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Parents Guiding Groups:  
Perspectives from Participants

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## **Abstract**

During the last few decades, the field of parental guidance in Israel has developed in a variety of frameworks and institutions. Parental guidance is an educational activity, taught by professional and licensed people, who have acquired theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of parenthood, in order to enhance and strengthen the quality of parenthood. The need for such educational intervention has increased 21<sup>st</sup> century western societies due to changes in social status and parental authority within the family.

Research conducted in the United States and in Israel show that parental guidance in general and parental guidance groups in particular, is an efficient tool in enhancing the quality of parenthood and childhood in a wide array of areas: e.g. prevention of violence, improvement of behavior at school, educational achievements, coping with difficulties during adolescence, strengthening familial functions, etc.

The goal of this research is to investigate the learning process of mothers who participated in such guidance program, as members of a parental guidance group.

In guidance group the knowledge acquired goes far beyond the curriculum's content. Social issues are also dealt with, and participants get to experience cooperation and mutual support, as well as to be exposed to other parents issues. Along these interactions, other factors have an impact on learning as well. Participants develop a sense of trust in the group leader (advisor) as to his ability able to convey the theoretical knowledge as well as in his ability to create a trustful and open atmosphere to enable the group dynamic.

Parents' decision to partake in one of these parental guidance activities are motivated by two different sources: some parents seek for knowledge and to feel more confident as parents. Others are approached by public institutions such as schools, sports youth-center and social services. All are driven by the belief that parents' learning in these programs will enhance their parental skills and beneficiate the children.

This research focuses on the latter group of parents who were attracted to the program following the initiative of public institutions. .

This research sets out to study the participants' experience and perception of their learning process like for instance: what they thought to have been the most remarkable characteristics of the program, what influenced them most and how they explain the nature of this influence.

The research revolve upon two central questions:

1. 1. What do the participants feel to have learn in the area of parental skills as well as in other areas?
2. What characteristics of the program do they report as having particularly enhanced and/or hindered their learning?

The research focuses on 15 mothers who have partaken in a group of parental guidance organized by a public body during the year that preceded the interview.

The research was conducted through in-depth, half structured interviews with each participant. All the interviews were transcribed and analyzed following the guidelines of "Grounded Theory", which is especially conducive in the production of categories of theoretical significance. (Gabton, 2001; Shkedi, 2003).

The findings show that in addition to the acquisition of knowledge in the field of parenthood, most participants felt they had learnt and have grown in matters of other fields like improvement of their communication skills; their relationship to others (life partner, family and their entourage.) Some participants reported to have grown in the intra-personal realm, like developing better self-control, increase of serenity and sensitivity towards others.

Additional findings involve the impact of the group guidance on learning. Beyond the part of the personality and modus operandi of the group leader in determining the way the learning happened, it was found that learning in a group made group members mutually more productive, supportive and cooperative. At the same time, learning in a group may create difficulties related to sharing and exposing oneself in

front of the group. This is why the trust between the participants was presented as requirement in the learning process of the group, this trust might be compromised in the case of absenteeism on the part of the some of the participants. Also, the socio-economic and/or cultural differences between participants proved to be a disturbing factor, although in some cases it was productive. The same applies where participants knew each other before starting the program. It was sometimes presented as an advantage and some other times as the reverse. Most interestingly, it was noted that the participation of fathers in the guidance group was likely to contribute positively both from the point of view of the children's education and from the point of view of the experience as a couple, and the partnership it creates in the goal of education.

The findings of this research, particularly in regard to issues of group management, program characteristics, participants' expectations and implementations might be helpful for leaders of similar parental groups, as well as to key players of social and educational bodies.