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## Strengthening Families in Santa Cruz County

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Strengthening Families in Santa Cruz County

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### **Abstract**

Parenting is very rewarding and enjoyable, yet it can be challenging and exhausting. Therefore, there is no right way to be a parent. At *La Manzanita Community Resources (LMCR)*, a family program of *Community Bridges*, there is a strong belief in strengthening families within the Santa Cruz County community. That is why *LMCR* provides various services such as, *Triple-P Positive Parenting Program*. *Triple-P*, funded by First 5, provides *parents* and *caregivers* parenting support ranging from birth to 12 years of age, with additional support for families with teens, and families of children with special needs. The main purpose of this capstone project was to find a cause as to why there is a high dropout rate with *parents* through the use of *surveys*. This study used a sample of 15 *parents* and *caregivers* from two different parenting classes to prevent biased answers. Results indicated that *Triple-P* classes are effective for *parents* learning. Future research may involve following up with *parents* who have dropped out of these classes to get additional feedback, yet continue surveying parents who stay and complete the courses.

**Keywords:** *Parents, Evaluation, Survey, Triple-P Positive Parenting Program, La Manzanita Community Resources (LMCR)*

## **AGENCY AND COMMUNITIES SERVED**

### **Agency, mission and purpose**

La Manzana Community Resources (LMCR) is one of ten programs provided by one of the largest nonprofit agencies in the Santa Cruz County, Community Bridges. Community Bridges, founded in 1977, mission is “to strengthen our diverse community through innovative human services” (LMCR, 2017, para. 1). The vision is to provide a brighter future by offering hope and providing an extra hand to those in need (LMCR, 2017, para. 3). Community Bridges consists of ten different programs that serve more than 27,000 children, families, and seniors each year across the region of Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties (Community Bridges, 2015, p. 4). Community Bridges family of programs are as followed: Child & Adult Care Food Program, Child Development Division (CDD), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), La Manzana Community Resources (LMCR), Live Oak Community Resources, Mountain Community Resources, Nueva Vista Community Resources, Elder Day, Lift Line, and Meals on Wheels (LMCR, 2017). These programs are focused on children and nutrition, family resources, and seniors and transportation.

As previously stated, LMCR, one of the ten programs offered by Community Bridges, provides direct services to participants seeking aid. LMCR services include community advocacy/drop-in center, literacy program, food distribution, summer lunch, Triple-P Positive Parenting Program, and foster family support, also known as Roots & Wings (LMCR, 2017). LMCR is located in Watsonville, which is in the Southern part of Santa Cruz County. In fact, one of the most accessed resources within LMCR is the community advocacy/drop-in center. LMCR community advocacy/drop-in center program provides bi-lingual advocacy, helping community members access resources and set goals to address issues of housing, employment, healthcare,

disability, insurance, immigration, counseling, education, substance abuse recovery, domestic violence prevention, and child care (LMCR, 2017). The LMCR advocate staff and volunteers strive to provide direct services to anybody who seeks aid. These, services are designed to meet both immediate needs and long-term goals. In fact, all services are conducted with a focus on strengthening and improving the lives of families and fostering self-sufficiency.

### **Communities served**

Each year La Manzana Community Resources (LMCR) serves more than 2,400 individuals, 86% reside in Santa Cruz County and 13% reside in Monterey County (M. Melendrez, personal communication, March 6, 2017). The reason LMCR has a higher percentage for Santa Cruz County is because all services are offered to community members residing in the Santa Cruz area only. However, due to a collaboration with Monterey County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) and LMCR being the nearest resource program for residents in Monterey County such as, Pajaro and Salinas, are given direct services every Wednesday only. Additionally, 73% of females receive assistance than males, with a 27% (M. Melendrez, personal communication, March 6, 2017). To add, over 52% of the participants work in agriculture, 13% are unemployed, 10% are homemakers, 7% are retired, 6% are disabled, and 4% are caregivers (M. Melendrez, personal communication, March 6, 2017). On average, 92% are low income, which can be explained by the high percentage of agricultural workers and seasons workers go through (M. Melendrez, personal communication, March 6, 2017). Also, 88% are monolingual Spanish speakers with limited to no literacy skills, 8% speak English, 2% are bilingual, and 2% dialect Mixteco/Zapoteco/Triqui (M. Melendrez, personal communication, March 6, 2017). Off this population 98% are of Latino/Hispanic and 2% are white (M. Melendrez, personal communication, March 6, 2017). According to the Santa Cruz County Community Assessment

