

# Tips For Working with Interpreters and Multi-Cultural Families

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Bringing the Incredible Years parenting programs to new immigrant parents who represent different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages is a special privilege. Moreover, when parent group leaders collaborate with interpreters who share the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the parents, they begin to understand the special concerns and issues facing parents who are navigating a new culture. When parents share their goals for their families and their children, the leaders and interpreters can more effectively help them to use the parenting skills that will promote their children's social, emotional and cognitive competence. Here are a few tips about working with interpreters and multi-cultural groups.



## **Tip #1: Partnering and Collaborating With Interpreters**

The first step in the process of working with culturally diverse families is to partner with carefully selected interpreters who are well-respected leaders from the same communities as parents in the group. The second step is for the group leader to collaborate with these interpreters to learn more about their culture, values, and parenting beliefs. It is important for group leaders and interpreters to have thoughtful and sensitive discussions in preparation for how to translate these parenting strategies across cultures, so that parents understand how the concepts are relevant for achieving their goals for their children. In some cultures, words or parenting behaviors such as “praise”, “ignore”, or particular feeling states, have no literal word translation, and it takes extra time and discussion to describe the meaning of these words.



## **Tip #2: Train Interpreters Carefully**

Interpreters should be trained to understand the rationale, child development principles and social learning theories underlying the parenting socialization concepts that underpin the Incredible Years program. At first interpreters themselves may find the parenting concepts to be different from their own experiences and may be unsure of the skills themselves or their value for their families. Therefore it is important to take the time to explore these issues with interpreters before starting the group, so that interpreters will be confident and convincing in their translations to parents. In order to help interpreters understand these skills, they are encouraged to practice the strategies they have learned with their own children or with children in a preschool setting. This practical experience with children will make it easier for them to model and coach the parents and will give them examples to bring into their discussions with parents.

Interpreters also must be trained in the interpersonal skills and methods needed to be effective coaches for the parents. Since there are many small group practice exercises in this parenting program, interpreters will play an important role in coaching and supporting parents while they practice new parenting skills. Interpreters must give ample positive feedback to the parents for taking the first steps at trying something new.

The interpreters' role is not only to translate words but to help bridge the gap between the different cultures so that parents understand the meaning of the concepts and relevance for their families. Interpreters help define words being used, clarify misunderstandings, and model the parenting skills for the parents to observe. In many ways, the interpreters are the co-therapist providing encouragement, support and feedback as needed.



### **Tip #3: Ensure Meaningful Group Discussions**

Leaders and interpreters work together to make sure the discussions and practice exercises are relevant to each parent's culture, goals, and community values. For example, new immigrant parents who don't speak English are often worried about how to help their children be successful in school because they cannot communicate with the teacher, or read their children's homework or school newsletters. If this is the case, the group leader can help them coordinate with interpreters and teachers so that they can learn ways to support their children's academic activities at home.

It is important that interpreters translate both the group leaders' words as well as the parents' responses. With direct translation of all interactions, parents of differing cultures will share ideas and get to know each other. It can be tempting to interpret only what the group leader is saying, but if this happens, the program will be didactic, rather than collaborative, and parents will not develop support networks or do their own problem solving.



### **Tip #4: Lengthen Program and Carefully Select Vignettes**

Because of the time it takes to interpret everything the group leaders and parents say, it will take additional sessions to cover the entire program. Plan to take 16-20 sessions to complete the basic program. Sessions may be offered in 3-hour blocks instead of 2 hour sessions in order to reduce the number of weeks it takes to complete the program. Group leaders should also select fewer vignettes to show in each session and provide enough time for parents to discuss them, ask questions and practice. In general we recommend the clearest vignettes to show rather than the more ambivalent vignettes with language nuances. These are the **minimal** number of vignettes we recommend showing. However, depending on parents prior familiarity with this

material, you may want to add additional vignettes. \* See suggested progression of vignettes following these tips.



### **Tip #5: Orient Parents to the Video Vignettes**

There are several important strategies to use when showing the videos to parents who speak a different language.

First, preview what the upcoming vignette will be about. For example a, “*You are about to see a 2 year old throwing a tantrum because her mother took away the toy. Watch how the mother responds to this tantrum.*” Then the preview is translated by the interpreters. Letting the parents know in advance what the vignette is about and telling them what to watch for will enhance their ability to learn from the scenes.

Second, pause during the vignette for translations and ask if parents are understanding what is happening in the interaction.

Third, when the vignette is finished, ask an open-ended question to see if the parents understood what was being modeled on the video. If parents don’t understand, let them know they can request to see the vignette a second time to watch the interaction again.



### **Tip #6: Use supplemental Program on Child-Directed Play and Interactive Reading for Multi-cultural Families**

Two new programs concerning child-directed play skills and interactive reading are recommended for diverse populations as supplements to the Basic Parent Program (preschool version). These programs show examples of Vietnamese, Chinese, Ethiopian, and Eritrean parents demonstrating the parenting skills. Sometimes the parents on the tapes speak in their own languages and sometimes in English. These programs can be shown to expand parents’ knowledge of how to promote social, emotional and academic coaching for their children.



### **Tip #7: Do Live Role Plays and Frequent Practice Exercises**

Whenever possible after a vignette has been shown and discussed, plan a short role play in front of the group to practice the skills being taught in different languages. You can even use the same toys or activity that was shown in the vignette. Sometimes these role plays may be demonstrated by interpreters so that the parents have the opportunity to see the interactions modeled on the video re-enacted in their own

language. Another strategy is to replay the video vignette but turn down the volume, and ask the parents to practice the skills such as praise or descriptive commenting or emotion coaching in their own languages.

Small practice groups help every parent to get practice with the new skill and to receive positive feedback from the group leader and interpreters. When parents are practicing, the interpreters can help by modeling the behavior and then by praising the efforts made by the parents to try out the new ideas.



### **Tip #8: Encourage Support Groups and Buddy Calls**

Buddies will be paired up by language groupings. If there is not a second parent who speaks the same language as one parent, then the interpreters can become the buddy. These buddy calls are important in terms of building the support systems within the group.



### **Tip #9: Include Teachers When Possible**

If programs are offered in schools, it can be immensely helpful to invite teachers to some of the sessions. Teachers can personally invite parents to participate in the classroom and help them understand that they are welcome. Parents can also be provided with opportunities to ask teachers questions about what they can be doing at home to support their children's education.



### **Tip #10: Highlight Parents' Principles from Discussions**

When discussing the vignettes, the group leaders highlight key points or principles which come from the parents. For example, if a parent observes on the video that the parent's controlling style seemed to stifle the child's communication and imagination, then the parent would be given the principle. "Sophie's principle is that encouragement leads children to talk more and be more creative in their thinking." This principle is written down on a flip chart next to the parent's name. The interpreters can translate these on paper for parents who don't read English. Each week a typed list of the principles is given out to the parents. For parents who do not read, the interpreters can refer to the list each week to verbally review the prior week's key points, using the parent's name for the principle as the group leader does.



### **Tip #11: Coach Parents with Their Children**

When possible, parents should be given opportunities to try out their emotion, social, and academic coaching skills or interactive reading skills when playing with their own children. If the parent program is taking place in a school, these individual practice experiences could be set up in their children's classrooms during choice times or reading times. Or, if children are in Dinosaur School or child care while parents are in the parent group, a parent could take a turn playing with their child each week while the group leader and interpreter coach them.

**Suggested progression for parents who do not speak English  
(minimum vignettes to be shown)**

**Weeks 1-2 Play**

Play Program Part 1: Vignettes 4, 5, 6, 9, 18, 19, 21

Play Program Part 2: Vignettes 5, 6, 17, 21, 22 (omit 5, 6, & 17 if showing the Child-Directed Play Program).

**Weeks 3-4 Academic, Social Skills and Emotion Coaching**

Child-directed Play: Vignettes 1-8 (academic and social) Vignettes 9-14, 19-22 (emotion coaching)

**Weeks 5 –6 Praise**

Praise Program: Vignettes 1-5, 7, 8-11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26

**Week 7 Reading with CARE Building Blocks**

Interactive Reading: Vignettes 9-14, 19-22

**Week 8 Incentives**

Reward Program: Vignettes 1-3, 6-9, 12

- Note: More time may be spent on this program for parents with children with behavior problems. For parents of preschoolers the emphases will be on spontaneous rewards.

**Weeks 9-10 Limit Setting**

Limit Setting Program: Vignettes 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 21, 22, 24, 25-28

**Weeks 11-12 Ignore**

Handling Misbehavior Program Part 1: Vignettes 5-9

**Week 13 Time Out for Aggression**

Handling Misbehavior Program Part 2: 5-8

- Note more emphases will be placed on Time out for children who are aggressive or extremely oppositional. An extra session may be needed.

**Week 14 Consequences**

Handling Misbehavior Program Part 2: 22-24