

Personal Mentor Exercise

Time: 50 min. (depending on size of group)

Goals:

1. Create connection with a source of personal support.
2. Root the understanding of “encouragement” in the participants’ personal emotional, social and cognitive experience such that it can be applied in relating with children.
3. Create an inner awareness of the importance of encouragement for personal well being.
4. Identify the behaviors and attitudes typical of “encouraging parenting” as opposed to authoritarian or permissive parenting styles.

Description of Personal Mentor Exercise

This is a guided visualization exercise in which participants:

- remember someone who was consistently supportive and encouraging to them,
- study the attitudes and behaviors of that person,
- identify the positive influence on themselves and
- create a basis of understanding for using an encouraging rather than an excessively authoritarian or permissive parenting style with their own children.

It sets the stage for the Parenting Styles exercise and for basic child management skill material, which follow.

Introducing Exercise:

Tell participants, “We are going to double the number of people in the room.” Make this announcement in a lighthearted, humorous manner that engages their interest. Say, “We are going to invite some very important people to join us...people that only you know.”

Tell them, “ Now for this to happen, you’re going to have to let me talk for a while and not talk yourselves. I’m going to ask you to remember someone who was always there for you and to remember what he or she did that was so important for you and how they did it. In order to really get a picture of that person for yourself, you can’t be talking. Our brains can’t make pictures and talk at the same time. You’ll have a chance to introduce this person later.”

Identifying a Personal Mentor:

Begin by saying, “ This person may be someone who was always in your life or was only there for a short time. They may still be around or they may have passed on like a beloved grandparent, but their memory and influence and support is still with you.”

“It could be a friend or a teacher or a relative. Maybe your first boss when you got your first job.”

Continue this sort of suggestive talk while watching the participants’ responses. When people have this person clearly in mind their facial expressions will soften and calm and their physical postures may appear to become more relaxed.

When it appears that all or nearly all of the participants have established a clear memory of the “Personal Mentor”, say something that reinforces the idea that the memory of this person and what it meant is always available, always somewhere in the back of our minds although we may not have thought of them for months or years. What they did and how they did it becomes part of who we are and we always have access to that wisdom and support.

Identifying Behaviors and Attitudes of the Personal Mentor

Say, “Now that this personal mentor is clearly “in your mind’s eye” I’d like you to study what they did and how they did it that made you remember how important they were to you. In ordinary life, it’s not polite to stare at people, but I’d like you to just study this person, seeing what they did, what their expression was, their tone of voice, choice of words, body language, etc. Just gaze them in the way we gaze at a sleeping child in our arms. See what they did...what they didn’t do. . If you needed some comfort, how did they provide that? How did they let you know you were important to them, important in the world? They probably were honest with you...not just handing out treats and cookies. If you needed some straight talk, how did they provide that?”

“If you study this person carefully, you may learn more about them, how they did what they did and why it’s important to you even now, so take as much time as you need to get reacquainted with them and then we’re going to invite them to join us here in the room.”

Give the participants a minute (or less) to complete this part of their visualization.

Introducing the Personal Mentor to Others

(This is the second repetition of identifying the Mentor’s specific encouraging behaviors and attitudes.)

After the participants to pair up with a person nearby in the room. This needs to be done quickly so that the “presence” of the Personal Mentor isn’t lost by a lot of moving around in the room.

Ask each participant to introduce their Personal Mentor to the others in the group as though the Mentor was actually there. Say, “I want you to meet my grandmother, Alice, who.... describe nature of relationship and special traits of the person and what this meant to you then and still is important now.” Trainer can demonstrate by introducing an important person of their own to the group. Tell them the name, the nature of the relationship and describe what the Mentor did, how

they did it and what the impact has been for the participant. Introduce them so clearly that the other person comes to know them.

Introducing the Personal Mentor to the Whole Group
(Third repetition)

When participants have completed the second step, ask them to introduce the Mentors to the whole group. In this repetition, the person to whom the Mentor was introduced introduces the other participant's Mentor. The participant who "met" Grandma Alice, for instance, introduces her to the whole group and describes why she was and is important to the other group member. If they forgot anything important, Participant A can coach and remind Participant B of the details.

In the response, the trainer "welcomes" the Mentor to the group and reinforces and identifies the significant encouraging behaviors being described and the fact that the gifts of this encouragement and its effects remain present as a model for us now. Note that sometimes the behavior included NOT overreacting to problem behavior /mistakes on the part of the participant, setting appropriate limits, spending quality time, etc.

When all of the Mentors have been introduced, the trainer closes the exercise by thanking the Mentors for joining the group and inviting them to stay for the remainder of the session.

At the end of the session (after the Parenting Styles exercise) thank the Personal Mentors for coming to the group as well as thanking the participants for sharing their experience with the Mentors and for their other contributions to other group members and the quality of the group atmosphere.

Notes:

1. Occasionally someone will say that they never had anyone like that in their lives. Indicate to them that finding such a person, such as a 12-Step sponsor, may be one of the gifts of sobriety and thinking about what this kind of relationship means, can help make healthy decisions about friendships and other current relationships. Say that in the short term we hope the parenting class atmosphere will supply some of that kind of support.
2. Occasionally someone will identify their own child – even a young child – as being the "personal mentor." I never confront this directly as being a potentially unhealthy role reversal, but side step it and suggest that new relationships in sobriety may also provide other adults who can fulfill this supportive role.
3. It often happens that at the next class some of the participants have reconnected with the Personal Mentor-called them, visited or sent them a note and have new stories to relate about their experience with this person. This is extremely enriching because often these healthy relationships have fallen victim to the AOD using, addictive lifestyle so it not only influences parenting styles but encourages parents to make healthy adult relationships.

