touchpoints: 3 to 6*. Da Capo Press. (for parents of older children)

Carter, Christine. (2010) *Raising Happiness: 10 Simple Steps for More Joyful Kids and Happier Parents*. New York: Ballantine Books. [for child-care arrangements]

Love, P. (with J. Robinson) (1990). *The Emotional Incest Syndrome: What to Do When a Parent's Love Rules Your Life*. New York: Bantam Books.

Murray, L. & Cooper, P. J. (Eds.) (1997). *Postpartum Depression and Child Development*. New York: Guilford Press.

Powell, B., Cooper, G., & Hoffman, K. (2016). *The Circle of Security Intervention: Enhancing Attachment in Early Parent-Child Relationships* Reprint Edition. New York: Guilford Press

Siegel, D. and Bryson, T. (2014) *No Drama Discipline* New York: Bantam Books
Stern, Daniel. (1985). *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. New York: Basic Books.

Skynner, R. & Cleese, J. (1983). *Families and How to Survive Them*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Humor plus insights about the family)

Winnicott, D.W. (1993). *Talking to Parents*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing.