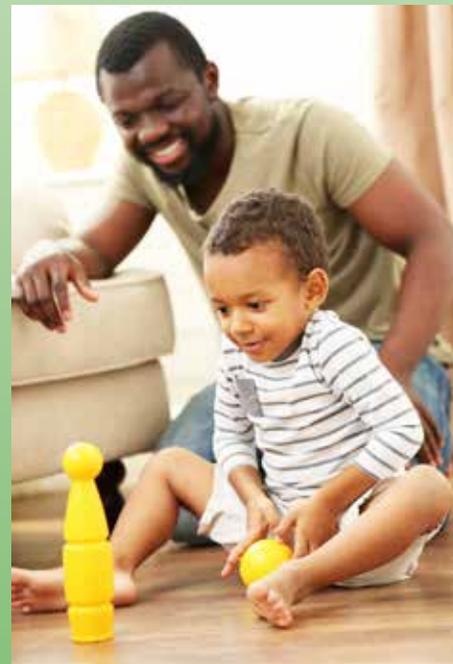




NPEEN
NATIONAL PARENTING
EDUCATION NETWORK



**Paraprofessional Parenting
Educator Competencies:
A Resource Document for
the Field of Parenting Education**



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Educator Competencies:
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the Field of Parenting Education***

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In 2011, NPEN formed the Diverse Roles in Parenting Education committee, in order to understand the role of paraprofessionals as practitioners in the field of parenting education. The Diverse Roles Committee conducted a 2013 national online survey that targeted paraprofessionals. In 2017, the Committee led five regional paraprofessional focus groups across the U.S. in Arkansas, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, and Texas. The following list of publications and presentations represent the work that resulted from the national survey and focus groups:

- Publication: **Jones, S. T., Stranik, M. K., Hart, M. G., McClintic, S., & Wolf, J. R.** (2013). A Closer Look at Diverse Roles of Practitioner in Parenting Education: Peer Educators, Paraprofessionals, and Professionals. National Parenting Education Network White Paper.
- Presentation: **McClintic, S., Stranik, M. K., Jones, S. & Wolf, J.** (2014, November). A Closer Look: Peer Educators and Paraprofessionals in Parenting Education. Presentation at the National Council on Family Relations 76th Annual Conference, Baltimore, MD.
- Presentation: **McClintic, S., Stranik, M. K., Jones, S., Wolf, J. & Durrant, L.** (2015, April). A Closer Look: Peer Educators and Paraprofessionals in Parenting Education. Presentation at the North Carolina Parenting Education Network Conference, Wilmington, NC.
- Publication: **McClintic, S. & Durrant, L.** (2016). Examining the roles, training, and characteristics of paraprofessionals in parenting education. Texas Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 3(1), 27-39.
- Publication: **Durrant, L., & Jones, S.** (2019). Technology and Paraprofessionals Provide Parent Engagement Opportunities. Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE), Network.17-18.
- Presentation: **Durrant, L. & McClintic, S.** (2019, November). Challenges and Rewards for Paraprofessionals in Parenting Education, Presentation National Council on Family Relations Conference, Ft. Worth, TX.

Questions and comments about this resource can be sent to pprc@npn.org.

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Introduction

Parenting education practice has roots in several disciplines including child development; early childhood education; adult development, learning, and education; family studies; psychology; sociology; health care; and social work. Parenting education encompasses knowledge and skills representing multiple perspectives about children, parents, parent-child relationships, family life, and parenting across the lifespan.

Paraprofessional parenting educators must possess basic knowledge and skills to effectively practice, regardless of their type of service delivery (e.g., written materials, electronic/technological means, group programs, home visits, or individual consultations). We start with the assumption that effective paraprofessional parenting educator practice positively impacts parent knowledge, skills, and development, leading to improved parent-child interaction and parent and child outcomes.

National Parenting Education Network (NPEN) aims to promote a broad and comprehensive set of competencies, which include key knowledge, skills, beliefs and values typical of effective paraprofessional parenting educators.

Competencies for Paraprofessional Parenting Educators

Paraprofessional parenting educators typically enter the parenting education role differently from the professional parenting educator. Paraprofessionals may have little or no formal education or training in parenting educator competency areas, but they typically have a wealth of applicable life experiences.

Ideally, the paraprofessional parenting educator is not an independent role. Paraprofessionals should work in collaboration with supervisors. They must be careful to work within the boundaries of their role and the profession while striving for greater competence. Paraprofessional parenting educators who are recruited and hired from the participating community of parents have practical and concrete knowledge of parenting education services from the parent perspective. They develop paraprofessional parenting education competencies (knowledge, skills, beliefs and values) through a combination of pre-service training and education, regular on-going training, and work experience with reflective supervision. Finally, they honorably represent the profession and advocate for programs for parents and children.

Because competencies are developed through training and experience, the focus of this document is competencies for a paraprofessional parenting educator who has completed training and has approximately a year of experience working with parents. It is understood that paraprofessional parenting educators will likely continue to acquire competencies over time through education, training and experience. The competencies they acquire are often tailored to their role as a parenting educator and the audiences they serve.

Program administrators and supervisors can use this document as a guide for identifying qualifications, developing training, and supervising paraprofessional parenting educators. It may also be used to assess competencies and encourage the growth of paraprofessional parenting educators. A partner document is being developed to assist program administrators and supervisors in their responsibilities to their paraprofessional parenting educators. This document will soon be available on the NPEN website (npen.org).

Paraprofessional parenting educators can use this document as a guide for continued growth in their role with parents. They can assess their current level of knowledge and skills and identify areas for additional learning. With this information, they can set goals and develop plans for continued training and education.

Questions and comments about this resource can be sent to pprc@npen.org.



NPEN Paraprofessional Parenting Educator Competencies Model

The NPEN Paraprofessional Parenting Educator Competencies Model depicts paraprofessional parenting education competencies in three knowledge areas and a separate applied knowledge/skill domain that incorporates knowledge from the first three areas.

Content in the first three areas consists of competencies in three broad areas of knowledge needed by parenting educators, and the fourth area describes skills needed to practice parenting education. The three knowledge areas are illustrated with the three pieces of the pie chart and the circle surrounding them shows that the skills described in area four apply to all three knowledge areas. The circle in the center of the pie chart represents the beliefs and values that paraprofessional parenting educators should aspire to for guiding their practice. The parenting education content is derived from research and theories related to human development and family science. The illustration shows that each content area is influenced by and also influences research, theory, and practice in parenting education.



Para- professional Parenting Educator Beliefs and Values

Paraprofessionals, like everyone, have beliefs about people (i.e., children, parents and professionals) and values (i.e., caring, social justice, professional responsibility) that lead to ethical thinking and behavior. This list encompasses the beliefs and values that have emerged from the parenting and family education field that ground and guide practice.

Paraprofessional parenting educators:

1. believe that human development is a life-long process that can be supported through parenting education.
2. care about the physical and emotional health and well-being of children and parents.
3. respect parents' rights and honor their responsibility to make decisions for their family.
4. recognize there are many positive ways to parent and appreciate that parenting occurs in changing and complex families, societies, and cultures.
5. are dedicated to developing respectful relationships and partnerships with parents and other practitioners.
6. believe that identifying parent, child and family strengths is the starting point for work with parents and families.
7. appreciate family and community relationships and cultural traditions as possible sources of support for individuals and families.
8. strive to be capable and effective, open to learning, and dedicated to growth as a parenting educator.
9. recognize and respect other parenting education and community support services available to meet the diverse needs of parents.
10. value research and theory as the foundations of parenting education practice and commit to the development of the field.
11. value assessment and evaluation as important to improving parenting education practice and outcomes.
12. honor established standards of ethical practice for parenting educators.

Four Areas of Paraprofessional Parenting Educator Competencies

AREA 1

Knowledge of Child Development and Caring for Children

AREA 2

Knowledge of Parenting Roles, Parent-Child and Family Relationships

AREA 3

Knowledge of Paraprofessional Parenting Education Practice

AREA 4

Skills for Paraprofessional Parenting Education Practice



Parenting Education is a process that involves the expansion of insights, understanding and attitudes and the acquisition of knowledge and skills about the development of both parents and of their children and the relationship between them (NPEN, 1996).

Parents are those who are so defined legally and those who have made a long-term commitment to a child to assume responsibility for that child's well-being and development. This responsibility includes providing for the child's physiological and emotional needs, forming a loving emotional relationship, guiding the child's understanding of the world and culture, and designing an appropriate environment (NPEN, 1996).



AREA 1

Knowledge of Child Development and Caring for Children

Paraprofessional parenting educators understand knowledge of child development and the many influences that can impact development. They understand that appropriate care of children is the foundation to supporting healthy development of children. They can deliver quality and developmentally-appropriate services and programs aimed at supporting child development.

Paraprofessional parenting educators need to know about particular aspects of child development. Since paraprofessionals often have a specific group of families they work with (i.e. families who have 0-3 year olds, teens, etc.) they may not need to be responsible for knowing all stages of development. They do need to know very well the ages and stages of development of the children in the families with whom they work.

Paraprofessional parenting educators are knowledgeable about and understand:

1 Ages and stages of typical development and markers of atypical development of children in the following developmental areas.

- ▶ **Physical development** — how children's bodies grow and change over time
- ▶ **Cognitive development** — how children grow in thinking skills and the way they understand the world around them
- ▶ **Social development** — how children learn to connect with others and build relationships
- ▶ **Emotional development** — how children experience, express and manage emotions, understand emotions in others, and develop empathy
- ▶ **Language and communication development** — how children learn to take in and understand information and express themselves through speech, writing, and creativity



- ▶ **Moral and spiritual development** — how children learn the difference between right and wrong and understand how to make choices; spiritual development is connected to children's understanding of the meaning and causes of life experience

2 Components of caring for children that nurture positive growth based on age and stage of development.



- ▶ **Healthy** nutrition, sleep, and physical activity guidelines that provide the basic foundation of caring for children
- ▶ **Health care** including basic hygiene, preventive health, and basics of first aid
- ▶ **Physical environments** necessary to meet developmental needs and safety of both children and parents
- ▶ **Daily family structure and relationships** — predictable but flexible routines that provide an emotionally safe environment and positive social interactions
- ▶ **Temperament** — the “inborn” way of thinking, behaving, and reacting characteristic of a child, and the way the child’s temperament interacts with his/her parent’s temperament
- ▶ **Sensitive periods** or “windows” of time critical for stages of development

AREA 2

Knowledge of Parenting Roles, Parent-Child and Family Relationships

Paraprofessional parenting educators are knowledgeable about and understand information on parent development, parenting and parent-child and family relationships. They know about and understand the complicated nature of the parenting role and variations in how it is expressed. They are competent in delivering quality services and programs promoting sensitive and effective parenting, as well as healthy parent-child and family relationships. They respect the rights and responsibility of parents to make decisions about their family. They are aware that effective, research-informed practices can promote healthy individuals and families, and that community and society benefit as a result.

Paraprofessional parenting educators are knowledgeable about and understand:

1 Parenting roles and responsibilities.

- ▶ **Parents as providers** — basic needs of families and ways to meet them
- ▶ **Parents as protectors** — strategies and resources to make homes, outdoor spaces, and vehicles safe including teaching children safety rules and supervising interactions with children and adults
- ▶ **Parents as nurturers and comforters** — effective and appropriate ways parents express warmth, love, and affection; strategies to soothe and support children who are stressed or in distress
- ▶ **Parents as teachers** — how children learn, their learning styles, strengths, and challenges; strategies for supporting the child as a learner
- ▶ **Parents as guides** — importance of parents modeling behavior for children; guidance and discipline techniques and their short and long-term effects; parents' expectations communicated in age-appropriate ways
- ▶ **Parents as play partners** — strategies for parents to support learning through interactive play
- ▶ **Parents as advocates** — techniques to advocate for their families and children
- ▶ **Parents as providers of their own self-care** — strategies for parents to identify and satisfy their needs in healthy ways

2 Theories and research on parenting and the parent-child relationship.

Paraprofessionals understand the main concepts of the following research and theories and recognize that research and theory are the foundation for best practices in parenting education.

- ▶ The range of human needs and the differing importance of them (Hierarchy of Needs Theory)
- ▶ The quality of the relationship between the child and his/her primary care giver(s) (Attachment Theory)
- ▶ Parent development and stages of parenting (Parent Development Theory)
- ▶ Styles of parenting and the effect on the child and family (Parenting Styles Research)
- ▶ Trauma and resilience (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
- ▶ Parent-child relationship development, including the effect that the parent's and child's behavior have on each other (Attachment, Dynamic Process and Family Systems Theories)
- ▶ Family life stages usually marked by children's ages (Adult and Family Development Theories)
- ▶ The influence of family members' connections and dependence on each other (Family Systems Theory)
- ▶ The influence of people, place, environment, and changes over time on development (Bio-ecological/Theories)



3 Family influences that affect parenting, parent-child and family relationships.



- ▶ Culture, ethnicity, and language
- ▶ Beliefs, values, and preferences
- ▶ Family structure
- ▶ Family relations, communication, and behaviors
- ▶ Family history and past experiences
- ▶ Socioeconomic status – income, education level, neighborhood
- ▶ Risk factors, especially those associated with domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and personal and historical trauma

4 Diverse community and cultural influences on parenting and the parent-child and family relationships.

- ▶ Family interaction with formal community institutions and resources, including child care, faith and cultural communities, human service programs, and recreation

- ▶ Family interactions with informal resources in the community as supports for parents and families including, peers, neighbors, and other community members



AREA 3

Knowledge of Paraprofessional Parenting Education Practice

Paraprofessional parenting educators are knowledgeable about and understand parenting education practice and underlying theories. They believe that parenting education can be an effective means of promoting healthy parent-child relationships and preventing and addressing parenting and family issues.

Paraprofessional parenting educators are knowledgeable about and understand:

1 Foundations of parenting education.

- ▶ The history of parenting education
- ▶ The program model and underlying assumptions of their specific program

2 Adult learning and education.

- ▶ Theories about adult learning and education
- ▶ Models of working with adult learners used by their program



3 Adult learning strategies used in specific programs.

- ▶ Observational skills related to parenting education
- ▶ Effective and creative strategies to engage and keep parents involved
- ▶ A variety of ways to meet diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles of parents
- ▶ Technology as a source of information and instruction



4 Relationships and communication with parents and families.

- ▶ Ways to build mutually respectful partnerships with parents
- ▶ Effective communication techniques
- ▶ Parent and family strengths
- ▶ How to handle difficult behaviors or negative reactions of parents
- ▶ Problem solving and decision-making strategies

5 Working with parents in groups.

▶ Group process

- Group leadership styles
- Stages of group formation and development
- Group dynamics – ways group members interact
- Strategies for addressing difficult moments

▶ Parent-child family programming

- The role of parent-child activities to support parent learning
- Appropriate parent-child activities based on the developmental stages of children and parents

6 Working individually with parents and families (home visits, one-on-one instruction, consultation, coaching).

In addition to competencies in sections 3 and 4 above, these competencies are specific to working individually with parents in their homes or other locations.

- ▶ The roles and expectations for conducting one-on-one meetings with parents
- ▶ Unique boundary issues of working in parents' home space
- ▶ Practices related to personal safety



7 Assessment and evaluation.

- ▶ Key concepts related to assessment and evaluation
- ▶ A continuum of evaluation activities from needs assessment to outcome evaluation
- ▶ Methods to assess individual and group needs and goals
- ▶ The role of assessment and evaluation in improving parenting education services

8

Paraprofessional development.

- ▶ **The role of ongoing training and supervision**
- ▶ **Reflective practice**
 - The role of self-assessment and self-reflection
 - Strategies and techniques for reflecting on one's work in parenting education
- ▶ **Knowledge of the ethical guidelines of the field**
 - Boundaries and limits of the paraprofessional parenting educator's role
 - Knowledge of organizational process for dealing with ethical dilemmas
 - Role and responsibilities as mandated reporter
- ▶ **Collaboration with other organizations**
 - Indicators of need for referrals of children and parents to other professionals and services
 - Other community services and sources of support for children and parents
- ▶ **Support for policy and advocacy**
 - The role of advocating for parents, children, and families
 - The connection of public policies to families' lives
 - Methods of communicating with various stakeholders, i.e. interested and affected audiences



AREA 4

Skills for Paraprofessional Parenting Education Practice

The skills for parenting education practice are based on the ability to integrate understanding of the knowledge base identified in Areas 1-3 into practice through delivery of effective parenting education services. Parenting educators can apply their knowledge in the three knowledge areas through the skills listed in Area 4. Again, a paraprofessional parenting educator is, ideally, not an independent role. Paraprofessionals work in collaboration with supervisors. They are careful to work within the boundaries of their role and the profession while striving for greater competence. Finally, they honorably represent the profession and advocate for programs for parents and children.

*NOTE: The categories in Areas 3 and 4 are the same because the **skills** for parenting education practice reflect the emerging **knowledge** of practice in the field of parenting education.*

Paraprofessional parenting educators have skills in:

1 Foundations of parenting education.

- ▶ Can describe the history of their parenting education program(s)
- ▶ Can describe how their program informs and supports desired changes in parents and families

2 Adult learning and education.

- ▶ Adapt to the unique characteristics and needs of adult learners
- ▶ Apply the different roles of paraprofessional parenting educators in supporting adult learning (i.e. facilitate discussion, use activities to support multiple learning styles, model parent-child interactions, etc.)



3 Adult learning strategies used in specific programs.

- ▶ Create learning environments that encourage positive social interaction and active engagement in learning
- ▶ Involve parents in planning and implementation of program activities
- ▶ Choose adult learning activities to suit a range of learning styles and learners needs and abilities
- ▶ Provide feedback about the match between their program and the parents they serve
- ▶ Consider parents' access and comfort with technology when using it for communication and instruction

4 Relationships and communication with parents and families.

- ▶ Develop personal awareness and skills to interact sensitively with parents
- ▶ Use observation and reflection to gain understanding of each parent
- ▶ Promote, teach, and model effective communication with families
- ▶ Assist parents in discovering and assessing their parenting values, goals, expectations, knowledge, and skills
- ▶ Communicate concerns with parents directly, honestly, and respectfully
- ▶ Model and practice problem solving and decision-making strategies with families



5 Working with parents in groups.

▶ Group process and facilitation

- Facilitate the process of enabling parents to discover and clarify their own goals and the steps towards achieving them
- Encourage parents to develop mutual support systems
- Practice the skills and approaches necessary to work with parents in groups, such as:
 - ◆ Balancing the different needs of individuals within the group,
 - ◆ Integrating parents with cultural and language differences into groups,
 - ◆ Using structures that enable people to work in pairs/smaller groups/at different paces,
 - ◆ Acknowledging differences and similarities among parents,
 - ◆ Achieving a balance between time for building trust and providing support and time for learning skills,
 - ◆ Facilitating parents learning from one another,
 - ◆ Acknowledging strengths of parents,
 - ◆ Using group discussion to illustrate common parenting challenges,
 - ◆ Employing social media and virtual spaces to promote group engagement and community building for learning
- Practice skills for managing difficult situations

▶ Parent-child family programming

- Create an environment and activities that provide opportunities to teach parents about the ways children learn
- Demonstrate and model ways of teaching children, answering their questions, and encouraging new ideas
- Model and encourage nurturing behavior between parents and their children
- Identify, advocate for, and model positive guidance techniques for parents of children at various stages of development
- Use shared observation and reflection to help parents become better observers of their children

6 Working individually with parents and families (home visits, one-on-one instruction).

- ▶ **Develop relationships with parents based on trust and caring**
- ▶ **Identify and address individual parent, child, and family needs**
- ▶ **Use home visiting as a way to understand the parent/family context**
 - Respect parent space and role as a visitor to the family home
 - Sensitivity to issues of safety



7 Assessment and evaluation.

- ▶ **Engage participants in evaluation of programs and services**
- ▶ **Use data collection tools for assessment and evaluation**
- ▶ **Maintain records on participants and program activities**
- ▶ **Observe parents' strengths and challenges**
- ▶ **Observe and assess each child's development, as appropriate for the program**
- ▶ **Partner with parents to understand child and parental assessments and their result**
- ▶ **Assist parents in reflecting on their parenting successes and challenges and own growth as parents**

8

Paraprofessional development.

- ▶ **Participate in formal and informal opportunities for continuing education**
- ▶ **Develop plans for additional learning and skill development**
- ▶ **Reflective practice**
 - Reflect on their own practice and identify knowledge and skills that need further strengthening
 - Confront personal biases that interfere with their ability to educate and support family members
 - Develop a personal philosophy of parenting education
- ▶ **Apply ethical principles in all aspects of parenting education life**
 - Appropriately represent the parenting education field and one's organization
 - Monitor one's role and boundaries in interacting with parents
 - Uphold mandated reporting responsibilities
 - Consult with supervisor on ethical dilemmas
- ▶ **Collaboration and referrals with other organizations within program expectations**
 - Are familiar with community resources and refer parents to appropriate resources as needed
 - Assess family needs and strengths along with current support systems and resources
 - Respond to family crises by connecting families to the support and resources they need
- ▶ **Paraprofessional role supporting policy advocacy efforts within program expectations**
 - Respect and uphold laws and regulations that pertain to one's practice as a paraprofessional parenting educator
 - Advocate for children and families using a variety of strategies
 - Inform relevant agencies of unmet needs among families in the community

ADDENDUM

The *Paraprofessional Parenting Educator Competencies*, was adapted from the *Professional Parenting Educator Competencies* document that can be found on the National Parenting Education Network (NPE) web site NPE.org. This addendum describes the purpose, history and the model for the Professional Parenting Educator Competencies and is taken from the introduction, background and structure, and model sections of that document.

Purpose

The NPE Professional Preparation and Recognition Committee (PPRC) developed the document to describe the competencies related to effective parenting education practice. Parenting educators must possess basic knowledge and skills to effectively practice, regardless of their mode of service delivery. NPE's purpose in creating the document is to describe the knowledge, the practice skills, and the attitudes and dispositions that are foundational to effective practice for parenting educators. NPE starts with the assumption that effective parenting educator practice positively impacts parent knowledge, skills, and development, leading to improved parent-child interaction and parent and child outcomes.

History

The Professional Parenting Educator Competencies was created over a period of several years. It is based on the work of Dana McDermott, Professor Emeritus of DePaul University. McDermott researched university programs, state and national networks, and international initiatives to identify where they converge on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and dispositions needed to be competent in the field of parenting education. McDermott lists 10 areas of competencies found in her research: Human Growth & Development; Dynamics of Family Relationships; Guidance and Nurturing; Family Diversity or Diversity in Family; Professional Best Practices Related to Parenting Education and Family Support; Family and Community Relationships; Child Care and School Relationships; Assessment and Evaluation; Health & Safety; and Policy Development.

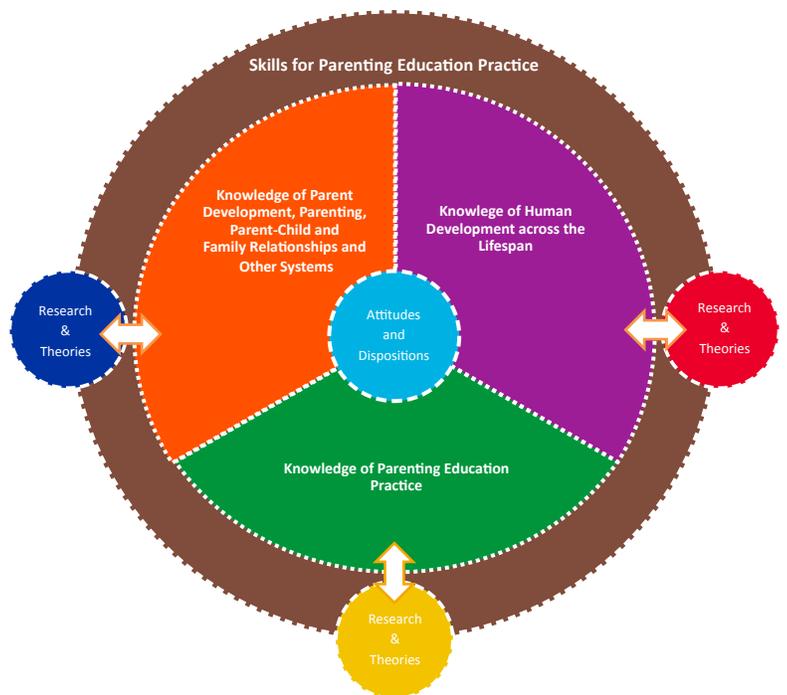
Parenting education is a field that encompasses knowledge and skills that stem from a diverse set of disciplines representing multiple perspectives about children, parents, parent-child relationships, family life, and parenting across the lifespan. Parenting education practice has roots in several disciplines including child development; early childhood education; adult development, learning, and education; family studies; psychology; sociology; health care; and social work. As such, parenting education is practiced in multiple arenas by practitioners who have typically been prepared in a specific discipline with a knowledge-base and mindset that is consistent with their preparation.

NPEN hopes that this document will help guide the development of a unique interdisciplinary identity that draws upon the best of the diverse roots and maintains both a mindset and space for collaborative work with those in other disciplines to best serve children, parents, and families.

Professional Parenting Educator Competencies Model

The NPEN Professional Parenting Educator Competencies Model, below, depicts professional parenting education competencies in three knowledge domains and a separate applied knowledge/skill domain that incorporates knowledge from the first three domains. It has some differences from the Paraprofessional Parenting Educator Model on page 4.

Content in the first three domains consists of competencies in three broad areas of knowledge needed by parenting educators, and the fourth domain describes skills needed to practice parenting education. The three knowledge domains are illustrated with the three pieces of the pie chart and the circle surrounding them shows that the skills described in domain four apply to all three knowledge domains. The circle in the center of the pie chart represents the attitudes and dispositions that professional parenting educators should aspire to for guiding their practice. NPEN members developed a list of critical attitudes and dispositions needed by parenting educators covering all four domains. Content of parenting education is derived from research and theories related to human development and family science. The illustration shows that each domain is influenced by and also influences research, theory, and practice in parenting education.



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