(2014), 81.4% are of Hispanic/Latino descent and 43.7% are white. This explains why there is a higher percentage of Spanish speakers and a higher population of Hispanic/Latinos who access resources at LMCR. Furthermore, 69% of community members have received less than middle school education (29% no formal education), 13% attended middle school, and 4% are high school graduates (M. Melendrez, personal communication, March 6, 2017). Finally, community members who access resources are aged 18-25 10%, 26-33 make 21%, 34-41 20%, 42-49 16%, 50-57 13%, 58-65 11%, and 65+ 9% (M. Melendrez, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

### **PROBLEM, ISSUE OR NEED**

To begin, the agency's official name is "*La Manzana Community Resources*" (LMCR), a family program of "*Community Bridges*" and the project under LMCR is with one of its services, *Triple-P Positive Parenting Program* (LMCR, 2017). Triple-P, funded by First 5, helps address a wide range of topics providing support to parents and caregivers in the Santa Cruz County. These classes vary by age and needs such as, birth-12 (Core Triple-P), teens (Teen Triple-P), and families with children who have special needs (Stepping Stones Triple-P) (Triple-P, 2017). This allows parents to get the support they need wherever they stand. Some options given to these parents to meet with a Triple-P practitioner are as followed: seminars, workshops, individual sessions (brief or in-depth), groups (classes), and specialized parenting support (Triple-P, 2017).

### **Sentence statement & problem definition/description**

Parent education classes/workshops are not effective when repeated more than once by parents who are mandated. Triple-P Positive Parenting Program parenting classes are ineffective when parents and caregivers are court mandated. In fact, about 70% of parents who assist Triple-P classes are required by court (S. Rodelo, personal communication, September 21, 2017). The majority of the parents are instructed to take several parenting classes among other resources

such as, substance abuse programs that will allow them to get their children back and to enhance their parenting skills for their children's safety. Additionally, due to the high requirements in a short time frame (about 3-6 months), parents become highly stressed and pressured while trying to maintain a job and having time to visit their children when children have been removed from homes (S. Rodelo, personal communication, September 21, 2017). As a result, mandated parents stop showing up to classes and fail to complete court requirements. In return, parents need to retake these classes, although they have assisted to the majority of them. Only then are they given a certificate of completion they must present to the judge and social worker.

Additionally, the population most directly affected by this problem are Santa Cruz County adult parents, aged 21-30. Parents who participate in Triple-P classes currently hold opened Child Protective Service (CPS) cases. Child Protective Services (CPS) refers to “protection for children who are at risk of, or are experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or emotional or physical neglect. The focus is on the safety of the child and support for parents to strengthen families and promote safe nurturing homes for children (Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, n.d.).” In order to provide assistance and resources, parents are referred to community resources like the Triple-P. Many parents take advantage of this program because it’s free of cost. Still, depending on the severity of CPS cases, parents are asked to assist to other resources they will benefit from like substance abuse programs.

When approached with a CPS case, parents have a difficult time dealing with the stress of getting their children removed from their home or parenting. However, parents are given the support and education to work on what a social worker or court asks for. For instance, finding a job to prove they can financially support their children. According to the Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (n.d.), CPS is in charge of doing various things like: screening and

investigating reports of abuse, neglect, or harm, providing families with referrals to community resources, providing supportive services to children and families in their homes, providing out of home placements and permanency planning when necessary, and providing services to help foster care youth transition to adulthood. Therefore, social worker Ms. Griffon (personal communication, October 14, 2017) stated that social workers and courts work as hard as they can to prevent children from being removed from their homes.

### **Problem causes/contributing factors**

Having an open CPS case for any unique circumstance can expose parents and children to gain a great amount of stress. Getting investigated can intimidate a family, especially children. According to social worker Ms. Griffon (personal communication, October 14, 2017), parental bonding is one of the most important elements in the development of a child. Children are dependent upon their parents for emotional and physical care. As a result, children expect this relationship to continue through life, but when they are removed from this atmosphere of reliability and comfort, things can fall apart. Children taken from their parents will likely experience several psychological consequences of separation (C. Griffon, personal communication, October 14, 2017). These may include depression, behavior disorders, separation anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Depression alone includes a wide range of damaging effects, including loss of interest in things children would normally enjoy, anger or irritability, sleep deprivation, and changes in personality. Therefore, CPS social workers help families strive to provide the resources needed in order to strengthen families.

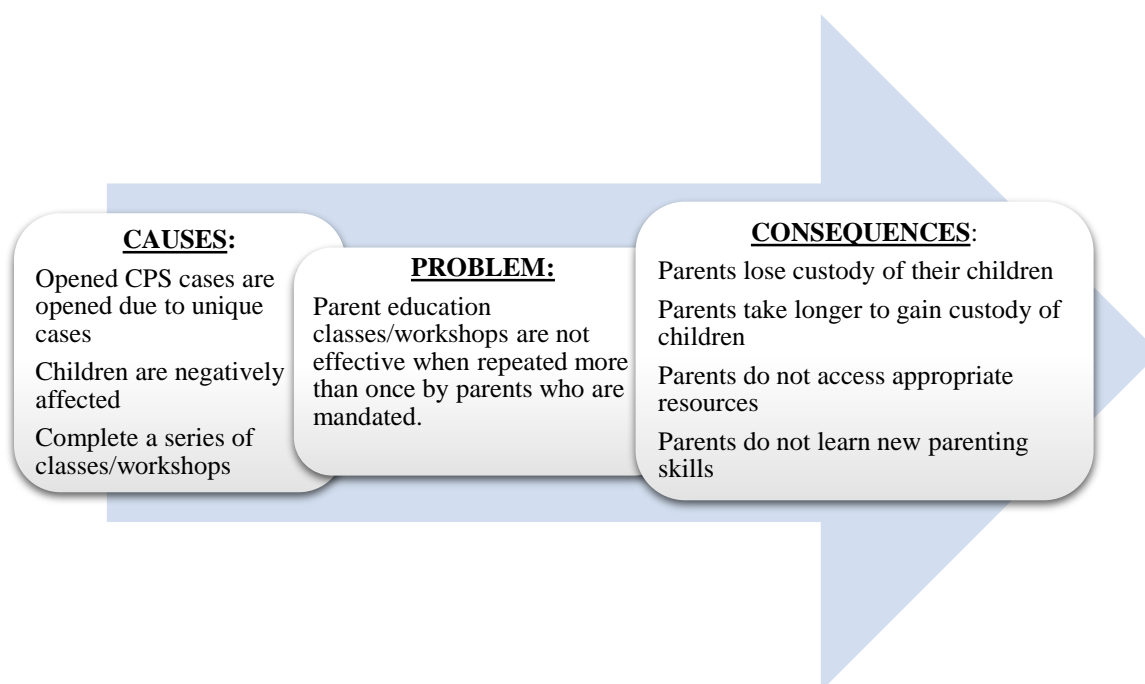
### **Problem consequences**

CPS cases can progress negatively if parents do not follow up with what their social workers or court asks from them. In order to keep their children, parents must assist parenting



classes and present a certificate as proof of the completion of courses, yet access other resources their social workers or court has assigned for them. Ms. Rodelo (personal communication, September 21, 2017) mentioned most parents need about 10 certificates. Also, social workers regularly check in to follow up on parent's progress. If these instructions are not followed, parents may be more likely to lose custody of their children or have a difficult time gaining custody of their children.

**Problem model (graphic or visual representation of the problem dynamics):**



**CAPSTONE PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION**

**Project, purpose and justification**

The project title is, “Strengthening Families in Santa Cruz County.” This project was meant to evaluate Triple-P classes and find the cause behind the high dropout rate. In order to implement this project, a survey was prepared. Methods used to address this project were as followed: letter of donation, surveys and incentives (see Appendix pg. 18 for more information). The survey was two pages long including 5 yes or no questions and 11 open-ended questions.

Initially, the survey was created in English (see Appendix pg. 19-20 for more information). However in order to better address parent's needs, surveys were then translated in Spanish (see Appendix pg. 21-22 for more information). The reason for this is because services are provided in bilingual and the majority of LMCR population are Spanish speakers. To add, surveys consisted of a series of questions that were given to parents in an interview setting. The interview questions helped evaluate the effectiveness of classes for parents who are mandated by CPS. In addition, this survey/interview process allowed parents to speak about their own experiences and how these parenting classes are affecting them.

The general purpose of the parent interviews was to discover if mandated parents learn new parenting skills from taking classes more than once or if there is a need for additional resources for parenting support. For instance, parents may choose to assist classes because they are mandated by their social workers. Other parents may show up to classes to learn new parenting skills and strengthen their bond with their child. Another purpose this project was looking to assess was the effectiveness of classes. For instance, are parents more susceptible to learn parenting skills?

A goal this project is meant to evaluate as well is if parents have enough resources offered to them. For instance, crisis services that may involve aid with domestic violence, etc. or having advocacy and planning groups for both families and children. Many parents who have opened CPS cases tend to face unique situations and need extra support. Therefore, this project will also assess if the Triple-P program is providing parents with additional resources they may benefit from during a moment of crisis or if parents feel they are getting the help they need. Another thing this project may address is if parents feel there is a social stigma behind participation of parent education classes. For instance, do parents feel they are being negatively

judged by others? Do they feel they are not “good” parents? However, the main goal and purpose of this project is to find out if parents are effectively using these classes to adapt new skills.

Project implementation (methods and scope of work).

### **Obstacles and/or unexpected circumstances**

There was a series of unexpected circumstances in the implementation of this project. First, creating a series of validated questions that would be suitable and applicable to classes, as well as parents. It was important to have all parents relate to a question of their own experiences. To add, in regards to the questions that will be asked, parents may answer with short answers to open-ended questions which can limit intake. They may also not answer questions truthfully which can throw off data. Secondly, another challenge can be gathering participants and deciding how many should be interviewed. Having too many interviews can be overwhelming for both the interviewer and interviewee. Yet or at the same time having a few interviews can limit feedback and limit outcomes. Also, deciding how interviews should be conducted. For instance, through a phone call or face-to-face.

## **PROJECT RESULTS**

### **Project outcome(s)**

Two classes were randomly selected for the conduction of the survey interviews. These classes included, “*Triple-P Brief Group: Building Children’s Communication & Problem-Solving Skills*” consisting of five English speaking parents in which four participated and “*Grupo del Programa Padres Positivos para Familias con Adolescentes 13-16 Años*” translated as the “*Positive Parenting Group for Families with Teenagers 13-16 Years,*” consisting of 13 Spanish speaking parents in which 11 participated. Triple-P’s “*brief group*” is a four week long program and it’s main purpose is to help the parents learn how to teach children communication skills by

talking, reading, singing, and playing. Also, how to teach children to express their emotions in healthy and appropriate ways, and to give parents tips for teaching children problem-solving skills. On the other hand, the “*positive parenting group*” is an eight week long program and its main purpose is to help parents learn positive strategies that will allow them to have a positive relationship with their teenagers, understand daily influences in their teenagers behavior, teach their teenagers problem solving techniques, and how to have more trust on their teenagers.

Overall, the course curriculum was pre-established by Triple-P. Because funding comes from First 5, class curriculum could not be changed (M. Melendrez, personal communication, September 12, 2017). Furthermore, this project was developed and implemented with a public administration, public health, and with a social work focus by incorporating surveys to improve program outcomes and prevent parents from dropping-out in the future. The main objective of the surveys was to assess the effectiveness of the parenting classes and practitioner.

### **Assessment of project outcomes**

The expected outcome for this capstone were 15 survey interviews that were successfully conducted within two different parenting classes. The surveys were an important aspect of the project because questions were created in a form that had parents evaluate the effectiveness of the class. These questions also helped address the main idea of the project, are parenting classes effective when taken more than once? And do parents learn new skills? To add, the survey's main purpose was to assess thoughts and opinions of parents towards the class they were currently taking and the Triple-P practitioner facilitating the class. Then, an evaluation process was taken. The surveys and classes were critically examined. By doing so, surveys were collected and information was analyzed. Besides surveys, another form of data collection was the attendance sheet parent's sign when attending classes every class meeting. This counts towards

hours completed so they can receive the certificate of completion at the end of the program. If parents fail to assist classes more than three times, they are asked to repeat the class when it's offered again no matter how far along they are in the curriculum (S. Rodelo, personal communication, September 21, 2017).

### **Findings/results**

As a result of this project, the expected outcome was not achieved. Initially this project was created to address parents with opened Child Protective Services (CPS) cases. However after information was collected, the majority of these parents came out to be voluntary, only one parent had a CPS case and was court mandated, a few other were mandated because of their children's school. Children who attend private college prep schools are required to complete at least 25 hours of community service a year in order to stay in that specific school. In this case Ceiba College Prep parents had to (G. Gomez, personal communication, October 10, 2017). As a result, answers may have been biased because about 70% of parents who assist Triple-P classes are required by court and only 30% are voluntary (S. Rodelo, personal communication, September 21, 2017). The focus then shifted to why parents want to voluntarily participate. Therefore the initial project did not achieve its expected outcome, rather it was adjusted to best benefit other parent's needs and still address the effectiveness of parenting classes in general. Also, the majority of the parents participated in parent education classes for the first time and could not elaborate to what other classes they had taken before. As a result, this limited answers.

### **Limitations/challenges and how they were addressed**

A few challenges were faced within this capstone project. First, there was an initial problem as to what questions to ask that would fully address the population and the issue at hand. However, with various feedback from the capstone mentor, the survey was narrowed down to 2

pages long (front and back) with relevant questions. Second, initially the project was intended to have the intern conduct face-to-face interviews with parents who have opened CPS cases. Still, parent's schedules overlapped with interviewee or did not answer phone calls. Due to the short amount of time left to complete the project, classes were then taken into consideration for the month of October. The intern was not able to assist to these classes earlier because classes offered in the month of September had ended earlier than expected, another had a time overlap, and another class was rescheduled to begin in the month of October. In addition, classes that were taken into consideration had a limited number of participants. For instance, the English class had a total of five parents. In order to get more feedback a second class was taken into consideration due to parents not being CPS mandated. A Spanish survey was then created (see Appendix pg. 21-22 for more information) and was time consuming. By the second week of October, the survey was complete and took nine drafts which delayed survey interviews to be done. Also, a letter of donation was created and sent for feedback to the agency mentor. However due to a lack of communication and tight schedule from the mentor, the letter was sent out to intern late. The letter was then sent out to Target in late September impeding the intern to rely on Target incentives. As a result, Starbucks gift cards were purchased as a way to increase participation and provide incentives to participants. Most importantly, when handing out surveys to participants in the first group, some parents didn't fully answer questions thoroughly.

### **Strengths/successes**

On the other hand, this project had its strengths. For instance, the majority of the class participants from the, "*Triple-P brief*" group participated with 4 out of 5 and the "*positive parenting*" group had an outcome of 11 out 13 making a sample size of 15. Something that helped elevate participation were the Starbucks incentives which was a strength. As a result, of

incentives, feedback was provided and the findings were helpful. For instance, in the “*positive parenting group*” parents mentioned having an additional professional facilitate the class, like a clinical psychologist who was helping facilitate the positive parenting class among a parent educator, was very helpful because parents got a clinical point of view. Parents also mentioned these classes have allowed them as parents to improve their communication skills with their children and teenagers. As well as, becoming more patient rather than losing their temper with their children or teenagers as they usually did. As a result, the goal was reached because parents are learning and taking theory into practice.

Another topic addressed within this project were parent educators. Parents believed Triple-P practitioners are doing an excellent job on facilitating the classes which also was a goal. Next, parents mentioned being in a group helps facilitate their learning because they enjoy hearing their peer’s experiences in dealing with their children and teenagers. This makes sense because parents are in a classrooms setting with the parent practitioner. Most importantly, parents appreciated having their thoughts and opinions heard. Overall, most of these parents had assisted a Triple-P class for the very first time and believed it helped them with gaining new knowledge. All in all, parent practitioners and class evaluations were successful.

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION/FINAL THOUGHTS**

This project should be continued because it gives parents the opportunity to reflect on information they have learned and to evaluate the effectiveness of the classes. Although there is no specific class, there are a variety of subjects. These surveys are broad and do not specifically focus on a subject, instead it asks the interviewee what they are learning and using to their advantage. It also gives parents the opportunity to voice their opinions and thoughts. Taking parents into consideration also helps Triple-P practitioners because they are given the

opportunity to view what is working and what needs to be improved. For instance, the reason behind their participation and their preferred learning styles.

What is recommended to La Manzana Community Resources (LMCR) Triple-P program is to update Triple-P materials provided during class such as, videos. The majority of the parents reported that videos are out of date and are old. Yet, parents did mention the videos are informative and give excellent representations of scenarios when it comes to dealing with conflict. Also, parents mentioned it would be important to add topics of relevance for teenagers such as drug use. Parents explained having a popular topic such as drugs, will allow them to address the problem by learning the signs and symptoms because it's something that they fear their teenagers may experiment with. Another thing parents mentioned was for Triple-P practitioners to be more extensive in topics being covered because it's mentioned but not fully covered. Others mentioned having less "student involvement" because it would better facilitate their learning since it tends to take away from the subject in hand. Overall, every parent was very satisfied with the Triple-P curriculum they were currently involved in. It has helped these parents learn how to better communicate and engage with their children and teenagers.

Also, if a student or Triple-P practitioners were to continue with this project, methods should be changed. For instance, the main method that is recommended for future use to collect data is the structured interview method. The reason why this approach will be useful for this particular project is because participants are more likely to verbally answer the interview questions with greater detail, rather than filling out a questionnaire that is bound to limit answers, is lengthy, and time consuming. The structured interview method also has few advantages such as having a "standardization of all questions that can give quantifiable data, replication, and data is more reliable as the issue is being investigated in a consistent way, and allows generalization



of results/conclusions to the population from which the sample was drawn (Gerard Keegan, n.d).” The structured interview method also allows participants to have equal opportunities to provide information which will be assessed and recorded from their own experiences.

Additionally, this method is more personal compared to other assessment methods and is useful for follow-ups when pursuing in-depth information on the subject in hand.

