

Curriculum Enhancement: We suggest using this exercise at the end of Module I following the brief discussion about parents' expectations and needs on page 16.

My Child's Suitcase: Visualization and Exercise

The suitcase exercise helps parents identify the values and goals they have for their children. Starting the group this way allows the Parent Educator to help families be mindful of their values and goals as they grow and learn as parents in the *MPAP* group. In this exercise, parents will imagine their child growing up. This can be emotional for some parents.

Time: 25 minutes

Material:

- Copy of the suitcase handout for each parent
- Markers
- Blank flipchart
- Flip Chart with visualization prompts listed:
 - Personal Qualities
 - Survival Skills
 - Experiences
 - Memories

Directions:

- There are four parts to this exercise: visualization, individual suitcase, group suitcase, and partner sharing. Italicized portions of text are suggested script.

Visualization

We are going to do a visualization in which we imagine our children growing up. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes and think about who your child will be when he or she leaves home.

Imagine your child at two years old. Get a clear picture of him or her in your mind.

PAUSE.

Now "grow" your child up a bit to be four years old, riding a tricycle, playing pretend with a friend, or drawing wonderful pictures.

PAUSE.

Now imagine your child as a seven-year-old, in school, learning to read and write, maybe playing soccer with friends.

PAUSE.

A few more years...your child is now twelve, almost a teenager, with lots of body changes and grown-up ideas, an "in between" stage.

PAUSE.

Now sixteen...your child may have learned to drive, may be interested in a boyfriend or girlfriend, and is much more independent.

PAUSE.

Now your child is eighteen, old enough to vote, ready to begin a new life—a job, college, marriage, or the service. He or she is holding a large suitcase and in it are all the things you have taught through the years, all the values and memories and experiences of your life together.

What do you want your child to have in that suitcase to take into life as an adult?

PAUSE.

What important practical life skills do you want your child to have?

PAUSE.

What character traits and values do you want your child to have?

PAUSE.

Attitudes toward other people? Other cultures?

PAUSE.

How do you want your child to handle mistakes? Success?

PAUSE.

What do you want your child to feel passionate about?

PAUSE.

What are special interests of yours that you would like your child to share?

PAUSE.

*What did you know at eighteen that you were **glad** you knew?*

PAUSE.

*What did you **not** know that you really wish you had?*

PAUSE.

What are the special memories you would like your child to have?

PAUSE.

What do you imagine your child saying to you about your life together?

PAUSE.

Your child is standing there with that large suitcase, full of everything from your life together, ready to leave...what do you want your child to have in that suitcase?

PAUSE.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

Individual Suitcase

- Pass out a copy of the suitcase picture and markers to each parent.

Now that you've had a chance to think about all the things you want for your child, you can record them on the suitcase handout. In your eighteen-year-old's suitcase, put all the memories, values, skills, and attitudes that you have thought of in the visualization exercise. Decorate it if you like, using symbols and pictures. Whatever you create will be a record for you of what you want right now for your child to take into the world.

- Post and refer to the reminder prompts on the flip chart.

Group Suitcase

- After parents have worked on their suitcases for a few minutes, draw a big suitcase on a flip chart sheet. This will become the "group suitcase."
- Ask parents to share some of the ideas from their individual suitcases.
- Record parents' ideas on the "group suitcase."

Now let's go around the circle and contribute one or two of our favorite suitcase items to a group suitcase.

- Encourage parents to add new ideas to their suitcases.

Let's help each other fill up the suitcases. Feel free to add other parents' ideas to your own suitcase.

- Add a few ideas of your own or ones that might be missing. Balance the list with practical skills like cooking or handling money if the parents have emphasized broader values such as honesty and courage. Be sure to include a sense of humor or joy.

We are packing our children's suitcases from the moment they are born.

*We do this through our words and behavior. For example, if we believe that honesty is an important value, then if we are with our child in a store and the cashier gives us too much change, we can return it and tell our child **why**. This is one example of how we might teach a child about honesty.*

- Walk through a few more examples of how to teach the values from the group suitcase.

Partner Sharing

- Parents, especially couples, may have a lot to share after this exercise. Allow at least five minutes for partner sharing.
- Ask parents to turn to their partner or another parent to share their suitcase thoughts.

This material is adapted from Juvata Rusch and Laura Backen-Jones, "Session 2," in *Parenting: The First Three Years: Terrific TWOs* (Eugene: Shelton Turnbull Printers, 2005) 14-18.

My Child's Suitcase