What can be done differently in the future is to conduct these surveys after the courses have been completed. For instance, on the last day of class. The reason for this is because parents will be more knowledgeable about the topic they have learned throughout the four to eight week span. This will allow more information to be gathered rather than having them fill out a survey within the second or third week because parents are beginning to gain knowledge in certain topics and have not yet developed a full understanding of it. This will better address what parents have learned and adapted. Another form to gain more information is to conduct phone call interviews. For instance, following up with parents who are court mandated and asking questions in regards to the Triple-P classes, yet doing the same with voluntary parents. This would allow the intern or whoever is giving the call to learn why parents are dropping out of classes and if classes are effective for their learning. Something else that can be asked is what barriers prevent them from participating in classes? Also, in order to be cost efficiently, a raffle can be held and all parents should be asked to fill out a survey. Tickets can be handed to parents who participate in filling out a survey. Then once all tickets are passed out and collected, a raffle should be held. Winners will receive prizes. For instance, Starbucks or grocery gift cards. Maybe prizes depending on the topic like children, reading books or coloring books. This will help parents become enthusiastic, at the same time it will give Triple-P practitioners feedback.

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## APPENDIX

### Updated Scope of Work

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Estimated completion dates</b>
Begin donation request letter & get feedback	Funding	April	April 27, 2017
Prepared surveys	Created questions	Aug.-Sep.	September 14, 2017
Incentives	Letter of donation was sent out	September	September 15, 2017
Prepared to meet with parents	Chose dates to conduct interviews	September	September 15, 2017
Incentives for interviews	Starbucks gift cards purchased	September	September 21, 2017
Interviews	Surveys were conducted	October	October 16, 2017 & October 24, 2017
Analyzed Results	Data was collected/analyzed	October	October 27, 2017

## Parent Evaluation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number or email: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to be reached: \_\_\_\_\_

What classes have you attended? \_\_\_\_\_

When did you attend? *Ex. Last month, currently* \_\_\_\_\_

Were the class times convenient?

Yes

No

Was the parent educator informative?

Yes

No

Did the parent educator answer your questions?

Yes

No

Were the tools you were given helpful? *Ex. Handouts*

Yes

No

What is your reason for taking these classes? *Ex. Court mandated, voluntary, etc.*

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How did you hear about Triple-P parenting classes? *Ex. Social worker referral, events, etc.*

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Is there anything from the Triple-P classes you learned and used? *Ex. Improved communication skills with children's* \_\_\_\_\_

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What did you find more useful about the Triple-P classes?

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What do you best like about these Triple-P classes?

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What could be done to improve Triple-P classes? *Ex. Class time, topics, etc.*

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Would you recommend these classes to friends or family?

Yes

No

Additional comments:

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## Evaluación para Padres

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_ Número de teléfono: \_\_\_\_\_

Mejor hora para llamarle por teléfono: \_\_\_\_\_

¿Qué clases de Triple-P ha tomado usted? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Cuándo atendiste a estas clases? *Ej. Mes pasado* \_\_\_\_\_

¿Fueron cómodas las horas de la clase?

- Sí  
 No

¿Fue la educadora de padres informativa?

- Sí  
 No

¿Respondió la educadora de padres a sus preguntas?

- Sí  
 No

¿Fueron las herramientas (consejos) que se le dieron en las clases útiles para usted? *Ej. Folletos*

- Sí  
 No

¿Por qué tomó estas clases de Triple-P? *Ej. Mandato judicial, voluntario, etc.*

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¿Cómo se enteró de las clases de Triple-P? *Ej. Referencia de trabajadores sociales, eventos, etc.*

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¿Hay algo de las clases de Triple-P que aprendió y usó? *Ej. Habilidades para comunicarse mejor con su hijo(s), etc.*

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¿Qué fue útil sobre las clases de Triple-P?

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¿Qué es lo que más le gusta de las clases de Triple-P?

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¿Qué se puede hacer para mejorar las clases de Triple-P? *Ej. Tiempo de clase, temas, etc.*

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¿Recomendaría estas clases a amigos o familiares?

- Sí
- No

Comentarios adicionales:

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